**ENGLISH 200:**
**INTERMEDIATE COMPOSITION**

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

**English 200: Intermediate Composition** is a program elective for English majors and a writing-intensive elective for nonmajors at Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU), a comprehensive institution of 11,000 undergraduate and graduate (master’s level) students. English 200 is described in the departmental course catalog as a course “in expository writing, focusing on rhetorical analysis of a variety of texts in our culture.” Instructor approaches vary within a special topics format; the topic for this section was “Rhetoric, Argument, and the Law in Popular Culture.” The course is capped at 20 students and has a pre-requisite of English 112 (Composition II: Research Writing).

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Institutional Context

English 200 was originally designed to assist sophomore-level students in the English department’s Secondary Education and Professional Writing tracks in “continued practice and instruction in the basic patterns of expository prose, including the research paper,” according to the original course proposal from 1979. It claimed to serve “the general student” in writing as opposed to those with “special writing interests,” such as creative writing. Assignments emphasized a modes approach; suggested texts included Plain English Please: A Rhetoric, Reviving Prose, The Elements of Style, and On Writing Well. Despite the proposal’s assertion that English 200 would be offered every semester, as of fall 2002, the course had not been offered for at least ten years due, in part, to lack of faculty expertise in writing and rhetoric and, in part, to the broad curricular goals governing the course’s content, which failed to clarify for prospective teachers or students how it differed from first-year composition.

As Elizabeth Penfield argues in her discussion of what space intermediate and advanced writing courses such as English 200 occupy, particularly in public, regional colleges like SCSU, “the teacher of advanced composition seems an anarchist and a loner. The teacher . . . is often solely responsible for developing and stating course goals, the means by which they will be achieved, the standards by which the students’ writing will be judged, and the syllabus, if any” (20). This historically vague shape of and inattention to courses labeled “intermediate” or, lacking that middle pedagogical ground, “advanced” composition that Penfield outlines may be indicative of Robert Scholes’s hypothesis that English studies, and by extension English major curricula, in the past twenty years have evolved such that “the term literature now excludes texts intended to persuade” resulting from “an opposition between the aesthetic text and the rhetorical text” (169). So while SCSU’s English department offers a popular and successful creative writing and a smaller professional writing concentration in addition to traditional literary study, advanced writing and rhetoric courses have had no real home or explicit purpose in our curriculum. Our English 200 faculty were—and to some extent still are—those loners that Penfield describes.

The absence of English 200 from the regular SCSU course offerings also likely stemmed from the place the course has occupied in relation to our extensive first-year composition sequence. Since 1985, all students have been required to take English 112 (Composition II: Research Writing) as well as English 111 (Composition I), and/or English 110 (Composition Writing Lab, i.e., basic writing), depending upon placement exam results. When English 200 first appeared in the course catalog, however, only two of these courses existed—English 110 and English 111. There was no second-semester research course now so prevalent among our sister institutions in the Northeast and else-
where. It’s likely that the original English 200 was thus in some respects a very
different version of intermediate writing—a “remediated” elective in grammar
and language—as the course proposal implies and as some have recognized as
the fate of intermediate composition, given its troubled curricular positioning
(see Gage, Olson). It’s clear that while English 112 was not meant to replace
English 200, the mid-1980s extension of the first-year sequence complicated
what our department now meant by “intermediate” writing.

Echoing the general debate in the profession about the function of
writing courses beyond first-year composition, those of us interested in reviving
the course as a study in rhetoric wondered what English 200 could be. Could it
rise to John T. Gage’s hope and “challenge the writing student to attempt higher
levels of thinking” backed by a “more sophisticated context” than first-year
composition (162)? Could it mirror Michael Carter’s model for an advanced
writing course which depends “less and less on explicit strategies and more
and more on the intuition developed through the experience of writing within
a particular rhetorical context” (66)?

This was the local challenge in fall 2002, when some of our tenure-track
faculty in rhetoric and composition, including myself, decided to revive English
200 as one of our university’s “L” (writing-intensive) courses. We found that
the course filled a curricular gap, as many of our students sought continued
coursework in expository writing not specifically rooted in literary study or in
other writing-intensive or professional fields outside of English studies. We thus
revised the course’s focus to emphasize rhetoric and analysis, clearly marking its
approach as advanced in comparison to English 112. Like Penfield’s students
at the University of New Orleans, our students in English 200 seemed to pos-
sess writing skills that they perceive to have “evolved so that they no longer
worry about error and are ready to move toward effectiveness” (22) and, thus,
needed a writing experience distinct from first-year composition.

