

# COMM 458: Rhetoric of Race Relations (6:00-8:30 PM, KM 204) Dr. Kevin M. Minch

**Instructor:** Dr. Kevin M. Minch  
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**Office Hours:** Noon-2 PM Tuesday/Thursday; 5-6 PM Wednesday, and by appointment.

\* Please feel free to call me at home. It does not bother me in the least. In the interest of everyone concerned, however, I would prefer that you confine such calls to the period between 9 AM and 10 PM. I do not consider myself bound by any answers or promises I make during late hours. As a general rule, you are more likely to find me at the office than at home. There is voice mail at both locations.

## Course Objectives

The objective of this course is to investigate the interaction of language and communication with the social, political, and psychological constructs of race. Because the term “race” is inherently ambiguous, we will be treating race as a broadly conceived concept, encompassing inter-related issues of ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, and virtually any “grouping” which might be categorized by a person’s rhetoric. Examples of topics that will be considered include, but are not limited to, hate speech, the language of oppression, the rhetorical effects of categorizing groups, intersectionality, and critical race theory. While the methodological approach to the material is rhetorical, you will also find the interdisciplinary elements of law, political science, sociology, linguistics, and anthropology at work here. The ultimate objective is to have participants leave this course as better consumers of rhetoric related to these issues and more critical thinkers about the topic.

## Evaluation of Performance

The object of courses in your major area concentration is to provide focused attention to specific subject matter, through which the application of methodologies, and broader concepts from the communication curriculum, are brought to bear on appropriate artifacts or topics. In the case of this course, students will study the process of rhetorical criticism as a method of seeking truth and understanding. The exams and papers in this course are designed a) to test rote memory of fundamental persons, concepts, and facts, and b) assess students’ abilities to tie this knowledge together conceptually and articulate a holistic vision of what the study of the rhetoric of race relations is all about

## Course Materials

A course pack (contains most of the material for the course).

Delgado, Richard and Jean Stefancic. Critical Race Theory: An Introduction. New York: New York University Press, 2001.

While not a required text, I strongly recommend that students invest in a style guide appropriate to their further study in this discipline. Students of rhetoric will generally find themselves writing in either the MLA or APA style. The library has limited online references to formats. Students will be expected to adhere to one or the other of these style manuals when writing.

## Attendance and Work Completion Policy

I consider each of you to be adults. Consequently, I will not enforce a rigid attendance policy in this course. However, it should be clear to everyone concerned that there is always “collateral damage” when one does not attend class. **I will not accept assignments by students who miss class.** This has the net effect of imposing a penalty on non-attendance. I will not allow students missing quizzes or tests to make up said work. I will not accept papers turned in via mailbox, e-mail, or fellow student courier if the student responsible for the work does not attend the class period during which the assignment was due. I will not supply notes or outlines to students skipping class. Since class participation is an element of the course grade, poor attendance will severely impact that grade. Some assignments are partially based on viewing video materials in class **that most likely cannot be obtained elsewhere.** The instructor will not be responsible for providing access to these missed materials or providing a substitute assignment if missed. Do not ask.

In the event that you have to miss class for a legitimate reason—University-sponsored activity, job interview, serious illness, etc.—I expect prompt notice (preferably advanced notice). Appropriate accommodations for the completion of the assignments involved will be made at the discretion of the instructor. Generally speaking, oversleeping, conflicts with other courses’ assignments, heavy semester workload, hangovers, and excuses not related to direct scheduling conflicts with co-curricular activities (not extra-curricular activities), medical excuses, or family excuses, will not be considered. Co-curricular activities are defined as University-sponsored activities associated with an academic program (such as athletics, forensics, Model UN, music and theater travel, academic conventions). Extra-curricular activities include events associated with clubs, fraternities and sororities, and other activities without direct academic ties.

**All assignments in the course must be completed to receive a passing grade.** In other words, you cannot “play the points.” If you have enough points to get a B going into the final and decide to skip it, your points to that point will be voided and your grade will drop back to an F.

## Digital Submission of Assignments

All papers (except weekly response papers) must be submitted digitally—in Microsoft Word format. Please send the paper via-email attachment before the commencement of the class period upon which it is due. Keep a spare copy on hand for your own use. A reply message will be sent upon receipt of your paper. If you do not receive a message verifying receipt of your paper by 5 PM the evening the paper has been turned in, you should immediately contact the instructor. It is your responsibility to verify whether a paper has been correctly submitted. Use of “Spell check” and “Grammar check” are highly recommended, as this will be one of the tools used to check format, spelling, etc. You should also be aware that papers will likely be scanned by Eve2, a plagiarism detection program.

