

Studies in Argument: Nuclear Rhetorics Fall 2001

Professor: Joanna Ploeger

Office: 155 BCSB

Office Hours: 2:30 to 4pm T/Th, F by appointment

Course Description:

This class explores the communicative dimensions of the history and current state of nuclear weapons development in the United States. Throughout the course we will explore the cultural dramas that shape our understanding of nuclear weapons. We will pay particular attention to the impact of such dramas on our political/strategic/policy choices with respect to nuclear technologies. In short, we will be concerned not only with what nuclear weapons mean in American culture, but also how such meaning is constructed through public discourse.

Over the course of the semester we will work toward three principle goals: 1) Students should develop a basic understanding of the history of the United States' development and use of nuclear weapons. 2) Students should develop a thorough understanding of arguments offered in favor of and in opposition to particular nuclear weapons technologies. 3) Students should be able to recognize, through systematic analysis, how such arguments intersect with larger socio-political dramas. 4) Students should be able to apply this knowledge and understanding to the analysis of public argument regarding ongoing nuclear controversies.

Required Texts:

Return to Armageddon—Powaski

The Spread of Nuclear Weapons—Sagan and Waltz

Caging the Genie—Turner

Strategic Deception—Mitchell

Recommended:

Way Out There in the Blue—Fitzgerald

Approximate Cost through Amazon—\$50-75

Books will also be available through the IMU bookstore.

Required readings will be available on line (through the course website) or on reserve at the Main Library.

Additional Resources:

New Nukes: India, Pakistan, and Global Nuclear Disarmament—Bidwai

The Coming Crisis: Nuclear Proliferation, U.S. Interests, and World Order—Utgoff

Defending America: The Case for Limited National Missile Defense—O’Hanlon

The American Atom—Cantelon, Hewett, Williams, and Hewlett

Long Term Stewardship and Nuclear Weapons: The Challenge Ahead—Probst and McGovern

Best of Intentions: America’s Campaign Against Strategic Weapons Proliferation—Sokolski

The Absolute Weapon Revisited: Nuclear Arms and the Emerging International Order—Harknett and Wirtz

Fire in the East: The Rise of Military Power and the Second Nuclear Age—Bracken

Citizens Against the MX: Public Languages in the Nuclear Age—Glass, Bella

Trinity’s Children: Living Among America’s Nuclear Highway—Bartimus, McCartney

Repairing the Regime: Preventing the Spread of Weapons of Mass Destruction—Cirincione

Life Under a Cloud: American Anxiety about the Atom—Winkler

Nuclear Rites—Gusterson

Nuclear Fear—Weart

Learning to Glow—Bradley

The Nuclear Freeze Campaign--Hogan

(...and many more!! Just try searching Amazon with the keywords “nuclear weapons”—you should get about 1450 hits. Remember, however, information literacy is very important when evaluating resources on this topic!)

Required Films and Documentaries:

Over the course of the semester, you may be required to watch several feature films and documentaries that confront issues of nuclear weapons development. To the extent that it is possible, we will watch the films in class. Due to their length, however, some films may be placed on reserve for required individual viewing.

Grading:

Satisfactory work that meets all the requirements of the assignment is sufficient to earn a C. Higher grades are awarded to work that goes beyond the minimum standards of the assignment. You must complete all assignments to fulfill course requirements.

The following percentage grading scale will be used to figure final course grades:

A = 94-100; A- = 93-90; B+ = 88-89; B = 84-87; B- = 80-83; C+ = 78-79; C = 74-77; C- = 70-73; D+ = 68-69; D = 64-67; D- = 60-63; F = below 60

Course Requirements:

Assignment One (100 points)—Report on the history of nuclear weapons in the United States. This report is to be well researched and written in the style of a feature article in the newsmagazine aimed at a general audience (think Time, Newsweek, US News and World Report, etc.). After completing your report, you will be asked to answer several questions about the process you went through and decisions you made as you “reconstructed” the history of nuclear weapons in this country.

Assignment Two (150 points)—Research on a current nuclear controversy. Throughout the course, we will attempt understand how the history and discourse impacts our understanding and response to current nuclear controversies. For this assignment, you are expected to make those connections through research on a current nuclear controversy, technology, or issue. Possible topics include, but are not limited to: 1) missile defense systems, 2) U.S. response to the development of nuclear weapons in India and Pakistan,

3) the maintenance of our aging nuclear arsenal, 4) nuclear terrorism, and/or 5) nuclear proliferation in Asia. You should choose one of these issues and conduct further research regarding the arguments surrounding these issues with an eye toward understanding their logics, significance, and historical origins. Your research should include both articles published in both professional and popular journals/magazines. As evidence of your work, you will turn in an annotated bibliography that summarizes and organizes your research.

Assignment Three (150 points)—Argument analysis paper. Having completed your bibliography, you are now ready to analyze the public arguments surrounding your chosen issue. This paper should be 5-6 pages in length and should address the following: 1) What narrative arguments surround your chosen issue? 2) What action (or lack of action) is proposed or being advocated in the narrative? 3) Why? 4) What reasons are given for the action? 5) Evaluate these reasons, both “real” and “claimed.” Ask yourself, could the story have been constructed differently (with different actions, outcomes, or reasons)? 6) Evaluate the outcomes made possible by the narratives currently in play. Pay particular attention to the implications of recent actions on current and future nuclear policy decisions.