These students were not primarily from the humanities or at the sopho-
more (i.e., 200) level. Between spring 2003 and fall 2004, the 137 students
who enrolled in English 200 were largely juniors and seniors (60%) followed
by sophomores (28.5%). Students from popular major fields such as Psychology
(13%), English (10.3%), Nursing (9.5%), and Business (8.1%) dominated
the enrollments. More generally, students in other social sciences made up
a large portion of the population (13%) as did students from fields in science
and math (10.3%). The course also attracted students in foreign languages,
liberal studies, education, exercise science, communications, and fine arts (4 to
6% of the enrollment total from each of these respectively). Students who had
yet to declare a major (17%) and/or were part-time or nonmatriculated (10%)
also were a significant presence. These statistics indicate that at SCSU, Eng-
lish 200 has been serving a very broad population similar to that of first-year
composition. This is in contrast with the role of intermediate composition at other institutions nationwide, where frequently the course serves as primarily or even exclusively an English major elective (Keene and Wallace 99). Our desire to reintroduce English 200, however, was secondarily fueled by our perception that SCSU’s English department was woefully behind the times in its writing course offerings as compared to other programs nationwide. Our only other undergraduate rhetoric/composition course was and is English 405: The Teaching of Writing (for future high school teachers). We thus wanted to revive English 200 as a course that emphasized the basics of rhetoric and rhetorical analysis within different frameworks (including other topics such as ethnography and computers and writing) so as to appeal to a range of students inside and outside English studies, avoiding the roadblock to learning that can occur in first-year composition whereby students have “no investment in the course and no ownership of it” (Penfield 28).

Much as David Fleming has argued for attention to rhetoric as a “coherent and attractive course of study” in the university, where regrettably rhetoric as a subject is on a “continued decline” (169), we felt our undergraduates also needed more exposure to rhetoric as part of their English degree and that the larger university community outside English could also benefit from more electives in writing and rhetoric past the required first-year composition sequence. The revived English 200 course is, in our perception, a key building block for undergraduates who wish to pursue a career path that values rhetoric and rhetorical analysis as an area of study distinct from the writing and analysis done in the fine or literary arts.

In 2000, at the University of Michigan, I also taught intermediate composition (English 225: Argumentative Writing), and this provided me with a secondary local context upon which to build my SCSU course. That setting had included similarly diverse “pre-professional” students—in pre-law, exercise science, and business—for whom the course also served as an upper-division writing requirement on a WAC model. I structured the course around argument and the law to appeal to this group, making it clear in the syllabus that this was not a course in legal writing. My resulting mixed experience at Michigan greatly influenced my desire to retool English 200 at SCSU with a stronger focus on the principles of classical rhetoric.

In English 225, students used different texts (Lunsford’s Everything’s an Argument as well as different films rooted in legal drama, such as The Accused, Philadelphia, and A Civil Action) and a more traditional, argument-based syllabus. Students grappled with rhetoric in writing assignments and oral presentations, however, without ever actually interrogating the terminology, particularly in the analysis of linked visual texts (the students viewed one episode of a television series, and the films listed above, but no thematic
connection arose from these viewings). This may be because I was primarily interested in developing broad skills in argument, assuming the pre-law students especially would bring in prior knowledge of some of the terminology.

My Michigan course unfortunately followed what Fleming would see as the position of first-year writing in the academy: the “universal method for writing” course that settles “to the bottom” of the hierarchical field of rhetoric and composition studies, which pushes practical courses in writing to the first year and theoretical courses to the senior or graduate years, with little in between. With no focus on the practice of rhetoric and its terminology, my English 225 illustrated Fleming’s theory of the “decline in rhetorical education” that comes with this current polarization in the field (172). Upon offering the course at SCSU, I thus wanted to be cognizant of not just the shift in population between institutions and the considerations of that in my pedagogy, but also the critical space that intermediate writing could occupy in the curriculum.

SCSU students, who are approximately 60% female and 20% of color, largely come from working-class backgrounds, with nearly 50% being the first in their families to attend college. SCSU students work on average 25-30 hours per week; many are part-time or returning nontraditional students and over 50% live at home, within 10 miles of campus. Nearly all are on financial aid and are tied to the local community such that most have no immediate plans to leave Connecticut. In contrast to the Michigan students, SCSU students by and large lack self-confidence in writing and critical thinking due to poor preparation during their high school experiences and a local belief, perpetuated by our traditional curriculum, that writing is an “English” skill and that lessons learned in composition do not apply to other subjects or to the work world. Additionally, SCSU students, even future English majors, often have little facility with formal arguments or rhetorical analysis and additionally lack the benefits of elite college students’ home life, which may be augmented by reading or writing as a valued leisure activity.

Thus, my challenge in teaching English 200 was to work with factors that could be both limiting and liberating. While my students’ work world experience and geographic world view could be an extremely positive element of classroom discussion and an asset to group perspectives, truly situating our classroom discourse as a local activity, these factors also limited the assignment of activities such as field research, travel to other libraries, or even analysis of extensive amounts of television programming as homework. The students did have a keen interest, however, in analyzing television as a cultural product rich in argument. My course design thus asserts that the study of classical rhetoric need not be limited to just division I, pre-professional students, those assumed to become learned men and women in the workforce. As Scholes believes, “All good citizens must be rhetoricians to the extent that they can imagine
themselves in the place of another and understand views different from their own” (168). I, too, believe that this displacement of self in the service of a larger communicative good is the highest reward available to writing students, and that this skill is especially important for first-generation, working-class, public-college students like mine, who overwhelmingly will be the majority of college graduates for the foreseeable future.

