

RWS 6321: Rhetoric and Technology

Fall 2025 | 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:

- *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* by Safiya Noble. ISBN: 9781479837243 (soft copies/free pdfs might exist)
- *Elon Musk* by Walter Isaacson. ISBN: 978-1982181284 (also available by as eBook and audiobook through El Paso Public Libraries).

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

- *Claiming the Bicycle: Women, Rhetoric, and Technology in Nineteenth-Century America*. ISBN: 9780809334445
- *Race, Rhetoric, and Technology* by Adam Banks. ISBN: 9780805853131
- *Track Changes: A Literary History of Word Processing* by Matthew Kirschenbaum
- *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 2pm

You will submit weekly response papers unless otherwise stated. Ideally, each response should *synthesize* the day's readings and *advance one or two arguments* that connect the readings to each other, to previous readings or discussions, 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 or AI Project: October 24

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 because of that technology's existence. Imagine the public as your audience, like the readers of *The Atlantic* or the *New York Times*, not an academic audience. 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. Your review could be in the form of a video (like a YouTube tech review or a recorded PowerPoint/Zoom video).

Instead of the Tech Review described above, you could opt for an AI-related project. This project can use any text or image-based AI tool as proof of concept to make an argument about AI. For example, you could design an entire course including course syllabus, sample lesson plan, schedule etc. using AI prompts and then discuss your process, outcomes, limitations etc. to reveal something critical about AI. Consequently, the AI-project option will have two parts: the AI-based thing you produce, and your analysis.

Paper Proposal and Annotated Bibliography: November 14

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: December 3

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/AI Project	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, 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 in Room 106, Union East. Students are responsible for presenting the instructor with any CASS accommodation letters and instructions.

Course Calendar

This schedule is a living document and will evolve in response to class demands. Kindly review every few weeks for updates. Major updates will be announced in class or via email.

Dates	Content	Due Date/ Remarks
Week 1: Aug 27	<p><u>Introduction</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Syllabus, Schedule, & Assignments • Experience & Expectations • Grad School Resources 	
Week 2: Sept 3	<p><u>An Overview of Rhetoric & Technology</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eyman: Ch.1: “Defining and Locating Digital Rhetoric” in <i>Digital Rhetoric: Theory, Method, Practice</i>. • Ridolfo: excerpts from <i>Digital Samaritans</i> • Dorpenyo: “Risky Election, Vulnerable Technology: Localizing Biometric Use in Elections for the Sake of Justice” 	<p>Reading response @ 2pm</p> <p>Sign up for facilitation.</p> <p>Buy required books</p> <p>Explore examples of DH projects</p>
Week 3: Sept 10	<p><u>Writing with Technology. Writing as Technology</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ong: “Writing is a Technology that Restructures Thought” • Kirschenbaum: excerpts from <i>Track Changes: A Literary History of Word Processing</i>. • Flusser: excerpts from <i>Does Writing Have a Future?</i> 	<p>Reading response @ 12pm</p>
Week 4: Sept 17	<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>Reading response @ 2pm</p>
Week 5: Sept 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Catch Up Day: First In-person Class</i> 	<p>Reading response @ 2pm</p>
Week 6: Oct 1	<p><u>Algorithmic Bias + Race, Rhetoric, & Technology</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Banks: excerpts from <i>Race, Rhetoric, and Technology</i> • Noble: excerpts from <i>Algorithms of Oppression</i> 	<p>Reading response @ 2pm</p>

Week 7: Oct 8	<p><u>Algorithmic Bias + Rhetorical Code Studies</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noble: <i>Algorithms of Oppression</i>, Chapters 2, 3, first 10 pages of Chapter 4. • Brock: <i>Rhetorical Code Studies</i>, Introduction, Chapter 1, Chapter 2 	Reading response @ 12pm
Week 8: Oct 15	<p><u>Generative AI, Artificial Aesthetics, and Rhetorics of Utopia</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Majdik and Graham: Rhetoric of-with AI: An Introduction • Roberts: “Your AI is a Human” • Benjamin: “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” • Dobrin: <i>Talking about Generative AI: A Guide for Educators</i> • Manovich: Artificial Aesthetics: Generative AI, Art, and Visual Media • Lex Fridman Podcast: “Open AI CEO on GPT-4, ChatGPT, and the Future of AI” • Lex Fridman Podcast: “Marc Andreessen: Future of the Internet, Technology, and AI” • Meta: “The Metaverse and How We’ll Build It Together” • Lex Fridman Podcast: “Mark Zuckerberg: First Interview in the Metaverse” • MKHBD: “DALLE: AI Made This Thumbnail” • WAC Clearinghouse AI Repository 	<p>Reading response @ 2pm</p> <p>Today’s readings, videos, and podcasts are recommended, not required.</p> <p>Complete AI project for presentation</p>
Week 9: Oct 22	<p><u>Tech Bros</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Isaacson: <i>Elon Musk</i> • Foer: “How Nasa Engineered its own Decline” • Douthat: “Peter Thiel and the Antichrist” 	<p>Reading response @ 2pm</p> <p>Tech Review Due: October 24</p>
Week 10: Oct 29	<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> 	Reading response @ 2pm

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Edwards: “Digital Rhetoric on a Damaged Planet: Storying Digital Damage as Inventive Response to the Anthropocene” 	
Week 11: Nov 5	<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> Couldry & Mejias: excerpts from <i>The Costs of Connection: How Data is Colonizing Human Life and Appropriating it for Capitalism</i> 	Response Paper @ 2pm Project Proposal Due: Nov 14
Week 12: Nov 12	<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 @ 2pm
Week 13: Nov 19	<p><u>Truth & Virality: Expertise, Fake News, Free Speech, Regulation</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 @ 2pm Talks by Gergely on Deepfake & AI Policy and Gabriel on Content Moderation
Week 14: Nov 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project Presentations + Peer Review Writing Workshop Thematic & Schedule Review 	Thanksgiving: Nov 27
Week 15: Dec 3	No Class: Work on Final Projects	Last day of classes Final Project Due: Dec 3