Course Number/Title: IHSS 6960: Digital Rhetoric.
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
Department of Communication and Media
Spring 2024
Time/Dates: TR 4:00PM-6:50 PM In-Person
Location: CARNEG 102
Instructor Name: Corinne Jones
Title: Assistant Professor of Scientific and Technical Communication
Email:
Phone:
Office Hours: MO 12:00 PM – 1:30 PM. In-Person or Zoom. If you need to meet outside of that time, please email me so that we can make alternative arrangements.
Office Location: Sage 4404

Course Description:

Although digital content only exists "on the computer," digital content has real-world consequences that are both positive and negative. It can persuade people to change their behaviors, purchase products, vote for politicians, and participate in protests. Yet, digital content can also deceive people and persuade them to participate in toxic groups and activities. Why is this content so powerful, and how does it persuade people to do both helpful and harmful things in the world? Broadly, digital rhetoric analyzes and assesses these persuasive techniques and processes to understand how they make meaning.

While rhetoric has historically been defined as "the available means of persuasion," scholars today understand rhetoric as "epistemic," by which they mean that rhetoric participates in the creation of knowledge. Thus, we will explore how rhetoric, as a meaning-making practice, shapes knowledge through digital technologies. This class is *not* a "how-to" course; we will not learn to create websites or other internet content. Instead, we will think about digital media and rhetoric in a cultural and theoretical sense.

Objectives:

In this class, students will:
- Analyze how historical rhetorical practices translate or adapt to meet the demands of contemporary, digitally mediated communication practices.
- Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of digital rhetorical strategies, and analyze how the use of digital rhetorical principles both shape, and are shaped by, digital environments.
- Apply digital rhetorical principles in a project of their choosing that will communicate effectively to target digital audiences.
- Develop theoretically informed frameworks for digital rhetorical analysis and compose arguments that articulate well-supported arguments that contribute to digital rhetoric.

Required Texts
- All reading material will be available online, through RPI's library, or PDFs on Blackboard.

Other Requirements

- Please come to class with a computer, Internet access, and familiarity with computer programs and technology.
  - We will complete activities that require access to the Internet in class. If you do not have a laptop, you can [rent one from RPI](#).
- A word processing program (e.g., Microsoft Word)
- A PDF reader (e.g., Adobe Reader)
- All papers must use APA formatting.
- In-class assignments and reading comprehension questions may be turned in directly through Blackboard. Unless otherwise stated, all major assignments must be turned in using Microsoft Word (e.g., ".doc" or ".docx" file formats.)

Grade Breakdown:

Participation (14 total classes. 12 required. 12 x 4 points each), **4.8%**	48 points
In-Class Reflection Questions (2 total x 26 points each), **5.2%**	52 points
Weekly Discussion Questions (10 required. 10 x 25 points) **25%**	250 points
Application of Digital Rhetorical Principles Assignment, **30%**	300 points
Digital Rhetorical Analysis Assignment, **35%**	350 points
Final Grade	**1,000 points**

*There is no form of grade "resurrection" built into this grading. Rather, you have multiple small assignments so that one poor grade will not result in failure. There are no formal means to appeal grades. Extra credit will be available throughout the semester.

Grading Scale:

A	94-100	B-	80-83	D+	67-69
A-	90-93	C+	77-79	D	64-66
B+	87-89	C	74-76	D-	60-63
B	84-86	C-	70-73	F	59 and below

If the grades are between cutoff percentages at the end of the semester, I will round the final grade up or down. If the grade is a 93.45%, I round that down to 93% for an A-. If the grade is 93.55%, I round that up to 94% for an A.

Assignment Descriptions

Participation.
Participation is broadly defined. Since this is a discussion-based class, being able to talk about discussion questions is a large part of this grade. Attendance is also crucial, since we will discuss important information in-class that will scaffold you into your major assignments. This semester has 14 total class periods. You may miss up to **two** total class periods without penalty. After two absences, you will lose points. **If you show up for class more than 5 minutes late, or if you leave more than 5 minutes early, you will only receive half credit.**

In-class reflections.
In our first and last class, you will complete simple reflection questions, broadly addressing (1) what you hope to learn from the class, and (2) what you have learned from the class and how you

can use that knowledge outside of this class. They will not be graded on grammar, but on the completeness of the answer (e.g., responding to all parts of the question).

