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Rhetoric and Public Culture

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Program Description

This interdisciplinary program of study addresses foundational problems in both the practice of democracy and the conduct of inquiry. "Rhetoric" refers to systematic study of how texts, images, and other media operate as a mode of action. It comprises a civic art, a hermeneutical method, and a continuing challenge to all systems of classification. Historically, this study has ranged from reflection on the practice of public address within the first democratic societies, to a tradition of technical craft and instruction in civic, clerical, and literary composition, to a general theory of the discursive constitution of knowledge and power. Because of the scope of the linguistic turn in the human sciences during the 20th century, "rhetoric" now provides a pertinent basis for reflection on the discursive and organizational conventions of contemporary scholarship. Such reflection is becoming increasingly necessary as scholarship and democracy alike adapt to new communication technologies and related elements of globalization defining the 21st century.

"Public Culture" delineates a fundamental feature of modern civil society. Three basic assumptions guide scholarly study of public culture: First, publics emerge through the interplay of a wide range of arts, media, and other modes of performance. Second, public identity involves specific habits of audience response and social interaction that have contingent relationships to other forms

of power. Third, public agency operates through both political institutions and other communicative practices that are more vernacular, nomadic, or transitory. Because they are at once distinctively modern, inherently pluralistic, and inevitably contested, public cultures have become vital political forms in an increasingly interconnected world.

Thus, "rhetoric and public culture" denotes study of the communicative practices by which public culture is created, sustained, modified, and challenged. The program welcomes scholars who wish to be both attentive to rhetoric and engaged with important intellectual and political discourses that cross the disciplines and other institutional boundaries.

Students interested in pursuing a PhD in [African-American Studies](#), [Art History](#), [Communication Studies](#), [Comparative Literary Studies](#), [English](#), [French and Italian](#), [German Literature and Critical Thought](#), [History](#), [Music](#), [Performance Studies](#), [Philosophy](#), [Political Science](#), [Religion](#), [Slavic Languages and Literatures](#), [Sociology](#), and [Theatre and Drama](#) are encouraged to find a second intellectual "home" in this interdisciplinary cluster.

Program Faculty

Kate Baldwin, Department of Communication Studies

Brian Edwards, Department of English

Dilip Gaonkar, Department of Communication Studies

Jessica Greenberg, Department of Communication Studies

Robert Hariman, Department of Communication Studies

Patrick Johnson, Department of Performance Studies

Ernesto Laclau, University Professor of the Humanities and Rhetorical Studies

Saul Morson, Department of Slavic Languages

Helmut Mueller-Seivers, Department of German

Janice Radway, Department of Communication Studies

Angela Ray, Department of Communication Studies

Irving Rein, Department of Communication Studies

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