

# COMS 650: Foucault, Discourse and Social Change

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## ➤➤ Course Goals

In what is being termed the "postmodern age" -- a social condition marked by the loss of a "center that holds" -- the concern for how change might occur takes on a new urgency. If we are but effects of the social practices that define us, to what extent might we possess any rhetorical agency? How might we effect change in a world that determines who and what we are? How have these social practices and not others come to define us? These questions are but a few that might be asked in interrogating the prospects for a rhetoric that effects change in the postmodern world. Several communication theorists have turned to the work of Michel Foucault in seeking potential answers and/or strategies for coping with the fragmentation and uncertainty that defines the contemporary "postmodern" condition. Given that interest, an examination of Foucault's relevance becomes an appropriate focus for a special seminar.

The overarching goal of this seminar is to develop a clearer sense of what it means to have rhetorical agency in a postmodern world. In moving toward that goal, we will interrogate a small sampling of Foucault's work that bears on the themes of discourse, power, and the subject. While not an exhaustive account of Foucault, the literature to be examined will provide a sufficient grounding in Foucault's project to allow for critical assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of his perspective. My hope is that each of you obtain a critical appreciation of Foucault's perspective and that you develop sound arguments for the concepts you see as helpful, as well as critiques of those concepts you see as limitations or errors. To achieve that end, I do not plan to lecture in any formal sense, though I will perhaps talk more than I should! This should be seen as a collaborative effort, where we learn from each other, question each other and ourselves. We need to arrive at each class having carefully (rather than casually) read the assigned materials, raised our own questions about those materials (as in A what is going on here? @ and A why would he claim that? @and "how is this thesis applicable to discourse or to social change? @ ). Class format will depend in part on the number of students. We will discuss the best way to accomplish our collective goals, and then move forward with whatever format, or combination of formats seems best.

## ➤➤ Written Assignments

The following will assist in interrogating Foucault's work. While variations on the tasks below may be entertained, the expectation is that, in each writing assignment, Foucault will be at the center of the interrogation, and relevant secondary works will be used as needed to facilitate that interrogation or to support your own interpretation/argument. In this context, the goal is to refine your ability to use theory to support a point of view. Establishing and advancing your voice thus is an essential component of your written work.

1. Reflection Papers B:  
5-6 pages as assigned that allow you to interrogate an essay, concept, thesis in a way that both advances your understanding of the topic, as well as expresses your interpretation of its significance in managing social change through discursive means.
2. Research Papers B:  
The expectation is that the research paper should be about 22-25 text pages (approx. 5500-6000 words), plus references/endnotes as appropriate. The aim is to write a conference paper that also serves as the initial draft of a paper you would submit for publication. Thus, it should be more than a synthesis of an idea or concept; it should have as its "reason for being" a specific argument/position or claim that you seek to advance. Further, it should be written in a manner that accents your own voice, using Foucault/others as support for the argument you advance. An oral report on the paper will be given during the last class period. While this can be a critical analysis of some rhetorical artifact, it must reflect your reading/integration of concepts/ideas encountered during this course. The paper will be due mid-week during final exam week. Time will be provided during the third and seventh weeks of the course to discuss ideas B and to force early decisions/work on the paper.

### ➤➤ **An Alternative Focus**

As an alternative to a convention-ready paper, you may focus on a "state of the art" review essay in which the goal is to pair Foucault and a major subject/content area and examine the most current/recent literature extant on that issue. For example: Foucault and Gender/Feminism; Foucault and Cultural Studies, Foucault and Governmentality; Foucault and Space, Foucault and Rhetoric/Discourse. The goal would be to write a review essay mirroring those in QJS in terms of aiming toward publication. The resulting review would mirror the length requirements suggested above.

NOTE: For reflection papers B you will have an automatic maximum one day grace period (4pm next day) to turn these in; if beyond that date, they will not count.

