

# ENGL 302 Special Topics: Technical Writing and New Media

## *The Rhetoric of New Media*

**Professor:** Dr. Nathaniel A. Rivers

**Email:** nrivers1@slu.edu

**Office:** 222 Adorjan Hall

**Office Hours:** TTh 11:00-12:00 p.m.

**Course Site:** <http://rhetmedia.wordpress.com/>

**Course Hashtag:** #mediarhet

Student emails are typically answered within 24 hours (excluding weekends and holidays).

### CONFERENCES AND CONTACT

I am open to discussing matters pertaining to course policies, readings, writing assignments, and grades; please feel free to contact me via email as well as in person. I hope students will also take advantage of my office hours.

### REQUIRED TEXTS

*What Technology Wants*, Kevin Kelly.

*The Design of Everyday Things*, Donald Norman.

*Everything Bad is Good For You*, Steven Johnson.

*The Wisdom of Crowds*, James Surowiecki.

Other readings made available as links or .pdf files.

### COURSE INTRODUCTION

Our public and private lives are increasingly lived across electronic networks. Wireless technologies and portable smart devices have only accelerated this development.

*The Rhetoric of New Media* explores such questions as: what is the impact of new media technologies on the composition and distribution of texts, on the work of persuasion and identification, and on the cultivation of *ethos* and identity? These are central questions for the critical methodology of *rhetoric*.

### COURSE SUMMARY

Merging form and content, students in this course use new media technologies (e.g., Facebook, Wikipedia, and online games) to write frequently (and in a variety of ways) about rhetoric, technology and culture. For instance, students are encouraged to incorporate their own wireless and smart device technologies (e.g., laptops, iPhones, and iPads) into the classroom. Students also collaborate online through social networking sites. Audio (or video) podcasts take the place of weekly writing assignments and exams. Class time is devoted to traditional discussions but also to engagements with new media technologies (e.g. workshops, demonstrations, and tutorials). Students likewise develop a research project, which can take a variety of forms utilizing new media technologies. The ultimate goal of this seminar-style course is the



generation of a diverse set of critical practices and responses to technology. To this end, the course is cordoned off into three distinct phases, each reinforcing the other.

*Phase One* (weeks one through three) is an introduction to the rhetorical tradition. Through assigned readings, engagements with new media and group exercises, we work to build a critical rhetorical vocabulary that prepares us for *Phase Two* of the course specifically and for the work of human interaction generally. *Phase One* includes f2f and online discussions (in the form of either audio or video podcasts), in addition to an exploratory writing assignment.

*Phase Two* (weeks four through twelve) directly engages new media technologies. During this phase of the course students read and respond to variety of popular press responses to technologies (read through the critical methodology of rhetoric developed in *Phase One*). In terms of enactment, students develop two interrelated projects: the new media technology tutorial and the distance enhancement project. The new media technology tutorial requires teams of students to teach the class how to use a particular new media tool (e.g., Twitter, blogs, RSS). The distance enhancement project sees teams of students using new media tools (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Text Messaging) to make a tangible, beneficial contribution to Saint Louis University.

*Phase Three* of the course is geared towards the culminating research project. The class revisits and re-visions the rhetorical methodology developed in *Phase One*. That is, given what we have learned through our engagements with new media, how might we remake a rhetoric for our contemporary scene?

### COURSE METHODOLOGY

This course and its understanding of new media are grounded in the critical methodology of rhetoric, which students will hopefully come to value as a productive method for negotiating, constructing, maintaining, and

reshaping their personal, professional, and technological lives. **Rhetoric**, briefly defined, is the use of symbols to produce an effect (e.g., a verbal command to “Stop,” a red traffic light, a Journey song imploring us “Don’t Stop Believing,” or a floor plan that makes collaboration easier than isolation). Though rhetoric has become a negative word within political circles and contemporary media, it has a rich history as one of the oldest intellectual pursuits in the western world. With a focus on audience, context, and *the persuasion inherent to all human endeavors*, rhetoric greatly informs the purpose of this course.

