ENEX 495: Women, Writing, and Rhetoric

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

As a special topics course in composition, ENEX 495: “Women, Writing, and Rhetoric” is a program elective for graduate students in the English department, English majors, Gender and Women’s Studies students, and a writing-intensive elective for non-majors at The University of Montana, a doctoral granting institution located in the Rocky Mountains in western Montana with about 12,000 undergraduates and 1,700 graduate students. ENEX 495 is described in the university catalog as “English: Expository Writing. Offered intermittently. Experimental offerings of visiting professors, experimental offerings of new courses, or one-time offerings of current topics.” The course is capped at 24 students and has a prerequisite of first year composition for undergraduates. Prior to this offering, the course had never been taught.

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

The reason the course had not been taught is emblematic of material conditions that reflect the fact that there is currently no place for composition as a discipline in the cultural imagination of the department. In addition to the fact that the course fulfills no departmental requirements, advising materials do not include advanced ENEX courses as elective options. For most students, staff and faculty, the designation “ENEX” calls up negative associations attached to the required general education writing course not a potential area of study. This situation is in part due to the fact that, prior to my hire, there had never been a need or desire on the part of a faculty member to teach any ENEX courses. Composition is understood to be a service not academic program: basic writing and first year composition are the only two composition courses in the course catalog other
than the TA practicum and standard special topic and independent study listings for each area of study in the English department. As the first tenure-track hire in Composition/Rhetoric Studies in the history of the university, my hire signals the department and university’s desire and need for my expertise, though the current departmental context belies and, in fact, challenges this commitment. As the new Director, I am expected to organize first year composition, mostly manage teaching assistants. Faculty, staff, and teaching assistants view composition courses as a means of ensuring students’ writing proficiency and providing graduate students with jobs. The idea that Composition/Rhetoric Studies is a discipline—with its own goals, theories, histories, genres, and research and teaching methods—is surprising to many of my colleagues. With no minor, major, or master’s degree, Composition/Rhetoric Studies is not recognized as a defined area of study at The University of Montana. Given this context, I suspect I received this course assignment because the chair had a vague desire to support my expertise, but did not have an official course to assign me since it was unthinkable that a tenure-track faculty member would want to teach first year composition or basic writing and did not understand the logistical and cultural challenges of assigning me the special topics course.

Nor did I, at first. When I was assigned the special topics course, I naively imagined it answered a perceived need and desire for my expertise. And, since I was excited at the possibility of using this opportunity to teach a feminist rhetorics course, I did not question the wisdom of the teaching assignment. I had little context for creating a special topics course at a new university, and since one of my new colleagues thought a course in women’s rhetorics would be “cool” and might find an audience in graduate students getting their master’s degree in teacher training (MAT) and Gender and Women’s Studies students, I settled on “Women, Writing, and Rhetoric.” While I am glad I had the opportunity to teach “Women, Writing, and Rhetoric,” I now view the course assignment as a mis-directed willingness to support a new faculty member’s research interests in a department whose requirements and general psyche are rigidly fixed (even fixated) on majors and minors in literature, creative writing, and English education. In many ways, it was an unthinking response to the arrival of an expert whose expertise is misunderstood. A more generous reading might suggest the course assignment was an opportunity to introduce a new discipline, but was perhaps too big a step in a climate needing smaller steps to change long-standing guidelines and habits of mind about curricula and programs. The challenge in teaching “Women, Writing, and Rhetoric” thus relates primarily to its status as a special topics course, which signals the narrow perception of Composition/Rhetoric Studies in my department.

The potential and viability of the course is absolutely hindered by its place outside of departmental requirements, values, and habits of mind; its invisibility to students who prefer to take classes that further a particular, known interest or fulfill a requirement further reflect this outsider status. Advertisement through the
Gender and Women’s Studies program and word of mouth were my only ways to generate knowledge about and interest in the course – avenues made more difficult by my arrival on campus mere weeks before the beginning of the academic year. Students did, however, find their way to the course for a number of different and compelling reasons, including undergraduates wanting more opportunities to do coursework in women’s studies, graduate students in the MAT program seeking to learn more about composition to be better classroom teachers, and a few English majors interested in reading women’s texts and developing their writing skills. By and large, these students were English majors in literature and MAT graduate students with undergraduate literature degrees. I suspect students initially saw the class as an opportunity to read and write about women’s texts and completely ignored the word “rhetoric” in the course title. While I understood these students would generally be unfamiliar with Composition/Rhetoric Studies beyond their own experiences with first year composition, the interests that brought them to the course meshed fairly well with my course rationale – introducing others to my discipline in ways that would appeal to their various rhetorical needs and my teaching and scholarly interests.

