

RAMAPO COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY
School of American & International Studies
English 180-05: College English

Bookworms, Computer Nerds and Drama Queens: Rhetorics of Academic Love and Labor from the Greeks to the Geeks

Professor: Dr. Todd Landon Barnes
Assistant Professor of Literature
E-mail: toddbarnes@ramapo.edu
Office: B-141
Office Hours: MR 3:30-5:00

Term: Spring 2011
Class Hours: MR 11:30-1pm
Location: E-214
Mailbox: AIS Office
Phone: 201.684.7500x7241

Catalog Course Description:

Students will be expected to interpret a selection of primarily non-fiction texts and to demonstrate logic, clarity, organization, and support in expository essays that reflect on these readings. The course will focus on the writing process, on revisions and peer critiquing. Individual faculty-student conferences are included. A portion of the course will be devoted to research techniques and to conventional MLA formatting and the development of a research paper.

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This course will both facilitate and interrogate passionate engagements with academic modes of inquiry. In other words, the course will allow you to “geek out” while studying the history of bookworms, drama queens, and computer nerds. We will follow the figure of the “geek” from ancient Greece to Silicon Valley, but instead of searching for the transhistorical, transcultural essence of the geek, we will analyze and practice research methodologies that look at the many different ways historical discourses and practices have invented, shaped, and transformed the figure of the geek. The course will be structured around the following questions:

How has the figure of the geek shaped what has been imagined as the “proper” relationship between love and labor, the human and the nonhuman, the masculine and the feminine, the physical and the metaphysical? What kinds of knowledges and behaviors are produced by the geek, and how do these knowledges and behaviors change alongside various technological innovations? How does the figure of the geek get refigured as it becomes historically associated with various technologies of learning? How do Shakespeare’s early-modern “bookworms” and “drama queens” differ from the computer nerds of the 1980s? How do Socrates’ dialogic technologies differ from those practiced by software engineers or theatre directors? How do different figures of the geek balance (or fail to balance) passions for learning with social or erotic passions? What is the relationship between academic modes of inquiry and those of the so-called “real world”? How do today’s research methods change in relation to technologies of literacy, performance and digital archivization? How does the geek, as a category of difference and exclusion, operate in relation to forms of difference defined by race, class, gender and/or body type?

Like the bookworms we study, we will be reading and composing intensely throughout the semester. We will also spend time developing an intimate relationship with the landscape of the George T. Potter Library (along with its virtual holdings). Like the computer nerds we study, a significant portion of the course will happen on **Moodle**. Like the drama queens we study, we will spend time at the campus theater.

Writing Intensive (WI) Course:

Writing will be integrated into the life of this course. You will receive comments, direction, and support as you work on strengthening your writing skills. Your writing will be evaluated and returned in a timely fashion, allowing you to incorporate my comments into your future work. You will be able to draft, revise, and resubmit a minimum of two papers. For help outside the classroom, please see me during my office hours and/or work with a writing tutor in the Center for Academic Success (CAS), Room: E-230 and Alcove, x7557.

Experiential Component:

This course will include a minimum of five (5) hours of unmonitored appropriate experience outside of the classroom. Each student will be required to keep a journal in which s/he will record and reflect upon instances of “the rhetoric of everyday life.” When issues and concerns discussed in class come up outside of class (with friends, on television, during vacation, etc.), students will log and comment on how these moments of everyday life struggle against the limits of representation. Examples of appropriate topics will be given throughout the semester.

Course Texts:

- *Writing Analytically*. Ed. Rosenwasser and Stephen. Cengage. Fifth edition.
- *American Nerd: The Story of My People*. Benjamin Nugent.
- *Figures of Speech: 60 Ways to Turn a Phrase*. Arthur Quinn
- Students are required to read, **print**, annotate, and bring to class, all articles on Moodle.
- *Rules for Writers*. Dianna Hacker. Sixth Edition (**Recommended**).

Course Goals and Measurable Student Learning Outcomes:

Though this course, students will acquire the skills required to think and write analytically about a variety of fiction and non-fictional texts. Students will learn techniques for performing critical analysis, and they will illustrate these techniques by composing thoroughly-revised essays. Students will learn and beware of common mistakes made in analysis and composition. Students will learn the difference between a summary, an observation, and an argument. Students will be able to (according to the MLA guidelines), support their ideas and arguments using textual evidence drawn from appropriate (primary and secondary) sources. Students will learn about the social aspects of writing and thought, and they will use this knowledge to better critique their own writing and the work of others. Students will acquire familiarity with a variety of rhetorical tropes and figures of speech. Students will be able to illustrate, in revised prose, the role these figures play in shaping culture. Finally, students will learn principles of digital literacy and how to best navigate the Internet and the library’s digital and analog collections.

