

# Rhetorical Ethnography

CMJ 593

**Faculty:** Bridie McGreavy, Ph.D.

**Course Schedule:** Tuesdays, 5 to 7:30 pm

**E-mail:** bridie.mcgreavy@maine.edu

**Office Hours:** T. /Th., 11 am to 1 pm and by appt.



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## Course Description

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This course explores ethnographic field methods and how concepts and critical approaches within rhetoric can shape ethnography as methodology. Rhetorical ethnography is a relatively recent development in critical rhetorical approaches, where scholars bring their questions and methods to sites as diverse as mudflats, mountain tops, desert raves, farms, tourist performances, political rallies, and more (Middleton et al., 2015).

The confluence of rhetoric and ethnography “provide[s] rhetorical scholars with an application of rhetorical theory and concepts through the direct observation of and participation within localized discourses and advocacy” (Hess, 2011, p. 132). We will wade into this confluence throughout the semester, examining and experimenting with how to apply rhetorical theory to observations and participation in diverse field sites. By working through the many ways in which rhetoricians conceive of and practice ethnography and by taking an engaged learning approach, this course will help you situate yourself as an ethnographer and rhetorician.

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## Course Objectives & Activities

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This course prepares you to conduct a rhetorical ethnography. More broadly, this course will help you design and conduct ethnographic and qualitative research. We ground ourselves in practical training in ethnographic approaches, addressing ethics and reflexivity and techniques for observation, data collection, textual organization, and interpretation. We then bring rhetorical perspectives to our observations and meaning making of our texts produced in the field. Drawing from diverse approaches to rhetoric, we explore rhetoric’s strategic, relational, dynamic, and ecological dimensions in the context of ethnography. Finally, we practice what it means to belong to a community through fieldwork by saving salamanders and doing other *mundane* things.

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## Learning Outcomes

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By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Describe ethical commitments for doing ethnographic field work
- Reflect on researcher access, positionality, and responsibility to research participants and communities
- Conduct and produce texts from field-based observations
- Organize, interpret, write about and potentially publish ethnographic research

## **Texts and Technology**

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There is one required text for this course:

Venkatesh, S. (2008). *Gang leader for a day: A rogue sociologist takes to the streets*. New York, NY: Penguin Group.

You will also need a field journal, which may be a simple wire bound notebook or hardcover journal. We will use Blackboard to access course materials and grades throughout the semester. I will send relevant course announcements through e-mail. All assignments will be uploaded to Blackboard.

## **University Policies**

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Please note the following University policies and resources:

### *Academic Honesty*

Academic honesty is very important. It is dishonest to cheat, copy term papers, submit papers written by another person, fake experimental results, or copy or reword parts of books or articles into your own papers without appropriately citing the source. Students committing or aiding in any of these violations may be given failing grades for an assignment or for an entire course, at the discretion of the instructor. In addition to any academic action taken by an instructor, these violations are also subject to action under the University of Maine Student Conduct Code. The maximum possible sanction under the student conduct code is dismissal from the University.

*Course Schedule Disclaimer (Disruption Clause):* In the event of an extended disruption of normal classroom activities, the format for this course may be modified to enable its completion within its programmed time frame. In that event, you will be provided an addendum to the syllabus that will supersede this version.

*Students with disabilities statement:* If you have a disability for which you may be requesting an accommodation, please contact Disabilities Services, 121 East Annex, 581-2319, as early as possible in the term.

### *Sexual Discrimination Reporting*

The University of Maine is committed to making campus a safe place for students. Because of this commitment, if you tell a teacher about an experience of sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, relationship abuse (dating violence and domestic violence), sexual misconduct or any form of gender discrimination involving members of the campus, your teacher is required to report this information to the campus Office of Sexual Assault & Violence Prevention or the Office of Equal Opportunity.

