

English 384a

Rhetorics of Advertising

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Office hours: Tuesday 2:30-4 p.m.; Thursday 11-12:30 p.m.

Catalogue Description

This course takes a rhetorical approach to the study of advertising, emphasizing questions of audience, context, language, and delivery. Students will examine important developments in twenty-first-century advertising practices, and will produce analytical writing about advertising as well as a multi-media advertising project. Writing Minor elective.

Prerequisites and Satisfactions

Rhetorics of Advertising is a Writing Minor course and does not count toward the English major. The prerequisite is *either* a Writing Minor baseline course (English 286 or 287) *or* permission of the instructor.

Course Rationale

In this course, you will learn how to conduct critical and rhetorical analyses of individual advertisements, and the advertising industry at large. We’ll explore various rhetorical strategies for understanding (and creating) advertising, including audience, context, medium, and delivery. In addition, we’ll investigate specific topics that are of particular interest for 21st-century advertising, including branding, ethical dilemmas, the “peep culture” of social networking software, and the gendered/raced nature of historical and contemporary advertising campaigns. Throughout the semester, we’ll be asking critical questions such as: What is the role of advertising in the 21st century, in a global economy, and in each of our own lives? In what ways does advertising tell us who we are (or who we want to be), and in what ways do we participate in those constructions? What options does each of us have for intervening in those constructions?

Course Objectives

At the end of the semester you should be able to do the following. These abilities will be performed in various modes, including writing, discussion, and creation of multimedia projects.

- Explain and apply key concepts involved in advertising, including audience, context, medium, delivery, placement, publicity, branding, and marketing/demarketing.
- Demonstrate awareness of the many different kinds of advertising, including mainstream commercial, public service, nonprofit, political, “advertorial,” and guerrilla/viral.
- Analyze the use of various persuasive strategies in advertisements.
- Identify and take a stand on the ethical dilemmas involved in advertisements’ persuasive strategies.
- Participate in substantive and respectful workshops to analyze your own and others’ critical and creative work.
- Apply feedback from workshops toward revision of your work.
- Develop greater insight into your own position as it relates to the advertising industry, and what role(s) you may wish to play with respect to it.

Attendance

This class is interactive and discussion-based. Without each member’s presence and active participation, the class won’t work. Therefore, attendance, preparedness and participation are required.

You may miss two classes without penalty. These “free” absences are intended to accommodate for unpredictable circumstances, such as illness, so try not to use them early in the semester. Aside from exceptional circumstances, being sick does not entitle you to extra “free” absences. Absences beyond the two “free” ones will pull down your final grade at the rate of one grade level for every additional absence. For example, a total of four absences (two “free” and two not) at the end of the semester would make a “B plus” into a “B minus.”

You will be considered absent if you are unprepared for class or are absent from a substantial portion (15 minutes or more) of any class meeting. Missing a scheduled conference or workshop also counts as an absence. Tardiness affects your attendance record as well: every three tardies equals one absence. You are responsible for keeping track of your own attendance record, but you’re welcome to check your record with me any time.

If you will be absent from class for a full week or more, or need to discuss other issues regarding attendance, contact the Office of the Dean of Students.

Punctuality

Being prepared includes having the work due that day in hand at the *beginning* of class. I cannot accept late work unless you’ve arranged for an extension ahead of time, or in extraordinary circumstances (to be determined on a case-by-case basis). If you find yourself beginning to fall behind, see me right away. I’ll work with you to help you get back on track.

Plagiarism and Academic Honesty

At the heart of Spelman College's mission is academic excellence, along with the development of intellectual, ethical, and leadership qualities. These goals can flourish only in an institutional environment where every member of the College affirms honesty, trust, and mutual respect. All members of the academic community of Spelman College are expected to understand and follow the basic standards of honesty and integrity, upholding a commitment to high ethical standards. Students are expected to read and abide by the Spelman College Code of Conduct (see the current Spelman College Student Handbook) and are expected to behave as mature and responsible members of the Spelman College academic community. Students are expected to follow ethical standards in their personal conduct and in their behavior towards other members of the community. They are expected to observe basic honesty in their work, words, ideas, and actions. Failure to do so is a violation of the Spelman College Academic Integrity Policy. Violators will be subject to the sanctions outlined in the Spelman College Bulletin.

