RWS 200: Written Arguments in Context – The Rhetoric of Satire

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Section Details: #53 meets T/Th, 9:30-10:45 in SSW 2532
#64 meets T/Th, 12:30-1:45 in EBA 444
Office Location: Storm Hall 116
Office Hours: T/Th, 2:00-3:00 pm

Required Textbooks:
- RWS 200 Course Reader (under Centanni at Cal Copy)
*both available at Cal Copy/KB Books, across the bridge on College Ave. Unavailable at SDSU bookstore.*

Course Description:

RWS 200 is a course in academic writing and reading, emphasizing the rhetorical analysis of arguments in context. Building on RWS 100, the course asks students to continue the work of articulating what argument a text is making and describing elements of the argument. It now asks them to also consider the contexts of arguments and to discover what arguments are responding to, both in the sense of what has come before them and in the sense that they are written for an audience in a particular place and time.

The course examines the way in which writers and entertainers (for the sake of simplicity, I will refer to them all as “writers” henceforth) use satire in their arguments in order to pursue questions, understand experiences, and enact social/political change. By the end of this course, you should be able to write and revise papers for which you have investigated the use of satire in context, discerned the overall effects of a satiric approach, and shown an understanding of their positioned, cultural dimension. You should be able to make independent decisions about structure, cohesion, and conventions of correctness. You should be able to present an argument – not in the sense of defending an already-formed opinion, but in having inquired into a question.

The key to RWS 200 versus RWS 100 is the inclusion of context.

Context is a term that refers to: a) the roots of an idea (e.g., religious and philosophical ideas from the Bible, Gandhi, and Socrates are some of the roots of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s discussions of non-violence); b) the time and place in which a writer is writing and the particular audience he/she addresses; c) the variety of texts available on a particular topic; d) the current moment in which one is reading a text – one’s own social, cultural, or historical context.

In RWS 200, I will help you to recognize a writer's source materials, to analyze how a writer uses those sources to construct new knowledge, and to practice using sources as you inquire into – and write about – complex questions. One part of this work is to recognize the influence of audience and social context on every piece of writing. As in RWS 100, your instructor helped you to examine
the texts you read for clues about situation, community, and culture in which these texts were written, and to recognize strategies for appealing to audiences. RWS 200 builds on this work by asking you to identify and analyze features of context embedded within arguments, and to research elements of context by being curious learners.

Course Requirements:

- Three formal essays, one shorter paper. One of the three formal essays will be a group project. First drafts will be required, and the paper grades will be lowered one full letter grade if there is no first draft included or if the revision has been inadequate, particularly if the revision consists primarily of grammatical corrections.
- Blackboard participation with two Initial Reflections and four Responses (more on this later).
- One “Dennis Miller Rant” (more on this later).
- Selected readings from Course Reader (C.R.) and Blackboard. Don’t make me give pop quizzes...
- Class participation in small group activities, class discussions, and individual writing conferences.

Grade Breakdown: Each paper will receive a letter grade based on the quality of the work it contains, as will your final project. The value of the letter grade corresponds to the recommended values in the SDSU catalog (A = 4.0, A- = 3.7, etc.). Participation will be assigned a letter grade that takes into consideration both your attendance and your level of involvement in class sessions. Your final grade will be determined by weighting those letter grades as follows:

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<th>Part</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tr>
<td>First Paper</td>
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<td>Third Paper</td>
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<td>Individual “Lens” Portion</td>
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<td>Other Assignments</td>
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<td>Participation</td>
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Policies:

Attendance: There is no substitute for attending class. Regular attendance will greatly elevate your chances of performing well. Simply showing up for class, however, will not be enough. Active participation does not have to mean answering every question, but I expect an optimistic, curious learning environment in class each day founded in respectful discourse. For those who miss class frequently, I will begin docking points after three (3) absences. Also, three tardies will be treated as one absence.

Late Work: Generally speaking, I do not accept late work. For larger assignments (the kind that could singlehandedly murder your semester grade), I may be kind enough to accept late work, though with a penalty. The penalty will, likely, be up to a full letter grade per day late.