**Theoretical Rationale**

My focus on rhetoric and law in popular culture in this course was the product of three integrated assumptions about the teaching of writing and accompanying successful methods of student learning at the intermediate level. These are: (1) that television is an accessible, potentially intellectual medium that students may study, in close reading format and via frequent analytical writing assignments, and with which they may interact to examine the principles of many elements of popular discourse, including formal arguments; (2) that students can and should become conversant with the tools of classical rhetoric vis-à-vis a variety of textual formats, including visual narratives found in dramatic television programming; (3) that an intermediate writing course rooted almost exclusively in the analysis of these primary visual texts, rather than the triangular (and perfectly legitimate) dialogue between secondary critiques, primary texts, and student perspectives, is an appropriately challenging way to inculcate the principles of classical rhetoric.

**The Visual Texts: Rhetoric on TV**

Many scholars argue for integrating visual rhetoric into our composition course pedagogies. We often hear about the importance of visual technology (computerized classrooms, internet study, and other electronic communication rooted in the visual), but we less frequently hear the championing of other visual mediums considered more historically “lowbrow” in our culture. Behind these arguments, thus, is a more complicated series of questions: How do writing teachers integrate more traditional/historical visual texts such as television into our students’ writing and writing practices? Do we use visual texts in our courses but only as supplements to the “real” material of the course, found in print texts? Or do we create courses entirely rooted in the written analysis of the visual and, if so, for what reasons? Certainly the popular opinion is that television is a vast wasteland that teaches our children to be violent, highly sexualized, and passive instead of active citizens. Television keeps us from reading; television keeps us from regular social interaction; television keeps us, quite literally, under its power, to the exclusion of all other things. Any faculty member teaching a class that utilizes television as text, therefore, must be aware of the public perception of such a course when constructing pedagogy
that privileges and even promotes the visual, even as the term “visual literacy” pervades many curricula today.

Indeed, courses like English 200 likely raise questions with tuition-paying parents who may wonder, why television to teach classical rhetoric? On the surface, the medium seems incapable of communicating the message. As stated in one popular newspaper read by the tuition-paying public, USA Today, “The one thing that television can’t do is express ideas. . . . It cannot convey reality nor does it even want to” (qtd. in Woiwode 85). This is not so far from scholar Neil Postman’s theory that television is incapable of exemplifying public discourse, even in educational programs. In Amusing Ourselves to Death, Postman argues that in order for television to be successful, “there must be nothing that has to be remembered, studied, applied, or, worst of all, endured . . . any information, story, or idea can be made immediately accessible” (148) since television is not about education or retention of knowledge, but about entertainment or the momentary transmission of images.

While television as a passive entertainment mechanism in our homes may indeed represent these anti-intellectual values, I have found through incorporating televised legal dramas as primary rhetorical texts, when used as an example of rhetoric in action, that television can accomplish more lofty goals and even interrogate rhetorical principles more clearly than can print texts, in that classical rhetoric developed from an oral, visual culture that television, in certain ways, has the power to replicate for today’s students. Ultimately, a great deal of classical rhetoric is being demonstrated in these legal dramas yet is going unrecognized in our classrooms, perhaps because we, as instructors, have our own subjective views of television as a one-dimensional site of entertainment. As Charles Hill argues regarding the perception of the visual, there is no “pure apprehension of objective reality. Comprehending and interpreting any image . . . requires an active mental process that is driven by personal and cultural values and assumptions” (113). For students, viewing television programs, even complex and highly rhetorical ones, remains a passive process until and unless those programs are repeatedly interrogated in an active, writing-intensive setting.

As such, television can challenge students to study and apply ideas if students are directed to analyze the way in which characters speak, are spoken to, and, importantly, how they develop positions on issues that become critical to their own moral and civic (albeit fictional) development. In this way, television can be a teaching tool as opposed to a passive instrument designed to substitute for the teacher; television, I believe, can indeed be a text that employs memory, of all things, and continued interaction on the part of the students. In English 200, while we spent four class periods watching episodes of Law and Order and The Practice (two episodes of each program), we did
so with the principle that shared viewing constitutes the ideal audience for any visual art form. This principle is rooted in reception theory in Media Studies, which argues that the ultimate meaning of a film (or here a television program) is dependent upon the material and social conditions of viewing, including issues of audience identification (i.e., losing one’s self in a darkened room) and audience interaction (sharing ideas with other viewers as events unfold). While such a principle is challenged by the rise of cable television and movie channels that allow “on-demand” viewing and individual DVD/home video viewing in general, it is an important community issue I wanted to emphasize in this course.

Allowing students to view programs as a group initially, then to view additional episodes privately when completing the writing assignments, better replicates the purpose of such programs’ original method of transmission (over public airwaves and shared viewing spaces). After these group viewings, we spent equal class time discussing and reflecting upon what we had seen, rooted in students’ individual 2-3 page responses to each episode. These responses were modeled on previously assigned reading responses, in which students sought out “real-world,” print (or living) examples of the rhetorical principles and terminology outlined in Crowley’s chapters, for example, enthymeme, syllogism, logical fallacy, and kairos, among many others. Sharing these responses became the cornerstone of our analytical exercises as well as important prewriting activities for the formal essays in the course.

