the #epicfail as argument

[engl 20833]



Samuel Beckett watching a rehearsal of Waiting for Godot

What, exactly, does it mean to "fail"?

How do we make sense of texts and images that fail to communicate?

Why study failed arguments?

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Try again. Fail again. Better again. Or better worse. Fail worse again. Still worse again.

—Samuel Beckett, Worstward Ho

66

The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.

—Ludwig Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus Failure is something we have all dealt with at some point. Failed quizzes or tests in school. Failed plans and projects at work. Failed relationships with the people in our lives. And as frustrating or disappointing as each of these failures might initially seem, in time we come to understand how failure can lay the groundwork for success by exposing both the flaws in our original plan(s) and the rules, limits, or behaviors that we have violated in our initial attempt to achieve a desired goal. The purpose of this course, then, is to examine failed communication—speeches that flopped, tweets that shocked the world, movies that "bombed" at the box office, books that confused their readers—as a way of better understanding the processes by which effective communication operates. Following Beckett's advice, we will attempt to continually "fail better" throughout the semester until our failures finally result in the successful communication we seek.



Pepsi attempted to revolutionize the soft drink market in the early 1990s with "Crystal Pepsi." It lasted for less than a year.

course goals and outcomes

ENGL 20833.016

T/TR 9:30 – 10:50AM SCHAR 4002

Mr. Tom Jesse

Reed 402 Tuesdays 8:00 – 9:15 Thursdays 11:00 – 1:00

(or by appointment)

E-mail: t.jesse@tcu.edu

Website: tomjesse.com

- Students will demonstrate facility with the language and analysis of argument.
 - Study terminology from historical and modern rhetorical theory
 - Analyze a variety of arguments in different media
 - Analyze and assess genre, discourse conventions, rhetorical situation, and argument strategy in complex texts
 - Study the implications of contemporary argumentation for individuals and communities
 - Examine how their role as citizens includes participation as critical consumers and producers of arguments
- Students will demonstrate the ability to write an argument for a specific rhetorical situation.
 - Compose a variety of arguments in different media
 - Produce an argument with a situation-appropriate focus, thesis, or controlling idea and recognize such in others' texts
 - Practice firsthand the complex dynamics of collaborative work and analyze how that affects the rhetorical situation in analyzing and producing arguments
- Students will demonstrate competency in using sources, (primary, secondary, electronic) in argument construction.
 - Find, evaluate, and analyze primary and secondary sources for appropriateness, timeliness, and validity
 - Incorporate and synthesize source material (primary, print, digital) in argumentative composing
 - Practice connecting their personal experiences, values, and beliefs with larger social conversations and contexts
 - Summarize, paraphrase, and quote from sources using appropriate documentation style
 - Edit for style as well as conventions of Standard Amer. English
- Students will demonstrate the ability to use computers effectively as a communication mechanism.
 - Correspond online using e-mail, blogs, etc.
 - Find, evaluate, and use online sources in various assignments
 - Use word processing software to produce and format texts, as well as use computers to facilitate presentations, and produce and incorporate non-print information in academic argument





The DeLorean DMC-12, as featured in Back to the Future

a note on the syllabus "genre"

Over the next sixteen weeks, I will ask you to "do" a lot of things you might not be that interested in doing:

Read this book.
Think about this topic.
Write this essay.
Edit this movie.

Present this information to your peers.

The goal of any good syllabus, then, is to convince you that these things are worth your time—that if you go ahead and do them, you will gain certain knowledge and/or skills that will be of benefit to you in this class, in other classes you might take here at TCU, and perhaps even in your life post-graduation. In building "The #epicfail as Argument" around the following core assignments, it is my hope that the **value** inherent in these projects becomes clear to everyone in the class.

It is unlikely, of course, that I will be able to convince **all of you** that **every assignment** is worth your **full effort and attention**. But therein lies the allure of studying failure: in learning what doesn't work, what fails to convince you of its worth, I prepare myself to "fail better" the next time by producing an even more effective argument for the kinds of work I ask students to engage in on a regular basis.

(continued)

What is a syllabus if not an extended argument about the value of the work a course requires?

Core Assignments

Course Textbook

Rhetoric: A User's Guide
by John D. Ramage
(Pearson, 2006)

RHETORIC

A User's Guide

JOHN D. RAMAGE

This course includes <u>four core</u> <u>assignments</u> plus additional informal writing tasks. The info presented below is merely an overview of each assignment; more detailed instructions will be provided well in advance of assignment due dates.