A rhetorical note about plagiarism: All academic writers use ideas, words, and short passages from others in their own writing. Reference and citation are required parts of academic writing. Material from outside sources, *whether quoted, paraphrased, summarized, or simply referred to*, must always be accompanied by acknowledgement of the source. Failure to acknowledge the contributions of others' words or ideas to your work is plagiarism. Understanding what plagiarism is and how attribution works can be complicated, so be sure to ask as many questions as you need to. I strongly encourage you to read the full Academic Integrity Policy (<http://www.spelman.edu/academics/catalog/catalog2007/academicintegritypolicy.html>) and come to me with any questions you may have.

Work From Other Classes

Within the category of "academic honesty" comes the issue of submitting any work which has/will be submitted to fulfill another academic requirement. This practice, identified in the College's Academic Integrity Policy as "multiple submissions," is a violation of academic honesty. However, I realize that—like most authors—you may find yourself returning to sources you've read previously, or topics that you've found compelling in the past. For example, you may wish to include a reading from another class in your research for an essay, or you may wish to re-visit a topic that you've already discussed in a current or previous class. If this is the case, *you must discuss the situation with me before work on the project begins*. Failure to do so will be considered a violation of academic honesty and subject to appropriate penalties.

Accommodations, Disabilities, and Academic Support

Spelman College is committed to ensuring the full participation of all students in its programs. If you have a documented disability (or think you may have a disability) and, as a result, need a reasonable accommodation to participate in this class, complete course requirements, or benefit from the College's programs or services, contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) as soon as possible. To receive any academic accommodation, you must be appropriately registered with ODS. The ODS works with students confidentially and does not disclose any disability-related information without their permission. The ODS serves as a clearinghouse on disability issues and

works in partnership with faculty and all other student service offices. For further information about services for students with disabilities, please contact the ODS at (404) 270-5289 (voice), located in MacVicar Hall, Room 106.

I assume that all of us learn in different ways, and that the organization of any course will accommodate each student differently. For example, you may prefer to process information by speaking and listening, so that some of the written handouts I provide may be difficult to absorb. Please talk to me as soon as you can about your individual learning needs and how this course can best accommodate them. If you do not have a documented disability, remember that other support services, including the Writing Center and the Learning Resources Center, are available to all students.

Required Texts and Materials

- Readings/viewings accessed via library databases, WebCT, and the World Wide Web. See the attached “Course Bibliography” for a full listing of required readings/viewings.
- A notebook in which to keep all materials from the course. Establish a system that allows you to pick out any piece of writing, or any handout, within a few seconds.
- Pens and pencils, colored paper, glue, card stock etc. for creating mock-ups and exercises. Several of our exercises will ask you to make visual renderings of ads or packaging.

Overview of Assignments

- Discussion leadership.
- Short exercises (4-6 total).
- One unit test (short-answer).
- One analytical paper, written in multiple drafts (minimum 1,500 words).
- One visual/verbal final project, with oral presentation.
- Advertising agency analysis (fourth-hour project).

Discussion Leadership

On designated days, members of our class will be assigned to lead that day’s discussion. Discussion leadership involves two major tasks. First, the discussion leaders must collaborate to produce a series of debatable, thought-provoking questions that *fully* cover the reading for that day. Discussion questions must be emailed to me by 5 p.m. the day before class. Second, leaders must facilitate our discussion of that day’s material. Leaders are encouraged to develop activities, exercises, or other ways of engaging the class with the material. (Activities must be developed collaboratively among leaders so that they can take place within the time allotted.) A significant portion of your final grade relies on your ability to plan a stimulating discussion or activity, and to engage the class in it (see “Grading” section).

Analytical Paper

For your analytical paper, you will select *either* the Dove “Real Beauty” *or* the Komen “Race for the Cure” campaign, both of which we will study in class. This is the scenario: You are an account executive in charge of advertising for the campaign. However, a major problem has arisen: Consumers have begun to protest the ethical problems involved in the campaign’s current advertising strategy, and public protests and boycotts have caused sales/donations to drop precipitously. In response to this problem, you must write a paper that proposes a new direction for the campaign and present it to Dove / Komen for approval.

In your paper, you will need to review the history of the campaign, including its effectiveness in areas including audience, purpose, delivery, medium, and reach. You will also need to refer to analysts who have criticized the campaign. The paper may refer to readings from class, but must also refer to at least three additional sources, at least one of which must be a scholarly source. Ultimately, your task is to make an argument about what new direction this campaign should take, and why. Be very specific in your proposal, including elements such as copy, images, target markets, and especially your rationale. *Why* will your proposed campaign be most effective as the new direction?