This course envisions three distinct ways of articulating rhetoric and technology:

technology is a function of  
rhetorical action

technology functions as  
a rhetorical agent

rhetoric is  
a technology

## COURSE GOALS

### Writing in Context

Analyze cultures, social contexts, and audiences to determine how they shape the various purposes and forms of writing, such as persuasion, organizational communication, and public discourse, with an emphasis on:

- writing for a range of defined audiences and stakeholders
- negotiating the ethical dimensions of rhetorical action

### Project Management

- understanding, developing, and deploying various strategies for planning, researching, drafting, revising, and editing documents both individually and collaboratively
- selecting and using appropriate styles and technologies that effectively and ethically address contexts and audiences
- building *ethos* through voice, evidence, documentation and accountability

### Document Design

Make rhetorical design decisions about documents (and other compositions), including:

- understanding and adapting to genre conventions and audience expectations
- understanding and implementing design principles of format and layout
- interpreting and arguing with design
- drafting, researching, testing, and revising visual designs and information architecture

## Teamwork

Learn and apply strategies for successful teamwork and collaboration, such as:

- working online with colleagues
- determining roles and responsibilities
- managing team conflicts constructively
- responding constructively to peers' work
- soliciting and using peer feedback effectively
- achieving team goals

## Research

Understand and use various research methods and sources to produce quality documents, including:

- analyzing historical and contemporary contexts
- locating, evaluating, and using print and online information selectively for particular audiences and purposes
- triangulating sources of evidence

## Technology

Use and evaluate rhetorical technologies such as emailing, instant messaging, image editing, audio editing, video editing, presentation design and delivery, HTML editing, Web browsing, content management, and desktop publishing technologies.

## CORE COURSE POLICIES

### Technology Expectations

- ability to interact with the course website and other websites
- access to word processing, visual design, podcasting, and web design software
- a suitable email account checked regularly for course-related business
- a Flash drive or other means to backup coursework

Routine work with technology is a component of this course. Students need not be technological experts to succeed in this course, but digital technology interaction is integral and *computer problems are not valid excuses for incomplete work. Practice the core principle of digital data work: redundant backup. Digital technology will fail; be prepared for that eventuality.*

### Personal Technology Devices in the Classroom

Students may use laptops, cell phones, and other digital devices during class, provided that they do not disrupt other students' learning. *This is not a trick.* This course is situated in an increasingly connected multimedia environment. Each student is responsible for his or her own engagement with class meetings, and thus his or her resultant success or failure.

### Availability of Online Material

Because of the nature of the course, some material posted to the course website may be publicly accessible through the Web. (A student's grades and personal

information will not be shared publicly.) Additionally, any material posted to the course website may be used anonymously for teaching or published research purposes. For these reasons, students are encouraged to select usernames that are different from their real names.

### Collaborative Work

Because one of the most salient features of digital technology is its social aspect, teamwork and group projects are required elements of the course. Student teammates are responsible for updating each other and the instructor about project development and progress. Additionally, student teams are responsible for negotiating all aspects of their work, including planning, drafting, revising, file managing, scheduling, and leading tutorials and presentations. When a group project is assigned, students will complete activities that foster successful collaboration. After the conclusion of group projects, individuals complete forms to assess the contributions of group members and the global performance of the team.

### COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

Assignment	Points
Podcasts (and comments)	20
Rhetoric Q&A Essay	10
New Media Tutorial (group)	10
Distance Enhancement Project (group)	20
Rhetoric Q&A 2.0	30
Participation, Attendance and Quizzes	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

### COURSE GRADING SCALE

Final grades are calculated according to the following point-based scale:

<b>A</b>	93-100 points	<b>C</b>	73-76 points
<b>A-</b>	90-92 points	<b>C-</b>	70-72 points
<b>B+</b>	87-89 points	<b>D+</b>	67-69 points
<b>B</b>	83-86 points	<b>D</b>	63-66 points
<b>B-</b>	80-82 points	<b>D-</b>	60-62 points
<b>C+</b>	77-79 points	<b>F</b>	59 points and below

Here is the general course rubric:

<b>A</b>	Achievement <i>outstanding</i> relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.
<b>B</b>	Achievement <i>significantly above</i> the level necessary to meet course requirements.
<b>C</b>	Achievement <i>meeting</i> the basic course requirements in every respect.
<b>D</b>	Achievement worthy of credit even though it does not fully meet the basic course requirements every respect.
<b>F</b>	Performance failing to meet the basic course requirements.

