

**RHE 309K: Rhetoric of Irony**  
**Summer 2012**  
**Syllabus & Class Policy Statement**

**Instructor: Eric Detweiler**  
**Unique Course Number: 87935**  
**Class Time and Place: Parlin 310, 10:00 – 11:30am, M – F**  
**Email: eric.detweiler@utexas.edu**  
**Course Website: <http://edetweiler.pbworks.com>**  
**Office: FAC 16**

**Office Hours: M 1:00-2:30, Th 11:30-1:00, F 11:30-12:30 (also by appointment)**

### **Textbooks**

- ✓ Crowley, Sharon, and Debra Hawhee. *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students*. 4th ed. New York: Pearson, 2008. Print.
- ✓ Lunsford, Andrea. *Easy Writer: A Pocket Reference*. 4th ed. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2009. Print.
- ✓ Various readings posted on course website

### **Course Description**

What is irony? It's a rhetorical device that has been called "infinite absolute negativity" and "the key to the tightest bonds of friendship." Socrates used it to teach, Jane Austen to critique Victorian social norms. Stephen Colbert uses it to comment on American politics, television shows like *South Park* to mock just about everything. Irony's complex history is part of the reason its definition is so hard to pin down. Working towards an understanding and definition of the term will thus be one of the aims of this course.

Irony's *presence* in individual rhetorical exchanges can be equally hard to identify, however. Consider the times you've been reading something—say a friend's Facebook status—and found yourself asking, "Can this person possibly be serious?" In this course, then, we will also examine how irony functions practically in political and popular discourse. The effective use of irony requires both speakers and listeners to share a mutual understanding not only of the position being ironically stated, but the unstated beliefs and the actual critical message under the surface. Traditional rhetorical variables—speaker, audience, purpose—are all present, but layered in a manner that requires especially acute rhetorical awareness. This course will thus necessitate that we all assume and practice rigorous rhetorical consciousness as we engage with irony as both a concept and a complex rhetorical device. We will construct and critique ironic arguments as we consider the historical, political, and ethical implications of irony's deployment from Jonathan Swift to Jon Stewart.

### **Course Goals**

Given irony's complicated, layered, and fluid nature, we'll begin the semester by researching and presenting on particular historical instances of ironic argument. This will necessitate (1) identifying the stakeholders and historical/political *context* of arguments; (2) mapping ironists' actual positions, purposes, and audiences; and (3) understanding the opposing perspectives—that's "perspectives," plural—ironists are critiquing. Subsequent major and minor writing

assignments will build on the rhetorical concepts and skills introduced in the initial presentation: You will invent compositions based on the preliminary exercises (progymnasmata) in Crowley & Hawhee's *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students*, and compose/revise rhetorical and ethical analyses of a self-selected contemporary ironic argument. Developing an understanding of irony, as well as the ability to practice and critique ironic compositions, are thus central goals in this course. Also key is developing and demonstrating the ability to reflect critically on your own progression as a learner and writer via Learning Record assignments, which are discussed in more detail below.

### Writing Flag Statement

This course carries the Writing Flag. Writing Flag courses are designed to give students experience with writing in an academic discipline. In this class, you can expect to write regularly during the semester, complete substantial writing projects, and receive feedback from your instructor to help you improve your writing. You will also have the opportunity to revise one or more assignments, and to read and discuss your peers' work. You should therefore expect a substantial portion of your grade to come from your written work.

### Coursework and Grading

#### *Coursework*

For this course, we will be using a method of assessment called The Learning Record (LR). With the LR, your grade will depend heavily on your ability to reflect on and provide evidence of what you *learn* and how you *develop* as a learner, writer, and student of rhetoric during this course—not just the quality of the isolated assignments you turn in. The primary factors in your grade will be an end-of-term self-evaluation (LR Evaluation B) in which you create an evidence-based argument for your course grade. You will have a chance to practice and get feedback on such self-evaluation in a reflection written at the end of our first course unit. The submission of evaluation B will be followed by an individual teacher-student conference in which I will sign off on or challenge your proposed grade. We will discuss the LR, including dimensions of learning, course strands, and the course wiki where much LR work will take place, in greater detail in coming days. For now, the major assignments you'll be responsible for this semester are as follows:

#### *General Assignments*

- |                           |                          |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| ✓ Irony Definition        | 1 page                   |
| ✓ Unit 1 Timeline         | Group Prezi presentation |
| ✓ Unit 1 Reflection       | 2 pages                  |
| ✓ Paper 2.1/2.2           | 4 pages                  |
| ✓ Paper 3.1/3.2           | 4 pages                  |
| ✓ Preliminary Exercises   | 4 total, 1 page apiece   |
| ✓ Misc. Reading "Quizzes" | Assigned as needed       |
| ✓ Peer reviews            | Mandatory                |
| ✓ Participation           | Invaluable               |

