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Department of Rhetoric and Writing Studies Newsletter

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John Gage Delivers Language in Action Lecture



Professor John Gage

John Gage, Professor of English at the University of Oregon, delivered DRWS' third annual "Language in Action" lecture on October 19, 2005. The department welcomed Gage back as a returning faculty member. He had served in DRWS as Distinguished Visiting Professor in 1994-95, working with then-chair Carol Sweedler-Brown and the faculty to chart the course for our new department.

Gage's topic was "The Pursuit of Rhetorical Virtue," and he posed the question, "what is going on when people argue ethically?" Noting that rhetoricians can offer much good advice about what argument strategies will be effective in particular situations, he also asked us to consider what we might be able to say about which kinds of ar-

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Department Acquires Book Collection

I have two developments to bring to your attention in this final issue of 2005.

First, there's the matter of the dolly.

Many of you who have seen me pushing large stacks of mysterious boxes through the department recently have commented on the surprising variety of tasks that seem to be included in the chair's job description. This particular labor, though, has been entirely pleasurable, if unconventional. Many of you remember Don Bush, a popular lecturer who taught technical writing for the department in the 1990s and early 2000s. Having made the decision to move to Albuquerque, Don determined that the time was right to give away his large collection of books on technical writing, linguistics, and rhetoric; and he chose our department for his donation. On behalf of the department, I was delighted to accept the library, and I quickly got to work moving it from his Del Cerro basement to the third floor of the Extended Studies Center. Most of the 48 boxes

of books are currently being stored in the office occupied by Mary Gardella. As soon as it is convenient, we'll install shelving and develop a check-out system so that interested faculty and graduate students can enjoy the collection. The remaining volumes, which are rare eighteenth- and nineteenth-century books, will reside in my office for the time being. These, as well, will be available to our faculty and graduate students.

A lifetime bibliophile who has collected with passion and skill, Don is particularly fond of dictionaries and books on grammar, so you'll find this collection to be especially rich in these areas. There are many other delights to be encountered in this library, though, including many original volumes of *The Gentleman's Magazine*, the famous eighteenth-century periodical that published articles by Samuel Johnson and other luminaries of the age. As soon as the collection is ready, I encourage you to peruse it.

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Spring Nonprofit Writing Course will Host Guest Lecturers

This spring, the Department of Rhetoric and Writing Studies will offer RWS 507, Technical Communication in Nonprofit Organizations. This year's class will meet on Tuesday evenings from 7:00-9:40, and is open to all graduate, advanced undergraduate and Open University students.

Members of the class research, choose and partner with a local nonprofit organization (NPO) to create typical documents like mission statements, organization resumes, material associated with capital campaigns, etc. They work closely with the San Diego Foundation downtown to identify and research organizations dedicated to regional issues such as homelessness, affordable housing, social services, education and the environment.

The course focuses on the rhetorical challenges of grant proposal writing; as a final project, students research and write a winnable grant proposal for the nonprofit with whom they partner. Typically, students immerse themselves in their organizations: they absorb its mission, work with its clients, participate in its events, and then write effective, targeted proposals to an appropriate funder.

Students also link academic rhetoric to practical documents and genres, specifically addressing how canons and appeals can make

"storytelling" in grant proposals stronger. Two texts—one theoretical, one based on workshops—support the lectures and presentations, and sections of Crowley and Hawhee's excellent *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students* supplement these resources. Last semester students exchanged ideas on a course blog (npogo.blogspot.com), which became a great vehicle to connect reading and practice.

The first hour of each class period is dedicated to discussing a current issue addressed by local and international NPOs. This year's course highlights organizations in the Mid-City/City Heights area. San Diego State has committed significant resources to this neighborhood, and as one of only six areas nationwide designated by the State Department as a Refugee Resettlement Zone, its population relies on nonprofits a great deal.

Last spring, students wrote grant proposals for San Diego's Harborside School, Voices for Children, the San Diego Humane Society, AngleCare Children's Aid International, the San Diego Public Defender's Homeless Court Program, Oaks and Acorns Intergenerational Learning, Athletes for Education, the Cabrillo Foundation, the Serudj Institute and the San Diego Interfaith Alliance, among others.

Each class member supplemented the written component with a brief standalone PowerPoint presentation for the organization. This year, as last, representatives from local nonprofit organizations and other community members will be invited to these presentations.

Students in the course have direct and candid access to some of the most important community leaders in the nonprofit sector. Guest lecturers, including local and national experts in their fields, begin presenting the second week of class. All address crucial issues involved in writing successful proposals.

RWS 507 Speaker List

Theresa Bagg, Director of Resource Development, La Maestra Community Health Center, City Heights

Steve Binder, Founder and Lead Attorney, San Diego Public Defender's Homeless Court Program

Elena Cruz, Office of Refugee Resettlement/Workforce Development Program, La Maestra Community Health Center, City Heights

Christina Cundiff, Program Coordinator, Mi Esperanza City Center, Tegucigalpa,

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Papers, Etc.