Failed Speech Analysis (Unit One)

Students will select a recent example of highly contentious or controversial speech—perhaps a speech that was universally criticized, a tweet that resulted in public controversy, or even comments made during an interview or on a personal blog that received negative media attention—and develop a rhetorical case study that examines how and why this text failed to communicate its intended message.

By examining a "failed speech act" in its social, historical, and rhetorical context, your case study will demonstrate not only that you understand what it means for a speech act to "fail" by violating audience expectations (based upon the act's rhetorical situation), but also that you are becoming adept at course-specific approaches to rhetorical analysis and are willing/able to engage with course terms, concepts, and readings. Finally, the FSA assignment seeks to expand your awareness of the composition process while also asking you to reflect on that process.

LENGTH = 6–8 pages
DUE DATE = February 13
REVISION DUE DATE = March 21

Box Office Bomb Argument (Unit Two)

Students will develop a well-researched argument about the specific <u>causes</u> and/or long-term <u>consequences</u> of a recent Hollywood film that severely underperformed at the box office.

Questions to consider include:

- Why weren't audiences interested in this big-budget blockbuster?
- What choices did the producers, actors, and/or director make that were universally reviled by critics and audiences?
- How might the promotional advertising for this film have done a better job "selling" audiences on the project?

Building upon skills developed in the Failed Speech Analysis, you will argue for your own reading of the film and its context(s)—one that explores and explains its failure to resonate with contemporary audiences in a convincing fashion. In so doing, you will develop an understanding of film as a rhetorical act situated in a specific rhetorical context. You will also expand upon your previous work with rhetorical analysis by using analytical techniques and strategies as a means of supporting your own argument about the film you choose to discuss in this essay. This project will also require the integration of at least three visuals into the final draft.

LENGTH = 7–9 pages DUE DATE = March 20 REVISION DUE DATE = April 23

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Public "Dis-Service" Announcement (Unit Three)

As the capstone project in this course, the PDSA assignment asks students to synthesize a semester's worth of rhetorical and compositional exploration in one three-part project. For the first time, students will produce their own "failed" arguments and then reflect critically on the rhetorical choices they have made in creating something that has been designed to fail.

The PDSA is comprised of three main components:

- (1) Students will work in small groups to design, plan, film, and edit a sixty-second video public service announcement intended to "fail" in its purpose as a PSA.
- (2) Each student will submit an individual paper analyzing and explaining the group's decision-making process for each intentional deviation from the conventions of successful PSA videos.
- (3) For the course's final exam, the class will view, discuss, and critique the PDSA videos. Each group will be expected to give a brief presentation (5-6 mins.) about their finished product on exam day.

Although this may seem like an "easy" assignment—How hard can it be to make a project that fails?—the PDSA assignment builds upon a semester's worth of readings, discussions, and assignments to get you thinking about failure from a more creative, more positive perspective. Success on the PDSA, then, does not mean simply throwing together

a really bad video; success requires that that you demonstrate mastery of course material through the quality of your video, the critical depth of your self-analysis essay, and the professionalism and polish of your final presentation. In other words, the best PDSA projects will do all of the following:

- Engage meaningfully with the traditional conventions of the Public Service Announcement in order to create a video that flouts these conventions in purposeful/creative ways
- Reflect critically on your group's rhetorical choices in order to communicate a complex understanding of the extent to which failure reveals the conventions that make successful argument possible
- Share your work in a polished, professional manner both in your reflective essay and during your in-class presentation

LENGTH = 6–8 pages (ESSAY)
60 seconds (MOVIE)
DUE DATE = April 30 (ESSAY)
EXAM DAY (MOVIE)

"Everyday Rhetoric" Essays (All three units)

As a standing assignment in the class, students will analyze one contemporary example of three key concepts: **Rhetorical Situation**, **Identification**, and **Epideictic Rhetoric**.

In each mini-essay, students will cite at least one source from the course reading and one outside source related to the example they have selected.

LENGTH = 2 pages

DUE DATE = *Check Calendar*

"Success, after all, loves a witness, but failure can't exist without one."

—Junot Diaz The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao

Grades & Assessment

Grading Philosophy

The number one source of anxiety for both students and professors is how grades in a given course will be determined. This is something we both think about, and I want to make my grading philosophy as transparent as possible so that we can all be on the same page. If you have any questions at any time about how your grade is being determined, be sure to consult this section of the syllabus in addition to contacting me so that we can resolve the issue as quickly as possible.