Additionally, and most critical to a course on rhetoric, television can express ideas, even recalling debates on moral and ethical dilemmas that have no clear answer or resolution. Consider the “ripped from the headlines” content of many Law and Order episodes and the way in which those current events are often complicated or left unresolved in individual episodes or sequences of related episodes. These become salient points of argument upon which to layer rhetorical tools, both in class discussion and in formal papers, and in facilitating small group work on the canon of invention in particular. One half of the class could be asked to build an appeal inductively, using existing evidence, and the other half deductively, using the same evidence. The fact that the episodes don’t promote a “right” way of thinking makes this sort of class task all the more legitimate as a real-world exercise in rhetoric and human interaction.

Finally, the ideas on television are not static; they are opportunities for dynamic ideological interaction between the program and the students. I found that otherwise shy or reserved students in English 200 were willing to comment on a visual text more readily than they would a written text, perhaps because the experience seemed more shared and the space thus more accommodating of possible “wrong” answers. Additionally, a student with highly unpopular
views—such as my conservative, pro-life student in a class of otherwise mostly liberal, pro-choice individuals—was more likely to speak up about “Serena’s decision” or “Eleanor’s morals” than she might when discussing similar positions in a historical, written text, or the extended examples of abortion rhetoric in Crowley’s text. In this setting, television characters with ideas could function much like literary characters in that students could transfer their opinions, which may conflict with others’, onto the visual text and, thus, more productively engage in a discussion of the origin of those opinions within the framework of dramatized rhetoric.

The Writing Assignments: Rhetoric in Practice

In designing my section of English 200, I wanted to offer students frequent opportunities to both practice the art of rhetoric in their own formal and informal writing assignments and, with the aid of a rhetoric textbook, to analyze the use of rhetoric in both written and visual documents, in this case documents focusing on legal discourse such as the television series *Law and Order* and *The Practice*, and films such as *Twelve Angry Men*. As someone with a background in both English and film studies, I believed that such a course would broaden students’ perceptions of a seemingly archaic subject (rhetoric) while simultaneously revising their notion of what a dynamic medium (television) can contribute to a community’s ideological discourse. With its hybrid design and focus, I hoped that English 200 might offer the students a truly unique course—an experience that would lead to a larger, cross-historical world view of persuasion and argument via current cultural artifacts. When designing the writing assignments for English 200, therefore, I took as my premise that television is an active, creative medium, which may attract a more or less creative, active response in the viewer in kind, particularly depending upon the values and assumptions that Hill highlights above.

Since I always prioritize student choice in designing writing assignments, providing two or three writing options wherever possible, I continued with that structure for this course. In the first assignment, that choice was embedded in the stance the writer chose to take: an argument for whether logical or ethical appeals were the most important to *Law and Order* as a television series. Surprisingly, students were quite evenly divided in their responses, depending on their perspective on the series. Those students who saw the design of the show, its larger physical and narrative architecture, as paramount typically viewed the series as one rooted in logical appeals, prioritizing the sequencing of *law* and *order* and believed in logos as the driving force in determining what is “true” in each episode. One student, Amanda, argued that attorneys must privilege logos over ethos in order to win cases in which moral principles are up for grabs. As Amanda noted, in one episode in
which a particularly sympathetic mother (who is also a killer), the Assistant District Attorney tells his colleague that in order to win, “you [must] win their minds, [as] she’ll win their hearts” (“Ethical Appeal” 5). This student used this maxim of sorts to build her detailed analysis of how legal discourse, in her opinion, was all about logic, whereas the layperson’s reasoning typically is controlled by pathos, led by a strong ethos.

Those students who gravitated toward character construction and focused on the dramatic development of the complex personalities in each episode/plot tended to argue for ethical appeals as primary in the series. These student writers saw ethos as a means of compelling characters to do the “right” thing, even if not the “truest” action in context. Such an analytical standpoint required a greater attention to the viewer as part of the rhetorical triangle. As one student, John, argued in his paper:

> Although logos is employed considerably in Law and Order, it does not surpass the effect that the characters’ use of ethos has on the audience. While these characters use logic simply to gain knowledge or information, their use of ethos makes a colossal impact on the viewer’s morals; these fans wonder whether the characters’ methods were right or wrong, whether they themselves (viewers) would use the same methods, and what kind of standing the characters have in their communities due to this [their ethos]. (“Logos Versus Ethos” 2)

This first assignment thus enabled students—and myself—to see the way in which their own values as viewers allowed them, or prevented them, from being persuaded—how rhetoric is situationally specific, in other words, and not a fixed subject or endeavor.

The second major paper for the course invited students either to argue for the most important canon of rhetoric as evident in The Practice or another legally-focused dramatic program from their own perspective—in traditional essay format—or to play the role of Aristotle in arguing for the overall clear and successful presence (or absence) of the canons as evidenced on the program. I wanted students to have the option of really seeing the television series from the perspective of a rhetorician because I have found that, in writing courses, occasionally getting students to write from outside their own personal perspective allows for a greater sense of audience and purpose. Since we had not studied or read Aristotle’s primary works, this was a formidable challenge. But I asked that the students try to immerse themselves in the thinking that he might do, rather than the language he might use, with the purpose of adopting a perspective from which to see the five canons differently, or more clearly, than they previously had. Only a few students chose this more creative
option—perhaps not surprisingly, given students’ comfort level with such unusual writing tasks (especially in a noncreative writing course).

