Audience Theory in Composition

Overview: In this class we will investigate the following questions: What does audience mean when contemporary Compositionists use the term? How do their uses of the concept vary? This course is designed to give an overview of the ways critics within the field of composition have conceptualized audience. This course seeks to give a contemporary view of the concept, including (1) the Bitzer-Vatz debate of the late 1960s, (2) the conversation surrounding Ede and Lunsford’s “Audience Addressed/Audience Invoked,” (3) scholarship about publics, and (4) research on digital concepts of audience. Some important questions to consider: How does “audience” change from author to author and why do these changes occur? What emerging trends can we map between different authors? What epistemological commitments do certain views of audience require? It is my hope that alongside these considerations, we ask ourselves ‘what view of audience do we hold?’

Course Goals:

• To consider, investigate, and question the way composition has viewed audience since 1968
• To understand the theoretical relationships between writers and audiences, as well as the way those relationships change
• To inquire into audience for the purposes of teaching the concept more effectively in a writing classroom
• To question our own assumptions about audience and be able to take multiple perspectives of audience into our professional contexts
• To be able to perform an audience analysis for the purpose of understanding a collegial audience, as well as the possibility of socialization into that audience

Requirements, Projects, and Assignments:

• Readings as per the schedule, including weekly discussion posts online (for use in class discussion). In these 500+ word posts, I expect you to draw connections between the readings for that week, as well as readings from past weeks. For class participation, I expect you to arrive with five discussion questions for the rest of the class. These questions may also be posted with your online responses.

• Seminar Facilitation for part of a class period (two times): lead approximately the first hour of one seminar session with a fellow classmate. It is your responsibility to present relevant, supplemental background information (outside research), to lead some activity, and to moderate some discussion time. Research beyond that week’s readings is expected and required. This research should be related to the week’s readings. A conference with me (both of you present) will be scheduled at least three days prior.

• Audience Analysis of a selected journal (due in Week 7; Maximum of 6 pages, single-spaced). The primary purpose of this project is to use one of the ways our readings have understood audience and apply that lens to a specific journal relevant to your particular interests. This project consists of the following:
✓ Read the past year of a publication in the journal (depending on frequency; you should read approximately four full issues) and create an annotated bibliography for each article. Please note that the readings for week six and seven are particularly light.
✓ Identify common themes in the journal and analyze each of these themes as to why the journal has decided each theme is relevant to its readership (about half a page for each them, with a maximum of four themes) *2 pgs
✓ A short reflection on the direction of the journal’s scholarship: Where might this journal be headed? What articles are frequently cited and why? Are there any blind spots in the journal’s scholarship, why or why not? What kinds of individuals comprise its audience? How might its audience shape the direction? *2 pgs
✓ How does this journal seem to understand audience? How does this understanding fit into our readings from this semester? Buttress your response with several assigned readings, as well your journal readings. *2 pgs

• Seminar Project and Manuscript on a topic related to audience designed for a specific journal (preferably the one you chose for your audience analysis). For this project, I ask you to pursue a question related to the topic of audience, as approved by me. You are to develop your own ideas/position regarding this question. The resulting manuscript will be produced with the intent of publishing in that particular journal. You will draw on relevant scholarship to develop your thinking and contextualize your work in regards to the way the journal views its own audience. You are expected to generate a manuscript that is formatted (including length) according to the submission guidelines. Further, you should submit a second version of the manuscript that reflects the way it might appear as you imagine it published (it does not have to be perfect). Finally, you are also expected to write a short (3-5 page single spaced) reflection on the way your manuscript fits with the journal’s view of audience.

Weighting for Work for Grading:

Seminar project and manuscript: 50%
Audience Analysis: 25%
Facilitate Class Discussion: 20% (10% each)
General Participation, including online posting: 5%

Required Texts:
• Rosa Eberly’s Citizen Critics (2000)
• James Porter’s Audience and Rhetoric (1992)
• Mary Jo Reiff’s Approaches to Audience (2004)
• Kazys Varnelis’ Networked Publics (2012)
• Michael Warner’s Publics and Protopublics (2005)
• There are a number of articles available on e-reserves, electronically for download from the library, and my dropbox.
Tentative Schedule and Readings:

Week 1: The Rhetorical Audience

Week 2: “Address” and “Invoke”

Week 3: Revising/Critiquing “Address” and “Invoke”

Week 4: Towards the Social World of Audience—Discourse Communities

Week 5: Connecting Audience and Genre—The Work of Audience


Week 6: Mid-semester Prospectus (reading of journals)
1. Share prospectus for audience analysis with class (10 minute discussion of each)

Week 7: The Socialization of Students into Discourse Communities


4. Selected Journal analysis DUE and to be shared with the class

Week 8: Going Public
1. Update the Wikipedia page on “Audience” as a class


Week 9: Senses of Audience
1. Mary Jo Reiff’s *Approaches to Audience* (2004)

Week 10: Digital Audiences and Movement


Week 11: Going Public beyond the Classroom
1. Eberly’s *Citizen Critics*


Week 12: Audiences as Publics
1. Warner’s *Publics and Protopublics*. (especially chapters 1 and 2)

2. Preliminary discussion on manuscript ideas
Week 13: Going Public in the Classroom


2. **Individual conferences to discuss publication projects and analyses**