Simply fulfilling the minimum course requirements warrants an average grade (i.e., C). A higher than average grade will be based on three factors: 1) the distinctive quality and development of your written work; 2) the consistent demonstrating of critical and creative thinking in the drafting and revision process; and 3) a willingness to take risks by exploring new subjects, genres, and techniques.

Coming to class every day and completing your assignments is not something that earns "extra credit" or an automatic A; it's an expectation for being in this course.

At right is a breakdown of how final grades are calculated; as we move into the semester you'll receive more detailed information about how your writing is evaluated. I update the grade book on our PLS website regularly, so be sure to keep track of your performance in the course as the semester progresses.

Grade Breakdown

Given the variety of assignments you'll be completing for this course, the following weightings have been designed to reflect the amount of time, effort, and dedication each assignment requires. Those assignments that ask more of you have been weighted accordingly; those that ask less will (obviously) count less.

Success in this class depends on your ability to effectively prioritize assignments and readings based upon their importance both to you and to your grade. I simply ask that you make the most informed choices possible when deciding where to devote your time and attention.

Daily Work/Quizzes 10%
Failed Speech Analysis 20%
Box Office Bomb Arg. 20%
Public Dis-Service Ann. 25%
(Paper + Video)
"Everyday Rhetoric" 15%
(3 @ 5% ea.)
Final Presentation 10%

General Policies

Attendance

Regular attendance is necessary to your success in this course, and only official university absences are excused. Students representing TCU in a university-mandated activity that requires missing class should provide official documentation of schedules and turn in work in advance.

Three weeks of unexcused absences (six total absences) constitute grounds for failure of the course. Absences due to illness, sleeping, and long weekends are NOT excused—they all count toward the three weeks' absences limit. Since illness is likely at some point during the semester, students are urged to save their unexcused absences for times when you are too sick to come to class. To do well in this course, you must come to class.

Tardies

Please be on time for class. Students who arrive late (five minutes or more) can distract

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Letter Grade	Numeric Grade	Quality of Work	Range for Final Grade	GPA Points Awarded
A	95	Outstanding	93-100	4.00
Α-	92		90-92	3.67
B+	88		87-89	3.33
В	85	Exceeds Expectations	83-86	3.00
B-	82		80-82	2.67
C+	78		77-79	2.33
С	75	Meets Expectations	73-76	2.00
C-	72		70-72	1.67
D+	68		67-69	1.33
D	65	Below Average	63-66	1.00
F	55	Unacceptable	0-59	0

others' attention from the day's work—and, to be honest, they throw me "off my game" as well. For these reasons, I ask that you make it a priority to arrive before class begins (9:30AM) every day. If you choose to show up late for class regularly, keep in mind that multiple tardies will negatively impact your grade in the course. In-class work cannot be made up, so it is vital that you arrive on-time and ready to work.

Late Work

All major assignments will be submitted electronically through the Dropbox on our Pearson LearningStudio (PLS) website.

Assignments are to be uploaded by 11:59PM the day before we meet to discuss them.

Assignments will be considered late if they are submitted any time after 11:59PM. Be sure to check the course schedule regularly so that you are not confused or mistaken about when assignments are due.

Late papers will be penalized <u>one</u> <u>letter grade for each class period</u> <u>beyond the due date</u>, unless:

- a) the student has an official university absence
 and
- b) the instructor has agreed to late submission in advance of the due date.

If you know you will be missing a class, then you need to submit the assignment ahead of time or meet with me well in advance of the due date for us to discuss the issue.

This course relies heavily on technology, so you will need to have reliable access to the Internet, which is always available in several places (including the library) on campus. Problems with technology (i.e.: computer crash, printer malfunction, Internet connectivity issues, etc.) are not acceptable excuses for submitting

late work. Plan ahead to avoid last minute crises related your assignments.

Course Conduct

It seems strange to think that we'd need "rules" in a college classroom, but in the remote chance that student conduct becomes an issue, I want to be sure that my expectations for your behavior in class are made clear from day one:

- 1. Our classroom is a place for the free exchange of ideas in an environment of mutual respect. Students whose behavior distracts or disrespects others will be asked to leave and will be counted absent.
- 2. Please turn off your cell phone and/or laptop and put them away during class. If a true emergency requires you to keep your phone on or your computer out, please let me know before class starts.

That's it—just two rules. I will warn you, however, that I guard these two rules <u>fiercely</u>, so please abide by them at all times.