For the major paper B you will have an automatic maximum one week grace period beyond the mid-Finals week deadline; grades beyond that point will be determined based on completed work. Only if you have a compelling reason due to circumstances beyond your control, should you request a PR; if approved, you will have a maximum of 5 weeks to finish the paper before a grade is turned in (calculated w/or w/o the final paper included).

### ➤➤ **Oral Assignments**

1. Participation:  
I am asking that everyone assume responsibility for coming to class with a list of issues/questions that can be posed for response; you might also write a short paragraph that outlines an issue you wish to discuss.
2. Reports:

When assigned, I would anticipate a summary of the principal themes/arguments, along with a critical assessment of what was done well/not well. It would help if, at minimum, a one-page handout outlining the issues/themes were made available. I am not anticipating a detailed review of every aspect of the assigned reading. These will be occasional throughout the course—more than one person may be assigned to read/respond.

## ➤➤ Grades

1. Participation: 20% (based on overall rather than graded each time)
2. Reflection Papers: 40%
3. Research Papers: 40%

## ➤➤ Texts

[check Little Professor] Foucault, Discipline and Punish ; Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge (AK) Prado, Starting with Foucault. Readings are available online through the Library. The Prado text is assumed as a general resource B I = ve included specific chapters where they may be most useful to read as part of the overall discussion; we will refer to it on occasion B the assumption is that it is read as a background/interpretive resource.

## Tentative Class Schedule

1. Jan 8 Initial Thoughts on Foucault: Overview of Course
2. Jan 15 An Orientation to Rhetoric and to Foucault
  - 1) The Word Parrhesia
  - 2) Critical Rhetoric
  - 3) M. Foucault's Rhetorical Theory
  - 4) M. Foucault and the Question of Rhetoric
  - 5) Polemics, Politics, and ProblematizationsPrado: C. 1
3. Jan 22 Contextualizing Foucault: Archaeology, Genealogy, Discourse
  - 6) Report 1: Foucault and Critical Theory
  - 7) [Essay] - The Archaeology of Knowledge
  - 8) Nietzsche, Genealogy, History-Discourse on Language—in AK
  - 9) Politics and the Study of Discourse
  - 10) FoucaultPrado, C. 2, 3  
Reflection Paper 1 Due  
Paper Topic Discussion: Possible Topic Selection
4. Jan 29 Archaeology: Method or Means?  
[Text] - Archaeology of Knowledge - Parts I-V
  - 11) Report 2: The Statement: Foundation of Foucault's Historical Criticism
  - 12) On Foucault's Concept of DiscourseReflection Paper 2 Due

5. Feb 5 Discipline:  
[Text] - Discipline and Punish – Parts 1-2-3
6. Feb 12 Truth, Power, Knowledge
  - 13) The Concern for Truth
  - 14) Truth and Power
  - 15) Clarifications on the Question of Power
  - 16) The Discourse on Power
  - 17) On Power
 Reflection Paper 3 Due
7. Feb 19
  - 18) Powers and Strategies
  - 19) The Eye of Power
  - 20) The Subject and Power
  - 21) Body/Power
 Prado, C. 4, 5, 6
  - 22) Report 3: Bodies in Space: Foucault's Account of Disciplinary Power
 Paper Topic Selection: Progress report
8. Feb 26 New Issues:
  - 23) Governmentality
  - 24) The Political Technology of Individuals
  - 25) The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom
 Prado, C. 4
  - 26) Report 4: Bodies of Knowledge/Knowledge of Bodies
 Reflection paper 4 due
9. Mar 4 Heterotopia
  - 27) Space, Knowledge and Power
  - 28) Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias
  - 29) Different Spaces
  - 30) Questions on Geography
  - 31) A New Image of Thought
10. Mar 11 Open  
will catch up on reading/discussion and hear progress reports on research papers

### ►► Bibliography

[includes references for research utilization plus identifies source for readings at library by number

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