THEORETICAL RATIONALE

“Women, Writing, and Rhetoric” brings together my pedagogical philosophy, my beliefs about rhetoric and composition, and my particular interest in feminist rhetorical studies. At the tenth Composition Studies Conference at the University of New Hampshire in Fall 2004, Kate Ronald’s plenary address introduced me to a question that has since guided my teaching: what difference does it make? This question, which comes from Ann Berthoff’s reading of Paulo Freire as a pragmatist, demands we consider the value and ends of our actions:

He says to us, “How your theory works and what it changes will best tell you what your theory is.” He wants us to consider the worth of an idea by asking what difference it would make. He wants us to think about the dialectic of ends and means, about the mysteries of despair and hope. (qtd. in Ronald and Roskelly 617)

I understand the difference the constructivist, engaged pedagogy I embrace makes: it situates students and teachers as interested co-inquirers; privileges action, experience, and the social dimensions of learning; and recognizes that dialogue promotes understanding. I also understand the difference studying rhetoric and composition makes. Like James Berlin, I do not believe that compositionists are merely teaching writing skills; when we teach, we are always teaching students ways of experiencing and being in the world. I want my students to expand their rhetorical knowledge to better explore and communicate their ideas in writing. I also want my students to develop their interpretive engagement with texts to more effectively understand and respond to others’ perspectives. For me, teaching
composition and rhetoric is a means of teaching students to become more active, humane participants in their writing classes and in their personal, academic, professional, and civic lives.

To plan “Women, Writing, and Rhetoric,” I asked myself a more focused version of Ronald’s question: what difference can a course in women’s rhetorics make? I wanted students to learn about historical and contemporary women’s rich rhetorical practices, to experience the difference studying women’s rhetorics could make in their lives, to recognize rhetoric’s empowering potential and to learn about ways subject positions, particularly gender, constrain and enable speaking, writing, listening and reading activities. In reflecting on and researching possible course designs, I was particularly keen to respond to Ritchie and Ronald’s question in “Riding Long Coattails, Subverting Tradition: The Tricky Business of Feminists Teaching Rhetoric(s)”: “Can there be women’s rhetoric without traditional rhetoric?” (218). This early article about women’s voices and the rhetorical tradition advocates teaching women’s rhetorics alongside, and in dialogue with, the rhetorical tradition. However, given my students’ unfamiliarity with rhetoric and uneven experiences with women’s studies, I did not want to diminish my focus on women rhetors by starting the course with readings by forefathers like Aristotle and Cicero, a pattern I have observed in syllabi for similar courses at other institutions. I feared that beginning with an introduction to rhetoric through traditional, patriarchal texts might mean my students would read women’s texts as secondary to and not in dialogue with these patriarchs.

“Women, Writing, and Rhetoric” introduces students to Composition/Rhetoric Studies through women’s rhetorics. I developed four inter-related goals: (1) to recover a body of women’s writing and speaking; (2) to analyze and critique women’s texts to study women’s rhetorical practices; (3) to familiarize students with Composition/Rhetoric Studies to develop their abilities to read and write rhetorically; and (4) to turn these endeavors explicitly towards an exploration of students’ reflexive understanding of women’s rhetorics in relationship to their communicative practices as located subjects in academic, personal, and civic spheres. The following questions served first as a heuristic for further creating the course and later as a guide to students’ learning: What can we learn from reading and studying women’s voices? What strategies have women writers and speakers used to achieve their goals? What can women’s rhetorics teach us—men and women—about our own writing and speaking practices? My approach parallels Ronald and Ritchie’s recent interest, described in “Pedagogy and Public Engagement: The Uses of Women’s Rhetorics,” to turn from recovery and reclamation of women’s writing and speaking to analysis and use of women’s rhetorics: “Now that women’s rhetorics have been recovered and reclaimed, we think we should analyze the ways we can make use of them” (208).

The structure, readings and writing assignments for “Women, Writing, and Rhetoric” cohere around three units: introductions to the topic of women and rhetoric, close readings of women’s rhetorics using rhetorical analysis and rhetorical criticism, and applications of course readings to students’ experiences and efforts as writers/speakers and readers/listeners. In the first unit, I introduced students
to some of the questions, issues and concepts at stake in general in rhetoric and composition and in women’s rhetorics in particular. We identified the need to talk about women as rhetors by reading Joan Bolker’s “Teaching Griselda to Write” and the introduction to Elizabeth J. Natalle and Fritzi R. Bodenheimer’s *The Woman’s Public Speaking Handbook*. We read Jim Kuypers and Andrew King’s “What is Rhetoric?” and Jeanne Fahnestock and Marie Secor’s “Rhetorical Analysis” to identify a vocabulary for talking about texts from a rhetorical perspective. We also read articles by Patricia Bizzell, Lindal Buchanan, and Karlyn Kohrs Campbell to discuss feminist methods of research—recovery, criticism, and theorizing. A primary assignment to help students make sense of these readings asked students to create what I call discussion sheets, one-page handouts comprised of key terms, intriguing quotations, and analytical questions. This assignment spurred class discussions, focused freewrites, and raised ongoing lines of inquiry. This three-week unit helped us locate ourselves in feminist rhetorical studies, establishing our agenda, means, and language for studying women’s rhetorics in the larger context of rhetoric and composition.