#### *Learning Record Assignments*

- |                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| ✓ LR Reflection A | Initial reflection on your standing and goals as this course begins |
| ✓ LR Evaluation B | End-of-semester evaluation of your learning building on LR          |

Reflection A & Unit 1 Reflection, evidence from all previous coursework, and the five dimensions of learning

### Grading

You will assess your own overall grade for the course using the following plus/minus scale:

|                 |           |                 |
|-----------------|-----------|-----------------|
| 93 and above: A | 80-81: B- | 68-69: D+       |
| 90-91: A-       | 78-79: C+ | 62-67: D        |
| 88-89: B+       | 72-77: C  | 60-61: D-       |
| 82-87: B        | 70-71: C- | 59 and below: F |

The grading criteria on which you will base your self-evaluations — and which I'll keep in mind as I look them over — are as follows:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| A | Represents outstanding participation in all course activities, <i>perfect or near perfect attendance</i> , and <i>all assigned work completed on time</i> . Also represents <i>very high quality</i> in all work produced for the course. LR provides evidence of significant development across the five dimensions of learning. The LR at this level demonstrates activity that <i>goes significantly beyond the required course work</i> in one or more course strands. |
| B | Represents excellent participation in all course activities, near perfect attendance, and <i>all assigned work completed on time</i> . Also represents <i>consistently high quality</i> in coursework. Evidence of marked development across the five dimensions of learning.  |
| C | Represents good participation in all course activities, minimal absences, and all assigned work completed. Also represents generally good quality overall in coursework. Evidence of some development across the five dimensions of learning.  |
| D | Represents uneven participation in course activities, uneven attendance, and some gaps in assigned work completed. Represents inconsistent quality in course work. Evidence of development across the five dimensions of learning is partial or unclear.   |
| F | Represents minimal participation in course activities, poor attendance, serious gaps in assigned work completed, or very low quality in course work. Evidence of development is not available.   |

It is difficult to overstate the importance of you familiarizing yourself with these criteria.

### Major Assignments

You will complete one group presentation using Prezi, an online software. You will also write a total of five one-page assignments, and write and revise two major papers. These major papers will be four pages apiece. All the preceding assignments will build on LR Reflection A and build toward your Unit 1 Reflection and LR Evaluation B.

### Helpful Resources

In addition to the course website, the following sites will be helpful this semester:

Department of Rhetoric & Writing (DRW) - <http://www.drw.utexas.edu/>

UT Libraries - <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/>

Undergraduate Writing Center (UWC) Handouts - <http://www.uwc.utexas.edu/handouts>

Purdue's Online Writing Lab (OWL) - <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>

### **Late Work**

Summer courses move fast, and no opportunities will be available to make up missed coursework. Note that, based on the grading criteria above, turning in *any* work late automatically knocks you out of the “A” and “B” range for this course. The one (sort of) exception is for the two major papers: Deadlines are an important part of the drafting process, so “.1” papers (2.1 and 3.1) must be turned in by the beginning of class the day they are due. I will give you a single 48-hour extension—no questions asked—on one of the “.2” papers. If you turn in all your major papers on time, I am also willing to apply this exception to one of the shorter writing assignments. *This policy does not extend to your Unit 1 Reflection or any LR assignments.* In any case, excessive lateness will reflect very negatively on your arguments in your self-evaluations. If you anticipate any problem meeting a deadline, let me know at least 48 hours in advance. No guarantees, but I am much more likely to be flexible if I can see you are planning ahead.

### **Tardiness**

On any day you arrive after I have finished calling roll at the beginning of class, you will be considered tardy. Two tardies equal an absence. If you are more than 15 minutes late to class, you are absent—not tardy. You are responsible for making sure I mark you on the role when you are late. Leaving early will also count as half an absence.

### **Technology**

You will not need your cell phone for this class. If I see you on your cell phone, I will mark you absent. If your cell-phone use disrupts your fellow students, you will receive one warning before being dismissed from class. Do not take notes on your phone, as it is very difficult to tell note-taking from texting. If you have a special reason for needing access to your phone, notify me at the beginning of the class day.

If you wish to use a laptop in class for taking notes, peer reviews, etc., you will need to write me a one-page argumentative essay justifying that use. I'll read the essay and make the call on a student-by-student basis.

