

**RHET 204
FALL 2015
WRITING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE**

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Course Description:

In this course, we will explore the rhetorical aspects of social justice writing. As a class, we will critically analyze various modes of social justice writing and the strategies and ethics of a diverse range of activists and public intellectuals who use their writing as a form of social critique and to effect social change. Additionally, you will develop, negotiate, revise, and assess your own writing strategies and ethics as you write on social justice issues relevant to your interests (college-centered, communal, domestic, and international).

Negotiating the Contact Zone:

In seeking to make their classrooms more comfortable and less threatening spaces for students, many writing teachers end up disallowing the very expression of conflict and difference that could enhance (and make more interesting) the writing of their students. I will not take that approach for this course. I expect you to adopt communicative practices — oral and written — that allow for our classroom to be a space where *everyone* has an opportunity to defend, negotiate, and revise their perspectives and rhetorics relevant to social justice work. But please understand that there is a difference between having a classroom that is a *comfortable* and *non-threatening* space and a classroom that is a *communicatively open* space. We are going to have a communicatively open classroom space. You may not always feel comfortable in this classroom. Social justice work is not generally geared towards making people feel comfortable. Social justice work attempts to enact social change, and that can be quite threatening and uncomfortable on many fronts. Also, polemical and agitation rhetorics are strategies that some social justice writers employ. As such, I will not discourage their usage in your own writing. We will also examine in this course several iterations of these kinds of rhetorics at work in the writings of social justice activists. Like all the other strategies we will explore in terms of social justice writing, we will consider polemical and agitation rhetorics within the context of recontextualization. Working as a facilitator for this course, I will treat this classroom space as a contact zone, and all work for this course — reading, writing, and discussion activities — will be informed by this contact zone philosophy. Contact zones are often *messy spaces* because they bring together through conflict, struggle, negotiation, and revision a variety of different social, cultural, and political perspectives. **Please be prepared to engage in these four processes — conflict, struggle, negotiation, and revision.**

Required Materials:

Internet Access: I will post the readings, videos, and podcasts for the course on Blackboard:

- Video: Robin DG Kelley, “Becoming an Engaged Intellectual in the Age of Austerity”
- Irin Carmon, “Can Women Stand Their Ground? Depends on the Target”
- Detroit Water Crisis: Case Study Articles
- Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Case Study Articles
- Andrew Sullivan, “Here Comes the Groom.”
- Interview with Yasmin Nair

- Lisa Dettmer, “Beyond Gay Marriage”
- African American Policy Forum, “A Primer on Intersectionality”
- Kimberle Crenshaw, “What Kind of Ally Are you?”
- Tim Wise, “Most White People in America Are Completely Oblivious”
- Trudy, “I Don’t Want Tim Wise as an Ally. No Thanks.”
- Ewuare Osayande, “Word to the Wise: Unpacking the White Privilege of Tim Wise”
- Robin DG Kelley, “The U.S. vs Trayvon Martin”
- Henry Giroux, “Authoritarianism, Class Warfare and the Advance of Neoliberal Austerity Policies”
- Rania Khalek, “How Today’s Liberal Zionists Echo Apartheid South Africa’s Defenders”
- Claudia Jones, “An End to the Neglect of the Problems of Negro Women” (1949)
- Yasmin Nair, “What’s Left of Queer?: Immigration, Sexuality, and Affect in a Neoliberal World”
- Sarah Deer, “Decolonizing Rape Law: A Native Feminist Synthesis of Safety”
- Mariame Kabe and Erica R. Meiners, “Arresting the Carceral State”
- IAASTD, “International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science, and Technology for Development”
- Michel Foucault, “Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations”
- Bowers et al, *The Rhetoric of Agitation and Control*, Chapter Two
- Video: Malcolm X, “The Ballot or the Bullet” (1964)
- Malcolm X, Transcript of “The Ballot or the Bullet” (1964)
- Stokely Carmichael and Michael Thelwell, “Toward Black Liberation” (1966)
- Bruce Dixon, “Cowardly, Hypocritical, Subservient Congressional Black Caucus Endorses Israeli Apartheid and Current War Crimes in Gaza”
- Christian Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*, Chapter 3, “Social Media as Participatory Culture”
- Christian Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*, Chapter 7.4, “Privacy and the Political Economy of Facebook”
- Christian Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*, Chapter 7.5, “Conclusion”
- Christian Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*, Chapter 8.2, “Twitter, Social Media, and the Public Sphere”

Assessment of Course Goals:

Attached to this syllabus is a preliminary draft of a Learning Contract we will use for this course. Together we will be revising this preliminary draft of the Learning Contract and a final draft composed collaboratively will be adopted for the course.

