COM 494 Rhetorics of HIV/AIDS

The AIDS epidemic is cultural and linguistic as well as biological and biomedical. ...It is the careful examination of language and culture that enables us, as members of intersecting social constellations, ...to use our intelligence and critical faculties to consider theoretical problems, develop policy, and articulate long-term social needs even as we acknowledge the urgency of the AIDS crisis and try to satisfy its relentless demand for immediate action.¹

Rhetoric may be fruitfully defined as both a particular type of discourse and a perspective, or sensibility, about language and culture. “Rhetorics of HIV/AIDS,” then, announces an interest in and appreciation of multiple discourses and multiple perspectives about HIV/AIDS. Throughout the semester, we will engage in rhetorical investigations—or discoveries, syntheses, analyses, evaluations, critiques, actions, and interventions about language and culture—about HIV/AIDS. Importantly, rhetorical investigations assume and thus excavate the political and ideological dimensions of linguistic and cultural productions.

Course Goals:
Each of you will enter this course with personal goals, and your goals will be solidified, clarified, amended, and/or multiplied during the semester. During and by the end of this course, it is my hope that I will be able to facilitate the following for you:

- Understand and practice a distinctly rhetorical approach to the study of HIV/AIDS
- Understand early patterns of communication practice about HIV/AIDS in the U.S. and globally
- Discern how historical structures and practices of communication inform contemporary practices
- Examine recurrent topoi about HIV/AIDS across the span of the last several decades
- Investigate the assumptions, logics, forces, and consequences of key discourses about HIV/AIDS
- Attend to the ways in which race, class, sex, and other forms of difference shape the epidemic

Required Reading Materials:
Across the span of the semester, our assigned readings will include scholarly articles, popular cultural texts, activist texts, websites, films, videos, and more. Assigned readings will be delivered through the “Assigned Readings” area of our Blackboard site. Readings are listed on pages 5-7 of this syllabus. On pages 8-10, I have provided full reference information for all assigned readings during the semester.

Statement of Teaching Philosophy:
I think of teaching in ecological terms, meaning that I value interdependence—the ways in which we influence each other in and out of the classroom—and contingency—the ways in which unpredictable events provide unforeseen possibilities for learning and growth.

**Instructor Obligations:**
Each time that we meet, you should expect that I will:
- Arrive to class prepared and organized
- Convey passion for the material
- Conduct class in a manner that is engaging
- Respect each student's individuality as a person and as a learner
- Attempt to relate material in this course to your everyday lives

Outside of class, you should expect that I will:
- Demonstrate commitment to holding office hours and making appointments
- Embrace your efforts to learn and provide what encouragement I can

**Student Obligations:**
Each class period, I will expect you to:
- Have completed the readings
- Pose questions for clarification or extension of points
- Participate actively in discussion and debate or as a careful listener
- Respectfully challenge your instructor and peers when appropriate
- Contribute positively to the classroom climate

Outside of class, I will expect you to:
- Seek my assistance with assignments and course materials if you deem such assistance necessary
- Help me assist you in reaching your goals as a student

**Attendance Policy:**
It is my expectation that you will attend every class. And it is my sincere hope that you will find the course material and our in-class discussions so engaging that you enjoy every class. To incentivize your attendance, I will take attendance in a formal manner. Being present for class means being present at both the beginning and the ending of class. After more than five total absences (whether excused or unexcused), ten points will be deducted for each subsequent absence.

If you cannot attend class or choose not to attend class, then be aware of the following consequences:
- First, many of the announcements, concepts, and issues that we address during lecture and discussion are not covered in your readings, so your absence may seriously compromise your ability to perform competently on various assignments.
- Second, you might find that some of the assigned reading material is difficult to understand if you have not been in class, so your absence might compromise your understanding.
- Third, if you are absent or late on the day that an assignment is due in class, you will not receive full credit for that assignment. All in-class assignments are due at the beginning of class. Assignments not turned in at the designated date and time will be penalized by 20%, with 10% deductions for each additional 24-hour period after the due date and time.

On days that assignments are due, I will grant exceptions to late-policy penalties only under the following circumstances:
- If you must be absent, please notify me before your absence and before the assignment and provide justification that your absence will be absolutely necessary.
- If you know that you will be absent or late to class because you will be participating in a religious holiday or representing the university, please notify me in advance of the event so that we can discuss reasonable accommodations.
- If you experience an emergency immediately before class, you may contact me immediately after your absence and missed assignment and provide documentation explaining your absence, and I will then assess the validity of the absence, missed assignment, and documentation.