This paper assignment in general, however, resulted in quite a few insightful analyses of individual characters and their rhetorical predilections and how the power of the canons sometimes worked against the character’s motives or their desired outcomes. This was particularly meaningful to analyze in a program such as The Practice since the characters are defense attorneys who often represent guilty persons and/or persons of questionable character, in contrast to the characters on Law and Order, who prosecute such individuals and are invariably on the “right” side of the law. Focusing on the precarious position of the Practice attorneys, common student analyses dissected Jimmy’s poor employment of style, which often compromises his relationship with judges, as well as Bobby’s overreliance on delivery and repetitive means of invention, which overvalue his own ethos and arrogance in recycling arguments. In addition, students focused on how more clearly ethical characters employed the canons, with varying results and complications. For example, my student James argued that on the police drama NYPD Blue, which arguably dramatizes the law using an equally rhetorical, if less dialogic, structure, the lead detective Andy Sipowicz, even though a highly effective rhetor, sometimes minimizes his rhetorical effectiveness by his overreliance on the power of delivery because “he tends to establish independence from any type of reasoning process, and [thus] eliminates any chance for the use of the other canons” (“Everybody Loves Andy” 5).

Finally, I closed the course by asking students to apply what they had learned about rhetoric and popular culture to a research project of their choosing. Per my usual final-paper guidelines, I asked that students formulate their research as a question and tie it to the subject of the course—if not specifically rhetoric and television legal drama, then rhetoric and some other public artifact in American culture. This was the most traditional of the assignments but generated a wide variety of analyses from studies of individual programs (The Simpsons, NBC Nightly News) to broader cultural discussions (rhetoric and television war coverage; rhetoric and television situation comedies; rhetoric and medicine, specifically patient-doctor interactions). Accompanying the final project was an oral presentation—which seemed logical, given what we had studied regarding rhetoric’s roots in oral argument—and an annotated bibliography. I found this project to be perhaps the least satisfying component of the course for me as many students lost the tighter focus I had attempted to achieve in the close textual analysis of the programs themselves. However, the range of the writing projects showed me that students were attempting to apply what they had learned in a larger context and were doing so using course terminology, sometimes in sophisticated ways. One student, Chris, sought out
Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson’s study *Deeds Done in Words* in order to understand how President Bush employs “war rhetoric” to persuade the American people that the Iraq conflict is not only right, but “good”; Chris outlined Campbell and Jamieson’s five characteristics of such rhetoric to analyze Bush’s use of these principles, particularly in his use of the television news media.

Because of this extended primary interaction with the programs as texts in the major papers and because of the focus on outside research (which necessarily led to student interaction with existing scholarship as part of their investigations), I eschewed a type of text that usually I privilege: the critical, secondary readings that serve as intermediary between the student and the primary text. In general, I require that my first-year composition students read a good deal of critical metadiscourse particularly when I structure my courses around a broad theme such as “education” or “work.” Students often find these texts problematic because they believe such writing tells them how to think or otherwise interferes with their own learning process. I have had the most problems with critical essays in film studies courses, where students want to talk about why they “liked the movie” before—or in lieu of—reading what someone else thinks about it. While the debate over whether secondary readings thus have a legitimate home in lower-division writing courses is probably another investigation in itself, the question was an important one for me to answer in English 200. After weighing the value and availability of potential secondary criticism on television as text, as cultural artifact, and as linguistic stage, I ultimately decided that television and rhetoric should meet in this course in the sparest of conditions—face-to-face, without intermediaries.

Some faculty may see this pedagogical choice as an appeal to the weakest students in that secondary material is obviously more difficult to comprehend on a first reading, or even a second, and that, in the absence of secondary material, there is no triangular, scholarly effect in individual or collective visual, textual dissection and comprehension. But I would argue that my intentions were just the opposite: without metadiscourse afloat in the classroom, students would have to engage the principles of rhetoric on their own, and they would have to apply them to the television programs in a similarly independent fashion. There would be no Postman to insert himself into the students’ analytical processes and do some thinking (or arguing) for them. And for me, as the professor, there would be no crutch available when terminology got tough for students or programs failed to answer lingering questions about concepts key to our course.

**Critical Reflection**

Recently, one of my former English 200 students, Emily, stopped by to discuss why she was switching her major to English. She passionately
exclaimed, “I miss rhetoric!” and wondered aloud whether she would ever again find rhetoric elsewhere in her studies. This exclamation, though satisfying in its own way to me as a teacher, is obviously representative of a select student group but just as obviously communicates a failing in my own pedagogy. While I know that this student did well in the course and embraced its structure, obviously her grief over “losing” rhetoric after the semester ended told me that I must do more next time to reinforce the universal principles of rhetoric beyond the classroom.