Liane Bryson was awarded a \$20,000.00 grant through the Sweetwater Union High School District for which she is the principal Investigator. The grant is administrated by the SDSU Foundation and funds her work with 5 SDSU student assistants and 10 Sweetwater teachers who are currently teaching the Sweetwater 12th grade Rhetoric and Writing course Liane co-developed with Sweetwater curriculum specialist Marsha Zandi.

"How's My Writing?": Using Online Peer Feedback to Improve Performance in the Composition Classroom," by **Gabriel Jones**, appears as a chapter in *Self, Peer, and Group*

Assessment in E-Learning, edited by Tim Roberts, Hershey, PA: Idea Group, 2006.

In March, **Jennifer Sager** directed a rock opera at Palomar College called *The Who's Tommy* by The Who songwriter, singer, and guitarist Pete Townshend and La Jolla Playhouse Artistic Director Des McAnuff. The show was a success, selling out almost every performance.

Ellen Quandahl's "On a Rhetorical Techne of the Moral Emotions" appears in *Rhetorical Agendas: Political, Ethical, Spiritual*, edited by Patricia Bizzell and Lawrence Erlbaum, 2006.

RWS 100/200 Events for Spring

On January 17, there will be an important program update for all RWS 100/200 instructors. The presentation, "Current and Emerging Values of the Lower Division Writing Program," will take place in Com 206, twice, at 9:00 and 3:00 to accommodate everyone's schedules. Mark your calendars!

Also, the Lower Division Writing Committee invites all RWS 200 instructors to join collaborative teaching groups in the Spring. Liane Bryson will coordinate a group teaching a sequence developed from readings in the *Rereading America* text. Peter Manley will coordinate a group teaching readings in the *Words and Images* text. Both groups will meet on Wednesdays at 2:00.

Book Collection

Second, if you notice that things are running particularly smoothly and harmoniously next semester, the reason may be that I will be on sabbatical. My plan is to spend the spring studying African-American rhetoric—particularly the abolitionist texts of William Whipper and James Forten. African-American abolitionist rhetoric has been a passion of mine for the last few years, and I'm really looking forward to having the time to conduct a focused study of texts that to date have received little sustained attention from scholars of rhetoric.

In my absence, the duties of the chair will be expertly covered by the very capable team of Cezar Ornatowski and Carol Sweedler-Brown. I will be available for emergency consultation, but the daily management of the department will be entirely in Cezar's and Carol's hands. From years of experience, I've learned that if chairs want

to have successful research leaves, they must discipline themselves to STAY AWAY FROM CAMPUS. While ostensibly altruistic, a willingness to continue serving the department while on leave becomes a slippery slope leading inevitably to the premature death of the sabbatical. So, while I will not pull up stakes and flee to Paris or Amsterdam (a favorite tactic of many chairs), you will not see my face on campus with any regularity.

Let me say that I am very grateful that Cezar and Carol have agreed to shoulder this significant responsibility, and that I have great confidence in their ability to see to it that I will not be missed. I've warned them, though, not to run things too smoothly, or they will risk being pressed into continued service. They understand, and I know you will, too.

Glen McClish

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Thank You

To my friends and colleagues here in DRWS. I have wanted to send this message for some time. Now, in a season of Thanksgiving, the time seems right to extend my thanks for all the kind expressions of sympathy and the beautiful cards sent at the time of my father's passing.

I especially thank all of you who made donations to the Parkinson's Disease Association in my father's name. That tribute to his memory will always be a very fitting part of his legacy.

With deepest appreciation

Pat Morgan

Congratulations

To GMS Coordinator **Pat Morgan** and her husband Dennis, who will celebrate 25 years of marriage on January 17.

Authorized and Unauthorized "I": A Rhetorical Approach to Voice

You may be surprised to learn that the most common pedagogical questions I'm asked by colleagues concern voice. Should students be allowed to write in the first person? Should they feature personal pronouns that call attention to their roles as writers or rhetors, or should they disappear into the background, subtly pulling the strings of the prose for just the right effect? Should they marshal "metadiscourse," defined by William J. Vande Kopple as "discourse about discourse or communication about communication," in their papers to help readers "organize, classify, interpret, evaluate, and react" to the components of texts (83), or should they construct their arguments with as little authorial comment and side remarks as possible?

These are very good questions, questions that help us to think more explicitly about the ways in which voice (or, perhaps, ethos) is created in prose. And, you'll be equally surprised to learn, my answer is deceptively simple: With respect to such matters, your students should do whatever you ask them to do. If, for a given assignment or for the entire course, you want them to write using the first person, calling attention to

their role as the creator and shaper of the text, then require them to do so. If, on the other hand, for a given assignment or for the entire course, you want your students to avoid the first person and reduce metadiscourse to a bare minimum, then make your expectations known and stick to them. It's as simple as that.

