REVISIONS ASSIGNMENT SEQUENCE

Create the Future: Large-scale Advocacy and the Shaping and Furthering of Ideas

ASSIGNMENT SEQUENCE GOALS
This assignment encourages students to:

- Learn a rhetorical process for analyzing and producing texts
- Understand how audience and purpose shape effective communication
- Analyze and produce a range of (mixed) written, visual, and oral texts in a range of genres
- Learn how processes of reflection and invention are useful in developing communication
- Acquire extensive practice in revising written, visual, and oral communication
- Work both alone and collaboratively in learning and communicating
- Discuss and analyze the ethical implications of a communicator’s choices in a text
- Recognize that our communication choices are effective only when we understand how different audiences interpret texts, whether those audiences are local or global

WHEN TO USE THIS ASSIGNMENT
This is designed as an assignment that comes late in the semester, or at least after students have developed a sense of rhetoric and its clustering terms.
This assignment takes 7 weeks to develop and carry out.

WHAT STUDENTS MAKE
- A response to “Higher Education”
- A reflection/rhetorical analysis of a particular problem that is currently hampering humankind or a specific cross-section of it. The analysis will demand research as historical context will need to be uncovered.
- Based on the reflection/rhetorical analysis, students provide a way to tackle the problem by developing four separate ways of spreading the word to audience: an audio PSA-type announcement, a visual argument, an op-ed piece, and a substantial multimedia campaign that includes, among other genres, a set of instructions.
- User-testing and revision of documents
- Rhetorical reflection about design and ethical choices
- Students present their plans to the class in a multimedia presentation.

The pitch that seeks to attract students to Michigan Tech is “Our students create the future.” This assignment gives students the chance to develop what they have thus far learned in the course and apply it to create the future in an area where the future, based on present view, looks bleak. In other words, students will attempt to address a problematic area that affects a wide swath of humanity and they can draw on their Michigan Tech education thus far to show how they would indeed create a positive future within the problematic realm.

THE ASSIGNMENT SEQUENCE ITSELF

WEEK 1

HOMEWORK
Read “Higher Education” in cda and write up a response that addresses whether the author thinks a problem was solved—and how.

IN-CLASS
Discuss “Higher Education” as a description of how one community changed, looking also at the writer’s rhetorical choices in moving his audience. Use this as an introduction that shows students some of the disparities that exist locally, nationally, and globally and how others have addressed
the problems. Get students to brainstorm a list of what they consider the biggest problems facing
the world both now and in the future.

HOMEWORK
Have students choose one of the problems from the class-generated list and find 2-3 short sources
that discuss the problem. They write short individual reflections about what they currently know
about the problem, what more they need to learn about it, how they can further research it, and
(given whatever they know now) how they believe it should be solved.

IN-CLASS
Discussion: How much give-and-take is necessary to solve a problem? How bendable (or
intractable) can an audience be and how does that shape communication that attempts to solve
their problems? Small Groups: Share definitions of problems and solutions from the writing
of the previous class. Come up with a list of terms that will surface when communication from
“outsiders” attempts to solve the problems of “insiders.”

HOMEWORK
Read pp. 371-378 in cda about the Black Triangle. They are also to find 2, longer, sources writing
about the problem they have chosen and to write short summaries of those sources.

WEEK 2

IN-CLASS
Discussion: When should the line be drawn on something that is ostensibly helping people while
also harming them (such as when the coal from the Black Triangle was used for heat at the same
time it caused so much ecological and health damage)? How much does technology figure into
our problems and when should new technology be stressed at all costs over old technology? How
do we ethically denote responsibility (and apathy) in our society?

HOMEWORK
Further analysis of the problem that the students wrote about in week 1: given the discussions
of this week, how have their senses of what is possible — and what is rhetorically necessary
— changed for solving the problem? They perform research on the problem, based on your sene
of how to help them focus.

IN-CLASS
Discuss: Students provide brief overviews of the problems they’ve been writing about and
contexts to class. Students form collaborative groups to provide teams for user-testing and
possibly team up for topics as well. Move into discussion of audio and look/listen to examples
from the cda website.

HOMEWORK
Read Chapter 8 of cda and develop design plan for a 60-second audio PSA on the problem on
which they are focusing.

WEEK 3

IN-CLASS
Discussion: Ethos, logos, and pathos in audio. Listen to more clips in class and determine the
strategies and also discuss the various personas the audience is intended to inhabit by the speaker.
Wed some of the audio to visual counterparts to get students to see the different genres but how
they are tied together in purpose.
Small-group feedback to design plans.

HOMEWORK
Initial draft of sixty-second PSA.

IN-CLASS
Small groups listen to and give feedback to drafts of PSAs. Individuals write revision plans for
their PSAs.

HOMEWORK
Revise/finish PSAs according to feedback.
WEEK 4

IN-CLASS
Listen and respond to PSAs.

Discussion: Segue to visual part of the problem and look at various posters. How are the audience expectations similar yet different? How can we be sure not to make audiences feel helpless or hopeless while raising awareness and seeking to solve the problem? How do we resist perpetuating (or creating) stereotypes?

HOMEWORK
Read Chapter 10 and 324-326 of cda about the horror movie posters.

IN-CLASS
Discussion of chapter 10 and the writing on horror movies. In small groups, develop design plans for a poster or similar genre that ties to the problems on which they’ve been working.

HOMEWORK
Produce the poster.

WEEK 5

IN-CLASS
Feedback to posters. Discuss how posters and short PSAs differ, in terms of the kinds of arguments that are possible. What range of emotions and thinking can be addressed with the different approaches? When would they use one or the other? Who is most likely to be reached by these different approaches? Raise questions now about how longer written pieces will probably compare.

HOMEWORK
Read Chapter 13 of cda; they should find, and bring to class, what they feel is an effective editorial or op-ed piece.

IN-CLASS
Discuss the genre and its impact today. What are the different burdens on users from the PSA, the poster, and the op-ed piece? Are they all equally as effective if all things are relative? Workshop: Bring in examples of famous campaigns meant to instill national movements from various cultures. Show some historical ones from USA and examine what needs to be tweaked for current audiences and what would probably need to be tweaked for future audiences. Small Groups and Discussion: What are some effective campaigns they have witnessed that have sought great change and created it in them? What are the qualities of an effective campaign and what qualities are embedded in negative ones? What were the strategies (positive and negative) orally and visually? How could they work together?

HOMEWORK
Read Chapter 12 of cda on analyzing instruction sets.

WEEK 6

IN-CLASS
Discussion of chapter 12 and development of preliminary design plans for instruction sets.

HOMEWORK
Draft of instruction set and multimodal documents to be used in the field. Meet with groups to discuss revisions to documents.

IN-CLASS
Feedback to drafts; revision plans.

HOMEWORK
Revisions to instructions based on feedback and reflection.

WEEK 7

Peer review and additional user testing on people outside of the classroom. Presentations of work and debate on the project that would have the biggest positive future impact. Due: Revised versions of all documents.