## **Department of Rhetoric & Writing RHE Course Policy Statement**

### **Attendance**

Rhetoric & Writing has established this attendance policy for all summer RHE courses. Any questions or appeals concerning this policy must be made directly to the department Associate Chair. You are expected to attend class, to arrive on time, to have prepared assigned reading and writing, and to participate in all in-class editing, revising, and discussion sessions. **Should you miss the equivalent of six class meetings this summer—including individual conferences—excused or not, you will fail the course.** If you find that an unavoidable problem prevents you from attending class, you should contact your instructor as soon as possible, preferably ahead of time, to let him or her know.

You will not be penalized for missing class on religious holy days. A student who misses classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day should inform the instructor, in writing, well in advance of the absence, so that alternative arrangements can be made to complete work. If you know you will have to miss class for this reason, provide your instructor with the date(s) as early as possible. Please note that the university specifies very few other excused absences (e.g. jury duty). When you must miss a class, you are responsible for getting notes and assignments from a classmate.

### **Scholastic Honesty**

Turning in work that is not your own, or any other form of scholastic dishonesty, will result in a major course penalty, possibly failure of the course. This standard applies to *all* drafts and assignments, and a report of the incident will be submitted to the Office of the Dean of Students and filed in your permanent UT record. Under certain circumstances, the Dean of Students will initiate proceedings to expel you from the University. So, take care to read and understand the *Statement on Scholastic Responsibility*, which can be found online at <http://www.drw.utexas.edu/first-year/writing/plagiarism>. If you have any doubts about your use of sources, ask your instructor for help *before* handing in the assignment.

### **Students With Disabilities**

The University of Texas at Austin provides upon request appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. For more information, contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD), at (512) 471-6259 [voice] or (866) 329-3986 [video phone].

### **Email Accounts**

Email is an official means of communication at UT-Austin, and your instructor will use this medium to communicate class information. You are therefore required to obtain a UT email account and to check it daily. All students may claim an email address at no cost by going to <http://www.utexas.edu/computer/email/>.

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*Questions about these policies should be addressed to:*

Department of Rhetoric & Writing  
The University of Texas at Austin  
Parlin Hall, Room 3  
rhetoric@uts.cc.utexas.edu  
(512) 471-6109

## Plagiarism & Collusion

### Statement on Scholastic Responsibility

The writing you do in the Department of Rhetoric and Writing (DRW) courses must be your own. Passing off the work of others as your own can be either plagiarism or collusion. Both are scholastic offenses that the Department of Rhetoric and Writing will not tolerate. Be certain you understand what these terms mean.

This statement describes the acceptable and unacceptable forms of quoting and paraphrasing information in your written work and defines specific types of academic violations. You will sign and turn in to your instructor an agreement confirming that you have read and understood this policy, including the penalties for committing plagiarism or collusion. The DRW will keep your signed form on file.

Please read this statement carefully. Its detailed information can help you understand the need for documentation whenever you incorporate research into your papers. If parts of the statement are unclear, ask your instructor to explain them.

### Plagiarism

The General Information Catalog of the University of Texas at Austin defines *plagiarism* as follows: "the appropriation, buying, receiving as a gift, or obtaining by any means another's work and the submission of it as one's own academic work offered for credit."

- **You commit plagiarism if** you fail to acknowledge the sources of any information in your paper that is not either common knowledge or personal knowledge. Common knowledge includes facts, dates, events, information, and concepts that belong generally to the educated public. Even if you used a reference book to discover the dates of George Washington's presidency, for example, you would not have to acknowledge the source because those dates fall into the range of historical common knowledge. If you borrowed material that interpreted or commented on Washington's presidency, however, you would be expected to cite your source. You can acknowledge a source through in-text citations, attribution lines (for example, "George Will observes in *Men at Work* . . ."), footnotes, or other forms of documentation approved by your instructor.
- **You commit plagiarism if** you fail to acknowledge direct quotation either by using quotation marks when quoting short passages or indentation when quoting longer passages. Without the quotation marks or indentation, a passage copied directly from a source might be considered plagiarized even if it were followed by an in-text citation or a footnote: the citation or footnote acknowledges that you have a source but it does not indicate that you have borrowed someone else's exact words. If you use the language of a source, word-for-word, you must use quotation marks or block indentation.
- **You commit plagiarism if** you too closely paraphrase the original words of your source. Some students think that they can avoid a charge of plagiarism by changing a few words in each sentence they copy, or by rearranging the shape of phrases or the order of sentences in a paragraph. This is not true. When you take notes, you must be careful to put ideas in your own words, or to use direct quotation when you are relying on phrases

borrowed directly from a source.

