

Rhetoric I — Fall 2007

Lees-McRae College
RHE 101-01 — MWF 9:30-10:20
North Carolina Building (NCB) 3

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“What can we gain by sailing to the moon if we are not able to cross the abyss that separates us from ourselves? This is the most important of all voyages of discovery, and without it, all the rest are not only useless, but disastrous...”

—Thomas Merton

Course Description

According to the Lees-McRae College *Catalogue* for 2007-2009, RHE 101, “Rhetoric I” is:

An intensive introduction to college-level critical reading/listening, written composition, and public speaking that emphasizes thesis, support, reasoning, and organization. This course begins to establish a skills foundation required for further development in designated writing-intensive and speaking-intensive courses. Students will investigate various processes of rhetorical analysis and also apply learned principles in written and oral assignments. When linked with FYE, this course’s activities and subject matter may draw upon readings and topics covered in that class. (150)

With this course, as with most others I teach, however, reading the *Catalogue* description of the course is the beginning of wisdom, not its full measure. We will complete a number of writing and speech assignments in this course, and they will involve critical reading and writing at the college level. You will be asked to come to understand the world around you, as in any other “Freshman Writing” course, and as you come to understand *yourself*.

So be ready to read (and in other ways interact with the world), to do research, and to speak and write—even if these activities seem different from what you’re used to and what you expected.

Required Texts & Materials

Texts:

Lester, James D, and James D. Lester, Jr. *The Essential Guide: Research Writing Across the Disciplines*. 3rd ed. New York: Longman, 2005.

Lucas, Stephen E. *The Art of Public Speaking*. 9th ed. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2007.

Reese, Erik. *Lost Mountain: A Year in the Vanishing Wilderness*. New York: Riverhead, 2006.

Materials/Connections:

Computer media for backup/storage of your work.

A folder for handing in work.

Course Policies

The Format of the Class. This course will operate in several basic modalities, and will migrate between these modes frequently and fluidly. On a regular basis—like nearly every class session—we will engage in discussion, lecture, and activities.

Lectures are necessary in order to get information from me to you. But I never lecture long, and I try to make my lectures as painless as possible. I will never talk at you for the entire 50 minutes; believe me, I know that 20 minutes can be bad enough.

Activities give you the opportunity to practice the concepts covered in the readings and lectures. These will usually also at least make an attempt at being fun. Some will be begun and completed in class, some will be begun in

class and finished as homework, and some will be entirely homework.

Discussions will allow us to talk about the material covered in readings and lectures and your experiences and results in the activities. You should be prepared to contribute actively to these discussions.

Attendance & Participation. Attendance at and active participation in all class sessions are mandatory and expected. Participating in activities and discussions is an important component of the course; please don’t miss these opportunities. You will be permitted to miss three (3) class sessions with

no ill effects. After the third absence, your final grade in the course will be lowered by an entire letter grade for each absence (e.g., from “A-” to “B-”). **Note:** If you must miss four or more classes due to as college-sanctioned activity (athletic, musical, etc), make arrangements with me ahead of time (if your co-curricular activities will cause three or fewer absences, *plan well*). I do not make any distinction between excused and unexcused absences.

Completing Work. In order to receive a passing grade in the course, all of the major projects (four essays, four speeches) listed below must be completed. Regardless of the weight assigned to a project component in the final course grade, failure to complete any project will result in a failing grade for the course. Under *only* the most extreme circumstances, the grade of I [incomplete] will be considered.

Late Work. Turning in work late will severely impact your final grade in the course. All work should be turned in on deadline. Grades on any work not completed and submitted on time will be lowered by *one full letter grade* (e.g., from *A* to *B* for each week-day—not *class session, day*—late (Saturday and Sunday don’t count).

Drafting. Part of any capable writer’s process is drafting. You will get in the habit of drafting your work well ahead of time in this course. You will also be required to get feedback on these drafts from your peers and from me, meeting in pairs or small groups with your peers and individually with me.

Sakai. All course materials will be distributed in class, but will also be available through Lees-McRae’s Sakai Course Management System. You should know how to log in to Sakai and gain proficiency in using it. Any course document you lose (like this syllabus) should be replaced through Sakai. If work is to be submitted through Sakai, work submitted after the beginning of class will be considered *late*. It may seem strange at first, but you will get used to it, and it is—in a lot of ways—the wave of the future. Also, please note that while we will be using Sakai, I *will not* be using the grading system on Blackboard: when I’ve used it in the past, it’s been more trouble than it’s worth. You can, likely, keep track of your own grades, and I can show you how to do this—several different ways—if you would like. We will discuss Sakai early in the course.

Mechanics. Many people have a phobia about writing and writing courses because they believe they are deficient in the mechanical areas of writing: grammar, spelling, punctuation, and usage. In many cases—especially for native speakers of the language being written—this is nonsense. You already know all the grammar you need to know. Spell-checkers and dictionaries are there to help with spelling. Punctuation is actually relatively straightforward when you don’t get hung up on linguists’ terminology. Dictionaries also help with usage. These elements of writing *are not* the

primary focus of this course, though they are important to clear and elegant writing. So some tips: use spell-check (but *not* grammar-check); proofread carefully for misspellings and typos; have others proofread for you; offer to help others proofread; understand the uses of the basic punctuation marks (period, comma, colon, semicolon, question mark, exclamation point, quotation marks, apostrophe); use a dictionary; if you use a thesaurus, also use a dictionary—every time; do not be afraid to ask for help. I will be happy to help you, but remember I am not your proofreader; my job is to help you be able to do these things for yourself, not to do them for you.

Academic Integrity and Intellectual Property. This is a course in writing, and it is a course in which you will be expected to integrate your ideas with those of others, to build on knowledge and information that others have previously put forth, and to generally use information and ideas not your own in your work. In order to do this, you must appropriately give credit for ideas where that credit is due; we will devote attention in class to doing just this. In short, you must respect the intellectual property of others and not claim their work as your own—to do otherwise leads to plagiarism and piracy of ideas and expression. Please take seriously the need for appropriate citation and documentation of source material; if you have questions about how to do these things, ask them. While this course focuses more on learning how to appropriately cite and document sources than on “catching” plagiarists or pirates, you should know that academic dishonesty, especially in the form of plagiarism, is taken seriously in the academy, and can have a range of consequences: failure of an assignment, failure of a course, academic probation, suspension from an institution, and dismissal from an institution. Please take your responsibility to the intellectual property of others and for your own academic integrity seriously.

According to the Lees-McRae College *Student Handbook*, “Lees-McRae College fosters a spirit of complete honesty and a high standard of integrity. All students are expected to act in a manner that does not infringe upon the rights and responsibilities of others, including the right to learn and prosper in a campus community free from fraudulence and dishonesty; every student has the responsibility to help maintain such a campus community. The attempt of any student to present as his/her work that which they have not honestly performed is regarded by the faculty and administration as a most serious offense and renders the offender liable to severe consequences and possible suspension” (7).

For further discussion of Lees-McRae College’s Academic Integrity policy, including definitions of the actions covered by the policies, the consequences of those actions, and the procedures governing implementation of the policy, please see pages 7-9 of the Lees-McRae College *Student Handbook*.

Spell-Check. Spell-check is *not* infallible. It doesn't know the difference between *there*, *their*, and *they're* or between *here* and *hear*; to be honest, it can't tell whether you mean *to get her* or *together*. Spell checkers are good: they'll tell you when you've put too many *cs* in "necessary" (which is incorrect). But don't just take their word for it—whatever "it" is. If you can't figure out what the correct spelling is, use a dictionary to verify your spell-check's suggestions : it may have several and only one is both correctly spelled *and* the word you want. Remember, too, that spell-checkers can only account for words that are misspelled: they can't help you with homophones (*their/there/they're*) or with words that are often confused, such as *imply* and *infer* or *compose* and *comprise*. So, to close: Dictionary, Dictionary, Dictionary!

People-Friendly Environment. Guess what—we're grown-ups. And we're expected to act like it. In this class, and when working on projects for this class(, and in life in general!), treat other people like you want to be treated. In practical terms, that means discuss things rationally, even when you disagree; it means that while some ideas are better than others (have more merit, are more practical, will produce a better product), and while some ideas will ultimately be rejected, there are no "stupid" or "lame" ideas. And there are no "stupid" people here, either—everyone here is in college, and that means *something*. Belittling people, their ideas, their identity, or their beliefs will not be tolerated in this class—*period*.

Statement on Assistance for Students with Disabilities. Lees-McRae College makes every attempt to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Therefore, reasonable arrangements will be made for any student with a documented disability. If you have a documented disability, you can make confidential arrangements through Tami Tressler-Blewitt, the Coordinator of Disability Services at Lees-McRae, to accommodate your disability. If a student with a documented disability wishes to request accommodation, they must inform their instructor of that disability and must meet with the Coordinator of Disability Services at Lees-McRae prior to receiving any assistance or accommodations. Students with disabilities should make an appointment to meet with Ms. Tressler-Blewitt as soon as possible to complete the necessary paperwork and to develop an Individual Accommodation Plan. Ms. Tressler-Blewitt's office is in the Burton Center for Student Success and she can be contacted at ext. 2561 or via e-mail at: tressler-blewitt@lmc.edu.

Other Policies. In addition to these explicitly stated policies, this course will be governed by the policies laid out in the Lees-McRae College *Student Handbook*, and other college policies governing student conduct and the conduct of courses on the Lees-McRae campus.

Required Projects

There are eight (8) major projects for this course; four (4) essays and four (4) speeches. As stated above, each of these projects must be completed in order to receive a passing grade in this course. Each of these projects will be explained in greater depth as we approach it later in the semester, but here is an overview of the major projects in this course to let you know what's coming.

- ◇ *Audience Analysis Essay* (10% of final grade). In this essay you will answer the question, "Why is *Lost Mountain* an appropriate summer reading text for a Lees-McRae student?" in terms of the identity, mission, and goals of the college. Due: September 14, 2007.
- ◇ *Identity Speech* (10% of final grade). In this speech, you will answer the question, "What does it mean to be a Lees-McRae College student?" in terms of the identity, mission, and goals of the college and your personal decision to attend Lees-McRae. Due: September 12 & 14, 2007.
- ◇ *Summary Essays* (12% of final grade). This assignment involves a series of essays in which you summarize the argument of *Lost Mountain*. Each essay in the series will ask you to further condense the main points (1000, 500, and 200 words). Due: October 3, 2007
- ◇ *Retelling a Familiar Story Speech* (10% of final grade). In this speech you will narrate a familiar story from our cultural canon. You will select your own story and will be expected to further familiarize yourself with the story. Due: October 3 & 5, 2007.
- ◇ *"One Hour in the Life" Essay* (13% of final grade). This essay asks you to report on your observation of a particular setting, scene, or event—an observation you conducted over the continuous span of one hour. Due: October 29, 2007
- ◇ *Process Presentation Speech* (10% of final grade). In this speech, you will give a brief demonstration of some process. This is a "how to" talk, and you will talk your audience through the process and demonstrate it. Due: October 24, 26, & 29, 2007.
- ◇ *Annotated Bibliography Essay* (15% of final grade). In this essay, you will present documentation of research you've begun on an academic project. You will summarize and evaluate a number of sources on that topic. Due: December 7, 2007.
- ◇ *"My Favorite" Speech* (10% of final grade). This speech asks you to identify your favorite *something* and analyze and evaluate that things as your favorite. Due December 5 & 7, 2007, and during the final exam period.

Other Course Requirements

In addition to the eight major projects for this course (which you have likely noticed total only 90% of the course grade), there are other requirements for successful completion of this course. These are listed, with some details, below; you will receive further instructions (with handouts) for these, in class, as appropriate.

- ◇ **Homework and Activities** (10% of course grade). There will be many occasions on which our classroom activities will spill over into out of class time, and other occasions on which you will be assigned homework. In these cases, your work will be collected and evaluated, along with your active participation in the in-class portion of any activities. The portion of your grade depending on these activities will be cumulative throughout the semester.
- ◇ **Attendance at Writing Conferences** (no formal weight; see following). For each major essay assignment, you will be required to attend a brief, in person writing conference with me. We will discuss your work in progress and my suggestions and your ideas for improving it. For each day of individual conferences, I will cancel one day of class. Conferences will be scheduled throughout that day (and surrounding days), by appointment. Failure to sign-up for an appointment, or failure to keep that appointment, will count as **two (2)** class absences. Missing a conference will quickly impact your final course grade: drastically and negatively.
- ◇ **Preparation for Writing Conferences** (no formal weight; see following). During each essay project, in addition to attending an individual writing conference with me, you must be prepared for that conference. This means: 1) having completed a first draft of the essay; 2) having received guided feedback from at least one peer *in the class* on that early draft; 3) having revised the draft in response to the feedback you received; and 4) having presented your first draft, your peer’s written feedback, and your revised draft to me by the draft due date (on the course calendar for each assignment). We will work on the drafting and feedback process in class. Failure to be prepared as detailed above will count as missing the conference.

Other Notes

Remember, this RHE 101 section is paired with a section of SSC 121, “First-Year Experience.” These two courses will coordinate efforts on a number of assignments.

Dr. Kapper’s office hours for the Fall 2007 Semester are: Monday, Wednesday, and Friday 2:00 to 3:00 pm; Tuesday and Thursday 9:30 to 11:30 am; other appointments outside of these times can be arranged.

Grading

The subject of grades is always a delicate one. Students want good grades, and—though it may not always seem so— instructors want to give good grades. Grades, after all, reflect the quality of student work, and they are also often taken to reflect the quality of instruction. Everyone would be happiest if every student could earn an A in every course.

You may have heard, too, that instructors and administrators are concerned with “grade inflation,” a perennial worry in the college setting which can take two forms: either the grades awarded in the course are too high in relation to the quality of the work completed, or the course is so easy that every student can turn in a stellar performance in the course. In either case, these high grades mean little—even less than a grade as a measure of performance should be taken to mean. But you may also have heard (or more likely *overheard*) instructors complaining about a sense of “entitlement” to high grades among students: some instructors feel that some students believe their tuition dollars entitle them to a “good grade”—and it’s not really hard to see why when many instructors have had at least one student say, to their faces, “I pay your salary”; after all, the retail adage tells us, “the customer is always right.”

For me, and for this class, however, the biggest issue with grades comes down to a fundamental misunderstanding of what grades are, how they function, and their purpose in the educational setting. Grades lower than *A* are not punishment. I do not believe that every student starts with an A in every course, or on every assignment, and goes down from there when s/he “does something wrong.” When I give an objective exam, for instance, I do not keep track of how many points to *deduct* from the total possible points ($-8 = 92/100 = A-$); rather, I keep track of how many points the student has earned through correct answers ($+92 = A-$). Grades in my courses are related to students’ *accomplishments*, not their failings. My

grading strategies are meant to make grades into reinforcement, not punishment; I want to focus attention at all times on what students have done *right*, not on what they have “done wrong”; I want students to realize that an A- (or a B+, B, B-, or C+) is a grade they can be proud of.

Of course, with more subjective assignments (essays and the like), this can be trickier. It is tricky because subjective assignments come with a set of guidelines and a plethora of possible strategies for fulfilling the assignment. The question then becomes one of where those guidelines set the bar: do they establish the bare minimum for a passing grade? do they describe what an *A* paper will do? do they establish an “average” performance that will earn a student a *C*? When this is unclear, one of the commonest mistakes that students make is to assume that the guidelines are for an *A* paper: that meeting the guidelines will guarantee them an *A*, leading back to the question of “what did I do wrong?” when the instructor issues a B+ or a C for a paper that meets all of the assignment guidelines.

When making these subjective assignments in this course, I promise that—at the very least—I will tell you where the bar is set. When you receive the guidelines, you will know what grade you will earn by meeting those guidelines. I will also make every effort to let you know how exceeding (or failing to meet) those guidelines will impact the grade you will earn on the project. While I will be more specific with each assignment, know that, in general, I apply the following understanding of letter grades:

A	Outstanding work; work of the highest quality receives this grade
A-, B+	Well above average work
B, B-, C+	Above average work
C	Average work; the assignment guidelines will generally set the bar here
C-, D+	Work slightly below average; adequate but not up to expectations
D, D-	Below average work; only marginally adequate to the task
F	Severely below average or incomplete work; inadequate to the task

Please do not expect that assignment guidelines will tell you what you must do to earn each grade (“if you want a B+, do this...”); instead, expect that they will tell you what the general expectations are, what grade you will earn by meeting those expectations, and the ways in which exceeding or not meeting those expectations may impact the grade you earn.

Finally, please note that I have been careful throughout to refer to “the grade you earn” rather than “the grade you get” or “the grade I give.” You will earn your grades in this course; it’s true that I will *assess* your work and *assign* those grades, but my primary goal in this course is to help you *earn* a grade that you and I can both be proud of.

And, again, if I can help you figure out the calculation of your grade, please don’t hesitate to ask; I don’t want the process to be a mystery to you, and I am more than happy to help!

I will calculate your grades as though they constituted a grade point average: multiplying the weight of each project by the numerical representation of the grade, summing these products, dividing by 100, and converting the result back into a letter grade. It’s not as complicated as it sounds. I will use these values as numerical representations of letter grades on projects:

A = 4.0	A- = 3.7	B+ = 3.3	B = 3.0	B- = 2.7	C+ = 2.3
C = 2.0	C- = 1.7	D+ = 1.3	D = 1.0	D- = 0.7	F = 0.0

When converting grade averages back to letter grades, I will use these ranges:

3.65-4.00 = A	3.45-3.64 = A-	3.15-3.44 = B+	2.85-3.14 = B	2.50-2.84 = B-	2.15-2.49 = C+
1.85-2.14 = C	1.50-1.84 = C-	1.15-1.49 = D+	0.85-1.14 = D	0.00-0.84 = F	

Note that I *do not* issue the grade of D- as a final course grade.

Please note that in addition to the grading strategies I have discussed here, I will be using the rubric for the evaluation of writing approved for use on the campus of Lees-McRae College in evaluating your work. Remember, too, that the assessment of writing and speech is much more qualitative than quantitative, and that I will provide feedback—at the very least in our conference meetings—on your work in progress.