Well, not quite. In addition to requiring your students to create the kind of voice you believe is necessary for each assignment, it's vital that you explain to them that in rhetorically based writing, voice is indeed a creation, the result of a series of strategic choices. Thus, a line such as "in this section of my paper, I wish to argue that Amy Chua's argument is strengthened by the highly personal tone of her introduction" is inherently no better or no worse if one removes the first eleven words, but its effect changes significantly. Emphasize that your approach to the optimal voice for any given assignment is not based on any moral principle, mythic rule, or god-given style guide, but flexible, context-driven conventions of writing that you deem appropriate. And, of course, these conventions could be consistent through the

course, or they could alter from paper to paper. Also communicate to your students that in other writing contexts, both within and beyond this department, expectations about voice will inevitably change, and successful students will quickly adapt their approach to write effectively for their audiences.

And this facility with adaptation is precisely the goal. Ultimately, what is most important is not that your students become expert in any particular generic conventions or that they perfect one kind of academic voice, but that they learn how to read rhetorical situations astutely, that they come to understand what choices are best for a given argument. But surely, Glen, you'd draw the line with the passive voice? Isn't this one instance in which there really is an absolute standard, a kind of law of writing? Absolutely not. The passive voice, just like its active counterpart, is a strategic construction that has its place in the discourse of thoughtful rhetors. If it didn't, in fact, it never would have been invented. Try to envision the Sermon on the Mount or the Declaration of Independence without it. Or, more to the

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Non-Profit Class

Honduras

Nancy Jamison, Executive Director, San Diego Grantmakers

Debra Owen, President, Debra Owen Arts Group; Founder, City Arts San Diego

Missy Parks, Christine Spicer, Nancy Fox, Students, RWS 507, Spring 2005

Tony Phillips, Chief Administrative Officer and Director of Policy and Research, Alpha Project for the Homeless, San Diego

Sue Racanelli, Funding Information Director, The San Diego Foundation

Michael Summers, Director of Facility Operations, San Diego Symphony; Chair, Arts and Culture Subcommittee, San Diego Center City Development Corporation

John Gage

guments are most ethical.

Gage suggested that both philosophers and rhetoricians have formulated rules for good verbal conduct, and he reviewed with us rules for ethical discourse by Jurgen Habermas, including, for example, "every speaker may only assert what he really believes," and "Every speaker who applies predicate F to object A must be prepared to apply F to all other objects resembling A in all relevant aspects." He noted that these are good rules, but probably only for people involved in philosophical thinking about communication. Next offering "Gage's Decalogue," he acknowledged that even a good rule like "Let us try to acknowledge that when we enter into discussion of our disagreements, our own mind might be changed" doesn't really motivate ethical discussion.

As an alternative to normative rules, Gage proposed considering the problem of ethical arguments from the point of view offered by virtue ethics. Virtue ethics considers qualities of character rather than rules for virtuous action. For Aristotle, virtues are learned habits lying between the extremes of excess and deficiency. The overarching virtue, phronesis or practical wisdom, is about making "decisions based on the good in particular situations, in the absence of absolute knowledge."

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(CCDC)

Paul Thompson, Senior Vice President for Organizational Success, The San Diego Foundation; Former CEO of Project Concern International

Derek Turbide, Executive Director, I Love a Clean San Diego

Kelly Wright, Founder and Principal, Knowledge is Power Program, KIPP/Adelante Charter School, San Diego

Holly Younghans, Grants Director, Neighborhood House Association, San Diego

For information on RWS 507, contact Steve Merriam at smerriam@mail.sdsu.edu, or visit <http://tcomm.sdsu.edu>.

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Thinking pedagogically about phronesis, Gage challenged us to consider the kinds of situations that we create for students in which to argue and what qualities about those situations would call for the activity of practical wisdom. Recollecting the ongoing critiques of our current argument culture, he suggested that it might be more productive to think of arguments as "deriving from and ... revealing qualities of character." Such a question, he argued, would put ethos rather than logos at the center of argumentation. The central question for ethical argument would not then be, "is this argument virtuous?" but "from what virtue does this argument arise?"

A lively audience of about 35 people engaged John in questions and answers. Two featured speakers from previous Language in Action lectures, Professor Steven Mailloux and Professor Susan Jarratt, both of the University of California, Irvine, and Professor Lawrence Green of the University of Southern California, who is the current president of the International Society for the History of Rhetoric, joined in the discussion.

The full text of Gage's talk will be available in the next issues of DRWS' online journal, *Lore*. A chapter on "Ethical Argument" appears in the new edition of Gage's textbook, *The Shape of Reason*.

Ellen Quandahl

Voice

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point, perhaps, try to imagine a good scientific article that does not rely heavily on the passive voice. You may want your students to avoid passive constructions in their work for your class, but let them know, once again, that your requirement is based on specific, contextualized discourse conventions, not a universal principle. In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle defined his subject as "an ability, in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion" (36). Voice, one of the many means of persuasion, is a function of cases—it is inherently rhetorical.

If you would like to read more about the inherently rhetorical nature of voice and the elements of which it is comprised, I recommend beginning with Joseph Williams's fine book, *Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace*, which is now in its seventh edition.

Finally, I invite you to share this column with your students. Invite them to rewrite it, reducing the presence of personal pronouns, metadiscourse, and the passive voice. What are the rhetorical effects of such revision. Is my argument more or less persuasive when I disappear? Let me know what you discover.

Glen McClish

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