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*Silence = Death Project, 1986*
Course Assignments:

There are four types of assignments in this course.

195 pts 1) Critical Essay: Writing is a process. And writing well requires careful attention and diligent effort at multiple stages in the process. In a series of writing events, you will present the results of your semester-long investigation and analysis of (an) HIV/AIDS-related text(s). I will expect thoughtful and rigorous discussion of salient aspects of context as well as thoughtful and rigorous analysis of your text(s). Furthermore, in your writing you should demonstrate your ability to synthesize and apply ideas, concepts, and arguments that emerge from class readings and discussion. The Critical Essay process has four components:

20 pts    a) Research Proposal: This document should clearly announce your topic, the specific text(s) that you will examine, three-to-four research questions, and at least ten scholarly sources that will help you to craft your Context Essay, Rhetorical Analysis Essay, and Final Critical Essay.

50 pts    b) Context Essay: A five-to-seven (5-7) page essay (not including cover page, abstract, endnotes, or references) in which you explain the origins of your HIV/AIDS-related text(s), describe key events, documents, and people related to your text(s), and detail the current status of your text(s).

25 pts    c) Rhetorical Analysis Essay: A three-to-four (3-4) page essay (not including cover page, abstract, endnotes, or references) in which you perform rhetorical analysis of your HIV/AIDS-related text(s).

100 pts   d) Final Critical Essay: A fourteen-to-sixteen (14-16) page essay (not including cover page, abstract, endnotes, or references) that builds upon your revised Context and Rhetorical Analysis Essays and frames your research project with an introduction and conclusion.

45 pts 2) Reading Quizzes: Three times during the semester, I will test your comprehension of specific readings. These quizzes will take the form of short answer responses and will be administered during class. Quizzes will take place on January 19, March 15, and April 19.

75 pts 3) Midterm Examination: On February 25, you will take an in-class examination. This exam will challenge your understanding of rhetorical and cultural theory, critical concepts, and issues and controversies that we explore in class. Material for the exam will come from assigned readings, lectures, discussion, online and digital materials, and announcements.

135 pts 4) Participation: For participation, I will assess the quantity and quality of your engagement with course materials. In this course, your participation should take three distinct forms:

75 pts    a) Engagement with course materials in and/or out of class: In class, your engagement can take the form of responses to questions, question-posing, syntheses and analyses of course materials, contributions to our HIV/AIDS timeline, and summaries of current events. Outside of class, engagement can take the form of documented electronic communications (e.g., private emails; public postings to Blackboard discussion boards; public postings to blogs, social networking sites, YouTube, etc.) about course-related materials, phone calls and office visits about course-related materials, and documented service (e.g., volunteer or activist work for which you are not already earning academic credit or income) for HIV/AIDS-related organizations or constituencies.

45 pts    b) Reflection Papers: Three times during the semester, I will ask you to submit two-page reflection papers that respond to a specific question or prompt provided at least one week in advance. These papers should be typed, double-spaced, and written in 10-to-12-point font and should employ standard/default margins. Reflection papers will be due on January 28, March 31, and April 26.

15 pts    c) Discussion Questions: Each student will be responsible for crafting three (3) questions designed to stimulate thinking and provoke discussion for one specific assigned reading. These questions must solicit more than purely informational or technical responses, and they should be posted to Blackboard at least twenty-four (24) hours before the class period during which we discuss the reading.
**Grading:**

1) Generally in this course, “excellent” work earns “A”-range grades, “good” work earns “B”-range grades, “average” work earns “C”-range grades, “unsatisfactory” work earns “D”-range grades, and “poor” work earns “E”-range grades. More specifically, I employ the following scale:

- A+ = 97-100% (436.5-450 pts)
- A = 93-96.9% (418.5-436 pts)
- A- = 90-92.9% (405-418 pts)
- B+ = 87-89.9% (391.5-404.5 pts)
- B = 83-86.9% (373.5-391 pts)
- B- = 80-82.9% (360-373 pts)
- C+ = 77-79.9% (346.5-359.5 pts)
- C = 70-76.9% (315-346 pts)
- C- = 67-69.9% (285-314.5 pts)
- D = 60-69% (270-314.5 pts)
- E = 0-59% (0-269.5 pts)

2) All formal writing components of the Critical Essay should be submitted both to your instructor in class in hardcopy format on the days that they are due (first priority) and to the Safe Assignment database through our class Blackboard site (next priority). Please do not submit final versions of Critical Essay writing assignments by sliding them under my office door or by leaving them with an office assistant. Critical Essay writing assignments will be considered “received” only when they have been submitted both in-person and electronically.