If you want to talk in confidence to someone about an experience of sexual discrimination, please contact these resources:

For confidential resources on campus: Counseling Center: 207-581-1392 or Cutler Health Center: at 207-581-4000.

For confidential resources off campus: Rape Response Services: 1-800-310-0000 or Spruce Run: 1-800-863-9909.

Other resources: The resources listed below can offer support but may have to report the incident to others who can help:

For support services on campus: Office of Sexual Assault & Violence Prevention: 207-581-1406, Office of Community Standards: 207-581-1409, University of Maine Police: 207-581-4040 or 911. Or see the OSAVP website for a complete list of services at <http://www.umaine.edu/osavp/>

## **Grading and Assignments**

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| 1. Participation.....   | 25% |
| Attendance, discussion leadership, and meaningful contributions to class discussions and activities |     |
| 2. Constructive Reading Critiques (6 out of 8) .....  | 20% |
| 3. An Ethnography of Place .....  | 20% |
| Field journal and informal presentation   |     |
| 4. Final Paper (or Project) .....   | 35% |
| Proposal and literature review, 10%   |     |
| Conference-style presentation, 10%  |     |
| Final paper (or project), 15%   |     |

**Grade scale:** A 94-100; A- 90-93; B+ 87-89; B 84-86; B- 80-83; C+ 77-79; C 74-76; C- 70-73; D+ 67-69; D 60-66; F 0 -59

### **1. Participation**

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Attendance at all classes and active participation in discussion and class activities is essential for meaningful learning in this course. Active participation means coming to class prepared to discuss, ask questions about, and engage the themes introduced in the readings. It also means showing up, physically and practically, for field based activities and assignments.

You will be asked to lead class discussion at least once during the semester. Discussion leadership is about creating a space where people can thoughtfully consider questions, themes, and issues in rhetorical ethnography. From a rhetorical perspective, we can approach leadership not as a role but as a condition of the discussion itself. Leadership is about attending to group dynamics, promoting dialogue and voice, being sensitive to issues of power and inclusivity, and sensing the timing for when a new idea or question might invent new possibilities for learning and discussion. Leadership in this sense is relational and is enhanced through the group's commitment to dialogue.

## **2. Constructive Reading Critiques (CRCs) (6 out of 8)**

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The Constructive Reading Critiques (CRCs) are designed to help you develop reading habits that will support your projects in this course and in your academic program. We will approach your reading and the CRCs as a rhetorical situation (Bitzer, 1992). As Bitzer (1992) argues, “the world really invites change—change conceived and effected by human agents who quite properly address a mediating audience. The practical justification of rhetoric is analogous to that of scientific inquiry: the world presents objects to be known, puzzles to be resolved, complexities to be understood” (pp. 13-14). He invites us to engage with our reading as a change making process. How are the pieces you are reading a response to the world? How are you actively making meaning of the ideas the authors express? What remains to be said or done in the ongoing unfolding of puzzles and complexities inherent in writing and world making?

The CRC will have three parts. In one page (or less) briefly describe the:

**Exigence:** The problems, needs, or contexts and the central questions the authors address.

**Audience (you):** How do these articles help you think about your own project? How do you make meaning of the work?

**Constraints:** Describe the limits of these articles in a way that does not reject the argument but seeks to compose from it (Latour, 2010). Conclude with a provocative question that could guide discussion.

Approaching your reading as a rhetorical situation means first recognizing how each piece was written to respond to a problem or context, an *exigence*, that makes the work relevant in the field of rhetoric and for ethnography as method. Though there are many ways to conceive of audience, in your reading you are the *primary audience*. You will engage your own meaning making to summarize themes or ethnographic practices and how these themes or practices relate to your final project. Finally, you will explore the *constraints* or limits of the arguments. Critique seeks to identify constraints so we may choose to live within those limits or, conversely, transform what is possible within rhetorical ethnography. The critique is written with composition, i.e. creativity, making, and world-building, in mind. It is a problem-posing and questioning mode of inquiry so the critique section should conclude with a question that could guide group discussion and critical reflection.