## Work Format Policy

Spelling and grammar **do count.** As Cicero and Quintilian explained, the study of language and grammar are an integral part to becoming a good practitioner of the art of rhetoric. I will grade your writing as carefully for spelling, style, and grammar as I do for content. Samples of effective writing are included on my Website. The site also contains suggestions about various stylistic pitfalls to avoid. Errors in style, spelling, and grammar in excess of ten will result in automatic grade reductions. Basic style factors such as headers, page numbers and margins count as well. Your first nine errors are “free.” Once you hit error #10 your grade drops one point for every error. Every subsequent error results in a one-point reduction. On shorter assignments this can quickly turn an A into an F. Once a paper has enough errors to be an F I will stop reading it—whether I am one page in or a paragraph from the end. Proofread VERY carefully. If you are not willing to commit the time to check your work I am not the instructor you want to have class with. Repeating errors count every time the error occurs.

## **Policy on Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty**

I have no tolerance for academic dishonesty. Cheating is not just copying off of someone else's paper or exam. Representing someone else's ideas without attribution, copying word-for-word without using quotations marks, or excessive paraphrasing without attribution, can all be forms of plagiarism. Be sure to carefully cite any information you quote—even if it is from a primary source like your class textbook. DO NOT, under any circumstances, consider using the “Buy a Paper” services on the Internet. I have them all bookmarked on my browser and check for duplicates on every assignment. The penalty for academic dishonesty in my class will be severe, including failure in the course and referral to upper administration for further action.

## **Appealing Grades**

This is a rhetoric course. Complaints will not constitute an appropriate grade appeal. If you have a problem with your grade (in other words, if you feel you have been graded unfairly or incorrectly) you must wait at least 24 hours after the grade was returned—do not approach me when you are “hot headed.” Using **principles of argumentation discussed in your communication courses**, provide **written arguments** in support of your appeal. Arguments should be supported with evidence, be well reasoned, and when appropriate, should refer to appropriate precedents. Appeals will be disposed of within 48 hours of receipt of the written appeal.

## **Students With Special Needs**

If you have any special needs, such as a physical disability, learning disability, hearing or speech impairment, etc., please let me know at the earliest possible convenience. I will do whatever I can to address your needs within the confines of the law.

## **Comments About Diversity**

A course such as this one has enormous potential for personal and intellectual growth of students. At the same time, the subject matter has the potential to sadden us, as we come to more clearly recognize the prejudices of society. To have a dialog about the issues we will discuss in this course, students must be prepared for the possibility—in fact, the likelihood—that they will hear ideas expressed that they are uncomfortable with. Respect for diversity and dialog means a concomitant respect for differing opinions. A person should feel as free to say, “There is value in stereotypes” as a person should feel free in saying, “Stereotypes are evil.” Likewise, participants in this course should be prepared for the occasional necessity to examine rhetorical artifacts that use terminology that may be offensive. For example, a popular contemporary text by an African American author addresses the use of the “N-Word” and uses the word repeatedly. Sample texts from extremist groups will need to be examined with the expectation that some of the content will be offensive. The assumption, however, is that we are approaching these materials with a critical eye, not necessarily an accepting one. Above all, everyone in this course, regardless of their personal background, political orientation, or social views, needs to respect the autonomy of everyone else in the course while at the same time approaching their communication acts responsibly and critically. Wide latitude for free speech will be given in this course, but participants are asked not to engage in speech that silences other participants. Students uncomfortable with certain discussions should bring it to the attention of the instructor.

## Grading

I grade on a straight scale of 1000 points. Students with 900-1000 points at the end of the semester receive an A. Students receiving 800-899 points inclusive will receive a B, and so forth. Students with a total of 599 or fewer points will receive an F. Unless specifically announced as an extra credit opportunity for all students, there will be no opportunities to earn additional extra credit.

Assignments and their point values are distributed as follows:

<b>Final Exam</b>	200 Points
<b>Reaction Papers (2 pages each, 10 reactions)</b>	200 Points
<b>Website Presentations</b>	100 Points
<b>Semester Research Paper</b>	400 Points
<b>Class Participation</b>	100 Points