Essays: Rough drafts of all essays are to be submitted electronically through Blackboard’s TurnItIn.com feature, before the class session starts, on the date specified. To be clear, if your essay arrives in my inbox one minute late, it is late. In the event of a technological meltdown, I will accept hard copies on the due date (not after). All essays must be typed, double-spaced, and must
adhere to MLA format (owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/). Rough drafts will be peer-reviewed, so be prepared to bring a hard copy to class on those days.

**Final drafts** will be turned in as hard copies, due by noon (12:00 pm) on the date specified.

In the event of an extreme emergency (zombie apocalypse, e.g.), I may consider (notice the rhetoric?) an extension, but don't count on it. In either event, communicate early and often. Note: Technology issues are not an emergency.

**Group Work:** Your third (and final) paper will be a group paper. **If you are not prepared to devote time outside of class to group work, you should not attempt this class.** Divide your group work as equally as possible. If you have any problems within your group that, after patient travail, you cannot resolve, please see me. Alternatively, coming to see me early on with a problem that I feel you might have worked through on your own will hurt your participation grade. Coping with the challenges of collaborative work is an essential part of this course.

Each student will earn an individual grade and a single group grade (50% each). The individually graded portion will be highly scrutinized, since the amount of writing will be less per person than your other papers. The group grade will be based on the overall quality of the final project, in addition the group’s ability to function cohesively. At the end of this assignment, each group member will rank their teammates’ contributions – this will contribute to the individual grade.

**Initial Reflections & Responses:** Six times during the semester you will be asked to participate in an “online discussion” of a reading. You will be asked to post an Initial Reflection twice over the course of the semester, where you will write approximately 250 words summarizing the text and considering its rhetorical properties. Four other times you will be asked to write a Response. This will not be responding to the reading directly, but to one of your classmates’ Initial Reflections. Responses will be 100-150 words. I will have a handout that further explains these assignments.

“Dennis Miller Rant”: One time during the semester, I will ask you to write a satirical rant about a social or political issue of your choice. This can be done at any point over the course of the semester, but I recommend waiting until we’ve delved into a few sample texts so that you can get an idea about what is required. If you are “not funny” (which is a complaint/reality of many young writers), this will be your opportunity to try your best. I won’t be grading on how funny the rant is, but on how much effort is put into the assignment. This, too, will be posted on Blackboard.

**E-mail:** This is not an online course. If you miss a session, I will not correspond with missed class work via e-mail. If you need class work or notes, please ask a classmate. Also, when you correspond with ANY professor, send a formal e-mail (i.e., proper capitalization, punctuation, spelling, and respectful greeting/signoff!). This is a life skill that the text message is murdering.

**Attaching Files to E-Mail:** In the event that anything needs to be e-mailed directly to me, I must be able to open the document the first time. Therefore, double-check your attachments and make sure all files are either saved “.doc” (NOT “.docx”) or “.rtf”. This might sound petty, but trust me, it is a necessary policy. I will make no exceptions to this policy.
Blackboard: I will post major announcements and any class readings not in your textbooks on Blackboard. Please print out class readings and bring them to class unless otherwise noted.

Electronics: I have a love/hate relationship with electronics. I love what they can do, I hate what they do do. While I won’t make a hard and fast “use it and I’ll kick you out” rule, I will say that distractions (texting, Facebook, etc.) might lead to me embarrassing you and asking you to leave. Don’t test me, please. Be smart.

Student Athletes: If you are a student-athlete, please make arrangements early for sessions you must miss. I was a student-athlete, so I am aware of the obligations that come with that territory. However, this does not entitle you to miss work—it may entail turning in assignments early.

Plagiarism: All work in this course must be original. Plagiarism will result in serious consequences ranging from grade reduction to failure in the class to expulsion from the college. For more information on the university cheating and plagiarism policy, please visit: http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/dept/senate/policy/pfacademics.html.

