COMMUNICATION 540:
RHETORIC OF SCIENCE

Class Meetings: Tuesdays and Thursdays 11:30 a.m.- 1:20 p.m., 242 CMU
Professor: Leah Ceccarelli
Office: 145 CMU
Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:30-11:20 a.m. & by appointment
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Course Description: This course is an introduction to the interdisciplinary field of scholarship known as “rhetoric of science.” We will examine the rhetorical structure of arguments about scientific truth claims as well as the rhetorical strategies used by scientists when they communicate outside their fields to scientists in other disciplines and to the public.

Questions for discussion will include: How do scientists use language, situation, culture, and prior tradition to reach intersubjective agreement about their discoveries and theories? In what ways are the argumentative standards applied by scientists in their fields of expertise similar to those applied by arguers in public or private settings? How do scientists communicate with the public? What does public discourse about science tell us about our attitudes toward science? What happens when there is a crisis involving technology in the public sphere and scientific expertise is unable to resolve doubt and warrant deliberative action?

We will read a number of critical works in the field, to see how rhetorical scholars have added to our collective knowledge of the communicative practices of scientists. We will discuss some of the larger theoretical and practical issues that arise from the rhetorical interpretation of science. And over the course of the quarter, each student will write a paper that engages in the rhetorical criticism of a piece of communication about science.

No background in rhetoric or in science is necessary to take this course.

Class Website: Readings, assignment dropbox, and grades are available on the COM 540 website at https://catalyst.uw.edu/workspace/cecc/18047/.

Method of Evaluation:

- Reading discussion prompts.......................................................... 30%
- 5 pg. text choice paper ................................................................. 10%
- 1,000-1,500 word book review ................................................... 10%
- 5 pg. segment of your final paper ............................................... 10%
- Final paper.................................................................................. 40%

The grades you receive on assignments in this class will be determined according to a four point scale and then multiplied by the percentage that each assignment is worth to determine your final class grade. Grades will be recorded on Catalyst. All assignments should be turned in electronically, as a Word document or a PDF file, in the Catalyst assignment dropbox for the
class, available on the course website.

*Reading Discussion Prompts*: to encourage thoughtful reflection as you complete the course reading and to stimulate classroom discussion, you will submit a discussion starter before class each day that there is a reading assignment. You should provide some context for the question or insight you share in your write-up, but what you turn in each day should be no longer than one paragraph. You are expected to raise the question or make the point during the class discussion that day. Because these are meant to spark class discussion, late reading discussion prompts will not be accepted. I will evaluate your corpus of reading discussion prompts by the following criteria:

- **Completeness**: the number of reading discussion prompts turned in by deadline
- **Relevance**: the degree to which written discussion prompts adequately involve one or more of the reading assignments for that day
- **Engagement**: the degree to which discussion prompts are used by the student to spark class discussion
- **Insight**: the degree to which the student’s reading discussion prompts offer intriguing critical remarks about the assigned texts, or make particularly unique and edifying discoveries about the relationship between ideas in different readings, or extend the ideas in the texts in important ways


*Scholarly Article*: Your final paper should be an article-length (18-25 pgs.) contribution to the interdisciplinary field known as the rhetoric of science.

Early in the quarter, you will complete a 5 page *text choice paper* in which you:

- identify the primary text(s) that you plan to examine in your final paper
- justify your choice of primary text(s) by making a compelling case that rhetorical criticism of this subject will make an important contribution to an ongoing scholarly conversation
- identify the resources you’ll need to complete the paper - e.g., the availability of the text(s) that you’ll be rhetorically critiquing, the secondary sources that contain the existing scholarly conversation on this subject, the concepts in rhetorical inquiry that you think will assist you in analyzing your text(s), etc.

Around the same time that you identify your final paper topic, you will consult with me...
and we will identify a single, representative article or book chapter in the rhetoric of science that is appropriate to your project and that will be added to the class reading assignments toward the end of the quarter, so that everyone will get an opportunity to read and discuss a secondary source that is important to your research for this class.

Later in the quarter, you will be expected to turn in a completed 5 page segment of your final paper. This will not be a rough draft (it should be carefully polished work), nor should it just repeat the justification argument that you made in your text choice paper. Instead, this segment should offer a taste of one of the insights that your final paper will make. Your purpose in this assignment will be to persuade me and your classmates that you are at an appropriate stage on the way toward the completion of your final paper and that the completed paper will have something important to add to the academic study of rhetoric of science.

Cancellation of Class: If weather conditions necessitate that class be cancelled on a particular day, we will hold our class discussion virtually, using the Catalyst GoPost discussion board available on the course website.
CLASS SCHEDULE

WEEK ONE

Tuesday, September 25: Orientation to the Course

Thursday, September 27: Orientation to the Field


WEEK TWO

Tuesday, October 2: Recent Work on the Rhetoric of Medicine


Thursday, October 4: Recent Work on the Rhetoric of Climate Change


WEEK THREE

Tuesday, October 9: Recent Work on the Rhetoric of Creation Science


**Thursday, October 11: Recent Work on Rhetoric and Biosecurity**


**WEEK FOUR**

**Tuesday, October 16: Susanna Hornig Priest guest lecture**


**Thursday, October 18: Your Paper Topics**

**DUE: 5 pg. text choice paper**

**WEEK FIVE**

**Tuesday, October 23: ARST Vicennial Position Papers and Responses**


**Thursday, October 25: Rhetorical Methods: One Text, Three Reading Practices**


**WEEK SIX**

**Tuesday, October 30: Rhetorical Methods: Reading Visuals, Reading Controversy**


**Thursday, November 1: Viral Rhetorics**


**WEEK SEVEN**

**Tuesday, November 6: Lynch-ing Research in Rhetoric of Science: DTC and “Gay Gene” Studies**


**Thursday, November 8: Your Rhetorical Criticism Findings So Far**

*DUE: 5 pg. segment of your final paper*

**WEEK EIGHT**

**Tuesday, November 13:** *Class Cancelled, NCA Conference*

**Thursday, November 15:** *Class Cancelled, NCA Conference*

**WEEK NINE**

**Tuesday, November 20:** *Book Review Presentations*

**Thursday, November 22:** *THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY*

**WEEK TEN**

**Tuesday, November 27:** *The Rhetoric of Dietary Supplements and Psychiatric Culture*


**Thursday, November 29:** *International Rhetorics of Science*


WEEK ELEVEN

Tuesday, December 4: Final Paper Presentations

Thursday, December 6: Final Paper Presentations

FINALS WEEK

Wednesday, December 12: Final Paper Due by 6:20 p.m.