

COM 475
Seminar in Public Relations Theory
Organizational Rhetoric as Reputation Management
Fall 2017

COURSE INFORMATION

Class Meetings: Tuesdays, 6:30-9:20 p.m., Fell 112

Lead Student: Dr. Jeff Courtright

Office: 428 Fell Hall

Office Hours: MTW 1:15-2:45 p.m., and by appointment

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WELCOME!

I'm very excited to be with you this semester to talk about and apply one-half of the relationship between message design and corporate reputation, which together drive my thinking about communication and my research agenda.

As part of this, we'll clarify and go further in depth with message strategies that the average person takes for granted: message genres and the individual strategies we use to guide what a campaign copy platform should employ, how to coach a spokesperson before an interview or news conference, the development of speeches on behalf of others, and the like. The everyday person probably appreciates well-crafted messages, but they don't know what some are more effective in audience appeal than others that they tune out.

In the so-called Information Age, all of us experience *information overload*, so how do we as responsible communication professionals do things well but not take advantage of audiences' message processing so that we don't engage in unethical rhetoric? That's just one part of this course. As such, I like Kenneth Burke's view of rhetorical study as "consumer protection" for anyone that communicates. (Hmm. That doesn't leave out many humans on the planet.)

The other part of this course brings together principles that Dr. Peter Smudde and I have talked and written about since we started writing together in 2005, as well as my own development of the core principles I believe to be essential in understanding message design, from soundbite-sized message strategies to the broader level of discourse that various fields call genres. (That, by the way, varies according to the field of study.)

What's been most exciting in this course is to think about ideas that can help as practitioners and as academics. The assigned textbook grew out of Smudde's and my mutual interests and was test-driven the last time I taught this course. Once it appeared in print, my thoughts have returned to the issue of how to plan and communicate messages with minimal discourse and symbols, as opposed to the forms of traditional argument and other message design approaches from decades gone by.

So join me as we explore the realm of message design so that we become better creators and consumers of public discourse that will sharpen your critical thinking and bring that to bear on your professional writing!

TEXTBOOKS & PROVIDED MATERIALS

Conrad, C. (2011). *Organizational rhetoric: Strategies of resistance and domination*. Malden, MA: Polity Press.
Hoffman, M. F., & Ford, D. J. (2010). *Organizational rhetoric: Situations and strategies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
American Psychological Association. (2009). *Concise rules of APA style* (6th ed.) Washington, DC:
Author. (*Get the 2nd printing or later!*)

Additionally, the remainder of class readings will be in the form of journal articles and supporting materials (journal articles and popular press artifacts, websites, pages and other media) found in the “Readings & Dates” folder under the “Resources” tab on ReggieNet. Each date’s folder includes the readings for that week. Prior to midterm, you’ll have a chapter or two to read from our textbooks as well.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Goal: To become better creators and consumers of words and symbols, deepening critical thinking and generating ethical messages that appeal to audiences.

Objectives

As a result of this course, you should be able to:

- discuss and apply the principles of genre theory, be it rhetorical, linguistic, literary or mass media;
- recognize and analyze the strengths and weaknesses of particular message strategies;
- bring an ethical approach to message design in professional and other public situations;
- and perform an in-depth analysis of a public relations or communication campaign or similar phenomenon; and
- generate informed, well-reasoned discussion and criticism of public communication

COMMUNICATION BETWEEN US

I will be available for questions and comments regarding your progress in COM 475.

- See my office hours on the first page.
- As a matter of priority, if you have a question or concern, or if you need to notify me about missing a class or due date, contact me via e-mail and/or telephone as soon as possible. If using the phone, please leave a message if I am not in my office.
- Use of two channels of communication is helpful, should one fail to reach me!
- I will use ReggieNet rather than university e-mail.

CLASS FORMAT & FACILITATION

As is typical of graduate seminars, we’ll have free-flowing conversation as much as possible.

- In order to make the most of our discussions, we’ll do two things.
 - First, all of us should come prepared with **at least three (3)** comments or questions regarding the readings.
 - PLEASE bear in mind that I will NOT summarize readings for you, even the more difficult ones to follow, e.g., from the early works of Kenneth Burke, which are foundational to my view of communication strategies and processes!

- Second, each of you will write five (5) 1½ -2½ page “Think Pieces.”
- Half the class will write every other week.
 - Next, each week you’ll read aloud your Think Piece to facilitate discussion.
 - I’ll determine a grade based on the amount of discussion your paper generates.
 - I’ll drop the lowest of your five grades.

Fourth, after midterm, you will work with a partner to lead a seminar evening.

- For each of these, two of you will be facilitators for that week.
- For details, see the next section.

Finally, as a complement to your term paper, you’ll do an 8- to 10-minute convention-style presentation to report the key findings of your term paper.