## **3. An Ethnography of Place**

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The Ethnography of Place will start the second week of the class and continue throughout the semester. For this assignment, you’ll need a field notebook. You will choose a place that you will visit at least once a week to record observations and connect readings and class discussions with your active meaning making in the place.

For those who have an ongoing ethnography, this may be an opportunity to deepen or expand your observations. For those who are new to ethnography, this is a chance to attend to the meaning making that becomes possible when we commit to showing up in a place, attend to myriad interactions between many different types of participants

in that place, and apply rhetorical theory to guide our observations and interpretations of the “texts” we produced.

#### **4. Final Paper or Project**

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The goal of the final paper or project is to provide an opportunity for you to connect the course content to support the development of your graduate work. You may choose from a range of options including, but not limited to, the following:

- Final Paper: Write a final paper that could be submitted for conference presentation. This is a 12 to 15 page paper written in APA style that either builds new rhetorical ethnographic theory, innovates around method, or shares empirical or critical rhetorical ethnographic research.
- Final Paper, modified: Write a final paper that supports the development of a dissertation or thesis or that helps you meet your professional goals, such as to develop grant writing skills. This may include a more extensive literature review.
- Final Project: The final project is the most flexible and open ended, and will require at least one meeting with me to discuss the vision for this.

**Prospectus (due Tue. 3/1):** This is a 3-page paper that details what you plan to do for your final paper or project; provides a preliminary literature review; and describes how this is relevant for your professional or personal goals as a learner.

**Complete rough draft (due Tue. 4/5):** The rough draft is an opportunity for you to get in-depth feedback about the development of your final paper or project. This should be developed enough to provide me with a strong sense of what the final version of your paper or project will be. You will receive a preliminary grade that will be replaced with the final grade. This will give you a sense of how much more the project needs to grow.

**Final Presentation (due Tue. 4/26 or Tue. 5/3):** The final presentation is a conference style presentation, including 10 to 12 minutes of oral presentation followed by 5 minutes of Q &A. Though not required, I encourage you to try out the rhetorical style of giving conference presentations where you do a prepared reading from a manuscript that is written for oral presentation. Six pages of double spaced text read at a comfortable, slow pace takes about 12 minutes.

**Final Paper or Project (due Tue. 5/10):** This will be the culmination of your semester’s work and is designed to meaningfully connect with your broader graduate research program and your new or enhanced expertise in rhetorical ethnography.

## Course Schedule

Date	Topics & Questions	Readings & Assignments
<b>Week 1</b> Orienting to Rhetorical Ethnography		
Tue. 1/19	What is the course about? How will our study shape graduate work?	<b>Read:</b> Hess (2011); Middleton, Senda-Cook, & Endres (2011); Start Venkatesh (2008)
<b>Week 2</b> The Art of Rhetoric and Ethnography		
Tue. 1/26	What is rhetoric? What is ethnography? How can they be artfully combined?	<b>Read:</b> <i>Rhetoric</i> : Crowley and Hawhee (2012), Ch. 2; Bitzer (1992); Scott (1973); <i>Ethnography</i> : Middleton, Hess, Endres, & Senda-Cook (2015), Intro and Ch. 1; Venkatesh (2008), Ch. 1-4 ; Recommended (optional): Sloan (2001) <b>Due:</b> Ethnography of Place commitment
<b>Week 3</b> Ethnography and Ethics		
Tue. 2/2	What are the critical and ethical questions that arise within fieldwork? What are our ethical commitments in doing this work?	<b>Read:</b> Venkatesh (2008) Ch. 5-8 and acknowledgments; Madison (2004), Ch 1. and 5; Conquergood (1991) <b>Due:</b> CRC #1
<b>Week 4</b> Practices and Commitments of Ethnographic Field Work		
Tue. 2/9	How do we review literature for a rhetorical ethnography? Library session with Jen Bonnet at Fogler Library	<b>Read:</b> Seidman (2006), Ch. 3 and 5; Take Human Subjects Training (if not already completed); Identify and read at least two articles from library literature review session.
<b>Week 5</b> Ethnographic Methods: Participant Observation and Field Notes		
Tue. 2/16	What methods can we use to guide and record our observations in the field?	<b>Read:</b> Lindlof & Taylor (2010), Ch. 5; Geertz (1973); Pezzullo (2003) <b>Due:</b> CRC #2 (include articles from 2/9).
<b>Week 6</b> Ethnographic Methods: Interviews in the Field		
Tue. 2/23	How do we conduct an interview within a rhetorical ethnography?	<b>Read:</b> Seidman (2006), Chs. 1, 2, 6, & 7 <b>Due:</b> CRC #3
<b>Week 7</b> Rhetoric and the Available Means for Making Meaning		
Tue. 3/1	How do rhetorical theories guide our questions, observations, and critical analyses in fieldwork?	<b>Read:</b> Hauser (1998); Rickert (2004); LeMesurier (2014); McHendry et al. (2014); McGill (2006) <b>Due:</b> Prospectus <b>Due:</b> CRC #4
<b>Weeks 8 &amp; 9 Spring Break</b>		