The course is divided into five modules:

Module One: What is Social Justice?: Allyship and Ethics in Social Justice Writing

Module Two: Examining and Analyzing the Recontextualization Strategies of Public Intellectuals and Activists

Module Three: Writing Persuasive Policy and Advocacy Arguments

Module Four: Polemical and Agitation Rhetorics in Social Justice Writing

Module Five: Digital Literacy and Social Justice Writing

Assessment of the course goals will be based on assignments that will take several forms:

Major Assignments: There are 5 such assignments, varying in content, length, purpose, and genre. A detailed description of each Major Assignment will be provided:

Major Assignment One: “What is Social Justice?” Essay — First Draft Due, Wednesday, September 16

Major Assignment Two: Rhetorical Analysis Essay — First Draft Due, Monday, October 5

Major Assignment Three: Persuasive Policy and Advocacy Essay — First Draft Due, Monday, October 26

Major Assignment Four: Polemical and Agitation Text — First Draft Due, Wednesday, November 16

Major Assignment Five: Project on Digital Literacy and Social Justice Writing — Presentations, Nov 30 - Dec 11

Final Essay: This essay will be due during the final examination period. Using your five Major Assignments, you will compose an essay in which you discuss, analyze, and reflect upon the relationship between literacy and social justice work.

Short Writing Assignments: Short writing assignments and in-class writing exercises will make up a portion of the writing you will do for this course. For these assignments and exercises, you will be asked to write in response to assigned readings for the course and in response to assignment prompts I have designed for the course. I will ask you on several occasions to write critically and analytically about your own writing, considering various directives that I will provide for you in the assignment prompts.

Writing Groups and Peer Review: You should expect to produce multiple revisions for some of the writing you compose for this course. Therefore, your active participation in Writing Groups and Peer Review is important for this course, and thus mandatory for your success in this course.

Attendance Policy:

Regular attendance in this class is mandatory. Each student will be allowed three absences with no penalty or questions asked (although this does not excuse you from turning in work on time). After that, however, absences or frequent tardiness will negatively affect your grade (see the Learning Contract for details). It is your responsibility to inform me of an absence beforehand. **The earlier I know about a problem, the more flexible I can be.** There is always something happening in class, so even if I inform you beforehand about what will be covered it is still your responsibility to acquire notes or other important information from your classmates if you are absent.

Late Work Policy:

All work is due when assigned. I will only receive late work when an arrangement with me has been made prior to the class meeting for which the assignment is due. If you have a significant problem getting assignments in on time, (EX: an ongoing medical issue), talk to me as early as possible because **the earlier I know about a problem, the more flexible I can be.**

Cell Phones and Laptops:

Laptops may be used in class for class work only. Exceptions for keeping a cell phone on will be made in extreme circumstances and I should be informed before class if this is the case.

Physical and/or Learning Differences:

If you have physical or learning differences that may affect your work in this course, please inform me as soon as possible. Also, the office of Jane Boomer, Coordinator of Services for Students with Disabilities (Peters G27-28; x5-5588), can provide lots of help in addressing them.

Learning Contract

Dear Class:

I believe that grades create false hierarchies that are counterproductive to an educational environment. As such, I use Learning Contracts to create in the classroom what is often called a *culture of support*. Instead of a classroom made up of an instructor assuming the authoritative role and students competing (often against each other) for grades and the approval of the instructor, a *culture of support* fosters an environment where we all function as collaborators in the learning experience.

I offer to you this first draft of a Learning Contract for this course that focuses on the responsibilities we'll assume for our work in this course. As the instructor, I will not assign a grade to individual pieces of writing you generate for this course. Now, don't worry. I will give you evaluative assessments on all of your Major Assignments, and you will receive feedback on your work from me and your fellow peer-colleagues. My evaluative assessments (Exceeds Expectations, Meets Expectations, and Needs Improvement) and my comments on your work will provide you with a sense of my assessment of your commitment to your work processes for this course (reading, drafting, revising, and self-assessments and self-reflections). I will also give you a midterm grade.

If you actively engage and continue to improve upon the work we engage during the semester based on the learning objectives for the course, then you will earn a "B" in this class.

To Earn a B in this course, you must:

- Complete all 5 Major Assignments and the Final Essay
- Complete all short writing assignments and in-class exercises and assignments on time
- Attend (and come prepared for) all required conferences
- Comply with the standards of the Honor Code (You must write/type the Honor Code statement at the end of every assignment: "I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment.")
- Arrive on time and keep regular attendance (No more than 3 absences)
- Participate regularly in all in-class activities, discussions, writing workshops, and peer reviews
- Be civil and respectful to your classmates and to me as the instructor

To Earn an A or A+

- Demonstrate exceptional commitment to your work processes (reading, drafting, revising, and self-assessments and self-reflections) on all 5 Major Assignments, the Final Essay, short writing assignments, and in-class exercises and assignments.
- Contribute thoughtfully, collaboratively, and frequently to class discussion
- Satisfy all other B-level minimum requirements

Final Grades Below a B

- Failure to meet the terms of the Learning Contract (due to missing and/or incomplete work, excessive absences and late arrival to class sessions, lack of preparation, and lackluster performance on assignments) will lower your grade.
- If you accumulate 4 or 5 absences, your final grade will automatically drop to a C.
- If you accumulate 6 or 7 absences, your final grade will automatically drop to a D.
- If you accumulate 8 or more absences, you will receive a failing grade for the course.

By remaining enrolled in this course and attending class, you accept this contract and agree to abide by it. I (Joy Karega) also agree to abide by the contract, and administer it fairly and equitably.