Students analytical skills will be measured through regular essay writing. Students will also analyze and respond to readings via Moodle. Essays and assignments will illustrate various isolated and combined skills (using primary and secondary sources, composing an annotated bibliography, summarizing a writer’s rhetorical moves, isolating oppositions, strands, repetitions, and support in reading assignments; composing a thesis; evolving that thesis). A final research paper (and its various draft stages) will allow peers and the instructor to assess students learning outcomes. Class discussion will also provide a means of assessing student comprehension.

Participation/Attendance:

This class will not be possible without your participation. Unlike some courses, the success of this course depends on your contributions, your labor, and your perspective. In addition to the authors we read together, your work will form a central focus of our attempts to understand what it means to articulate the ineffable. Students should come to class having printed out, read and annotated all required reading. Students should take notes while actively and courteously listening to and engaging with the professor and their peers. Any student discovered to be off-task (as determined by the professor) will be *marked absent*. Using technology to virtually exit the class will always constitute an *absence*. Coming to class after I've taken role or leaving before the class is over will constitute an *absence*. Students can miss two classes with no questions asked. A third absence lowers the student's grade (by 1/2 a grade, 5%). A student absent four times in one semester cannot earn higher than a C+ (79%). If a student is absent five times, **s/he automatically fails the course**. College policy states that students must notify faculty within the first three weeks of the semester if they anticipate missing any classes due to religious observance.

Papers: No late papers will be accepted. Your essays need not be perfect, but I do expect them to be on time. Papers will be written, reviewed and returned in accordance with a shared schedule. Late papers threaten to jam what I hope will be the smooth machinery of the review process. All papers are to be typed and formatted according to the most recent MLA guidelines. Refer to Diana Hacker's *Rules for Writers* for help with these guidelines. For additional help in writing papers, I encourage you to visit our Center for Academic Success. Their helpful website can be found here: <http://ww2.ramapo.edu/academics/cas/>.

Amanda Lentino is the class tutor. The writing center, Ms. Lentino and I are all working together to provide you with the resources and guidance you need to succeed in the course. Please do not hesitate to utilize this invaluable support.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism, etymologically, means *kidnapping*. Do not steal the brainchildren of others. Students who engage in plagiarism will suffer the consequences set forth by the college. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, see one of the instructors or the university's guidelines at: <http://library.ramapo.edu/plagiarism.html>.

Note: This course follows standard Ramapo College policy for Electronic Forms of Communication, Academic Integrity and Students with Disabilities. For details, please refer to the Academic Review Committee Website at <http://ww2.ramapo.edu/arc/>.

Disabilities/Accommodations: If you feel you might need any accommodations in order to succeed in this course, please let me know privately as soon as possible. Also, you should contact the Office of Specialized Services at 201.684.7514 (voice), 201.684.7092 (TTY), or oss@ramapo.edu (email).

Requirements/Grades: Your performance in this course (and your experience of this course) will be assessed through course blogs, class discussion, regular quizzes, and compositions. Your weighted grade in the course will be determined according to the following schema:

Essay 1.1:	05%	Final Research Project:	30%	Everyday Life Journal:	05%
Essay 1.2:	10%	Short Exercises/Blog:	10%	Discussion/Participation:	10%
Essay 2:	15%	WA presentations:	05%	Peer Review:	10%

Course Blog: The virtual component of this course is substantial. This semester, we will be utilizing the **Moodle** as our digital community. You can logon to Moodle here:

<https://moodle.ramapo.edu/>

Students will be required to regularly post comments and feedback through this site's forum. I will also use this site to post readings, make announcements and give student feedback. It is your responsibility to stay tuned.

Prospective Schedule (*subject to change at the professor's discretion*):

Week One: Introduction: Figuration

Carpenter, E. "Rhetorical Analysis and Close Reading"

1/20 R: Introductions/Metaphoricity/Read Carpenter/**Paper 1.1** Assigned

Week Two: Metaphors: Figuration and Critical Reading

Lakoff, G./Johnson, H. Excerpt from *Metaphors We Live By*

Rosenwasser, D./Stephen J. Chapter 1: "Analysis: What It Is and What It Does" &
Chapter 2: "Counterproductive Habits of Mind"

1/24 M: Discuss Lakoff-Johnson/Naturalizing Assumptions

Close Reading Due (A Metaphor We Live By)