- **You commit plagiarism** if you borrow the ideas, examples, or structure of your source without acknowledging it. You can be guilty of plagiarism if you systematically borrow the ideas and organization of a source—even if the language of your piece is substantially original. A student who, for example, reports on a major news event by using exactly the same ideas in the same order as they appear in an article in *Time* or *Newsweek* might be accused of plagiarism.
- **You commit plagiarism** if you take, buy, or receive a paper written by someone else and present it as your own.
- **You commit plagiarism** if you use one paper for two different courses, or re-use a paper previously submitted for credit, without the prior approval of both instructors.

**If you want to use words, ideas, or the structure of a selection** such as the passage below from *Harper's*, you may do so correctly in two ways.

Medical costs will bankrupt this country if they continue on their current trajectory. And there are no data to demonstrate that improved management techniques will solve the problem. "Managed care" and "managed competition" might save money in the short run (though the examples of some other managed industries—such as the utilities and airlines do not inspire confidence). But the bulk of the savings achieved by Health Maintenance Organizations has been achieved by cutting back on expensive, unprofitable facilities such as burn centers, neonatal-intensive-care units, emergency rooms, and the like. In other words, HMOs conduct what amounts to a hidden form of health-care rationing—confident that municipal and university hospitals are still around to pick up the slack. (Gaylin 62)

From: Gaylin, Willard M.D. "Faulty Diagnosis: Why Clinton's Health-Care Plan Won't Cure What Ails Us." *Harper's* (Oct. 1993): 57-64.

**You may quote from the passage directly**, using appropriate citations and quotation marks, or (when the quotation is lengthy) indentation. For example:

Willard Gaylin, a professor of psychiatry at Columbia Medical School, maintains that "medical costs will bankrupt this country if they continue on their current trajectory. And there are no data to demonstrate that improved management techniques will solve the problem" (62).

**You may report the information in your own words**, acknowledging Gaylin as your source and using an in-text citation to indicate the location of the passage:

Doctor Gaylin, for instance, does not believe that the improved management techniques proposed by the Clinton administration will solve the problem of rising medical costs, because the cost-cutting measures followed by HMOs under the current system will not be feasible when all Americans belong to such health collectives (62).

**You may not simply change a few words or phrases and call the material your own**, even if you acknowledge a source. The following passage based on Gaylin's original would be considered plagiarism, with or without an in-text citation or footnote:

Medical expenses will ruin America if we stay on our current path. There is no evidence that better management techniques will fix the trouble. "Managed care" may save some money today, but the way things are we will still pay for expensive, unprofitable care tomorrow.

**You may not call the work your own if you change the language in the original passage** but closely follow its organization, ideas, and examples. Most instructors would consider the following passage too much like Gaylin's original to be considered acceptable as a student's work:

Our country will go broke if it follows on its current path. And there is no information that says we can get out of this mess through better management. HMOs are successful today because they leave the county and teaching hospitals to fund costly, unprofitable specialized care (Gaylin 62).

**Collusion.** The current General Information Catalog of the University of Texas at Austin defines *collusion* as follows: "the unauthorized collaboration with another person in preparing academic assignments offered for credit or collaboration with another person to commit a violation of any section of the rules on scholastic dishonesty."

- **You commit collusion if you allow someone else to write your papers.**
- **You also commit collusion if you allow someone else to edit your papers.** It is scholastically dishonest for students to employ tutors to correct, edit, or modify essays in any substantive way. The same reservations and restrictions apply, within reason, to any outside assistance you may receive from a parent, friend, roommate, or academic tutor. Any changes, deletions, rearrangements, additions, or corrections made in your essays should represent your own work. If you want assistance in a course beyond that which your instructor can offer in class or in office hours, you may use the DRW's Undergraduate Writing Center (UWC) in the FAC or remote locations or the Learning Skills Center (LSC) in Jester A332. Tutors at these facilities are trained to comment on essays and to offer advice without editing or rewriting papers.

### **Penalties**

If you have any questions or doubts about the way you are employing sources or getting assistance in writing a given paper, consult your instructor before handing it in. The penalties for plagiarism or collusion can be severe. In all demonstrable cases of either offense, the DRW recommends that its instructors fail the student for the entire course, not just for the paper. However, the penalty in a given case is at the discretion of the individual instructor.

Your instructor must discuss any charge of scholastic dishonesty directly with you and may also refer you to the Chair or Associate Chair of the Department of Rhetoric and Writing. In

most instances, a plagiarism or collusion case is resolved either in the meeting between student and instructor, or between instructor, student, and Chair or Associate Chair. If it is not, a student has a right to a hearing before a designated University official and a right to make an appeal to the Office of the Dean of Students.

