WRT 205/2012

Unit 2: Sources Matter

*“Rhetoric matters because rhetoric—which demands engagement with the living—is the process through which texts are not only produced but also understood to matter” (296).*

Rosa Eberly, “Rhetoric and the Anti-Logos Doughball: Teaching Deliberating Bodies the Practices

of Participatory Democracy”

*“It’s complicated [and perhaps futile] to talk about whom something is written* ***for****; the issue is what we* ***do*** *with it [emphasis added].”*

Prof. Margaret Himley, Syracuse Writing Program Fall Teaching Conference conversation, August 2010

*“Like all writers, intellectuals need to say something new and say it well. But unlike many other writers, what intellectuals have to say is bound up inextricably with the books we are reading, the movies we are watching, the music we are listening to, and the ideas of the people we are talking with. Our creativity thus has its roots in the work of others—in response, reuse, and rewriting” (2).*

Joe Harris, *Rewriting: How to Do Things with Texts*

In the quote above, Joe Harris claims that “intellectuals” [a category which includes you as an academic writer, as well as professional academic scholars] are always checking in with other writers, thinkers, and texts. We do so because *our* writing projects necessarily involve using and rewriting the words and ideas and perspectives of others. In unit 1, we practiced the moves necessary for critical summary, and began exploring our inquiry for the questions that you found most intriguing. In unit 2, which serves as the next step toward preparing to compose a full synthesis essay for unit 3, you’ll begin to create a more focused set of questions for your own research project, and conduct research that helps you begin to shape and develop your tentative focus. Your task will be to carefully choose the three secondary sources that you deem the most interesting or worthwhile to your developing research project out of all the research you’ll conduct, and to critically analyze these sources in relation to your developing research questions. All of this is in preparation for the synthesis you’ll write in unit 3, which will be your opportunity, as Harris puts it “to say something new and say it well.”

**Learning Outcomes for Unit 2:**

* **Students will evaluate the validity of their sources in the context of their research question.**
* **Students will read sources rhetorically…**
* **Students will practice and produce analysis…as a central component of researched writing.**

The research questions you generated at the end of unit 1 will guide you as you search for sources, but the sources you find will in turn impact your research focus; so be prepared to revise, refine, and narrow the questions—and ultimately to decide on *one* specific and precise question. As you develop the question you’ll examine for your project, be sure to consider the ways that primary research (a required part of the unit 3 synthesis) will be valuable: in what ways does your question allow for primary research?

Your unit 2 analysis will unfold in two ways: along the lines of your attention to the rhetorical features and the rhetorical impacts of your sources; and in terms of your budding sense of your own writing project—that is, what you want to achieve in your essay, why it matters, and what materials and methods you might employ.

The following questions will be helpful to consider as you develop your analysis essay, but remember that they are invention prompts, not a guide for structuring your essay:

**How does the rhetorical function of the sources intersect with the research question?**

• Why does your research question matter *now—*in this cultural and historical and personal moment? What is the exigence of the issue you are exploring, and how are your sources establishing exigence? [We will define “exigence” together in class.]

• What rhetorical approaches are you seeing in the sources you encounter, or are you becoming aware of through attending to your research question, that you value and want to make use of in your own writing? [We will examine a range of rhetorical approaches together in class.]

**What are you coming to understand about your own writing project?**

• What tensions (aka complexities or complications) do the sources you are reading reveal in relation to the research question you are exploring, and how do the tensions inspire further thinking on your part? In other words, how are the sources helping you *forward* your ideas about your research question? Working with flashpoints would be an excellent way to get at this issue. Pick flashpoints from the sources and interpret them—why and in what ways do these quotes or keywords or concepts matter in relation to your research question? In what ways might you put the quotes, keywords and concepts *to use*?

• What questions could primary research answer? How might primary research bring you closer to your subject, provide insight, intimacy and illumination that you couldn’t necessarily reach through engagement with secondary sources? [We will look together at the primary research of other scholars in order to develop a better understanding of this question]. Discuss an option for primary research specific to your research question.

**Expectations for the essay and the unit:**

I will expect you to engage closely and critically with your sources—specifically to use material from the sources as evidence for the claims you make. Toward that end we will spend time in class reviewing analytical strategies that you may or may not remember from WRT 105. You are essentially composing this essay for me in order to demonstrate your careful reading and rhetorical analysis of your selected sources and your growing awareness of the relationships between those sources and the research question. Your interpretive claims will be the places where your new thinking about the sources, about the research question, about your writing project, is evident.

In addition to the source analysis essay, you will also compose and submit a rhetorical précis for the three sources you have elected to work with. [I will teach you the format and the approach for a rhetorical précis in class.]

And finally, of the three sources you analyze in the essay at least one must be a scholarly source.

**The Nitty Gritty**

The Unit 2 Sources Matter essay should be 6 pages in length, no more than 12 pt. font, double-spaced, and formatted according to MLA guidelines. The essay should include a Works Cited page and an appropriate title. The rhetorical précis should be 2 pages. Both the essay and the précis are due on **[insert date]** and should be turned in **[during class or by email by a particular time]**. The essay will count as 20% of your final grade; the rhetorical précis will count as 10% of your final grade.