Respect: In this class (and really, in life), maintain what Jon Kabat-Zinn refers to as a “don’t know mind.” Everyone has his or her own beliefs and values, and they are “right” in his or her mind. Enter every discussion in this class accepting the notion that you may not be “right.” Respect the views of others, even if you disagree with them. This is the first step toward intelligence and a necessary prerequisite for wisdom, so begin cultivating that in my classroom (if you haven’t begun already).

Problems: If you run into any problems or emergencies, don’t be shy—come to me as soon as possible.

Help/Services:
Course Tutoring, ESL, & Writing Help: In addition to my office hours and our individual conferences, RWS tutors are available to help you with your writing. Tutors are located in Love Library. Contact the Department of Rhetoric and Writing Studies at (619) 594-6515 for more information on drop-in tutoring hours. Some help is available for ESL writers. If you have questions or would like additional assistance with class concepts or projects, please visit me during my office hours or make an appointment to speak with me.

Office Hours: I will hold weekly office hours. My office is in Storm Hall 116, and it is shared with several other instructors. If you are scheduled to see me and I am not present, do not be shy. Ask someone in the office if they’ve seen “Louie” (we tend not to know each other’s last names). If that fails, e-mail me. My official office hours are Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2:00-3:00 or by appointment.
Course Outline and Reading Schedule:
Please note that the following schedule is approximate, as dates and topics may shift as the semester progresses. Please refer to Blackboard for current information regarding your assignment due dates. Unless otherwise noted, all readings are to be completed outside of class before the discussion date.

Thursday, January 23: Introduction to class, Get to know you, Syllabus, Expectations
DISCUSS Papers and Recurring Assignments
READ Introductory material from Course Reader (CR)

Tuesday, January 28: DISCUSS First Paper
Sign up for Groups
READ Kurt Vonnegut’s “Now then, I have some good news”
NOTES: The Rhetoric of Satire (web lecture from Ohio University)

Thursday, January 30: Context and Audience
READ Mark Twain’s “The Lowest Animal”

Tuesday, February 4: READ Chuck Klosterman’s “Billy Sim”
*IR#1: Group A*
*Response: Groups B/C*

Thursday, February 6: DISCUSS The effects of humor on making a point
GROUP Classwide analysis of the three texts

Tuesday, February 11: DISCUSS The difference between types of comedy

Thursday, February 13: Peer Revisions of Paper 1 (bring to class)

*Friday, February 14: Rough Draft of Paper 1 Due by Noon (12:00 pm).

Tuesday, February 18: Individual Conferences. No class.

Thursday, February 20: Final Draft of Paper 1 Due in Class.
INTRODUCTION to Margaret Atwood

Tuesday, February 25: READ “Harrison Bergeron” by Kurt Vonnegut

Thursday, February 27: READ Oryx and Crake, Sections 1-3
*IR#2: Group B*
*Response: Groups A/C*

Tuesday, March 4: READ Oryx and Crake, Sections 4-6

Thursday, March 6: READ Oryx and Crake, Section 7
READ Yorkshire’s Land...”
Tuesday, March 11: READ *Oryx and Crake*, Sections 8-10
Thursday, March 13: READ *Oryx and Crake*, Section 11
Tuesday, March 18: FINISH *Oryx and Crake*, Sections 12-End
Thursday, March 20: DISCUSS Comparing the Satire of Vonnegut and Atwood
Tuesday, March 25: **Rough Draft of Paper 2 Due in Class (If you want Professor comments, it must be turned in online by Friday, March 21st)!** - Peer Revisions of Paper 2 (bring to class)
Thursday, March 27: Individual Conferences. *No class.*

