Rhetorical critics have begun to turn their attention to the internet and other networked technologies in large part because the digital rhetoric that emerges from these locations and technologies plays an important role in public culture, and thus, in many ways, is at the center of what we typically envision as “rhetoric.” But, at the same time, investigation into digital and networked rhetoric demands training in theories of technology and methods of digital archiving. This class will provide you with that foundational training while also exploring the central debates in internet studies and digital communication. By the end of the course, you will be prepared to engage in rhetorical criticism of digital media objects that is both situated and careful.

Course Questions:

1) What theoretical assumptions do we as critics need to bring to bear on rhetorical artifacts that are digital?
2) What methods can critics use to productively, effectively, and ethically analyze digital rhetorical artifacts?
3) What are the central questions for researchers in fields like internet studies and digital communication?
4) What makes good rhetorical criticism of digital artifacts?

Schedule:

Part One: Foundational Concepts

Week 1: Historical Contextualization of Digital Technologies
   Abbate, *Inventing the Internet*
   Turner
   Walter Ong

Week 2: Theoretical Assumptions: Technological Determinism and Affordances
   Winner
   MacKenzie
   Baym

Week 3: The Current State of Research
   boyd
Part Two: The Public Sphere in a Digital World

Week 4: A Radically Changed Public Sphere  
Benkler
Week 5: An Unchanged Public Sphere  
Hindman
Week 6: A Fragmented Public Sphere  
Sunstein  
Dahlberg
Week 7: A Private and Personalized Public Sphere  
Papacharissi  
Bennett and Segerberg
Week 8: Changing Civic Practices in the Public Sphere  
Benaji and Buckingham  
Castells

Part Three: Online Communities as Rhetorical Audiences

Week 9: Online Communities  
Howard, “The Vernacular Web”  
Baym, “Online Communities”  
Postill, “Localizing the internet beyond communities and networks”
Week 10: The Practices, Boundaries, and Exclusions of Online Communities  
Hinck, “Ethical Frameworks and Ethical Modalities”  

**Archive Assignment is due**

Part Four: Doing Rhetorical Criticism of Digital Rhetorical Artifacts

Week 11: Software  
Manovich  
Brown
Week 12: Blogs  
Pfister  
McCauliff, “Blogging in Baghdad”
Week 13: Memes and Memorials  
Hanher, “The Riot Kiss”  
Peck, “A Laugh Riot”  
Hartelius, “Leave a Message of Hope or Tribute”  
Phillips, “LOLing at Tragedy: Facebook, Memorial Trolls, and Reactions to Grief Online”  
Jenkins, “Intro” to Spreadable Media
Week 14: Online Video, Video Games, and Maps  
Hess, “Democracy through the Polarized Lens of the Camcorder”  
Herbig and Hess, “Convergent Critical Rhetoric at the ‘Rally to Restore Sanity’”
Assignments:

Participation: One important element of the training you receive in graduate school is becoming part of a learning community. Good colleagues will listen to your ideas, ask questions, and connect you with other scholars, research, and conference opportunities. Participating in course discussions enables you to practice being a good colleague: you will learn to listen to your colleagues’ ideas and ask questions that lead to stronger scholarship. Both you and your colleagues benefit from strong, sustained, and engaged in-class participation. Towards that end, in-class participation will be worth 50 points.

Weekly Response Papers: You will be required to write weekly response papers that are 3-4 pages in length. They are worth 10 points each. These response papers should demonstrate that you have read the course material carefully and engaged the material in a significant way. Make some kind of claim about the implications of the course readings, applications to other kinds of research, new research questions to ask, or a discussion of what the course readings mean for your own research. In addition to turning in your weekly papers (before midnight), you will read one of your colleagues’ weekly papers before class. Part of the goal of this class is to foster a collaborative learning environment. That means talking with other people about what you’re reading, showing other people your writing, and talking about other people’s writing. Exchanging one paper each week allows your colleagues to learn about what your research focuses are, allows you to learn from your colleagues, and will provide some of the groundwork for future collaborations. Your response papers will be worth a total of 125 points.

Digital Archive: An important part of being a rhetorical critic who studies rhetoric online is learning how to archive digital rhetorical artifacts. This involves two primary tasks: 1) downloading or saving artifacts and 2) organizing your artifacts into an archive using metadata labels. Toward this end, you will create an archive for your Final Seminar paper. To complete this assignment, turn in a flash drive holding your entire archive and a 3-page explanation of your archive, explaining how you downloaded the digital artifacts, how you chose which artifacts to archive, and the organizational method of your archive. This assignment is worth 125 points and is due during Week 10.

Final Paper: Compose a seminar paper that is between 25-35 pages long. Your paper should consider some set of digital rhetorical artifacts. The paper should be suitable for submission to a conference and should serve as the groundwork for a later publication. Begin thinking now about which conference or which journal your paper would fit, and write with those audiences in mind. Your final paper will be worth 200 points.

During graduate school, think of seminar papers as the first step in the publication process. After receiving my feedback, revise your paper and send it to a conference. After receiving feedback from your panel respondent, revise your paper again and share it with a graduate student writing group. After revising your paper based on their feedback, you should be ready to submit your
paper to journal. Remember that a seminar paper will not likely be a manuscript ready for publication (especially your first year in graduate school), but it is the first step in that writing process.

Points for this Class:
Participation: 50 points
Weekly Response Papers: 125
Digital Archive: 125
Final Seminar Paper: 200
Total Points: 500 points

Bibliography of Course Readings:


