

The Rhetoric Of Beauty

Summer 2020 Course Syllabus

RHE 309K - 82114

Instructor: Sam Allan

Contact: samallan@utexas.edu

Office Hours: Wednesdays via Zoom, 12:00 PM to 3:00 PM CST, and by appointment

Asynchronous Canvas Webinar – <https://utexas.instructure.com/courses/1280961>

Technology

To take this course, please make sure that you have access to:

- Canvas, UT's course interface
- Zoom, the digital conference service
- A word processor that saves or converts files to .doc or .docx
- Stable internet to view images, stream videos, and join conferences

If you know that you will not have access to any of these resources, or if you are worried that your access is unreliable, please let me know.

About

"Beauty was not simply something to behold; it was something one could do." - Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*

Many people begin thinking about their relationship to beauty at a startlingly young age. From magazines, to billboards, to the hyper-aestheticized annals of Instagram, the beauty industry dazzles and accosts us, conditioning the way we see, value, and interact with each other and with ourselves. At times, the criteria for determining what it means to be *beautiful* can feel so absolute—in part, because it is so pervasive—that we forget the role we play in building, challenging, and reshaping that criteria to address the term's abuses. Negotiating the rhetoric of beauty can mean fighting injustice in the work place, raising our expectations for interpersonal relationships, and divorcing ourselves from the idea that how we look determines what we're worth. It can also open new pathways for creativity and fulfillment.

This course will explore the way our society constructs, upholds, resists, and markets beauty standards. In particular, it will focus on the complicated role of beauty in feminist discourse. Questions of interest might include: how does the pursuit of beauty empower and inspire us, and in what ways does it exert unwelcome pressure upon our lives? Does the beauty industry succeed in creating inclusive community spaces, and what happens when the rhetoric of self-care becomes commodified into a skin-care routine? In what ways might beauty assist in gendering our experiences with age, youth, and the passing of time? How are definitions of beauty conditioned by racism, classism, and gender essentialism, and what is being done to challenge these definitions? What should be?

Textbook

Glenn, Cheryl. *The New Harbrace Guide: Genres for Composing*. Cengage Learning, 2018 (available either in print or eBook form.)

All other materials will be provided on Canvas.

Goals

This is a rhetoric course with an emphasis on research, reading, and writing. We will discuss representations of beauty across a variety of mediums in order to:

1. **Analyze** a text's relationship to historical, political, and social contexts
2. Conduct original, credible **research** using UT library resources and online search engines
3. Develop a thoughtful writing **practice** through peer review and revision
4. Identify **rhetorical strategies** across a range of multimedia beauty-related texts
5. Form, present, and respond to well-researched opinions about a chosen topic that **contribute** to larger conversations about beauty
6. **Write** compelling analytical papers

Because there are so many topics related to beauty—and only five weeks of class—your research will play a crucial role in determining where we focus our efforts. It is my teaching philosophy that you have as much to teach me and each other as I (hope to) teach you. To build a dynamic environment, this class will use a curated selection of materials as a foundation for a collaborative research community, through which your own thoughts, discussions, and projects will direct many of the questions we tackle in our (online) classroom.

Assignments

We will proceed according to the following general timeline:

I. *Exploring Beauty*: In this unit, you will conduct provisional, independent research and produce the following:

- 4 Canvas discussion posts that respond to recorded course lectures and prompts
- 2 (1-2 page) journal entries that use textual and contextual analysis to think and pose questions about two sources of your choosing

II. *Analyzing Beauty*: In this unit, you will study rhetorical strategies and develop a personal writing practice to create a polished analysis of one source. You will produce:

- 4 Canvas discussion posts that respond to recorded course lectures and prompts
- 1 4-6 page rhetorical analysis about a source of your choosing
- 1 revision of that same analysis using peer review and instructor feedback

III. *Changing Beauty*: In our last unit, you will develop a research question about a concrete subtopic related to beauty and/or the beauty industry, and submit a final project that is well-researched, thought-provoking, and argumentative. You will produce:

- 2 Canvas discussion posts that respond to recorded course lectures and prompts
- 1 Annotated bibliography containing 4 sources, a relevant research question, and a project plan
- 1 Final project or paper that synthesizes your sources in the service of a unique thesis (can be a recorded presentation, written paper, or creative piece, upon approval)

Grading

The assignments listed above will figure into your overall grade according to the following percentages:

Discussion Posts – 10 (15%)
 Journal Entries – 2 (15%)
 Rhetorical Analysis Draft – 1 (10%)
 Peer Review – 1 (5%)
 Rhetorical Analysis Final – 1 (20%)
 Project Plan – 1 (15%)
 Final Project – 1 (20%)

Final grades will be determined on the following scale. Please note: To ensure fairness, all numbers are absolute, and will not be rounded up or down at any stage. For example, a B- will be inclusive of all scores of 80.0000 through 83.9999. The University does not recognize the grade of A+.

A=94-100	B=84-86	C=74-76	D=64-66
A-=90-93	B-=80-83	C-=70-73	D-=60-63
B+=87-89	C+=77-79	D+=67-69	F=0-59

If you would like to discuss a graded assignment, **please wait twenty-four hours before visiting me during office hours**, and make sure you read all feedback before that meeting. Know that I take grading very seriously and review scores very carefully before releasing them. I will always do my best to help you feel confident moving forward, but I will not change a grade unless I have made an uncontestable mistake. University policy prevents me from sharing information about your grade through email or email-linked canvas messages.

Late Work

Our five week semester leaves very little room for extensions. While I strongly recommend that you complete all major assignments on time to the best of your ability, I understand that following one's schedule doesn't always go according to plan. Students may submit late work with the understanding that a late assignment will be marked down by half a letter grade for each calendar day that it is late; for example, an A would become an A-. Assignments that are graded for completion (including online discussion posts) are not eligible for late submission.

Respect

"Difference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic."—Audre Lorde

Your ability to treat your fellow classmates with respect and investment in their thoughts is an important part of your collaborative learning grades (discussion posts and peer review.) Be respectful of your colleagues, and please feel free to speak with me if anything makes you feel uncomfortable, threatened, or ill-at-ease during the course term. There is zero tolerance for derogatory language or hateful conduct. In this class, we will not only practice persuasive argumentation, but also how to:

- Make a commitment to understand unfamiliar positions from the context or point of view of others
- Speak for yourself rather than for a group
- Practice tactful honesty; even if your opinion may differ from others, you never know who is thinking the same thing you are, or if your perspective is a learning opportunity for the class.

Furthermore, I am committed to respecting your personal identity. **Please let me know if you prefer a name or gender pronouns that are not listed on the university roster**, and I will be happy to use them.

Accessibility

I am committed to making all course materials as accessible as possible, and to working with you if there are aspects of this course that can be made more conducive to your learning. **Students for whom accommodations will enable them to succeed in the course should schedule a Zoom meeting with me or send me an email as soon as possible to discuss.** I recognize that not all disabilities are documented with SSD and remain committed to accommodating all disabilities and learning styles as best I can. Please note that I cannot offer accommodations retroactively, and students are required to give me substantial notice if they need accommodations for assignments (particularly if requesting an extension.)

Writing Flag Statement

This course carries the Writing Flag. Writing Flag courses are designed to give students experience with writing in an academic discipline. In this class, you can expect to write regularly during the semester, complete substantial writing projects, and receive feedback from your instructor to help you improve your writing. You will also have the opportunity to revise one or more assignments, and you may be asked to read and discuss your peers' work. You should therefore expect a substantial portion of your grade to come from your written work. Writing Flag classes meet the Core Communications objectives of Critical Thinking, Communication, Teamwork, and Personal Responsibility, established by the Texas High Education Coordinating Board.

CALENDAR

* HG is short for *Harbrace Guide*

I. EXPLORING BEAUTY

June 4 – June 5

Th 6/4 Introduction

View: Syllabus Overview

Post: Introduction videos

F 6/5 Contouring (Contextual Analysis)

Read: “La Grand Odalisque” (image) by Jean August Dominique Ingres, “Pretty” (spoken word) by Katie Makkai, and “Flawless” (music video) by Beyoncé

Post: Analyze a text

June 8 – June 12

M 6/8 Defining Rhetoric, Defining Beauty

View: Key Terms and Concepts Lecture

Post: Lecture exit question

T 6/9 Mapping a Controversy, Determining Credibility

View: Research Primer Lecture

Read: HG pg. 282 – 284, assorted optional articles (see lecture.)

Post: Lecture exit question

W 6/10 Optional Workshop: Library Search Tools, Scholarly Sources

Reference: HG pg. 294 – 302

Th&F 6/11-12 Required Zoom Conferences: Research Interests, Scheduling

Due 6/12: 2 Journal Entries

II. ANALYZING BEAUTY

June 15 – June 19

M 6/15 Buying Beauty: Beauty and Capitalism – *Motivation*

View: Buying Beauty Lecture

Read: *Housework and Housewives in American Advertising: Married to the Mop* (excerpt) by Jessamyn Neuhaus, and “The Age of Instagram Face” (article) by Jia Tolentino

Post: Lecture exit question

T 6/16 Beauty for Who? – *Audience*

View: Beauty and Audience Lecture

Read: HG pg. 10 – 12 and “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (essay) by Laura Mulvey

Post: Lecture exit question

W 6/17 Optional Workshop: Writing Strategies

Reference: HG pg. 238 – 249

Th 6/18 Decolonizing Beauty: Beauty and Race – *Genre and Medium*

View: Beauty and Race Lecture

Read: HG pg. 12-14, “The Oppositional Gaze” (essay) by bell hooks, and “The Racial Bias Built into Photography” (article) by Sarah Lewis

Post: Lecture exit question

F 6/19 Optional Zoom Conferences: Writing Process

Due 6/19: Analysis Into & Outline

June 22 – June 26

Choose from any topic this week (T through Th) in order to post. You must post once.

M 6/22 Peer Review and Revision Workshop (viewing required, attendance optional)

Read: HG pg. 250 – 253

T 6/23 Beauty and Age

Read: *Sunset Boulevard* (film) and “The Double Standard of Aging” (article) by Susan Sontag

Optional Response Post

W 6/24 Queering Beauty: Beauty and Gender Presentation

Read: *Beauty* (documentary) and (article) TBD

Optional Response Post

Due 6/24: Peer Review

Th 6/25 Is Beauty Talent? Pageants and Other Problems

Read: *Painted Babies, 12 Years Later* (documentary) “Dethroning Ms. America” (essay) by Roxane Gay, and “Homegrown Royalty: White Beauty Contests in the Rural South” (excerpt) by Blain Roberts

Optional Response Post

F 6/26 View: Optional Discussion Debrief

Due 6/27: Analysis Final Draft

III. Changing Beauty

June 29 – July 3

M 6/29 Making Beauty Inclusive and Other Calls to Action – *Positions*

View: Proposals Lecture

Read: HG pg. 132 –133; 137 – 138 and “Try” by Colbie Caillat (music video)

Post: Project 3 Progress

T 6/30 What is a Real Body? Beauty and Weight – *Proposals*

View: Real Body Lecture

Read: HG pg. 156 – 162, “Is The Body Positivity Movement Working?” (article) by Jes Baker, and “Adele’s Weight Loss is a Double-Bind” (article) by Scaachi Koul

W 7/1 Looking Well: Beauty and Wellness

View: Wellness Lecture

Read: “The Unhealthy Truth Behind ‘Wellness’ and ‘Clean Eating’” (article) by Ruby Tandoh

Th&F 7/2- 3 Required Zoom Conferences: Final Project Check-Ins

Due 7/3: Project Proposal

July 6 – July 9

M&T 7/6-7 Required Zoom Conferences: Planning Feedback

W 7/8 The Future of Beauty – *Conclusion*

View: Conclusions & Futures Lecture

Post: Looking back

Th 7/9 Showcase: Presentations

7/11 Due: Final Project

Department of Rhetoric & Writing

RHE Course Policies Statement, 2018-19

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Rhetoric & Writing has established this attendance policy for all RHE courses. Any questions or appeals concerning this policy must be made directly to the department Associate Chair. You are expected to have prepared assigned reading and writing, and to participate in all in-class editing, revising, discussion, and conference sessions. If you find that an unavoidable problem prevents you from attending class, you should contact your instructor as soon as possible, preferably ahead of time, to let him or her know.

You will not be penalized for missing class on religious holy days. A student who misses classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day should inform the instructor, in writing, at least one week before the absence, so that alternative arrangements can be made to complete work. If you know you will have to miss class(es) for this reason, provide your instructor with the date(s) as early as possible. Please note that the University specifies very few other excused absences (e.g., jury duty).

If you must miss a class, you are responsible for getting notes and assignments from a classmate.

SCHOLASTIC HONESTY

Turning in work that is not your own, or any other form of scholastic dishonesty, will result in a major course penalty, possibly failure of the course. This standard applies to *all* drafts and assignments, and a report of the incident will be submitted to the Office of the Dean of Students and filed in your permanent UT record. Under certain circumstances, the Dean of Students will initiate proceedings to expel you from the University.

So, take care to read and understand the [*Statement on Scholastic Responsibility*](#), which can be found online at <http://www.utexas.edu/cola/depts/rhetoric/firstyearwriting/plagiarismcollusion.php>. If you have any doubts about your use of sources, ask your instructor for help *before* handing in the assignment.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Any student with a documented disability who requires academic accommodations should contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at 512-471-6259 (voice) or 1-866-329-3986 (video phone) as soon as possible to request an official letter outlining authorized accommodations. More information is available on the [Services for Students with Disabilities](#) website at <http://ddce.utexas.edu/disability/>

TITLE IX AND SENATE BILL 212

Beginning January 1, 2020, Texas Senate Bill 212 requires all employees of Texas universities, including faculty, report any information to the Title IX Office regarding sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking that is disclosed to them. Texas law requires that all employees who witness or receive any information of this type (including, but not limited to, writing assignments, class discussions, or one-on-one conversations) must be reported. If you would like to

speak with someone who can provide support or remedies without making an official report to the university, please email advocate@austin.utexas.edu. For more information about reporting options and resources, visit <http://www.titleix.utexas.edu/>, contact the Title IX Office via email at titleix@austin.utexas.edu, or call 512-471-0419. Although graduate teaching and research assistants are not subject to Texas Senate Bill 212, they are still mandatory reporters under Federal Title IX laws and are required to report a wide range of behaviors we refer to as sexual misconduct, including the types of sexual misconduct covered under Texas Senate Bill 212. The Title IX office has developed supportive ways to respond to a survivor and compiled campus resources to support survivors.

DEPARTMENT CLIMATE

At the Department of Rhetoric and Writing, we are unambiguous in our commitment to fostering a diverse, inclusive, and respectful professional and educational climate. For more information on our climate commitments, see the complete climate statement at <https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/rhetoric/about/mission.php>. If you have any questions or climate-related concerns, please contact the chair of the climate advisory committee: Professor Scott Graham (ssg@utexas.edu).

EMAIL ACCOUNTS

Email is an official means of communication at UT-Austin, and your instructor will use this medium to communicate class information. You are therefore required to obtain a UT email account and to check it daily. All students may claim an email address at no cost by going to the [IT Services](https://get.utmail.utexas.edu/) website at <https://get.utmail.utexas.edu/>.

EMERGENCY INFORMATION

Occupants of buildings on The University of Texas at Austin campus are required to evacuate buildings when a fire alarm is activated. Alarm activation or announcement requires exiting and assembling outside.

Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of each classroom and building you may occupy. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when entering the building. Students requiring assistance in evacuation shall inform their instructor in writing during the first week of class.

In the event of an evacuation, follow the instruction of faculty or class instructors. Do not re-enter a building unless given instructions by the following: The University of Texas at Austin Police Department, or Fire Prevention Services office.

Information regarding emergency evacuation routes and emergency procedures can be found on the [UT emergency page](http://www.utexas.edu/emergency) at <http://www.utexas.edu/emergency>

Other important Emergency Information

You can find more information about planning for emergencies on the [Emergency Preparedness site](http://www.utexas.edu/safety/preparedness/) at <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/preparedness/>

Behavior Concerns Advice Line: 512-232-5050

Use this resource to help fellow UT members about whom you have concerns. You can learn more about the [Behavior Concerns Advice Line](https://operations.utexas.edu/units/csas/bcal.php) on their site at <https://operations.utexas.edu/units/csas/bcal.php>

Questions about these policies

Questions about these policies should be addressed to:

Department of Rhetoric & Writing
The University of Texas at Austin
Parlin Hall, Room 3
rhetoric@uts.cc.utexas.edu
(512) 471-6109