To believe, also, that all students perceived the course in this same inquisitive way, despite its limitations, would be a fallacy. Certainly after I taught English 225 in Michigan, several bright, conscientious students wrote on their evaluations comments such as “it’s dumb to watch TV; this was boring,” or “My sister is a lawyer and these shows are so unrealistic! Why are we watching them?” These comments challenged me to put more emphasis at SCSU on the terms of rhetoric and its direct applications over the general teaching of argument using these programs as broad examples (assumedly held as “real” by these students, who criticized their representations of the legal system). The SCSU student evaluations were far more positive overall; sample comments include “I finally learned what rhetoric is instead of having a general idea about it” and “(this class) turned potentially boring subject matter into something exciting and relevant to everyday life.” Other students appreciated “the use of other media to help understand course material.” Another student commented that writing the short responses was “a great way of measuring student knowledge about rhetoric.” I’m sure that my teaching overall has improved in the ensuing five years since the Michigan course, but even these positive evaluations failed to show me whether students were now seeing rhetoric as a presence in their everyday lives. To borrow from the principle of Lunsford’s textbook, students may now recognize that “everything’s an argument,” but have they internalized the civics of why we argue in the first place?

Some students clearly never grasped the crucial connection between analyzing rhetorical discourse via a popular medium and internalizing the form and function of that discourse at a personal, intellectual level to take into the world. Some student papers, for example, did a great job of analyzing character motivation or plot contrivances in Law and Order or the relative believability of key character relationships in The Practice (a far more melodramatic program, appealing to many for this reason alone) but failed to see how those character relationships, motivations, or plot points were rooted in rhetoric. Similar to an introductory literature course that seeks to teach students human values via narrative texts, using television to teach the principles of rhetoric allows weaker students to absorb themselves in the narrative, a common criticism of those who see media as a poor teaching tool. For as many papers that insight-
fully deconstructed the ways in which Aristotle might view the fictional legal discourse of *The Practice*, there were always papers that spent three of the five pages describing scenes and character actions (particularly concerning principles of delivery) in painful detail, leaving little room for actual analysis. Thus, while some students may indeed “miss” the presence of rhetoric in their lives post-English 200, I can point to a few amendable failings in my own pedagogy and in the class dynamic that will be considerations when I offer the course again.

First, while I resisted the impulse to make this class a study in *visual* rhetoric, worried that such a layering would unnecessarily complicate our study of “pure argument” in the programs, in the future I plan to build in a small component that concentrates on visual rhetoric at a very basic level. This might be approached in any number of ways while staying true to the idea that analyzing primary source materials is a skill not emphasized enough in English studies today. I might, for example, ask students to analyze the content and design of the program web sites that are created by both fans and the networks, similar to other instances in which I have asked students to analyze the rhetoric of other public, web-based documents.

I might also ask students to employ basic principles of media analysis, which would require some additional readings in that subject, so as to deconstruct the visual representations of persons and person-types such as the Prosecutor, the Defense Attorney, and the Victim, in relation to their spoken rhetoric. While I don’t believe that these types are necessarily consistently drawn on dramas such as *Law and Order*—hence the power of the program overall—I recognize that students are becoming more accustomed to such readings of the visual in their regular television watching, especially where the so-called reality shows are concerned. In these settings, students regularly deconstruct appearances (“Will Richard win? He’s not the most attractive.”) so as to designate intrinsic values in characters. Once narrative elements are seemingly erased (in that such shows are not supposed to be scripted), viewers focus on intrigue of happenstance, particularly when what’s at stake (companionship, marriage, fortune) depends heavily upon the visual and interpretation of the core issues at hand. It thus seems essential for me to take these viewing principles into account when teaching the course again so as to open up a small but crucial discussion of visual rhetoric in this specific context.

Second, I would think about supplemental course readings that could augment and support the Crowley text. While I found this textbook to be the best for beginning rhetoric students among the many that I surveyed, some students found it too much of a *textbook* when used in near isolation and especially when held against the more dynamic television texts. I did bring in newspaper and other short magazine and journal articles for spontaneous
in- and out-of-class reading and group assignments. But students seemed to want a more substantial written text off of which to bounce Crowley’s larger ideas. Here again, I think that web writing and/or discourse might be a helpful addition as this is a genre with which students might interact out of class and one that can be easily integrated into one of our high-tech classrooms.

Third, a practical consideration for future offerings: The Practice has been cancelled after many successful seasons (causing many of my students great sadness). Therefore, I will need to think about adding another legal drama in its place, possibly The West Wing (assuming Law and Order itself is still on the air, a general hazard of basing a course on current television offerings). Or I might shift the focus to television drama in general, not just legal dramas specifically, as some students opted to do in their second analysis paper and/or their final research project. This shift would compromise some of the attractive qualities of the course for me—specifically showing students the rhetorical foundations of our litigious culture and its artistic representations—but it would also open the possibilities for offering different television-related topics for the course in general. The course could be more challenging for students if legal discourse were only one of the rhetorical approaches in the television dramas under study. This wider approach would also allow for current shifts in the public’s narrative tastes; my use of Law and Order included, for example, taped episodes from one to three seasons past, which didn’t connect with students as well as did the current/new episodes airing weekly.

All of these future considerations—more attention to visual rhetoric per se, greater use of written, counterpart texts and electronic discourse, and wider consideration of rhetorical elements of television drama as a whole—are considerations that can keep the course dynamic and current for students as well as keep the integrity of the relationship between rhetoric and popular culture intact such that the space of the intermediate writing course may remain integral to our burgeoning composition and rhetoric track, continuously viable as an attractive, university-wide elective and always intellectually challenging for both faculty and students. Ideally, universities will continue to offer such courses in their curricula despite the problematic position of such offerings in this age of proficiency demands and bare-bones course budgets, so that when we ask students, What is rhetoric? they might surprise us by pointing to their televisions to carefully (and thoughtfully) illustrate their answer.