Office Hours

During my office hours (TUES 8:00 – 9:15AM / THUR 11:00AM-1:00 PM) I will be at my desk and available to talk with you about any questions, comments, or concerns you have about the course. Please stop by and see me during these hours—that time is yours. If the times I have scheduled don't work for you, I'm happy to make an appointment to sit down and discuss your work.

Technologies

Please turn off cell phones and any other electronics during class. You'll be notified in advance if you should bring laptops to class for work; otherwise, assume you won't need them. Texting, checking Facebook, etc. from your phone or

"What we've got here is failure to communicate."

—The Captain (Strother Martin) in Cool Hand Luke (1967)

computer means you're not engaging in the daily activities of our course. I need you as focused as possible on the work we're doing at all times—it's the only way you'll be able to get something valuable from class each morning. Before class begins, you're welcome to use phones or laptops; during class time, however, I ask that you refrain from doing so.

If you are using electronics or otherwise wasting time during class, it will be marked in the grade book and I'll notify you after class or via email. Multiple violations will be considered grounds for a grade deduction in the course. Failure to adhere to the technology policies can impact your final grade, so please—do yourself (and your peers) a favor by giving each class meeting your full attention.

Pearson LearningStudio (PLS) Class Website

We have a course website we'll use for various activities throughout the semester: required readings; handouts and assignment sheets; discussion threads; resources on the Webliography; and assignment submissions via the Dropbox feature. The PLS site will play a major role in this course, so you should familiarize yourself with it in the first two weeks of the semester to be sure that any questions or concerns you have can be addressed right away.

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Course Resources

New Media Writing Studio Scharbauer 2003 www.newmedia.tcu.edu newmedia@tcu.edu 817–257-5194

The New Media Writing Studio (NMWS) is available to assist students with audio, video, multimedia, and web design projects. The Studio serves as an open lab for use by students during posted hours and has both PC and Mac computers outfitted with a range of design software. A variety of equipment is available for checkout to students whose teachers have contacted the Studio in advance. See their website for more information and a schedule of open hours.

Center for Writing Reed 419 www.wrt.tcu.edu 817-257-7221

The William L. Adams Center for Writing is an instructional service with the mission of helping members of the TCU community improve their writing. Consultants offer feedback on writing projects to students, staff, and faculty from all academic disciplines. Consultants work with writers on projects such as essays, theses,

dissertations, books, letters of application, articles, and other creative, personal, and academic projects. In addition to serving as a friendly audience, consultants address any issue a writer would like to discuss, though consultations often focus on topic generation, organization of ideas, style, clarity, and documentation. Go to their website to see their hours and make an appointment.

IC Computer Lab Mary Couts Burnett Library www.ic.tcu.edu

The Information Commons computer lab is an open use lab available to all TCU students. Access is first come, first served, with the exception of four multimedia stations that can be reserved for use at specific times if requested. Assistance is available from the Information Commons desk staff during all open hours, with additional support from either the full-time Computer Services Librarian or the full-time Computer Lab Assistant during most hours.

TCU Computer Help Desk Mary Couts Burnett Library www.help.tcu.edu 817-257-5855 The Help Desk provides support for TCU related computing accounts and services.

Mary Couts Burnett Library www.lib.tcu.edu reference@tcu.edu 817-257-7117

The Library provides resources and services for the research and information needs of the TCU community.

TCU Information

TCU Disability Statement

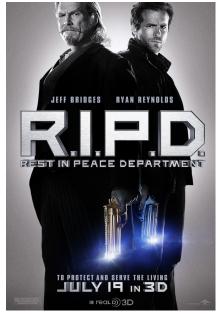
Texas Christian University complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 regarding students with disabilities. Eligible students seeking accommodations should contact the Coordinator of Student Disabilities Services in the Center for Academic Services located in Sadler Hall, 11. Accommodations are not retroactive, therefore, students should contact the Coordinator as soon as possible in the term for which they are seeking accommodations.

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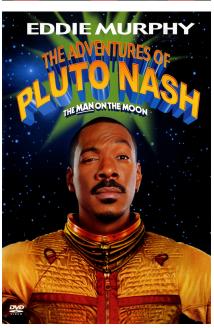


"Rather than focusing on 'great' or 'successful' speech, those seeking to analyze discursive limits would focus as well, if not more, on dramatically 'failed' discourse, precisely because dramatically rejected speech signals a transgression of ideational limits."

—M. Lane Bruner "Rhetorical Criticism as Limit Work"







Further information can be obtained from the Center for Academic Services, TCU Box 297710, Fort Worth, TX 76129, or at (817) 257-7486.

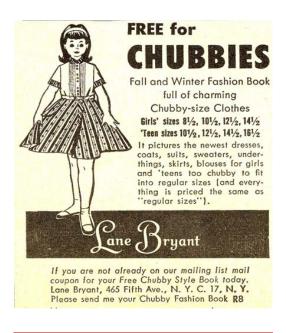
Adequate time must be allowed to arrange accommodations and accommodations are not retroactive; therefore, students should contact the Coordinator as soon as possible in the academic term for which they are seeking accommodations. Each eligible student is responsible for presenting relevant, verifiable, professional documentation and/or assessment reports to the Coordinator. Guidelines for documentation may be found at http://www.acs.tcu.edu/disability_documentation.asp

Students with emergency medical information or needing special arrangements in case a building must be evacuated should discuss this information with their instructor/professor as soon as possible.

Academic Misconduct (Sec. 3.4 from the Student Handbook)

Any act that violates the academic integrity of the institution is considered academic misconduct. The procedures used to resolve suspected acts of academic misconduct are available in the offices of Academic Deans and the Office of Campus Life. Specific examples include, but are not limited to:

- <u>Cheating</u>: Copying from another student's test paper, laboratory report, other report, or computer files and listings; Using, during any academic exercise, material and/or devices not authorized by the person in charge of the test; Collaborating with or seeking aid from another student during a test or laboratory without permission; Knowingly using, buying, selling, stealing, transporting, or soliciting in its entirety or in part, the contents of a test or other assignment unauthorized for release; Substituting for another student or permitting another student to substitute for oneself;
- <u>Plagiarism</u>: The appropriation, theft, purchase or obtaining by any means another's work, and the unacknowledged submission or incorporation of that work as one's own offered for credit. Appropriation includes the quoting or paraphrasing of another's work without giving credit therefore.
- <u>Collusion</u>: The unauthorized collaboration with another in preparing work offered for credit.



<u>unit one</u>

what is "failure"?

SYLLABUS NOTE:

Items listed in ORANGE are to be completed prior to class on this date.

are submission deadlines for Core Assignments.

week one

Tuesday, Jan. 14

Introductions / Syllabus Overview / Rhetoric's "Four Failures"

Thursday, Jan. 16

The Rhetorical Retort / Introduction to Logos, Pathos, Ethos Finish Reading Chp. 1 of RUG (pp. 8-32) View "Everyday Rhetoric" Essay #1 Assignment Sheet

week two

Tuesday, Jan. 21

The Rhetorical Situation, Pt. 1 / Discuss & Brainstorm FSA Essay Read Bitzer's "The Rhetorical Situation" (PLS)
View Failed Speech Analysis (FSA) Assignment Sheet

Thursday, Jan. 23

The Rhetorical Situation, Pt. 2 / Workshop FSA Topics
Read Chp. 3 of RUG (pp. 82-101—<u>SKIP</u> "Sidebar" Sections)
Bring Two FSA Topic Ideas to Class (Paper Copy)

week three

E.R. Essay #1 Due by MON, Jan. 27 @ 11:59PM

Tuesday, Jan. 28

Advertising as Argument / Locating & Evaluating Sources Read "10 Massive Ad Campaign Failures" (PLS)

Thursday, Jan. 30

What about AUDIENCE? / Discuss Sources in Small Groups Read "Why Inaugural Speeches Mostly Fail" (PLS) Annotated List of Five Research Sources (Paper Copy)

week four

Tuesday, Feb. 4

Discuss E.R. #1 Essays / Integrating Research & Personal Voice Read "How To" Guides for Integrating Research (PLS)

Thursday, Feb. 6

Peer Workshop: Failed Speech Analysis / The Revision Process Bring First Draft of FSA Essay to Class (Paper Copy)

week five

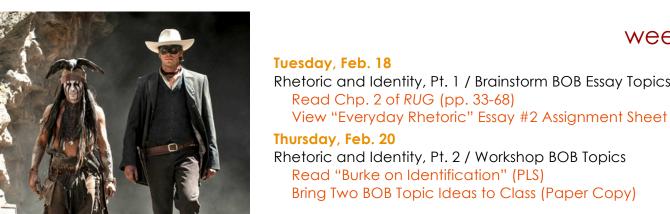
Tuesday, Feb. 11

Explaining Rhetorical Failure / Mr. Jesse's "Fab Fifteen" Read Chp. 3 of RUG (pp. 69-82)