Weekly Discussion Questions
Instead of writing summaries or annotations for each reading (which I suggest you do on your own), your **main task** for each reading will be to write **three** substantive discussion questions about *each* reading. These are *not* basic comprehension questions, nor are they yes/no questions. Refer to a quote with at least one question to ground our conversations. These will be posted in weekly discussion boards on Blackboard.

There are 11 weeks to turn in discussion questions. You are only required to turn in 10 weeks. You may turn in all 11 for extra credit. I will collate questions at the beginning of each class and post them to Blackboard (without your name attached to them) for class discussions.

Application of Digital Rhetorical Principles Assignment.
For this assignment, your **main task** is to **(1) create** a digital text (or series of texts) that makes an argument, and **(2) write** a short paper explaining what argument the text is making and what specific rhetorical strategies your text is using to make that argument. The paper will be in APA or MLA format, and it will be at least **1,000** words (before citations). It will use specific evidence from your digital text and at least **four** scholarly sources.

Digital Rhetoric Analysis Assignment.
For this assignment, your **main task** is to select a **clearly public-facing** digital text (or a series of digital texts). The paper will have a clearly stated thesis statement. It will also **(1) state** the argument(s) the text(s) is/are making **(2) analyze** how they use digital rhetorical principles to make those argument, and **(3) assess** the effects of these rhetorical strategies and explain the significance of this research for the field of digital rhetoric. The assignment should use at least **six** academic scholarly, peer-reviewed research articles, **two** of which should come from outside this class. The paper should be **2,500** words (before citations).

Syllabus Statements

Tentative Schedule (changes will be announced via the learning management system)

Week/Days	In-Class Activities	Readings and Assignments due before class.
Genre: What structure and form does research writing take in your field?		
Week 1: Thursday, January 11 2	**Introduction (to each other and to class)** **What is Digital Rhetoric? (In-Class Reflection 1)** Talk about how to read as a graduate student and practice critical reading for questions.	

	See:Miriam Sweeney's Blog for critical reading and PhD Reading Tips by Brisa Marie. **Hint**: the topics for each week can help you focus your read. Use James Zappen "Digital Rhetoric: toward an integrated Theory" as class example. (in BB) **Talk about assignments and evidence handouts.**	
Week 2: Thursday, January 18 3	**Definitions** What are key topics of conversation in digital rhetoric? (hint: look at the headings in the articles). What is rhetoric? What is digital? What is a text?	**Weekly Discussion Questions Due for:** Douglas Eyman "Chapter 1: Defining and Locating Digital Rhetoric" in *Digital Rhetoric: Theory, Method, and Practice*. 2015.(pay attention to the contemporary rhetoric part.) Angela Haas "Towards a Digital Cultural Rhetoric" Jenny Edbauer: "Unframing Models of Public Distribution: From Rhetorical Situation to Rhetorical Ecologies." 2005.
Week 3: Thursday, January 25 5	**Interfaces and affordances**	**Weekly Discussion Questions Due for:** Cynthia Selfe and Richard Selfe "The Politics of the Interface: Power and Its Exercise in Electronic Contact Zones." 1994. Kristen Arola "Indigenous Interfaces." 2017.

		Mel Stanfill "The interface as discourse: The production of norms through web design." 2015.
Week 4: Thursday, February 17	**Visual rhetoric and memes**	**Weekly Discussion Questions Due for:** Roland Barthes, "Chapter 1: Rhetoric of the Image" in *Image/Music/Text.* 1977. Marguerite Helmers and Charles A. Hill, "Introduction" in *Defining Visual Rhetorics.* 2008. Derek Sparsby: "Chapter 2: The Elements of a Memetic Rhetorical Toolkit" in *Memetic Rhetorics: Toward a Toolkit for Ethical Meming.* 2023.
Week 5: Thursday, February 89	**Games**	**Weekly Discussion Questions Due for:** Ian Bogost, "Preface" and "Procedural Rhetoric" *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Video Games.* 2007. Kishonna Gray "The 'problem' of intersectionality in digital gaming culture" in *Intersectional Tech: Black Users in Digital Gaming.* 2020. Bonnie Ruberg. "Empathy and Its Alternatives: Deconstructing the Rhetoric of "Empathy" in Video Games." 2020.

| Week 6:
Thursday, February 15
11 | **Self-expression and community formation** | **Weekly Discussion Questions Due for:**

Jacqueline Rhodes and Jonathan Alexander, "Introduction" in *Techne: Queer Meditations on Writing the Self.* 2015.