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1000 Points

## Course Schedule

*All Reading is to be complete before the class period under which it is listed. (RP) indicates that reaction papers are due on that date at the conclusion of the class period.*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic / Reading</b>	<b>Assignments</b>
<b>August 28</b>	Introduction to the Language of Oppression and Rhetorical Criticism	<b>No Reading</b>
<b>September 3</b>	The Language of Oppression	<b>Read:</b> “Language of Oppression” Bosmajian, Chs. 1-4. (RP)
<b>September 10</b>	The Language of Oppression	<b>Read:</b> “Language of Oppression” Bosmajian, Chs. 5-7. (RP) <b>Prospectus/Outline Due</b>
<b>September 17</b>	Defining Race: The Case of “Whiteness”	<b>Read:</b> Nakayama & Krizek, Crenshaw, Warren, and Moon & Flores (RP).
<b>September 24</b>	Defining the “Other”	<b>Read:</b> Burke “Rhetoric of Hitler’s <i>Battle.</i> ” (RP) <b>Watch (in Class):</b> “The Planet of the Apes.”
<b>October 1</b>	Website Presentations	Complete Presentation on an Extremist Group Website
<b>October 8</b>	Critical Race Theory	<b>Read:</b> Delgado and Stefancic (RP)
<b>October 15</b>	Hate Speech on Campus	<b>Read:</b> Lawrence “If He Hollers...” (RP)
<b>October 22</b>	Intersection of Race, Gender, and Sexuality	<b>Read:</b> Nakayama “Show/down time...” (RP) <b>Bibliography Due</b>
<b>October 29</b>	Portrayals of Race in the Mass Media	<b>Read:</b> Entman “Modern racism...” (RP)
<b>November 5</b>	Portrayals of Race in the Mass Media	<b>Read:</b> Cooper “...Do the Right Thing” (RP) <b>Watch (in Class):</b> “Do the Right Thing”
<b>November 12</b>	Portrayals of Race in the Mass Media	<b>Read:</b> Williamson “...Perfected Redemption,” Burke, Material on Perfected Redemption (RP)
<b>November 19</b>	NCA Convention—No Class	
<b>November 26</b>	Thanksgiving Vacation—No Class	
<b>December 3</b>	Catch-Up Day	<b>Term Papers Due</b>
<b>December 10</b>	Reading Day	
<b>December 13</b>	<b>Final Exam—6:00 PM in Normal Classroom</b>	

## Reaction Papers

For each class period where reading takes place you will be asked to complete a two-page, double-spaced response paper. These short papers are designed to convey your reactions to the material you have read or responses to the arguments posed by the authors. You will receive a general prompt for each class period that describes the central idea you should address.

The purpose of these papers is to enable you to come to class prepared to engage in substantive discussion of the material covered in the readings. A portion of the class will be dedicated to some (or all) of the students presenting their reactions or arguments. Consequently, you are encouraged to make an argument about the text(s) in question.

You may omit one of the ten reaction papers without penalty. You will receive up to twenty points for each reaction paper. You will receive up to twenty points automatically for the paper you choose to omit, but the value will be determined by averaging the grades for the other papers. If you decide to write all ten reaction papers, your lowest grade will be dropped and replaced with twenty points as a reward for effort.

Reaction papers should be submitted in hard-copy form...not as an attached file.

## Website Project

You will be asked to present a “mini rhetorical criticism” in which you critique a website that either (a) represents an extremist group, or (b) somehow uniquely portrays an ethnic, racial, or “other” group in either a significantly negative or positive light. Using concepts discussed in class, or other theories you are interested in studying, you will be asked to describe the artifact, evaluate it, and draw conclusions about its effectiveness. The presentation will be delivered orally and won’t exceed ten minutes in length.

## Term Papers

You will be asked to write a twenty-page paper due about a week before the end of the course. It may take one of two forms: (1) a rhetorical criticism, in which you critique an artifact of rhetoric using a particular rhetorical methodology or perspective to evaluate the effectiveness of the artifact; (2) a theoretical paper in which you investigate or challenge one of the theories discussed in class, or develop a theory of your own. The paper may be longer than twenty pages, if appropriate for the assignment.

Your paper will be developed in stages.

First, you will be asked to present a paper proposal in which you indicate your topic, your thesis, and present a tentative outline for the paper.

Second, you will be asked to provide a bibliography with short annotations to demonstrate that you have conducted the necessary research to complete your project.

Finally, you will submit the final paper for review. Drafts are encouraged prior to the final submission, but there is no guarantee that they can be read in full if they are submitted *within two weeks* prior to the due date.

# Personal Data Form

Please complete the following information as thoroughly as possible. This information will help me to better help you in this course.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Campus Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Campus Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Work Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Town: \_\_\_\_\_

May I include your e-mail address in a class mailing list to facilitate quicker dissemination of class news and feedback?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes      \_\_\_\_\_ No

Do you have any argumentation experience (such as academic debate, moot court, student congress, etc.)?

If you have taken one of the following courses, please place an X next to the course:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Oral Advocacy and Debate
- \_\_\_\_\_ Communication Law and Ethics
- \_\_\_\_\_ Survey of Rhetoric
- \_\_\_\_\_ Classical Rhetoric
- \_\_\_\_\_ Rhetorical Criticism
- \_\_\_\_\_ Mass Communication
- \_\_\_\_\_ Logic
- \_\_\_\_\_ Informal Logic
- \_\_\_\_\_ Philosophy of Law
- \_\_\_\_\_ Writing as Critical Thinking

Why did you take this class?

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Please Read and Sign the Following (Due by Second Class Period):

*I have read, or plan to read, the course syllabus in its entirety. I understand and accept the policies stated here and agree to abide by those policies. I understand that completion of all of the assignments in this course is necessary to pass it and that I am responsible for obtaining all of the necessary class materials and instructions for the fulfillment of the assignments given here. In addition, I agree to read the University's policy on academic misconduct and am aware of what constitutes plagiarism and the penalties for engaging in it.*

Name

Date