English 468 — Topics in Language, Rhetoric and Writing
"Epic Fail? Rhetoric and Writing in the Digital Age"
Spring 2011

Instructor: Dr. Sheldon Walcher
Office Hours and Location: Thursdays 5 – 6 p.m. in AUD 736
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REQUIRED MATERIALS

Because this class will focus on the production and use of digital texts (and the social, cultural and practical implications of such new media), all of the materials for the course will be available electronically—either for free, or at a substantially reduced cost.

- Aristotle. *Rhetoric*. [Kindle Edition] Translated by George Kennedy.
- Dillon, John and Tania Gergel. Trans. *The Greek Sophists*. [Kindle Edition.] New York: Penguin Classics, 2003.
- Plato. *Phaedrus*. [Kindle Edition.] Translated by Benjamin Jowett.
- Wysocki, Anne. *Writing New Media: Theory and Applications for Expanding the Teaching of Composition*. [Kindle Edition.] Logan: Utah State University Press, 2004.
- Selected secondary articles, videos, and applications. [Available on our Blackboard site.]

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The social networking site Twitter reports that in 2010, the average number of Tweets per day exceeded 50 million. Similarly, Facebook claims that more than 150 million users log on everyday, posting well over 2.5 million status updates every hour. Researchers estimate that well over 1 billion text messages are sent worldwide on a typical day, and over 247 billion emails. There are also more than 126 million active blogs on the internet, and each day, about 120,000 new web sites are launched. The explosive popularity of such new media clearly signals a transformation in the way humans across our planet communicate and interact. Simply put, more people are engaged in both the consumption and production of texts than at any other time in human history. Yet the emergence of such new tools and literacy practices has also caused a kind of "moral panic" among many educators, politicians, members of the media and the wider public, who see the spread of self-sponsored and unregulated/un-regularized discourse as a serious threat to a range of traditional values, attitudes, and beliefs.

This course will examine recent debates over the effects online communication and technology are having on traditional forms of literacy, but will also place these debates within a historical context. For the truth is, the nature, status, and function of writing has *always* been extremely fraught—beginning with Plato's attack on writing in the Phaedrus. By reexamining several key moments in the history of rhetoric through this lens of "technology" and "new media," – we will develop a better understanding of the tropes that inform so much of what we think we know about "good" and "bad" reading and writing more generally.

ACCESSING AND USING KINDLE EDITIONS

All of the primary texts for this course are available as Kindle Editions through Amazon.com. You do not need to own a Kindle to purchase and use these texts, but you will need to download the Kindle application, available free in both Mac and PC versions.

For Mac laptop and desktop users, the Kindle app can be downloaded from the Mac App Store: http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/kindle/id405399194?mt=12&ls=1. (An iPad version is also available through iTunes.)

For PC laptop and desktop users, the Kindle app can be downloaded directly from Amazon at: www.amazon.com/gp/kindle/pc.

COURSE OBJECTIVES
There are four interrelated goals for this course:

1) to familiarize students with the main arguments and controversies surrounding the effects technology is having on reading, writing and thinking in the 21st century;

2) to introduce students to several key moments in the history of rhetoric and composition that continue to influence how practitioners and scholars understand the work of writing instruction;

3) to help students refine their own understanding of what writing is and does (on practical and theoretical levels), and from there, to develop a holistic teaching philosophy;

4) to provide students who plan to teach writing in the future with some practical approaches to incorporating multimedia and multimodal composing in their courses.

REQUIREMENTS
In order to pass this course, you must satisfactorily complete all of the following:

- submit at least 8 out of 10 weekly **blog responses**, each to be at least 500 words in length, and consisting of a careful reflection of the assigned readings and how they relate or might otherwise inform your understanding of literacy and/or teaching.

- prepare and lead class discussion as part of a **facilitation group** at least once over the course of the semester (see Course Schedule for more details);

- complete the two course projects; **Project One** will consist of a more traditional "paper" (although submitted electronically), focusing on some historical aspect of moral panic and literacy; **Project Two** will consist of a multimedia/multimodal research project focused on teaching writing in the digital age.

- complete all **reading assignments**; actively participate in **class discussions and activities**, and maintain **regular attendance**.

ONLINE ACCESS
To access the online components of this course, you must first go to http://roosevelt.blackboard.com/, then follow the log-in instructions. If you have any questions or run into difficulty accessing the Blackboard material for this course, please call the Information Technology Services Help Desk at 312-341-4357, or visit them online at: http://www.roosevelt.edu/ITS.aspx.

PORTABLE ELECTRONIC DEVICES
Because much of the material for this course will only be available electronically, the use of laptops or other portable electronic devices that enable document reading (including smart phones) is highly encouraged in class! There may be times that for the sake of focus and class discussion, I will ask you to put such devices away, and of course, students who flagrantly misuse such devices in class for non-course related activities may be asked to leave, and/or may be considered absent for attendance purposes. But for the most part, the more technology the better!

ATTENDANCE AND PREPARATION
It should go without saying that regularly attending and participating in class will be fundamental to your success in this course. If for some reason you know you will be unable to make class, please email me so that we can make alternate arrangements to go over the material. Students who miss more than two class meetings may have their final grades reduced.

ADA NOTICE
Roosevelt University is committed to providing equal access to its programs, services and activities for people with disabilities. The Americans with Disabilities Act requires that reasonable accommodations be provided for students with physical, sensory, cognitive, systemic, learning, and psychiatric disabilities. If you feel you may need accommodations in this or any class, please contact the Office of Disabled Student Services at (312) 341-3810, or nlitke@roosevelt.edu as soon as possible.