Lisa Nakamura. "Chapter 1: "Ramadan is Almoast Here!" The visual culture, or AIM Buddies, Race, Gender, and Nation on the Internet" in *Digitizing Race.* 2008.

André Brock "Introduction" and "Chapter 1: Distributing Blackness: Ayo Technology! Texts, Identities, and Blackness" in *Distributed Blackness.* 2020.

Suggested Extra Readings: (not necessary)
Lisa Nakamura "Identity tourism"
And
Lisa Nakamura "Menu-Driven Identities" |
| Week 7:
Thursday, February 22
13 | **Self-expression and community formation (continued)** | **Weekly Discussion Questions Due for:**

Linh Dich. "Community Enclaves and Public Imaginaries: Formations of Asian American Online Identities" 2016.

Catherine Knight Steele, and Alisa Hardy ""I Wish I Could Give You This Feeling": Black Digital Commons and the Rhetoric of "The Corner"" 2023 |

		Derek Sparsby: "Chapter 3: Memetic Screens and Signaling Belonging in and Drawing Boundaries for Feminist and Queer Digital Spaces" in *Memetic Rhetorics: Toward a Toolkit for Ethical Meming*. 2023.
Week 8: Thursday, February 29 15	Looking ahead to assignment 2 and discussing internet research ethics.	**Application of Digital Rhetorical Principles Assignment Due by class time.** Association of Internet Researcher's (AOIR) Internet Research Ethics (IRE) 2.0. (You are also welcome to look over IRE 1.0 and IRE 3.0.
Week 9: Thursday, March 7 No Class, spring break		
Research Proposal: How can you answer questions that still exist in your field?		
Week 10: Thursday, March 14 17	**Algorithms**	**Weekly Discussion Questions Due for:** Jessica Reyman. "The Rhetorical Agency of Algorithms." 2018. Safiya Noble. "A Society, Searching" in *Algorithms of Oppression.* 2018 Kevin Brock. "Chapter 2: Rhetoric and the Algorithm" in *Rhetorical Code Studies: Discovering Arguments in and Around Code.* 2019.
Week 11: Thursday, March 21 19	**Circulation**	**Weekly Discussion Questions Due for:**

		Jim Ridolfo and Dànielle Nicole DeVoss "Composing for Recomposition: Rhetorical Velocity and Delivery." 2009. Laurie Gries "Iconographic Tracking: A Digital Research Method for Visual Rhetoric and Circulation Studies" 2013. Zhaozhe Wang. "Transnational Rhetorical Circulation in the Splinternet Age." 2023.
Week 12: Thursday, March 28 21	**Surveillance/privacy**	**Weekly Discussion Questions Due for:** Estee Beck, "The Invisible Digital Identity: Assemblages in Digital Networks." 2015. Rena Bivens "The Gender Binary will not be deprogrammed." 2017. Marwick, Alice. "The Public Domain: Social Surveillance in Everyday Life." 2012. **Optional:** Cagle, Lauren. "Surveilling Strangers: The Disciplinary Biopower of Digital Genre Assemblages" 2019.
Week 13: Thursday, April 4 23	**Rhetorics of platforms (e.g., the rhetoric that social media and other digital companies use).**	**Weekly Discussion Questions Due for:** Tarleton Gillespie "The Politics of Platforms." 2010. Dustin Edwards and Bridget Gelms, "The Rhetorics of

		Platforms: Definitions, Approaches, Futures." 2018. Kelly Cotter. """Shadowbanning is not a thing": black box gaslighting andthe power to independently know and credibly critique algorithms". 2021.
Week 14: Thursday, April 11 25	**Materialities**	**Weekly Discussion Questions Due for:** Dustin Edwards. "Digital Rhetoric on a Damaged Planet: Storying Digital Damage as Inventive Response to the Anthropocene." 2020. Angela Haas "Wampum as hypertext." 2007.
Week 15: Thursday, April 18 27	**In-class final reflection**	**Analysis of Digital Rhetorical Principles Assignment Due.**
Week 16: Monday, April 22 Last Day of Classes, April 24 28		
Week 16 Thursday, April 25 No Class		
Monday, April 29 No Class		