**Friday, March 28:** Final Draft of Paper 2 Due by Noon in SHW 141. *No class.*

Tuesday, April 1: Spring Break. *No class.*
Thursday, April 3: Spring Break. *No class.*
Tuesday, April 8: READ Compton, “Surveying Scholarship...”
WATCH clips
DISCUSS Criticisms of this media
*IR#4: Group A*
*Response: Groups B/C*
Thursday, April 10: READ Baym, “The Daily Show”
Tuesday, April 15: READ Day, “And Now...the News?”
*IR#5: Group B*
*Response: Groups A/C*
Thursday, April 17: READ Fox, “Wise Fools”
Tuesday, April 22: READ Waisanen, “Satirical Visions With Public Consequence?”
*IR#6: Group C*
*Response: Groups A/B *
Thursday, April 24: DISCUSS Satire as a Form of Social Resistance
Tuesday, April 29: **Individual “Lens” Paper Due in Class.**
Thursday, May 1: TBD
Tuesday, May 6: Rough Draft of Group Paper Due.

Thursday, May 8: *DENNIS MILLER RANT due on Blackboard*

General Education Capacities/Goals, and RWS Learning Outcomes:

Our Learning Outcomes Reflect the Goals and Capacities of the General Education Program. RWS 200 is one of several courses in the area of general education defined as “Communication and Critical Thinking.” Focusing particularly on argument, this course emphasizes four essential general education capacities: the ability to 1) construct, analyze and communicate argument, 2) contextualize phenomena, 3) negotiate differences, and 4) apply theoretical models to the real world. This course advances general education by helping students understand the general function of writing, speaking, visual texts, and thinking within the context of the university at large, rather than within specific disciplines. In addition to featuring the basic rules and conventions governing composition and presentation, RWS 200 establishes intellectual frameworks and analytical tools that help students explore, construct, critique, and integrate sophisticated texts.

Within this framework of four general capacities, the course realizes four closely related subsidiary goals. These goals focus on helping students

1) craft well-reasoned arguments for specific audiences;
2) analyze a variety of texts commonly encountered in the academic setting;
3) situate discourse within social, generic, cultural, and historic contexts;
4) assess the relative strengths of arguments and supporting evidence.

Our student learning outcomes for RWS 200 are closely aligned with these goals and capacities, and reflect the program’s overall objective of helping students attain “essential skills that underlie all university education.”

RWS 200 Student Learning Outcomes:

The following four outcomes describe the four major writing projects of “assignment types” for the course. Students will be able to:

1. Discern elements of context embedded in arguments, the clues that show what the argument is responding to – both in the sense of what has come before it and the sense that it is written for an audience in a particular time and place; examine a writer’s language in relation to audience, context, and community;
2. Use concepts and arguments from one text as a context for understanding, evaluating and writing about another;
3. Given the common concerns of two or more arguments, discuss how the claims of these arguments modify, complicate, or qualify one another; consider how major positions advanced in these texts relate to each other and evaluate the persuasiveness of these positions.
4. Consider your contemporary life as the context within which you are reading a group of arguments; position yourself in relation to ongoing research and discussion in order to make an argument and “join the conversation.” Evaluate source texts so as to create a space for an original contribution.

The following points describe outcomes to work on throughout the semester:

5. Building on the work done in RWS 100, you will be able to articulate what argument a text is making, describe the work that is done by each section of the argument, describe elements of the argument such as claims, methods of development, kinds of evidence, persuasive appeals, and translate an argument into your own words;
6. Investigate and articulate how an argument is positioned – based on certain kinds of assumptions, located in a way of thinking and representing issues from a point of view;
7. Work with multiple sources in a paper, deciding what to include and what to exclude, choosing an effective structure, and creating significant relationships among sources;
8. Evaluate the relationships among multiple positions (including strengths and weakness) with respect to audience, avoiding simplistic judgments and demonstrating, where appropriate, how the preponderance of the evidence supports specific positions over others.
9. Understand and incorporate all aspects of the writing process – including prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and proofreading;
10. Craft a cohesive paper, and use effective metadiscourse to guide a reader through it;
11. Describe your own papers and reflect on how you wrote them; differentiate between the content of your texts and the language and rhetorical strategies you employ;
12. Revise your own work effectively, re-reading previous work and re-envisioning it in the light of reflection, feedback, further reading, and new sources of information;
13. Edit your writing for the grammar and usage conventions appropriate to the project.