In the second unit, seven weeks in duration, we did close readings, analysis and critique of primary texts to explore our responses to individual readings and consider what useful observations we could make about American women’s rhetorical practices across the nineteenth-, twentieth-, and twenty-first centuries. Our reading selections came from Ronald and Ritchie’s *Available Means* and Shirley Wilson Logan’s *With Pen and Voice*, our two course anthologies. We focused on black women rhetors in particular since their writings need recovering for students at the University of Montana, a predominantly white institution. Use of informal writings and the discussion sheets helped extend information from the first unit into our collaborative efforts to read and write rhetorically.

Students undertook two of the three major writing assignments during this unit: the rhetorical analysis and gender critique. These overlapping genres served as a critical means for students to enter into ways of reading, thinking and writing practiced in Composition/Rhetoric Studies to help them interrogate individual course texts.

Mini-lectures, small group work, class discussions, in-class activities and short reading and writing assignments for homework on different issues and topics in composition and rhetoric provided students with strategies and lens for reading and writing rhetorically. We explored—contemplated, defined and redefined, applied and extended—the following topics: rhetorical distance; Burkean identification; ethos, logos, pathos; rhetor-audience relationships; Lloyd Bitzer’s rhetorical situation; classical discussions of definitions, schemes, and tropes; the five rhetorical canons; Lorraine Code’s description of subjectivity; and Quintillian’s “good man skilled in speaking.” For example, genre analysis helped us consider the petition as a space for nineteenth-century white and black women to speak and studying women rhetors’ pronoun use was a concrete means to analyze textual and ethical relationships between rhetors and readers. Code’s description of subjectivity
was particularly critical to explorations of women’s available means, exigencies and contexts for speaking and writing. Reading Adrienne Rich’s “Claiming and Education” and “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Revision” followed by an excerpt from Krista Ratcliffe’s study of Rich’s rhetoric in *Anglo-American Feminist Challenges to the Rhetorical Traditions: Virginia Woolf, Mary Daly, Adrienne Rich* helped students learn about Rich as a rhetor and develop strategies for analyzing and critiquing texts and for writing up this work. I thus sought to expose students to traditional and contemporary rhetorical concepts in relationship to readings, in part to prepare them for the more formalized genre assignments.

The rhetorical analysis is a critical assignment because it emphasizes that writers and readers benefit from studying the effects texts have on readers. I taught students to understand rhetorical analysis both as a way of closely reading course texts to understand how they persuade readers and as a way to learn rhetorical strategies to employ as writers, thus linking reading and writing practices. Students chose a written expository text by a woman writer to compose their rhetorical analysis. My primary goal was for students to demonstrate their emerging abilities as rhetoricians by studying how a text “works” and to learn about the effects of particular women’s writings. The rhetorical criticism extended the rhetorical analysis assignment; students analyzed a text, concept or issue to assert a particular reading. To focus this broad assignment, I asked students to write a gender critique, which I define as a kind of rhetorical criticism that focuses on rhetorically reading texts from an understanding that gender matters. Students chose a text(s) by a male or female author or a definition of a term (like feminism or academic freedom) and offered a rereading of that text(s) or concept. These critical rereadings took the form of challenging gendered assumptions or extending old ideas in new directions in light of feminist thinking. Both assignments challenged students generally schooled in literary studies to write papers about themes in novels, plays or poems to learn new ways of reading, analyzing, and talking about non-fiction—including petitions, speeches and essays—texts and compose in two previously unfamiliar disciplinary genres. For students trained in literary analysis, even those who struggled with it, doing rhetorical analysis was, in their view, a difficult shift between analyzing content to studying means and effects of textual production.

While students had opportunities to reflect on the relevance of unfamiliar readings and reading practices throughout the class, the third unit expressly linked the study of women’s texts to the consequences of this work for students as writers, readers, speakers, listeners, and participants in and beyond the classroom. A planned class dialogue on an ongoing public rhetoric project and a personal, academic essay comprised the two major assignments in this brief, two week unit. I designed the public rhetoric project a number of years ago as a way to challenge students to put their learning about rhetoric into action. This semester-long project asks student to take on the roles of rhetor and rhetorical listener in the public sphere by (1) creating a written or spoken text to address a need/desire they have to
communicate to members of some academic or public community and (2) writing a rhetorical criticism of a community or campus speaking event. Students wrote a reflection on their experiences as speakers and listeners and, during this final unit, engaged in a dialogue with peers to collaboratively reflect on and theorize about their experiences as rhetors and rhetorical critics. This assignment challenged students to work independently to use their learning about women and rhetoric to participate publicly in conversations they are committed to, whether giving a speech on euthanizing animals, attending a talk on women and the mass media, or writing to a state senator to protest government spending.