We will workshop in-process drafts in class. You are also encouraged to see me for individual assistance with your draft. (Note: If you plan to see me, do it early! Attempting to plan a large-scale revision one day before a final draft is due is frustrating for both of us.) Your final draft must be submitted in a manila folder (not a pocket folder) and accompanied by all previous drafts, peer responses, any written responses you’ve received from me (including emails), and annotated copies of all sources used in the paper.

Fourth-Hour Justification

For your fourth-hour project, you will conduct an analysis of an advertising agency that is located in Atlanta. (It is permissible for the agency’s main office to be located elsewhere, as long as it has a physical office in Atlanta.) You must schedule an in-person informational interview with a representative at this agency. Along with your interview data, use the agency’s website and current publications about the agency to round out your knowledge. Comment on features of the agency such as size, location, departments, major clients, and mission. In addition, comment on features that are of particular interest to beginning advertising employees, including internship programs, entry-level positions, and opportunities for advancement. Projects must be formally written (minimum 750 words) and turned in on April 13th.

Final Project

The final project will be a two-page print advertisement that you design yourself. The product / concept you advertise must be drawn from the exercise “A Very Bad Ad.” In other words, you will locate an advertisement that you believe is *not* rhetorically effective and completely redesign the ad so that it is more effective in reaching its target audience, conveying its message, and achieving sound design. All images and copy must be newly generated; no vestige of the original ad may remain, except the product name. In addition, all images and copy must be generated by

you (no stock photos, no clip art). Your final project must be professionally printed on a two-page full-bleed spread and mounted on a black background, as it would be presented to an agency during a pitch. A two-page full-bleed spread is about 15.5 inches by 11 inches. If you wish, you may choose to design two single-page ads that will run on consecutive right-hand pages of a magazine. If you have ideas for a different layout (for instance, a large single-page black-and-white ad for a daily newspaper), talk to me.

Final projects will be presented on the last day of class. When you present your project, you must also give a short (5-minute) talk in which you display the original ad, discuss the rhetorical problems you perceive, and explain how your re-designed ad addresses these problems.

Grading

All course requirements must be met in order to receive credit for this course. In addition, remember that overarching criteria such as attendance, punctuality, and preparedness will affect your final grade. The maximum number of points you can earn is 400.

Point Allotments

| | |
|--|----|
| Discussion leadership (25 points for questions, 25 for in-class leadership)..... | 50 |
| Written exercises (10 points each. If fewer than 6 are assigned, the extra points will be “free”)..... | 60 |
| Participation | 30 |
| Unit 1 test..... | 60 |
| Analytical paper | 75 |
| Fourth-hour project..... | 50 |
| Final project | 75 |

Letter Grade Equivalencies

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|----------|---------|
| A | 384-400 |
| A— | 368-383 |
| B+ | 352-367 |
| B | 336-351 |
| B—..... | 320-335 |
| C+ | 304-319 |
| C | 288-303 |
| C—..... | 272-287 |
| D+ | 256-271 |
| D | 240-255 |
| F..... | 0-239 |

Scoring Guide for Major Projects

When responding to your major projects (the analytical paper and the final multimedia project), I will use the following scoring guide. We will also use this list of criteria as a guide when doing in-class workshops of projects that are in development.

| | Analytical paper | Final project | Possible points |
|----------------------------|---|--|-----------------|
| Purpose / argument | Presents a clear, precise, arguable thesis. | Immediately draws the viewer in by means of a creative, surprising, or otherwise notable overall appearance. Provides a clear message or “take-away” for the audience. | 15 |
| Evidence | Integrates concrete, relevant and sufficient evidence to support the thesis, including correct citation for any use of outside sources. | Combines copy, images, and spatial elements to support the ad’s overall claim or message. If outside information (such as statistics) are included, the source must be made clear. | 15 |
| Context and audience | Demonstrates awareness of audience and context through appropriate use of language, recognition of assumptions, and/or consideration of others’ points of view. | Targets a specific audience and takes into account contextual factors such as placement (i.e., what sort of publication the ad appears in) and timing (when the ad will appear). | 15 |
| Structure / organization | Displays an intentional and coherent structure which provides a clear sense of “flow” for the audience from idea to idea. | Displays an intentional and coherent structure which provides a clear sense of “flow” for the audience from idea to idea. | 15 |
| Professionalism / delivery | Is free of mechanical and stylistic errors. | Is free of mechanical and stylistic errors. In-class presentation is carefully prepared, and carried out with clarity and polish. | 15 |

Course Bibliography

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