3) If you are curious or concerned about an assignment grade, then I encourage you to initiate a discussion with me about that grade. I ask that you follow a “24/7” principle—please wait until twenty-four hours after the graded assignment has been returned, and please wait no longer than seven days to initiate such a discussion. I reserve the right to ask you to present your grade concerns to me in writing.

4) Those who are registered with the Disability Resource Center (DRC) and who would benefit from alternative sites, dates, or formats for class assignments should notify me during the first two weeks of the semester. I will gladly work with you to accommodate your needs.

5) I do not offer extra credit in this course. Please plan accordingly.

**Academic Honesty:**

1) In December 2013, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Curriculum Committee and Faculty Senate approved the following Academic Integrity Statement to be included on all new course syllabi: “Academic honesty is expected of all students in all examinations, papers, laboratory work, academic transactions and records. The possible sanctions include, but are not limited to, appropriate grade penalties, course failure (indicated on the transcript as a grade of E), course failure due to academic dishonesty (indicated on the transcript as a grade of XE), loss of registration privileges, disqualification, and dismissal. Forms of academic dishonesty are varied but include plagiarism. In the Student Academic Integrity Policy manual, ASU defines plagiarism as ‘using another’s words, ideas, materials or work without properly acknowledging and documenting the source.’ For more information, see http://provost.asu.edu/academicintegrity.”

2) Plagiarizing the work of others is one form of academic dishonesty. “Self-plagiarism” is another form of academic dishonesty for which the penalties outlined above also apply. Here are helpful definitions and distinctions: “Whereas plagiarism refers to the practice of claiming credit for the words, ideas, and concepts of others, self-plagiarism refers to the practice of presenting one’s own previously published work as though it were new.” For the purposes of this class, self-plagiarism includes using the same academic work to earn credit in two or more classes this semester; it also includes presenting one’s own coursework (either a whole assignment or part of an assignment) from a previous semester as if it were new material for this course. In short, you are not permitted to submit the same work to earn credit in different classes at ASU.

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Additional Instructions and Invitations:

1) I encourage you to contribute your ideas and pose questions during class discussion.

2) If there are twenty of us in this course, then there may be twenty different perspectives on any specific topic. We may not agree with all of the views expressed in class, but we must all agree to be willing to listen to each other’s perspectives.

3) Common courtesy and basic respect for your peers and instructor demand that you turn off (not just turn down or turn to vibrate) cellular phones before class begins and that you leave them turned off until class is over. To put a sharper point on the issue: Do not send or monitor text messages in class. If ever you attend class with the possibility of receiving an emergency phone call, then please let me know before class begins.

4) Additionally, if you plan to use a laptop computer in class, please demonstrate courtesy and respect to your peers and instructor by using your computer only for note-taking and not for monitoring email accounts, updating social networking websites, or similar activities. If I witness you using your laptop for non-class-related activities, I will ask you not to use your laptop in class for the remainder of the semester.

5) Class will begin promptly at 12pm and will typically end at 1.15pm. Routinely arriving late to class or leaving early from class will be considered disruptive and discourteous acts.

6) I will answer your emails primarily during office hours. Outside of office hours and during the week, I will strive to respond to your emails within a 24-hour period. During the week, if I have not responded to your email within 48 hours, please resend the email and/or call me to make sure that I know you are trying to contact me. Please note that I will not be obligated to respond to emails during the weekend.

7) If you are enrolled in Barrett, The Honors College, then I am happy to work with you to craft an Honors Enrichment Contract. All contracts require that the student be mentored for a minimum of eight hours over the course of the semester. A contract should be proposed by the student and negotiated with the mentor faculty.

8) While our readings and discussions will frequently reference technical and demographic information about HIV transmission, prevention, and treatment, we will not spend a great deal of time in class rigorously learning such information. If you want or need to familiarize or re-familiarize yourself with such information, please peruse the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/index.html.

9) When we rhetorically investigate HIV/AIDS, we necessarily confront aspects of sex and sexuality. Several of our readings confront those aspects directly and candidly through words and visual images, and many of our discussions will do so as well. Please keep this in mind as you decide whether you will be able and willing to stay enrolled in the course.
Reference List for Assigned Readings (in Order of Use)