The personal, academic essay was an opportunity for students to make connections between their personal commitments and our academic pursuits and to enact some of the rhetorical moves we had observed and discussed over the semester in a less formal genre than the rhetorical analysis and critique. It was another chance, too, for students to stretch their understanding of the academic essay, which they often learned in literature courses is a distant, formalized analytical or researched essay. The major goal of this assignment was to begin to pull together some emerging ideas about their relationship to the course material in yet another unfamiliar genre. More specifically, this essay assignment, based on Candace Spigelman’s work on personal, academic essays and Donna Qualley’s discussion of reflexivity and “essayistic stance,” asks students to explore the impact of their encounters with the ideas, texts, and conversations they had been engaging in the class. Students had to locate themselves in relationship to our readings and discussions of women’s rhetorical practices: What has your study of women’s rhetorics taught you about your own writing and speaking practices? About your subjectivity? About your development as a rhetor? What difference does the body of work we’ve read, discussed, and written about this semester make for you? Here, the questions I had used to shape the course became prompts for invention. Throughout the course, students had learned that using the personal as evidence can be a powerful way of asserting one’s position and persuading others, and this assignment gave them a chance to explore this kind of writing. In addition, Juanita Rodgers Comfort’s “Becoming a Writerly Self: College Writers Engaging Black Feminist Essays,” bell hooks’ “Engaged Pedagogy” and Jacqueline Jones Royster’s “Time Alone, Place Apart: The Role of Solitude in Using the Power of Solitude” helped students extend their observations about women rhetors’ different uses of the personal to compose their own personal, academic essays. One student located herself in a tradition of black women rhetors which included Anna Julia Cooper, Francis Watkins Harper, Patricia Williams, and Toni Morrison; another claimed her feminism as a rural Montanan; and a third identified her ongoing struggle to find her voice and her available means for speaking and writing. The personal, academic essay privileged the rhetorical use of experience we had observed in our reading and asked students to locate themselves in relationship to the course in ways they were not used to doing in other courses and assignments, particularly papers for literature courses.
Final portfolios served as the culmination of this active reflective work as students took stock of their learning over the semester and positioned themselves in our semester-long exploration of women’s rhetorics. I like portfolio assessment for what it offers any writing classroom in terms of creating space for learning, drafting, and ongoing reflection and assessment, and this course was no different. Making choices about which informal writings to include; the amount, kind, and degree of revision of the major assignments; and the organization and delivery of the whole helped students revisit our work together and shape it to represent their learning to themselves and to me as their evaluator. The portfolios were specifically intended to help students see the interconnections among the three units, resee the introductory unit from a new perspective, consider the body of women’s writing we had read, and do concentrated revisions to their major genre projects based on their acquired understanding of rhetoric and composition studies. Draft workshops at the end of the semester also gave us opportunities to return to early questions and emergent lines of inquiry about topics ranging from women speakers and ethos to the use of personal experience and (anti)identification as a persuasive strategy for black women. We also returned to early readings about voice and established a list of constraints, exigencies and productive possibilities for women writing and speaking about different issues from a myriad of perspectives and in a range of genres. In the course of these intense workshops and in reading the final portfolios, I saw evidence that women’s rhetorics had made a number of differences for students, from introducing them to black women rhetors they had never read, to giving them strategies for rhetorically reading and composing texts, to initiating them into some of the theories, practices and genres that characterize the discipline of Composition/Rhetoric Studies.

**Critical Reflection**

My experience teaching this course twice in the past year; reflecting on students’ performances, informal responses to readings, assignments and activities; and gathering insights through course evaluations have reinforced my commitment to “Women, Writing, and Rhetoric” and underscored the necessary work to better position the course and teach it at my institution. The three units worked effectively to help students meet the course goals; moving from recovery, to analysis and critique, and to the use of women’s rhetorics was successful. Students interrogated texts and learned about a whole new grouping of women’s rhetorics, they entertained questions about the relationship between subjectivity and speaking and writing situations, they identified and employed rhetorical strategies, and they learned the power of using the personal as part of argumentation. In addition, my pedagogical approach was effective overall; students enjoyed the opportunity to take a rigorous discussion- and workshop-based course that positioned them as co-inquirers.
I did, however, underestimate the challenge of inviting students into a “new” discipline. Repeatedly, students’ expectations about the course and unexamined assumptions about English departments as the home of literary studies created learning challenges as they encountered questions, genres, research methods and practices of an unfamiliar discipline in the English Department. This was most evident in the two assignments asking students to compose in the genres of rhetorical analysis and gender critique. Because the two genres overlap, students who struggled with the rhetorical analysis also struggled with the gender critique. I incorporated different informal analysis activities and mini-lectures on composition and rhetoric into the syllabus in the second semester to give students more tools for practicing these acts. I believe students learned how to use rhetorical analysis and criticism as *activities* over the course of the semester, yet struggled when it came time to organize their responses to texts into academic essays. Some students had trouble distinguishing between rhetorical analysis and literary analysis, and at least one student still associated criticism with “saying something bad about someone’s writing” at the end of the semester. We discussed the differences between literary studies and Composition/Rhetoric Studies and developed glossaries of new terms to aid learning, but enacting this distinction was a significant struggle for many students. For me, these conversations really underscored Anis Bawarshi’s notion of genres as sites, “rhetorical ecosystems,” in which many of my students felt ill at ease. Bawarshi writes that