New Haven, CT

Notes

1 Our composition course sequence has undergone renumbering effective Fall 2005. Prior to Fall 2005, the courses were English 098, 100, and 101; as of
Fall 2005, the courses will be numbered English 110, 111, and 112, respectively, to accommodate a change in status for the basic writing course (098, now 110) from non-credit to credit-bearing. Thus, while my historical references to the sequence use the new numbers, for simplicity’s sake, readers should know that when English 200 was created, in 1985, the only courses in place were English 098, a non-credit basic writing course, and English 100, a standard first-semester composition course.

WORKS CITED


COURSE OVERVIEW:
Why are so many popular television dramas rooted in the American legal system—with scenarios based in either the courtroom, the judicial process, or the criminal justice system? Why are Americans fascinated with arguments, presented in these and other television programs, revolving around the law and transgressions against the law? Furthermore, how do these arguments work in our culture, and how do they stem from something called “rhetoric?”

These are just some of the questions that students in this section of English 200 will attempt to answer. By the end of the semester, students will be conversant with the terms of classical rhetoric, and be able to identify how and why these terms are employed in one of our American cultural products, television legal drama. Students will analyze these television programs as primary documents illustrating rhetorical strategies in both their design and their content.

PRE-REQUISITES:
Students enrolled in English 200 must have completed English 101 at SCSU, or its documented equivalent at another college or university, or have prior permission from the instructor.

This course may be used to satisfy one or more of the following graduation requirements, depending upon the student’s major field of study: (1) One of the three required L-courses (2) Elective in the Professional Writing track in the Department of English; (3) Elective in the Secondary Education track in the Department of English.

COURSE TEXTS:

We will also view episodes of the television dramas Law and Order and The Practice (in class), and the film Twelve Angry Men (outside of class), and discuss these texts as a large group. We may also read other short handouts (including newspaper articles and similar publications) and view clips of commercials and other brief television programs for the purposes of discussion and illustration of terminology related to rhetoric and culture.
WRITTEN AND ORAL WORK:
Three viewing responses of 2 pages each (10%)
Five reading responses of 2 pages each (10%)
Two analytical papers of 5-6 pages each (30%)
One analytical, research-based paper of 10 pages (30%)
Annotated Bibliography for final paper (10%)
Class participation and workshop participation (10%)

READING AND VIEWING RESPONSES:
At regular intervals throughout the semester, students will be required to write shorter, informal responses of two pages to the reading assignments, as well as the television programs and film under discussion. The purpose of these responses is to generate discussion based on student writing, and to allow students to write about course ideas and topics in a more informal setting. At the beginning of each class in which a response is due, I will randomly select two to four students to read their responses aloud. Any student who does not have a response to read will receive an automatic “zero” for that response; all students are responsible for knowing the topics for the responses (see next paragraph), even if they are absent from class.

MAJOR PAPERS: DRAFTING AND REVISIGN:
Each of the three major papers in the course will undergo draft and revision before being submitted for a final grade from the professor. The first and second papers will be based on rhetorical analyses of components of the programs Law and Order and The Practice, rooted in principles from course readings and discussion. The third paper will be a research-driven paper on a sub-topic of the student’s choosing related to rhetoric and popular culture, with an accompanying annotated bibliography that evidences the research process undertaken.

Course Outline

Week 1  Introductions and Overview; in-class writing
Discussion: What is “Rhetoric?” How do we use it in our everyday lives? Reading: Crowley CH 1 (pp. 1-19)

Creating and Developing an Argument: The Canon of Invention

Week 2  Principles of Rhetoric: Kairos and the Rhetorical Situation.
Stasis Theory: Asking the Right Questions
Reading: Crowley CH 3 (pp. 30-43) and CH 4 (pp. 44-74) and pp. 362-365 (“Introduction of Law”)
Small Group Work; Reading Response #1 Due

Week 3
The Commonplaces and Invention
Reading: Crowley pp. 44-74, continued, and CH 5 (pp. 74-104)
Small Group Work; Reading Response #2 Due

Week 4
Ethical Proofs and Ethos in Rhetoric
Reading: Crowley CH 6 (pp. 105-145)
In-Class Viewing: Law and Order
Viewing Response #1 Due; Discussion of ethical proofs/ethos in Law and Order

Week 5
Logical appeals and “Good Reasons”
Reading: Crowley CH 8 (pp. 163-182) and CH 9 (pp. 183-198)
Reading Response #3 Due; In-Class Viewing: Law and Order

Week 6
Viewing Response #1 Due; Discussion of Logical proofs/logos in Law and Order
Essay #1 Draft Due; In-class draft workshops

Week 7
Essay #1 Revision Due; small group mini-conferences
Emotional Appeals and Pathos
Reading: Crowley CH 7 (pp. 146-161); Reading Response #4 Due

Week 8
In-class viewing: The Practice
Discussion of emotional appeals in The Practice
Viewing Response #2 Due
Midterm Student-Professor Conferences

Positioning and Producing an Argument: The Other Four Canons of Arrangement, Memory, Style, and Delivery