1/27 R: Discuss/Distinguishing between Opinion, Summary, & Analysis

Week Three: Figuring Truth in History

Nietzsche, F. "On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense"

Rosenwasser/Stephen Chapter 3: "A Toolkit of Analytical Methods"

1/31 M: Discuss Nietzsche/**Paper 1.1 Due**

2/3 R: Discuss Nietzsche/Toolkit of Analytical Methods

Week Four: Figuring Knowledge and the Arts

Plato "Allegory of the Cave" from *The Republic*

Eagleton, T. "What is Literature?" from *Introduction to Literary Theory*

Rosenwasser/Stephen Chapter 4: "Interpretation: What It Is, What It Isn't, and
How to Do It"

2/7 M: Discuss Plato/Schools of Interpretation

2/10 R: Discuss Eagleton/Observations, Implications, & Assertions

Week Five: Figures of (Figuring) Speech

Quinn, A. *Figures of Speech*
Rosenwasser/Stephen Chapter 11: "Introductions and Conclusions"

2/14 M: Discuss Quinn (pp. 1-47)/**Paper 1.2 Due**
2/17 R: Discuss Quinn (pp. 49-98)/Introductions & Conclusions

Week Six: Greek Geeks

Aristophanes *The Clouds*
Plato *The Gorgias* (dialogue with Callicles)
Williams, J. *Style*

2/21 M: Discuss Aristophanes and Plato; Sophists and Metaphysicians
2/24 R: Discuss Style and the "Official Style"/**Style Exercises Due**

Week Seven: Bullying the Greeks

Nietzsche, F. Excerpts from *Twilight of the Idols*
Rosenwasser/Stephen Chapter 9: "Making a Thesis Evolve"

2/28 M: Discuss Nietzsche
3/3 R: Discuss Evolving Theses/**Paper 2.1 assigned**

Week Eight: Revenge of the Nerds

Kanew, J. *Revenge of the Nerds* (1984)
Kendall, L. "Nerd Nation: Images of Nerds in Popular Culture"

3/7 M: Screen Film: *Revenge of the Nerds* (1984)
3/10 R: Discuss Kendall and *Revenge*

Week Nine: Spring Break

Week Ten: Science Geeks

Martin, E. "The Egg and the Sperm: How Science Has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male-Female Roles"
Rosenwasser/Stephen Chapter 7: "What Evidence Is and How It Works"
Chapter 8: "How to Use Evidence to Build a Paper: 10 on 1 versus 1 on 10"

3/21 M: Discuss Martin/ **Paper 2.1 Due**

3/24 R: Discuss Martin/Types and Uses of Evidence/ **Peer Review Due**

Week Eleven: Drama Queens and Antitheatrical Discourses

Rapkin, M. excerpt from *Theater Geek: The Real Life Drama ...*
Barish, J. "Introductory," in *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*
Rosenwasser/Stephen Chapter 12: "Recognizing and Fixing Weak Thesis Statements"

3/28 M: Discuss Rapkin/**Paper 2.2 Due**

3/31 R: Discuss Barish/**Final Paper Assigned**

Week Twelve: Writing Workshop

Bartholomae, D. "Inventing the University"
Wertheim, J. "So Fresh, So Clean: An Analysis of the Bathtub and Its Figuring from Past to Present"

4/4 M: Discuss Final Paper/**Formulating a Research Question**

4/7 R: Discuss Bartholomae/Writing Workshop

Week Thirteen: Computer Nerds

Nugent, B. *American Nerd: The Story of My People*

4/11 M: **Library Tour**

4/14 R: Discuss Nugent

Week Fourteen: Research

Nugent, B. *American Nerd: The Story of My People*
Rosenwassen/Stephen Chapter 16: "Finding, Citing, and Integrating Sources"

4/18 M: Discuss Nugent

4/21 R: Discuss Primary/Secondary Sources/Annotated Bibliography

Week Fifteen: Pathologizing the Nerd

Rosenwassen/Stephen Chapter 15: "Organizing and Revising the Research Paper"
Baron-Cohen. *Mindblindness* (excerpt)
Silberman, S. "The Geek Syndrome"

4/25 M: Discuss Baron-Cohen, Silberman

4/28 R: **Prospectuses/Annotated Bibliographies Due**

Week Sixteen: Computer Nerds in Historical Periodicals

Kendall, L. "White & Nerdy": Computers, Race, and the Nerd
Stereotype"

5/2 M: Discuss Kendall

Week Seventeen: Final Project Conference

5/9 M: Final Conference/**Final Papers Due**