### ATTENDANCE

Attendance is welcomed, expected, and mandatory. To best utilize time, students must come to class on time. Students are considered absent if they are 1) more than 10 minutes late, 2) unprepared for class, and/or 3) not in class at all. There is regular in-class work and/or a sign-in sheet to record attendance and preparation for class. (See attachment "No Nonsense Attendance Policy".) After three absences students must attend a conference with the instructor to discuss whether they should continue in this course. In the event of inclement weather or other events that make meeting as a class impossible, the work of the course will continue online (as directed by the instructor) through the course cite, which should be no problem for a class full of new media geeks.

### PLAGIARISM

*Plagiarism is the act of presenting as your own work another individual's ideas, words, data, or research material.* The concept applies equally to written, spoken, or electronic texts, published or unpublished. All ideas and quotations borrowed from any source must be acknowledged: students should always give the name of the author, the title of the text cited, and the page number(s) of the citation. Correct citation is also required. This includes quote marks around quoted material and block quotes for quotes running longer than four lines. See the *OWL* (Online Writing Lab) for help with avoiding plagiarism.

### SLU Statement of Academic Integrity

Students are expected to be honest in their academic work. The University reserves the right to penalize any student whose academic conduct at any time is, in its judgment, detrimental to the University. Such conduct shall include cases of plagiarism, collusion, cheating, giving or receiving or offering or soliciting information in examinations, or the use of previously prepared material in examinations or quizzes. Violations should be reported to your course instructor, who will investigate and adjudicate them according to the policy on academic honesty of the College of Arts and Sciences. If the charges are found to be true, the student may be liable for academic or disciplinary probation, suspension, or expulsion by the University. Students should review the College of Arts and Sciences policy on Academic Honesty, <http://www.slu.edu/x16363.xml>.

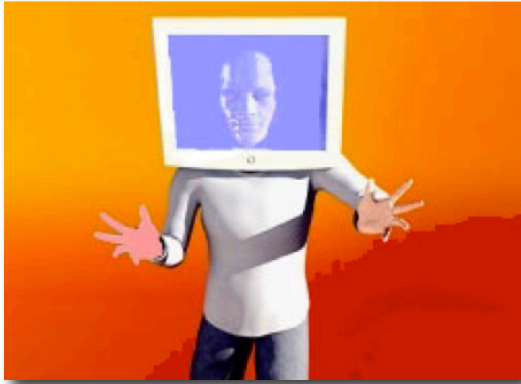
### STUDENT CONDUCT

This course's code of student conduct is informed by Saint Louis University's own code of student conduct, best encapsulated by the following statement:

*"All members of the University community are expected to contribute to the development and sustainability of community through word and action. Our community is characterized by respect*

for the dignity of others, honesty, and the pursuit of truth.”

Insults, slurs, or attacks of any kind are not allowed in this class (this includes f2f meetings and on the course site). Any student who engages in this type of behavior in the classroom will be permanently removed from the class. This code of conduct is equally important to maintain during group meetings outside of class. In order to have an effective teaching and learning environment we must practice both respect and tolerance, without question. The remainder of the university’s code of student conduct can be found at <http://www.slu.edu/x24293.xml>.



“All technology [...] are fundamentally natural.”  
—Kevin Kelly

## STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

In recognition that people learn in a variety of ways and that learning is influenced by multiple factors (e.g., prior experience, study skills, learning disability), resources to support student success are available on campus. Students who think they might benefit from these resources can find out more about:

- Course-level support (e.g., faculty member, departmental resources, etc.) by asking the course instructor.
- University-level support (e.g., tutoring/writing services, Disability Services) by visiting the Student Success Center (BSC 331) or by going to [www.slu.edu/success](http://www.slu.edu/success).

Students who believe that, due to a disability, they could benefit from academic accommodations are encouraged to contact Disability Services at 314-977-8885 or visit the Student Success Center. Confidentiality will be observed in all inquiries.

Course instructors support student accommodation requests when an approved letter from Disability Services has been received and when students discuss these accommodations with the instructor after receipt of the approved letter.