- Presentations will be during the Final Exam period, December 12, beginning at **5:30 p.m.** (Note the earlier time!)
- We’ll have ample time for Q & A after your presentation.

ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING SCALE

NOTE: For descriptions of the assignments as well as their grading rubrics, I’ve posted these under the “Assignments” tab on ReggieNet.

GRADING CATEGORY	POINTS	DUE DATE
Think Pieces (5 @ 25 points each, lowest one dropped)	100	Aug 29-Oct 17; Nov 28-Dec 5
Think Piece Discussion generation (2 @ 25 points each)	50	Aug 29-Oct 17; Nov 28-Dec 5
Seminar Facilitation	100	Oct 31-Nov 14
Rhetorical Analysis Paper (18-20 pages, including references) OR Campaign		
• Topic Approval	25	September 5
• Introduction & Situational Description Best Draft OR Organization & Audience research for your campaign*	50	September 26
• Edited Situation, Relevant Literature & Method section Best Draft OR completed Research & Planning campaign sections	75	October 24
• Best draft of work in progress: revision of previous sections included	100	November 14
• Final Paper	100	December 12
• Convention-Style Presentation OR Business Pitch	50	December 12
Student Engagement & Professionalism	100	holistic
Total Points for the Term	750	

***I recommend, in your best interest, that you revise and submit this assignment early so that you can begin your literature review **OR** complete the research and planning sections in your campaign proposal.**

I calculate final grades on a 90-80-70-60 scale.

TIME COMMITMENT & TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

(Additional seminar readings are connected to each calendar date on ReggieNet; marked with ** below.)

[I may add popular-press articles or examples along the way.]

DATE	TOPIC	READINGS	ASSIGNMENTS DUE
Aug 22	<i>Introduction to the Course</i>		
Aug 29	<i>What Is Organizational Rhetoric?</i>	Hoffman & Ford, Ch. 1 & 3; Conrad, Ch. 1	THINK PIECE #1, GROUP A
Sept 5	<i>Organizational Rhetoric & Message Design</i>	Hoffman & Ford, Chs. 2 & 9; Conrad, Ch. 2	THINK PIECE #1, GROUP B; FINAL PAPER/CAMPAIGN TOPIC DUE
Sept 12	<i>Organizational Culture → Organizational Identity → Corporate Identity</i>	Courtright & Smudde (2018, in press); Reputation Institute folder	THINK PIECE #2, GROUP A
Sept 19	<i>The First and Second Personae</i>	Hoffman & Ford, Ch. 6; McMillan (1987)**; Conrad, Ch. 3; examples for discussion**	THINK PIECE #2, GROUP B
Sept 26	<i>Neo-Classical Approaches & the "New Rhetoric"</i>	REVIEW Hoffman & Ford, Ch. 2; Smerecnik & Renegar (2010)**; Burke (1932), "Lexicon Rhetoricae," pp. 123-152**	THINK PIECE #3, GROUP A; BEST DRAFT, SITUATIONAL DESCRIPTION or CAMPAIGN RESEARCH SECTION
Oct 3	<i>Framing, Metaphors & Archetypes</i>	Burke, "Lexicon Rhetoricae," pp. 152-183**; Ruth & York (2004)**	THINK PIECE #3, GROUP B
Oct 10	<i>Genre Theory & Symbolic Convergence Theory</i>	Smudde & Courtright (2012), Ch. 3; **Courtright & Smudde (2010)**; Bormann (1982)**; Duffy (1997)**	THINK PIECE #4, GROUP A
Oct 17	<i>Organizational Narratives & Corporate Storytelling</i>	Dowling (2006)**; Kent (2015); Ihlen (2002)**; Venette, Sellnow & Lang (2003)	THINK PIECE #4, GROUP B
Oct 24	<i>Critical Organizational Rhetoric & Its Application</i>	Hoffman & Ford, Chs. 4-5; Boyd & Waymer (2011)**	REVISED RESEARCH SECTION, BEST DRAFT ANALYSIS SECTION or REVISED CAMPAIGN RESEARCH SECTION, COMPLETED PLANNING SECTION, AND DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNICATION SECTION
Oct 31	<i>Topic TBD; Communicating with Key Stakeholders (Dr. C)</i>	Facilitators' assigned readings; Hoffman & Ford, Ch. 10	SEMINAR FACILITATION, PAIR 1
Nov 8	<i>Topic TBD; The Rhetorical Uses of Silence (Dr. C)</i>	Facilitators' assigned readings; Dimitrov (2015) [R]	SEMINAR FACILITATION, PAIR 2
Nov 15	<i>Topic TBD; Issue(s) Management & Organizational Change (Dr. C)</i>	Facilitators' assigned readings; Hoffman & Ford, Ch. 7; Conrad, Ch. 4	SEMINAR FACILITATION, PAIR 3; BEST DRAFT OF FINAL PAPER DUE
Nov 19-28	THANKSGIVING BREAK		
Nov 27	<i>Risk Communication</i>	Hoffman & Ford, Ch. 8; Breeze (2012); Roper (2012)**; Prelli & Winters (2009)	THINK PIECE #5, GROUP A

Dec 5	<i>Crisis Communication</i>	Hoffman & Ford, Epilogue; Conrad, Ch. 5; Falkheimer & Heide (2015)**	THINK PIECE #5, GROUP B
Dec 12	FINAL EXAM PERIOD		FINAL PAPER DUE (Explanation plus Application); CONVENTION-STYLE PRESENTATIONS

COURSE POLICIES

Writing Standards

You must prepare for class activity and complete all written assignments before the seminar period for which they are due. Most important, these assignments should be largely free of errors, be they typographical, grammatical, or orthographical. To that end, such errors will result in a deduction of ½ point for each error. Repeated errors will receive deductions of no more than 2 points.

Late Work

Assignments cannot be made up in the case of unexcused absences. Should an illness or family emergency prevent your attendance on a due date, documentation will be required in order for you to make to turn it in later. (I will handle any change in lead facilitators for Think Piece discussion on an individual basis.

Otherwise, unless I offer you an extension because of extraordinary circumstances, I deduct 5% of the total points available for a given assignment for each day it is late.

Incompletes: Based on university policy, incompletes will be granted only *in extreme cases* when a documented emergency prevents you from completing the class, you have contacted the Dean of Students Office, and you have successfully completed all but the of the course’s assignments due at the end of April. **For graduation, please note: You must have any previous incompletes taken care of at least six weeks prior to the semester you plan to graduate.** Regardless, I require incompletes to be taken care of by midterm of the following semester that the course is taken.

Grade Reporting

Once you receive the results of any grading, please wait at least 24 hours before contacting me for any questions and concerns you have about your exam or any other assignment in this course. After that date, you have one week to discuss the results with I and/or to submit a written grade appeal. (Grade appeals must be in writing and include specific reasons for each contention the student or team wishes to make.) In short, 15 days after any due date, all grades are final.

The University places your final grade on iCampus as a service to both you and your instructors. This service, along with ReggieNet, will constitute the PRIMARY GRADE NOTIFICATION MECHANISM for this course. University rules prevent me from communicating grades via e-mail or telephone without your consent in writing.

Attendance

At the graduate level, I expect you to attend at each course meeting. Because I know that some of you have full-time work positions in university departments or non-university settings, I am generally understanding in such cases. However, please do not make such absences a regular occurrence. Please contact me in advance, if

possible, of an absence. I will determine if the absence is excusable. In the case of illness, please bring documentation from a physician as soon after your absence as possible. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to obtain notes from a classmate. Once you've obtained the information you need from someone else, feel free to contact me for clarifications regarding specific points from the readings or from class discussion/notes.

If for some reason you miss more than one seminar, I will ask to discuss your situation privately. The need for such meetings has been rare in previous seminars I've led, but, if absences become a problem (I had one student miss 3 meetings in Fall 2013!), I will inform you if this problem could make the difference in your final grade in the course (again, to be discussed and handled on an individual basis).

Use of Electronic Devices

You may use electronic devices in this class for recording notes, searching for items that come to mind during discussion and you'd like to share, and for receiving phone calls in the case of an emergency. In the case of the latter, you may excuse yourself to take the phone call and then quietly let me know if the situation requires you to leave class for the rest of the evening.

ABOVE ALL, please silence any devices so that they do not interrupt our discussions. (Besides, you don't want to have me get up and dance to the tune of your chosen audio alert for phone calls, your laptop booting up, etc.)

Intellectual Property & Academic Dishonesty

Plagiarism and any other form of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. As to plagiarism (presenting someone else's work as your own or without proper acknowledgment) or any other type of academic dishonesty, I will consider justification for failure for that particular assignment or the entire course, depending on severity. (See the two documents on academic misconduct linked in ReggieNet.)

Although you may discuss with each other any assignment and course material, bounce ideas off each other, and share the university's resources available to you (e.g., media guides), you cannot share actual work you do with others. All work must be that of the student and developed during the current semester for this course. You must give all sources credit, using APA style. For information regarding academic integrity and procedures for academic misconduct, see ISU's [Code of Student Conduct, Section V.B.1](#).

DISABILITY OR MEDICAL CONDITIONS ACCOMMODATION

Any student needing to arrange a reasonable accommodation for a documented disability and/or medical/mental health condition should contact Student Access and Accommodation Services at 350 Fell Hall, (309) 438-5853, or visit <https://studentaccess.illinoisstate.edu>.

NOTE

I may alter aspects of these policies and the syllabus as the course progresses. You are responsible to be aware of any such changes that I announce in class and/or post on ReggieNet.