Failed Speech Analysis Due by WED, Feb. 12 @ 11:59PM

Thursday, Feb. 13

Self-Evaluation: Your FSA Writing Process / Introduction to the "Box Office Bomb" (BOB) Assignment View BOB Assignment Sheet



unit two

the #epicfail in popular culture

week six

Rhetoric and Identity, Pt. 1 / Brainstorm BOB Essay Topics

Bring Two BOB Topic Ideas to Class (Paper Copy)

week seven

E.R. Essay #2 Due by MON, Feb. 24 @ 11:59PM

Tuesday, Feb. 25

Burke's "Corporate We" / Locating Sources for the BOB Essay Read Burke's "Identity, Identification" (PLS) Read "Reconsidering Box Office Bombs" (PLS)

Thursday, Feb. 27

Interpreting Rhetorical Choices, Pt. 1 / Intro to Visual Rhetoric Read Chp. 5 of RUG (pp. 134-48) Bring One Example of a Movie Promotional Poster to Class

week eight

Tuesday, Mar. 4

Interpreting Rhetorical Choices, Pt. 2 / MS Word Tutorial: Integrating Images Finish Reading Chp. 5 of RUG (pp. 148-72)

Thursday, Mar. 6

Ways of Reading: Film = Text = Language / Sample Film Analyses / Midterm Course Evaluations Read Theresa Enos's "Verbal Atom Cracking" (PLS) Read through "Writing about Film" Resources (PLS)

week nine

NO CLASS / SPRING BREAK

week ten

Tuesday, Mar. 18

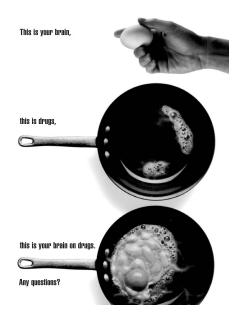
Peer Workshop: Box Office Bomb Argument Bring First Draft of BOB Essay to Class (Paper Copy)

Box Office Bomb Essay Due by WED, Mar. 19 @ 11:59PM

Thursday, Mar. 20

Self-Evaluation: Your BOB Writing Process / Introduction to the "Public Dis-Service Announcement" (PDSA) Assignment View PDSA Assignment Sheet

Revised FSA Essay Due by FRI, Mar. 21 @ 11:59PM



unit three

failure by design

Final Exam Presentations

Date = TBD

Time = TBD

week eleven

Tuesday, Mar. 25

What is "Epideictic Rhetoric"? / Assign PDSA Groups Read "Perelman on Epideictic Rhetoric" (PLS) View "Everyday Rhetoric" Essay #3 Assignment Sheet

Thursday, Mar. 27

The Logic of Toulmin Modeling / PDSA Group Brainstorming Read Chp. 4 of RUG (pp.102-33—SKIP "Sidebar" Sections)

week twelve

E.R. Essay #3 Due by MON, Mar. 31 @ 11:59PM

Tuesday, Apr. 1

Rogerian Approaches to Argument / "Glitch Art" as Rhetoric Read "Young, Becker, & Pike on Rogerian Argument" (PLS) Read Anne Wysocki's "awaywithwords" (PLS)

Thursday, Apr. 3

Conventions for Effective PSAs / Workshop PDSA Proposals One-Page Proposal for PDSA Assignment (Paper Copy)

week thirteen

Tuesday, Apr. 8

Rhetoric in the "Real World," Pt. 1 / Rhetorical Choices in Film Read Chp. 6 of *RUG* (pp. 173-93) Read Ian Bogost's "Review of *I Can End Deportation*" (PLS)

Thursday, Apr. 10

Rhetoric in the "Real World," Pt. 2 / Perspective by Incongruity Finish Chp. 6 of *RUG* (pp. 193-211)

Read Excerpt from Kenneth Goldsmith's *Traffic* (PLS)

week fourteen

Tuesday, Apr. 15

PDSA Workday with Group Members * NMWS / Laptops OK*

Thursday, Apr. 17

PDSA Workday with Group Members * NMWS / Laptops OK*

week fifteen

Tuesday, Apr. 22

Presentation Overview / Evaluative Criteria / Which Rhetorical Choices are Worth Writing About?

Revised BOB Essay Due by WED, Apr. 23 @ 11:59PM

Thursday, Apr. 24

Peer Workshop: Public Dis-Service Announcement Bring First Draft of PDSA Essay to Class (Paper Copy)

week sixteen

Tuesday, Apr. 29

Final Q&A for PDSA Assignment / Movie "Pre-Screening" Event *PDSA Essay Due by WED, Apr. 30 @ 11:59PM*