> [as] individuals make their way through culture, they function within various and at times conflicting genre spaces, spaces that reposition them in specific relations to others through the use of specific language exchanges as well as frame the ways they recognize and enact their language practices, activities, and themselves. (39)

My students were used to taking lecture style-literature classes, writing papers analyzing themes in novels, poems, or short stories and positivist research papers. Despite remote experiences with first year composition as students or current experiences as teachers of first year composition, practicing reading rhetorically and writing as a process of rhetorical decision making was something my students were not used to doing. They were, in Bawarshi’s terms, used to functioning in different generic spaces shaped by their experiences in literary studies. Even the MAT students found our work together far removed from their experiences as students, and they struggled to make connections between feminist rhetorics and their practices as writing teachers. At the end of the semester, some students still felt like outsiders when trying to function in the context of rhetorical analysis and critique, even if they had a new understanding of and ability with concepts, practices and issues in women’s rhetorics and the discipline of Composition/Rhetoric Studies more generally. I will still assign these two papers because of the vital rhetorical work they invite, but I will do so better prepared to recognize students’ struggles negotiating new ways of thinking about and responding to texts. My
increased awareness of this challenge will help me facilitate students’ entry into this unfamiliar discipline because I can make the struggle itself a topic of explicit discussion about the difficulties of entering another discipline—including its terminology, means of study and genres—and share more accessible student models of these two genres with my class.

The public rhetoric project has become one of my favorite projects because it so successfully challenges students to situate the rhetorical practices and issues they are studying in the context of their own interests and commitments. While some students resist the speaking/writing component—out of fear or reluctance to “get involved” and move out of the relative familiarity of the academy—I have grown committed to asking students to use rhetoric to act beyond the confines of the classroom. This past semester I added a listening component, so that students who fear or cannot easily pursue a speaking/writing need can find partial success in the project as an audience member at a panel presentation or speaking engagement. I like this revision to the public rhetoric assignment because it no longer privileges writing, speaking and reading, but invites students to think critically about listening, too. Next time I teach this course, I will also shift the nature of the public rhetoric project from an ongoing independent project to one with more teacher support—in the form of workshops on the texts students need to compose and activities about rhetorical listening—to see if that helps students turn emerging abilities with rhetorical analysis and criticism towards better success with high stakes written projects. The day students shared their projects with one another was one of the most engaging class discussions of the spring semester. In discussing students’ experiences as speakers and listeners in the spring semester, we extended our academic discussions of the role of emotion in public speaking, the relationship between a speaker’s ostensible purpose and a listener’s potential range of responses, and the way spaces and circumstances shape a speaking event in relationship to students’ experiences.

Another successful aspect of “Women, Writing, and Rhetoric” was the selection of readings. The introductory readings effectively framed our semester’s work, and I was pleased to find a good alternative to beginning the semester with forefathers in rhetoric. The second time I taught the course, I added Lindal Buchanan’s essay “Regendering Delivery: The Fifth Cannon (sic) and the Maternal Rhetor” to the introductory unit and found that this essay enhances students’ understanding of the challenges white women faced on the public platform in the nineteenth century. To better link the topic of “women and voice” with rhetoric more generally—since students had trouble recognizing Bolker’s and Annas’s essays as part of the same tradition as Kuypers and King and Fahnestock and Secor—I want to include Cindy Moore’s “Why Feminists Can’t Stop Talking About Voice” as a bridge between them, possibly replacing Zawacki’s or Annas’s essay. Moore’s discussion of changing definitions of voice complements Bolker’s early, accessible essay, yet also has the advantage of locating this issue in contemporary theory and classroom practice.
By the time the second unit began, students were ready to dive into our primary texts. Students enjoyed the range of nonfiction readings in *Available Means* and the opportunity to read speeches by a number of unfamiliar black women rhetors in *With Pen and Voice*. I chose a focus on the nineteenth- through the twenty-first centuries, including black women rhetors as a dominant presence, as a way to select among the many options currently available, because of my own interests, and because of the lack of racial diversity on my campus. In the introduction to *Available Means*, Ronald and Ritchie describe their resistance to creating a canon of women’s rhetorics, and refer to their collection as a “gathering” rather than a static storehouse of canonized women’s writing. I like this notion of resisting the tendency towards canonizing texts, and I would enjoy shifting my primary texts in future semesters to give voice to different rhetors in different time periods and locations. Given the fact that the University of Montana is within driving distance of two American Indian reservations—the Blackfeet and the Flathead—and that that the student body includes a small number of marginalized American Indian students, I would like to give more attention to American Indian women’s voices. While *Available Means* has a few selections, Malea Powell’s work in composition and rhetoric and Karen Kilcup’s *Native American Women's Writing: An Anthology* are additional resources I will consider in the future. The third unit is also another place to consider changing some texts to provide variety. I would like to include Nancy Sommers’s essay “Between the Drafts” as both an example of a personal, academic essay and an essay about the power of revision, as well as choose other essays to appeal to students’ areas of study and civic interests. While I liked the assigned readings, from the genres to the content, future chances to research and choose alternative readings that meet the course and unit goals in different ways appeal to me.