Week 9
The Five Canons of Rhetoric: Arrangement
Reading: Crowley CH 10 (pp. 198-227)
Small Group Work; Reading Response #5 Due
**Week 10**
Arrangement and Style, continued
The Five Canons of Rhetoric: Memory and Delivery

**Reading:** Crowley CH 11 (pp. 214-228), CH 12 (pp. 229-263) and CH 13 and 14 (pp. 264-289)

**Week 11**
**In-Class Viewing:** *The Practice*
Memory and Delivery continued;
Discussion of *The Practice* and the canons of rhetoric
Small Group Work; **Essay #2 Draft Due;** In-class draft workshops

**Week 12**
**Essay #2 Revision Due;** in-class writing.
Discussion of *Twelve Angry Men* (film to be viewed OUTSIDE of class)

**Week 13**
Research work day; Course Evaluations
NO CLASS—HOLIDAY (W and F)

**Week 14**
**Final Student-Professor Conferences**
Oral Research Presentations

**Week 15**
**Annotated Bibliographies Due**
**Essay #3 Draft due;** in-class draft workshops;
**Essay #3 REVISION will be due at our scheduled final exam slot**

**MAJOR WRITING ASSIGNMENTS (ESSAY #1 AND #2)**

**Essay #1: Logic or Ethics? Rhetorical Appeals in *Law and Order***

**Length:** 5-6 pages minimum, 8 pages maximum, following format guidelines outlined in the syllabus.

Select one episode of *Law and Order* for study. You may choose an episode currently airing on cable (TNT re-runs) or network (NBC) TV, or use one of the episodes I have placed on reserve in Buley Library to answer the question below. You are welcome to refer to more than one episode, but be sure to keep your references clear and to not let the separate plots of the episodes dominate your analysis.
Which is more important to and more successfully employed in *Law and Order*: ethical or logical appeals? How is the series built around showcasing this particular type of argument? Consider the show as a whole—its *construction* (how it looks; how it is designed, cast, promoted as a television program and a visual document of our culture) as well as its *content* (what its episodes argue; how its characters promote and construct their arguments; what its storylines imply or communicate).

You should think about what *Law and Order* is typically arguing *for*, and how those arguments are *invented*, and *why*, as well as to *whom* they are directed. Use specific terms from our reading in your analysis. Here are some issues to consider in your drafting/revising and in your viewing:

— What are the elements of an ethical appeal? What does *Law and Order* say about ethics and the law?
— What are the elements of a logical appeal? What does *Law and Order* say about logic/reason and the law?
— What characters gravitate toward what sort of appeals, and how do these characters thus control the overall appeals structure of the program?

You may bring in outside texts (reading, news events) to support your argument, but only insofar as these outside texts can be proven to actually inform the way in which *Law and Order* works as a television program rooted in rhetorical arguments.

**Essay #2: The Five Canons of Rhetoric**

**Length:** 5-7 pages typed, double-spaced, following standard format guidelines on your syllabus.

**Choose ONE of the following three paper options:**

1. Which of the four remaining canons of rhetoric that we are now studying—memory, style, arrangement, or delivery—is the *most important canon* that one of the attorneys in *The Practice* employs to construct his/her successful legal arguments, in or out of the courtroom? In thinking about your argument, consider the following:
—The firm does not always win its cases or, secondarily, its arguments (with colleagues, clients, opponents in the courtroom). Is this because it relies too heavily on the “wrong” canon of rhetoric? Or are the failures due to other flaws in its rhetoric?

—Who is the most prominent and/or successful attorney in the firm? Is this status due to his or her work as a successful rhetorician, or in spite of the fact that he/she is a successful rhetorician? In other words, how much is this attorney’s rhetoric affected by his/her status on the program?

—How are you defining “successful” in the context of this program and its use of rhetoric?

YOU MUST use specific examples from preferably two or more episodes, and you also must clearly define the canon which you believe the attorney employs, showing that you understand its history and meaning in the context of classical rhetoric.

2. Pretend that you are Aristotle, and you have come back to life in 21st century America, and have been told that The Practice is a perfect example of how your five canons work in our culture’s contemporary arguments. Let’s set aside for the moment that you have never before seen television, assume that you are smart (you are, after all, Aristotle), and that you understand that The Practice is a popular cultural product and that it is widely known among the population.

Write an essay in which you either refute or support the idea that your (Aristotle’s) five canons of rhetoric are, indeed, at work in The Practice. Some issues to consider:

—You, as Aristotle, may argue that some of the canons are employed and not others.

—You, as Aristotle, may argue that some or all of the canons are employed incorrectly or ineffectively in the program.

Remember that even though you are Aristotle, you MUST USE SPECIFIC EXAMPLES from at least two separate episodes, and you MUST make clear that you understand the history and definition of the five canons in the context
of classical rhetoric. You must also do your best to sound like Aristotle (or at least not sound like a student. . . ).

3. Apply the prompt for option #1 or option #2 to another television drama series that employs rhetoric and is currently or recently on the air. Some suggestions: *NYPD Blue*, *The West Wing*, *E.R.*. You must clear your series choice with me (A.S.A.P.) before proceeding with your essay draft. I suggest choosing a series that in some way speaks to the law if possible; however, this is not a requirement.
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