

RWS 6321: Rhetoric and Technology

Fall 2023 | Wednesday 6pm-8:50pm | Hudspeth Hall 313

Dr. Elias Adanu

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Office Hours: Fridays, 1:30pm-3:30pm

Course Description

This course is situated at the intersection of discourses about rhetoric and technology, that is, the dependence of contemporary rhetoric on modern technologies, and the rhetoricity of these technologies as we engage them in public life. The platform architecture and affordances of today's hardware and software technologies such as mobile phones, computers, and social media have an outsized influence in how we communicate, persuade, and act. They shape civic interaction, public policy, and even the democratic process. Consequently, we will interrogate how some of the pillars of modern rhetoric—writing, persuasion, communication, and culture—are influenced by modern technologies. The class will also explore how racial and gender disparities are enabled, exacerbated, and reconfigured by technological transformation even as technology itself mitigates some of these social problems. Finally, the class aims to highlight the language and strategies by which techno-optimists, including venture capitalists, tech startup founders, and government agencies, sell a utopian future built on the wonders of technology while masking its darker tendencies.

Required Texts:

- *Race, Rhetoric, and Technology* by Adam Banks. ISBN: 9780805853131
- *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* by Safiya Noble. ISBN: 9781479837243
- *Claiming the Bicycle: Women, Rhetoric, and Technology in Nineteenth-Century America*. ISBN: 9780809334445

Free pdfs of the following books will be provided (purchase hardcopies if preferred):

- *Track Changes: A Literary History of Word Processing* by Matthew Kirschenbaum (free pdf provided on Blackboard; purchase hard copy if you prefer that).
- *Digital Rhetoric: Theory, Method, Practice* by Douglas Eyman
- *Digital Samaritans: Rhetorical Delivery and Engagement in the Digital Humanities* by Jim Ridolfo
- *Theory of the Hashtag* by Andreas Bernard
- *On Bullshit* by Harry Frankfurt

Assignment Descriptions:

Weekly Responses: Wednesdays at 12pm

You will submit a total of twelve weekly response papers. Ideally, each response should provide a *critical summary* of the day's readings, and *advance one argument* that connects the readings to each other, to a previous reading, or to personal experience. These papers will serve as discussion starters in class.

Class Facilitation: Rotating basis; see sign-up sheet

Each student will facilitate discussion during one class session. This is intended as a pedagogical exercise during which the facilitator will provide discussion questions, practical application exercises, and a take-away document in the form of a PowerPoint, handout, or other resource. The facilitator will demonstrate mastery over the readings for the day and creatively nudge the class to contribute meaningfully. Each facilitator will have 60 minutes.

Tech Review

Write a 1200-1500-word critical op-ed on recent technology that has the potential to alter language, civic and political discourse, human relations, economic transaction etc. Like most op-eds, the piece of writing that emerges should make an argument that highlights a harm, benefit, ignored aspect or tension that arises as a result of that technology's existence. The technology you focus on may be conceptual, such as the metaverse or generative AI; an app or service such as ChatGPT or MidJourney; or hardware such as a new Samsung tablet or iPhone. You may focus on the discourse by which the technology was announced by the company or media, or the actual operation of that technology.

Paper Proposal and Annotated Bibliography

For this assignment, you will write a 500-word abstract for your proposed final paper. This abstract should state what you are proposing to argue, your methods, object of study, thesis, and contribution to existing scholarship and subfield. The abstract will be accompanied by an annotated bibliography of 5 reputable sources that stipulates which texts you will use and why.

Final Project

The final paper should be a substantial analytical document (about 4000 words) on a topic of your choice that engages some of the issues raised in the class. The paper should have a thesis, be supported by rigorous argumentation and researched evidence, and cite at least 10 scholarly sources.

Alternatively, instead of a traditional seminar paper, you may propose a multimedia project that deploys any of the theories and tools we have discussed in class. This may be a digital

edition, multimedia, or experimental project. This project will be accompanied by a 1500-word creator's statement that explains the work along with a minimum of 5 scholarly sources. This creator's statement needs to be both technical ("how I made this") and critical ("how my work contributes to our understanding of my topic").