Given the compressed nature of a summer course, the schedule below is both carefully structured and jam-packed. These will be a demanding few weeks, and I intend for us to stick to this schedule fairly closely. Unforeseen circumstances do arise, however, so I reserve the right to revise our schedule as necessary, though I will not do so without discussion and advance notice. If at any point during the semester you have concerns about the schedule (not just that it's "difficult," which is to be expected), feel free to bring them to my attention—I intend this course to be at least as much yours as mine.

We will be doing something important every day in this course—do not assume any day is unimportant. Assigned readings and writing assignments are italicized and due the day they are listed below. Readings that are located in the "Course Readings" folder of the course wiki are followed with a "(W)." Always bring *Ancient Rhetorics* to class with you on days an assignment from it is listed, and always bring hard, printed-out copies of readings from the wiki. Reading and writing ahead is rarely a bad idea.

| RHE 309K Syllabus Schedule |         |  |
|----------------------------|---------|--|
| Week 1                     | May 31  | Course Introduction<br>LR Reflection A Prompt  |
|                            | June 1  | Introduction to the Learning Record & Course Wiki<br>Definition of Irony (In-class composition)<br><i>Williams, "Jargon" (W)</i><br><i>The Oatmeal (W)</i> |
| Week 2                     | June 4  | Unit 1 Timeline & Reflection Prompt<br>Introduction to Prezi<br><i>Crowley &amp; Hawhee Chapter 1</i><br><i>LR Reflection A</i>                            |
|                            | June 5  | <i>Crowley &amp; Hawhee Chapter 2</i><br><i>Swift, "A Modest Proposal" (W)</i>   |
|                            | June 6  | <i>Kierkegaard, "The Concept of Irony" (W)</i><br><i>Progymnasmata 1</i>   |
|                            | June 7  | Plato, <i>Gorgias</i> (In-class reading)<br><i>Crowley &amp; Hawhee Chapter 4</i>  |
|                            | June 8  | <i>Booth, "A Rhetoric of Irony" (W)</i><br><i>The Mary Tyler Moore Show, "The Lars Affair" (W)</i>   |
| Week 3                     | June 11 | <i>Unit 1 Timeline Presentations</i>   |
|                            | June 12 | Paper 2 Prompt<br><i>Crowley &amp; Hawhee Chapter 5</i><br>Various political cartoons & Collins, "The Anatomy of a Jokester"<br>(In-class reading)         |
|                            | June 13 | <i>Unit 1 Reflection</i><br>Selected clips from <i>The Colbert Report</i> and <i>The Daily Show</i> (In-class viewings)                                    |
|                            | June 14 | <i>Wallace, "E Unibus Pluram" (W)</i>  |
|                            | June 15 | LR Evaluation B Prompt<br><i>Progymnasmata 2</i>   |

|        |         |   |
|--------|---------|---|
| Week 4 | June 18 | <i>Crowley &amp; Hawhee Chapter 6</i><br><i>Fish, "Reading Irony" (W)</i><br>Randy Newman's "Short People" & Foster the People's "Pumped Up Kicks" (In-class listening) |
|        | June 19 | <i>Progymnasmata 5</i>  |
|        | June 20 | <i>Paper 2.1</i><br>Peer Review 1   |
|        | June 21 | Paper 3 Prompt<br><i>Hall, "Jane Austen, Meet Jerry Seinfeld" (W)</i><br><i>Seinfeld, "The Opposite" (In-class viewing)</i>   |
|        | June 22 | <i>Paper 2.2</i>  |
| Week 5 | June 25 | <i>Rosenblatt, "The Age of Irony" (W)</i><br><i>Wallace, "The View from Mrs. Thompson's" (W)</i><br><i>Hirschhorn, "Irony, The End of" (W)</i>                          |
|        | June 26 | <i>Crowley &amp; Hawhee Chapter 7</i><br><i>South Park, "You're Getting Old"</i>  |
|        | June 27 | <i>Community, "Remedial Chaos Theory" (In-class viewing)</i><br><i>Progymnasmata 4</i>  |
|        | June 28 | <i>Crowley &amp; Hawhee Chapter 8</i>   |
|        | June 29 | <i>Paper 3.1</i><br>Peer Review 2   |
| Week 6 | July 2  | <i>Crowley &amp; Hawhee Chapter 9</i>   |
|        | July 3  | <i>Paper 3.2</i>  |
|        | July 4  | Independence Day – No Class Meeting   |
|        | July 5  | Last Day of Class<br>Definition of Irony Revisited<br>Course Evaluations  |
| Finals | July 6  | <i>LR Evaluation B (Due by 10:00am at the latest)</i><br>LR Evaluation B Conferences  |
|        | July 7  | LR Evaluation B Conferences   |