Assignment Four (150 points)—Group policy-setting project. Class members working on the same issues will form groups, pool their existing research (and conduct new research as necessary), and prepare a written report containing policy recommendations for the future development/containment/elimination of a specific nuclear technologies. An oral version of this report will be given in class during the final week of the semester.

Attendance/Participation (150 points)--Because this is a communication class, your attendance and contribution are crucial to the course. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class period (so you need to be there on time!). 5 points will be awarded for each class session attended up to a maximum of 150 points. Leaving early, arriving late without prior explanation and clearance, or working on other materials in class also will be considered an absence. Extended absences due to extreme circumstances will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. Documentation and advanced notification (when possible) will be required in these situations.

Participation will be evaluated in terms of constructive contributions to class discussions (this includes both listening and speaking), completion of homework assignments, participation in classroom exercises, and demonstrated knowledge of the readings and current public issues. Students can earn up to 30 extra points toward the total grade for active participation in class discussion (1 point per class period attended). Homework, exercises, and quizzes will be evaluated with a "+" (good), "check" (satisfactory), or a "-" (unsatisfactory). This system will allow you to keep track of your progress.

TOTAL = 700 PTS.

Course Policies:

1) Attendance—see above.

2) Late work: Tests and other assignments and activities cannot be made up. Absence on the day of a test or an activity or failure to turn a written assignment in on time will result in an F for that assignment (0 points). Due dates are set in advance, so there should be no need for extensions. If you are having difficulty with a particular project, please see me-- a personal conference can often help to get you on track and on time! Extreme circumstances will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. Make-ups are only granted when substantial documentation is provided and the instructor has been notified of the absence in advance!!!

3) Handouts: Most handouts and materials will be available through the course website. Handouts distributed in class will be distributed only once. If you lose them (or miss a class) you must get them from a classmate or print out a copy from the web. NO EXCEPTIONS!!

4) Plagiarism: The Liberal Arts Bulletin states:

"Plagiarism and cheating may result in grade reduction and/or other serious penalties. Plagiarism and cheating include, but may not be limited to:

*presenting the ideas of others without credit to the source

*using direct quotations without quotation marks and without giving credit to the source

*paraphrasing without credit

*participating in a group project that uses plagiarized materials

*failing to provide citations for material obtained through electronic research

*downloading and submitting work from electronic databases

*submitting material created by someone else as one's own,

including purchased term papers

*allowing someone else to use your work

Students who have questions about the proper use and citation of sources, or details and guidelines for any assignment, should discuss their questions with the instructor.

An instructor who suspects a student of plagiarism and cheating must inform the student as soon as possible after the incident has been observed or discovered. If the instructor comes to the conclusion that the student has plagiarized or cheated, he or she in consultation with the departmental executive officer may decide to reduce the student's grade in the course, even to assign an F. The departmental executive officer sends a written report of the case to the associate dean of academic programs. A copy of this report is sent to the student.

The associate dean for academic programs may uphold, as the offense may warrant, the following or other penalties: placement on disciplinary probation until graduation, suspension from the college for a semester or longer, or recommendation of exclusion from the University by the president."

5) Discussion Etiquette: I encourage a free and frank exchange of views in my classroom--good discussions flourish in an open environment. Be aware, however, that we will address contentious and controversial issues in this class. In such situations, listening is as much a part of participation as is speaking. Learning to understand a perspective that differs from your own is vital in the development of communication competence. Take advantage of the myriad of viewpoints offered by the participants in this class. Furthermore, given the nature of some class material, please feel free to speak with me if at any time you should feel challenged or confused by classroom discussion.

6) Classroom Etiquette: Every day that you are in class, you will be psychologically as well as physically present. Newspapers, books, and other materials (other than those we are using in classroom discussion) will be put away as soon as class begins. Likewise, you should refrain from packing up your materials until class is over--even a few people rustling papers or backpacks are highly distracting and disruptive to those trying to listen.

7) Disability: If you have a disability that may require some modification of seating, testing, or other class requirements, please see me during office hours or after class so that appropriate arrangements can be made.

9) Problems: Come see me with any problems you may be having with the class. I am always happy to speak with you.

Schedule for Nuclear Rhetorics:

Week One--8/28-8/30--Orientation

Week Two—9/4-9/6--Nuclear Criticism

Week Three—9/11-9/13--Nuclear Criticism

Week Four—9/18-9/20--Historical Overview—major developments in weaponry and policy

Week Five—9/25-9/27-- Key periods, technologies, and issues--40s and 50s

Assignment One Due (beginning of class--Thursday 9/27)

Week Six—10/2-10/4-- Key periods, technologies, and issues--40s and 50s

Week Seven—10/9-10/11-- Key periods—60s and 70s

Week Eight—10/16-10/18-- Key periods—60s and 70s continued

Assignment Two Due (beginning of class—Thursday 10/18)

Week Nine—10/23-10/25--Key Periods—The 80s

Week Ten—10/30-11/1--No class—NCA (students will meet in groups)

Week Eleven—11/6-11/8--Key Periods—The 80s

Week Twelve—11/13-11/15--Current issues

Assignment Three Due (beginning of class—Thursday 11/15)

Week Thirteen—11/20--Current issues

(11/22—Thanksgiving break)

Week Fourteen—11/27-11/29--Group Presentations

Week Fifteen—12/4-12/6--Group Presentations

Week Sixteen—12/11-12/13--Group Presentations

Assignment Four Due (beginning of class—Thursday 12/13)

Final Exam: Thursday, December 20th—9:45am