How to Earn Your Grade

Assignment	%	Numerical Grade Equivalents	
Attendance & Participation	10	A	100-90
Reading Responses	25	B	89-80
Facilitation	15	C	79-70
Tech Review	15	D	69-60
Paper Proposal	5	F	59-0
Final Paper	30		

Course Policies:

Class Meetings, Attendance and Participation

This class will meet once a week, in person, on Wednesdays from 6:00-8:50pm at Hudspeth Hall 313. Due to the length and time of day, I will build in frequent breaks to manage fatigue. Class attendance is mandatory. If for any reason, you cannot make it to class, email ahead to inform me. More than two unexcused absences will result in one letter grade dropped from your final grade.

Attendance is different from participation. Attendance constitutes your physical presence; participation entails your preparatory and contributory presence. So, to receive a good participation grade, you must come to class having read the material, completed assignments, and ready to engage in discussion and other in-class activities. Because this is a discussion-based course, I expect that we will engage each other with utmost respect, tact, and decorum even when we disagree with each other – *especially* when we disagree.

Office Hours and Availability

I will hold office hours in my office (HUD 316) on Fridays 1:30-3:30pm. If you prefer Zoom, alert me prior so I expect you online during office hours. The Zoom details are available through our Blackboard home page. Aside office hours, you can reach me via email. I respond to emails within 36 hours. For non-urgent requests, it might be more efficient to simply linger after class and ask.

Assignment Submission and Late Work Policy

Unless otherwise indicated, all assignments will have upload links on Blackboard. Although I give frequent reminders about upcoming deadlines, it is ultimately your responsibility to keep up with due dates. Late work is not accepted for the weekly response paper since

these demonstrate your preparedness for each class. For other assignments, life happens, I know (especially in the middle of a pandemic), so let me know in advance if you're facing any challenges which will impede your ability to meet a deadline and I'll be happy to make accommodations.

Diversity Statement

It is my intent that students from all backgrounds and perspectives be well served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed, and that the diversity that students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength, and benefit. I expect same from you.

Required and Recommended Online Programs

If any of the tools below are new to you, you should begin familiarizing yourself with them as soon as possible – from the Help Desk at UTEP or YouTube.

- **Blackboard:** Blackboard will be the main interface for our course. This is where you'll find all documents, course materials, resources, and instructions; participate in online discussion groups; submit all assignments; check your grades; and much more. For training or information regarding its use, please refer to the UTEP Connect Online Support Center.
- **Zoom:** If we need to communicate virtually in real time, such as office hours or occasionally when the class goes online, we will use Zoom. The meeting ID and password will be available on our Blackboard homepage.
- **OneDrive:** I recommend that you back up all your work in this class on OneDrive, for future use, but also in case your computer fails. Some of our class assignments and collaborative work will be done on the online version of MS Word via OneDrive.

University Policies:

University Writing Center

The University Writing Center (UWC) is located on the second floor of the UTEP library in Room 227 and offers free one-on-one online and in-person writing assistance for both graduate and undergraduate students. Their website is <http://uwc.utep.edu>.

COVID-19 Precautions

You must STAY AT HOME and REPORT if you have been diagnosed with COVID-19, are experience symptoms, or have had recent contact with a person who has received a positive coronavirus test. Reports should be made at screening.utep.edu. If you know anyone who should report any of these three criteria, encourage them to. If the individual cannot report, you can report on their behalf by sending an email to COVIDaction@utep.edu. Review university emails frequently for COVID-19 safety updates.

ADA Accommodations

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that reasonable accommodations be provided for students with physical, sensory, cognitive, learning, and psychiatric disabilities. If you suspect that you have a disability and need accommodation, please contact the Center for Accommodations & Support Services (CASS) at 915 747 5148 or at cass@utep.edu. The CASS office is located in Room 106, Union East. Students are responsible for presenting the instructor with any CASS accommodation letters and instructions.