Asking “what difference does it make?” is a good question for thinking about how and why I need to better locate this course in the department and university before teaching it again. The most important revision to make to “Women, Writing, and Rhetoric” is to locate it and Composition/Rhetoric Studies more generally within a program(s) of study as a legitimate—both in terms of requirements and disciplinary status—course for students to take. Persuading students to take a women’s rhetoric course depends in part on degree requirements, largely a matter in the control of faculty within and beyond my department, and on students’ being familiar enough with Composition/Rhetoric Studies to imagine taking the course. Certainly, students’ difficulties with rhetorical analyses and gender critique are symptomatic of a general view that Composition/Rhetoric Studies is only about first year composition and writing remediation. I need to convince faculty and students of the benefits of this discipline—particularly women’s rhetorics—for advanced students and/or graduate students in at least one of three sites: within the English Department, the general education writing requirements and the Gender and Women’s Studies Program. More gradual moves, including proposing courses in advanced composition to fulfill a university requirement for lower-divi-
sion writing intensive courses, developing a more professionalized Composition Program with curricula and teaching pedagogies that reflect current theories and practices in composition and rhetoric, and demonstrating the difference between a Composition Director as manager versus administrative-scholar and teacher are some ways to lay better groundwork for situating “Women, Writing, and Teaching” in the requirements and minds of students and faculty members.

The perception that Composition/Rhetoric Studies exists mainly to remediate unprepared students and manage new teaching assistants affects not only departmental decisions about course assignments and curricular structures, but also advanced students’ classroom expectations and experiences as they negotiate the territory between literary and rhetorical studies. I have a number of avenues to pursue to locate “Women, Rhetoric, and Writing” in students’ minds and in degree requirements—work that is always necessary when developing a new course, but might offer a particular challenge when introducing students and faculty to the questions, genres, and issues of an unfamiliar discipline. While I have the long-term goal of developing a concentration and then a minor (and, one day, a major) with a place for “Women, Rhetoric, and Writing” within a coherent sequence of courses or curricula, knowledge of the current cross-section of students who enrolled in the course this past year also gives me ideas for better situating the course in the context of future students’ needs and desires. My students have taught me that the course offers a variety of cross-disciplinary learning opportunities: it offers women’s studies students a new dimension to feminist theory and a new angles on questions of gender and writing, new teachers an opportunity to expand their understanding of composition and rhetorical theories to help them theorize their teaching, and it offers all students a chance to develop their writing and reading knowledges and abilities in a challenging, engaging context. The connection between “Women, Writing, and Rhetoric” and the Gender and Women’s Studies program offers a promising means to locate this and other composition courses that interrogate gender issues, particularly with the recent creation of a master’s degree in Gender and Women’s Studies. “Women, Writing, and Rhetoric” offers students a new means to study and write about gender issues, and the interdisciplinarity of the program complements the interdisciplinarity of Composition/Rhetoric Studies. The course is a good option for students pursuing their master’s degree in teacher training; both the topic and pedagogical approach complement program emphases in critical theory and pedagogy and advanced studies in composition theory. Finally, an advanced composition course under development might serve as an incremental step to this upper-division course, and “Women, Writing, and Rhetoric” might be refigured to meet university requirements for lower or upper-division writing courses. All these options present different opportunities for more firmly positioning the course in departmental, inter-departmental and institutional contexts. Nor will I neglect the power of formal and informal channels of advertising the course as I get more involved with the Gender and Women’s Studies Program, meet my colleagues interested in rhetoric in Communication

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Studies, and become more familiar with students’ needs and desires as students and rhetors. These ways of thinking about the students who might value the course might help make way for offering the course and further strategizing ways to introducing others to the potential of Composition/Rhetoric Studies. That said, I have some departmental and institutional work to do in order to teach the course as something other than a special topics course and to better establish an ongoing need for and understanding of the course.