### Week 10 Working with Texts

Tue. 3/22 What are practical approaches to organizing and interpreting texts? **Read:** Seidman (2006) Ch. 8; Lindlof & Taylor (2010), Ch. 8  
**Due:** CRC #5

### Week 11 Working beyond Texts

Tue. 3/29 What are experimental approaches to participatory epistemologies? Guest lecture with Dr. Senda-Cook **Read:** Barad (2003); Ingold (2011), Ch. 3 & 5; McGreavy et al. (under review); Senda-Cook (2012)  
**Due:** CRC #6

### Week 12 Ethnography and Ecology

Tue. 4/5 How and why combine ethnography, rhetoric, and ecology? **Read:** Kohn, Intro and Ch. 1; Druschke (2013); Stormer and McGreavy (forthcoming)  
**Due:** Rough draft  
**Due:** CRC #7

### Week 13 Flex week

Tue. 4/12 *This is a flex week for storm cancellations and to pursue emergent interests.*

### Week 14 An Ethnographic Encounter with Spring

Tue. 4/19 What is spring and how do we encounter it with ethnographic methods? **Read:** Abram (1997), Ch. 6 and 7  
**Due:** Ethnography of Place  
**Due:** CRC #8

### Week 15 A Rhetoric of Ethnographic Performance

Tue. 4/26 Final presentations **Due:** Final presentations

### Week 16 A Rhetoric of Ethnographic Performance

Tue. 5/3 Final presentations **Due:** Final presentations

### Week 17

Tue. 5/10 No class **Due:** Final papers or projects

### Conference Dates:

- Maine Water and Sustainability Conference, Tue. March 29<sup>th</sup> in Augusta, ME; Oral presentation deadline, Fri. Jan. 22<sup>nd</sup>; Poster presentation, Mon. March 7<sup>th</sup>.
- UMaine Graduate Student Research Expo, Wed. April 27<sup>th</sup> at the Cross Insurance Center in Bangor, ME; Submission deadline TBD, usually early February.
- National Communication Association (NCA), Nov. 10<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> in Philadelphia, PA; Submissions due Wed. March 30<sup>th</sup>.
- Eastern Communication Association, March 31<sup>st</sup> to April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2016 in Baltimore, MD; March 29<sup>th</sup> to April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2017 in Boston, MA. Submission deadline TBD, usually mid-October.
- Rhetoric Society of America (RSA), May 26<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup>, 2016 in Atlanta, Georgia; RSA Summer Institute, 2017, TBD; RSA, May 31<sup>st</sup> to June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2018 in Minneapolis, MN.

## References

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