Course Calendar

Dates	Content	Due Date/ Remarks
Week 1: August 30	<p><u>Introduction</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Syllabus, Schedule, & Assignments • Experience & Expectations • Grad School Resources 	
Week 2: September 6	<p><u>An Overview of Rhetoric & Technology</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ong: “Writing is a Technology that Restructures Thought” • Baron: Ch.4: “Are Instant Messages Speech?” in <i>Always On</i> • Eyman: Ch.1: “Defining and Locating Digital Rhetoric” in <i>Digital Rhetoric: Theory, Method, Practice</i>. • Haas: “Race, Rhetoric, and Technology: A Case Study of Decolonial Tech. Comm. Theory, Methodology & Pedagogy. 	<p>Response Paper @ 12pm</p> <p>Sign up for facilitation date.</p> <p>Buy required books</p>
Week 3: September 13	<p><u>Overview II: Digital Rhetoric & Digital Humanities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ridolfo: excerpts from <i>Digital Samaritans</i> • Eyman: Ch. 2: “Digital Rhetoric: Theory” • Eyman: Ch.3: “Digital Rhetoric: Method” 	<p>Response Paper @ 12pm</p> <p>No office hours on Sept 15</p>
Week 4: September 20	<p><u>Writing with Technology. Writing as Technology</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kirschenbaum: excerpts from <i>Track Changes: A Literary History of Word Processing</i>. • Flusser: excerpts from <i>Does Writing Have a Future?</i> 	<p>Response Paper @ 12pm</p>
Week 5: September 27	<p><u>Riding with Technology</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hallenbeck: <i>Claiming the Bicycle: Women, Rhetoric, and Technology in Nineteenth-Century America</i> 	<p>Response Paper @ 12pm</p>
Week 6: October 4	<p><u>Algorithmic Bias + Race, Rhetoric, & Technology</u></p>	<p>Response Paper @ 12pm</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Banks: excerpts from <i>Race, Rhetoric, and Technology</i> • Noble: excerpts from <i>Algorithms of Oppression</i> 	
Week 7: October 11	<p><u>Algorithmic Bias + Rhetorical Code Studies</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noble: excerpts from <i>Algorithms of Oppression</i> • Brock: excerpts from <i>Rhetorical Code Studies</i> 	Response Paper @ 12pm
Week 8: October 18	<p><u>Generative AI, Transhumanism, and Rhetorics of Utopia</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fridman: YouTube: “Marc Andreessen: Future of the Internet, Technology, and AI” • WAC Clearinghouse AI Repository 	Response Paper @ 12pm
Week 9: October 25	<p><u>Visual Rhetorics and Generative AI</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flusser: excerpts from <i>Into the Universe of Technical Images</i> and <i>Towards a Philosophy of Photography</i> • Redi et al: “What Makes Photo Cultures Different?” • Benjamin: “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” • Highland & Leaver: “Instagrammatics and Digital Methods: Studying Visual Social Media, from Selfies and GIFs to Memes and Emoji” 	Response Paper @ 12pm
Week 10: November 1	<p><u>Rhetorics of Surveillance</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ball et al: excerpts from the <i>Routledge Handbook of Surveillance Studies</i> 	Response Paper @ 12pm Project Proposal Due: Nov 3
Week 11: November 8	<p><u>Infrastructure Rhetorics & Digital Damage</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Starosielski: excerpts from <i>The Undersea Network</i> • Iheka: excerpts from <i>African Ecomedia</i> 	Response Paper @ 12pm

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Edwards: "Digital Rhetoric on a Damaged Planet: Storying Digital Damage as Inventive Response to the Anthropocene" 	
Week 12: November 15	<p><u>Digital Archives, Public Memory & Social Movements</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finnegan: "What Is This a Picture Of?" Bernard: <i>Theory of the Hashtag</i> Haskins: "Between Archive and Participation: Public Memory in a Digital Age" 	Response Paper @ 12pm
Week 13: November 22	<p><u>Truth & Virality: Fake News, Memes, Trolls</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lotier: "What Circulation Feels Like" Van Horn & Beveridge: "Attention Ecology: Trend Circulation and the Virality Threshold" Frankfurt: <i>On Bullshit</i> Chronicle of Higher Ed: "The Future of Expertise" Donath: "Why Fake News Stories Thrive Online" Higgins et al: Inside a Fake News Sausage Factory Schwartz: The Trolls Among Us 	Response Paper @ 12pm Thanksgiving Week: No office hours on Nov 24
Week 14: November 29	Last day of class: Presentations and Peer Review	At a conference: no office hours
Week 15: December 6	No Class: Work on Final Projects	Final office hours
Week 16: December 13	Exam Week	Final project due: December 11