When the opportunity arises—or when I have better created a context for this course—I will gladly teach the course again with a more explicit recognition of the challenges students entering a “new” discipline face, particularly the challenge of composing new genres. In many ways, then, this experience speaks to the need for faculty in Composition/Rhetoric Studies to develop minors and majors in our discipline, teach others about the scholarly nature and value of composition programs, and to position courses making issues of women and rhetoric central more central themselves.

Works Cited


Women, Writing, and Rhetoric: ENEX 495

*And where the words of women are crying to be heard, we must each of us recognize our responsibility to seek those words out, to read them and share them and examine them in their pertinence to our lives.*

Audre Lorde

This course heeds Audre Lorde’s challenge that we read and study women’s words and talk about what we can learn—as writers, readers, speakers, listeners—from them. We’ll read primary works by historical women like Ida B. Wells and Elizabeth Cady Stanton as well as contemporary women, including Paula Gunn Allen, Toni Morrison, and Adrienne Rich. We’ll also read critical essays about women’s writing and speaking practices, particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as a handful of articles to inform our discussions about women, writing, and rhetoric.

The course will explore the following questions: What can we learn from reading and studying women’s voices? What strategies have women writers and speakers used to achieve their goals? In the context of these conversations, students will be introduced to rhetoric and learn rhetorical approaches for interpreting texts and composing their own. We’ll talk about what the relationship between women and rhetoric and explore what women’s rhetoric(s) can teach us—men and women—about our own writing and speaking practices. In other words, we’ll ask what difference this growing body of work makes in a number of contexts and to different audiences.

**Course Goals**

- Gain an understanding of rhetoric to support your abilities to compose texts effectively and as a lens for interpreting texts
- Gain an understanding of the evolving relationship between women and rhetoric, including key concepts, figures, questions, methods of study
- Collaborate to exchange ideas and give and receive writing criticism
- Gain a reflexive understanding of your rhetorical power in the context of our reading, writing and discussions and in the context of your own affiliations and commitments.
Texts


Electronic readings


Assignment Overviews. I'll provide you with further instructions as we embark on these different assignments.

**Informal Writing.** You'll write informally—as a means of thinking through ideas—for a variety of purposes and in a variety of contexts. You'll write in and out of class, alone and in collaboration with others in response to readings, as acts of reflection, as ways of exploring course concepts.
**Rhetorical Analysis.** A focused study of a written or spoken text by a woman rhetor or rhetors to practice rhetorical analysis.

*Gender Critique.* A focused (re)reading of a text from a gendered perspective to practice one approach to the art of rhetorical criticism.

**Reflexive Inquiry.** A personal, academic essay in which you examine and critique your assumptions about some aspect of the topic women, writing, and rhetoric in light of your encounter with the ideas, texts, and conversations you engage in this class.

**Portfolio.** You will collect all your informal writings and assignments in a working portfolio throughout the semester. At the end of the semester, you’ll compose a reflective introduction to a submission portfolio and present your work in the class for final evaluation. The portfolio must include the rhetorical analysis, rhetorical criticism, reflexive inquiry, a selection of informal writings, and artifacts related to your reading, writing, and research processes. Graduate students will also include the book review.

**Public Rhetoric Projects: Speaking and Listening.**

*Part 1. Speaking:* Create/use a speaking opportunity as a means to enact and reflect on your rhetorical power as a speaker. You’ll turn in a brief description of your speech/talk and a reflection on its impact (2-3 pages).

*Part 2. Listening:* Attend a speech or talk on campus or in the community. Write a rhetorical analysis or rhetorical critique of the talk based on our readings and discussions of rhetoric (2-3 pages).

**Course Evaluation.** Your success in this class will depend on the following: meeting the requirements; the quality of your written and oral work; your willingness to try new perspectives and explore new ideas. Your grade will be determined based on the following percentages:

- **Class participation** 20%
- **Public rhetoric project** 15%
- **Portfolio** 65%
## Schedule

### Week 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Agenda:</th>
<th>Homework:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Introduction: Course, Texts, Goals</td>
<td>Review course texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Introductions 2: Course, Texts, Goals</td>
<td>“Teaching Griselda to Write” &amp; “Style as Politics: A Feminist Approach to the Teaching of Writing”</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Women and Voice 1</td>
<td>“Recomposing as a Woman” &amp; Introduction to “The Woman’s Public Speaking Handbook”</td>
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### Week 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Agenda:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Women and Voice 2; Introduce Public Rhetoric Project</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“An Allegory” Winifred Horner &amp; “What is Rhetoric?” Kuypers and King</td>
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<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>What is Rhetoric? What is its place in the university?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Rhetorical Analysis” Fahnestock and Secor</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Rhetorical Analysis: what is it? How do you do it? Introduce Rhetorical Analysis</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“The Feminization of Rhetoric” Gearhart &amp; “Feminism and Rhetoric” Herrick</td>
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### Week 3

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Agenda:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>When Women and Rhetoric Meet</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Feminist Methods of Research in the History of Rhetoric” Bizzell &amp; Kate’s article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Feminist Research Methods 1: Identify Text for Rhetorical Analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Regendering Delivery” Lindal Buchanan &amp; Introduction to Man Cannot Speak For Her Campbell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Feminist Research Methods 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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102 Composition Studies
Week 4
M  
**Agenda:** Exploring Women’s Rhetorics: Beginnings...  
Revisit course questions  
**Homework:** Belinda (89), Cherokee Women (106), Sarah Winnemucca (157)

W  
**Agenda:** 19th Century American Women Rhetors  
**Homework:** Sarah Grimke (114) & Angelina Grimke (119), *AM*

F  
**Agenda:** 19th Century American Women Rhetors  
**Homework:** Seneca Falls Convention (138), Harper (148), Anthony (151), Stanton (171)

Week 5
M  
**Agenda:** No class: university recess  
**Homework:**

W  
**Agenda:** 19th Century American Women Rhetors  
**Homework:** “Mounting the Platform” & Maria Stewart Ch. 1 *P&V* & Maria Stewart (109) *AM*

F  
**Agenda:** Workshop: Inventing Rhetorical Analysis  
19th Century African-American Women  
**Homework:** Ida B. Wells Ch 5 *P&V*; Ch 9 RR

Week 6
M  
**Agenda:** 19th Century African-American Women  
**Homework:** Anna Cooper Ch 4 *P&V*; Cooper (163) *AM*

W  
**Agenda:** 19th Century African-American Women  
**Homework:** Victoria Matthews Ch. 7 “The Awakening of the Afro-American Woman” (149) *P&V*

F  
**Agenda:** 19th Century African-American Women  
**Homework:** Is there an African-American Women’s rhetoric?  
Complete rough draft and mail to partner

Week 7
M  
**Agenda:** Workshop: Rhetorical Analysis  
**Homework:** Revise and send copy to partner
**W**  
*Agenda:* Rhetorical Analysis due for teacher comments; Introduce Rhetorical Criticism  
*Homework:* Jordan (218), Sanger (223), Goldman (226), Nelson (233) or Day (237) *AM*  
“The Art of Criticism” Kuypers

**F**  
*Agenda:* 1900s-1930s American Women Rhetors & rhetorical criticism  
*Homework:* Rich (267) (*AM*), “Claiming and Education” Rich Ratcliffe on Rich (excerpt)

**Week 8**  
**M**  
*Agenda:* Adrienne Rich as a rhetor  
*Homework:* Combahee River Collective (291) & Audre Lorde (301) *AM* Choose text for criticism

**W**  
*Agenda:* 1970s American Women Rhetors  
*Homework:* Walker (314) Dworkin (330) *AM*

**F**  
*Agenda:* 1980s American Women Rhetors  
Workshop: Inventing rhetorical criticism  
*Homework:* Terry Tempest Williams (401) & Patricia Williams (409) *AM*

**Week 9**  
**M**  
*Agenda:* 1990s American Women Rhetors  
*Homework:* Morrison (416) *AM*

**W**  
*Agenda:* Toni Morrison as a rhetor  
*Homework:* Allison (435)

**F**  
*Agenda:* “two or three things I know for sure” as a rhetor and rhetorician  
*Homework:* Work on rhetorical criticism

**Week 10**  
*Agenda:* Spring Break  
*Homework:* Draft your rhetorical criticism and send copy to reader for comments

**Week 11**  
**M**  
*Agenda:* Workshop: Rhetorical Criticism  
*Homework:* Revise
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Agenda: Rhetorical Criticism due for teacher comments; Introduce Reflexive Inquiry</td>
<td>“Writing and Reflexivity” Qualley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Agenda: Writing and Reflexivity</td>
<td>“Becoming a Writerly Self” Comfort</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 12</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Agenda: Writerly selves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Agenda: Feminism, teachers and students</td>
<td>Homework: Draft reflexive inquiry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Agenda: Workshop Reflexive Inquiry</td>
<td>Homework: Revise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 13</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Agenda: Reflexive Inquiry due for teacher comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Agenda: Planning the Portfolio; Compose portfolio plan</td>
<td>Homework: Portfolio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Agenda: Book Review Presentations</td>
<td>Homework: Book Review Presentations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 14</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Agenda: Draft workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Agenda: Public Rhetoric Project Sharings</td>
<td>Homework: Work on portfolio; Draft reflective introductions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Agenda: Draft workshop</td>
<td>Homework: Prepare for conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 15</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Agenda: Portfolio conferences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Homework: Portfolio

W Agenda: Editing workshop/evaluations
   Homework: Finish Portfolio

F Agenda: Portfolio due at beginning of class

Week 16
   Exam Week
   Meet to turn in Portfolios