The Study of Rhetoric

Long a part of the liberal arts tradition, rhetoric is the art of effective language use in written, oral, and visual communication. With roots in ancient Greece and branches in the most recent technologies, rhetoric is simultaneously the oldest and newest interdisciplinary academic field, fundamentally engaged by the relationship between language and culture.

As a discipline, rhetoric demonstrates how texts generate knowledge, mediate power and enact change; as an art, rhetoric enables a speaker or writer to create and critique persuasive discourse.

Courses in rhetoric and writing prepare students for graduate study in rhetoric, writing, communications, media studies, law, and other disciplines in the liberal arts. More broadly, they position students to become critical language users, preparing them to meet twenty-first century communication demands in almost any profession.

The Writing Center

The Writing Center offers Colgate students one-to-one assistance with course papers and other writing projects. The Writing Center’s mission is to help any writer at any stage of the composing process, from brainstorming initial ideas to reviewing and revising a draft.

**Primary Location:** 212 Alumni Hall  
**Hours:** Mon-Thurs 11:15am - 10:00pm  
Friday 11:15am - 3:00pm  
Closed Saturdays  
Sunday 4:15pm - 10:00pm  

**Appointments:**  
http://www.colgate.edu/writingcenter

Rhetoric is rooted in an essential function of language itself, a function that is wholly realistic and continually born anew.  
- Kenneth Burke
What Our Minors Say...

I became a writing minor soon after I took my first writing class. Had a writing major been an option, I would have definitely gone for that! My writing minor has gone hand in hand with my biology major. From lab reports to journal articles, I use my writing skills every day in the sciences. And because I hope to eventually become a dentist, my writing skills will surely come in handy in my future. The Writing Department has been a wonderful part of my Colgate experience, and I would encourage everyone to become a writing minor—and if not, at least take a couple of writing classes.

—Judy Tejeda, ’08, Biology Major Concentration

As a junior, I decided to become a writing minor not only because I was interested in my previous writing classes, but because of the effect these writing classes have had on my overall academic experience. Writing classes have taught me different techniques that help in various classes, as well as push my writing and thought process to a new level. I believe my voice matters; writing classes have given me an opportunity to share my voice.

—Tiana Tyeskey, ’09, SOAN Major Concentration

Writing allows you to express yourself. The thing with that is, within your own mind, there are limits. You will form sentences a particular way, use certain words that you’ve become accustomed to, or write in a sort of “you” bubble. While there is nothing wrong with that, I feel being a Writing minor allows you to broaden your mind and allows you to see all that is out there. For me, I have my style and I have my comfort zone, but through the Writing courses I’ve taken, I’ve stepped into areas that I never thought about going into or even knew existed.

—Liz Le, ’09, English Major Concentration

In searching for a job, I was able to sell myself as a mathematical economics major and a writing and rhetoric minor—a way to market the combination that successfully demonstrated both my analytical and communication skills. As a writing and rhetoric minor, I stressed development of the qualitative skills necessary for establishing and maintaining client relationships.

—Kyle Halks, ’08, Math-Econ Major Concentration

New Courses, Fall 2008

WRIT 210: The Rhetoric of Style
In ancient Greece and Rome, teachers of rhetoric taught style (ad. L. eloquio) as one of five essential canons, or rules, for effective and persuasive communication. By this rule, an effective communicator reaches an audience not just through the content of speech, but also through its artful expression. This class studies how writers’ stylistic choices can profoundly influence the reception and interpretation of texts. With the goal of practicing new stylistic techniques in their own writing, students closely analyze published authors’ diction, sentence structure, punctuation, and figures of speech. Since an understanding of prescriptive English grammar is essential to experiments in style, students review the parts of speech and study the parts of sentences, principles of syntax, and punctuation conventions.

WRIT 242: Stand and Speak: Feminist Rhetorics and Social Change
As an introduction to rhetoric, rhetorical history and criticism, and feminist rhetorics, this course foregrounds the study of how 19th-century women used both pen and voice with rhetorical precision to “stand and speak” to issues that marked their personal lives and their times. By studying women who composed and embodied what is now understood as the early years of the first wave of U.S. feminism, students access a genealogy of women rhetors who serve as exemplars—and cautions—for later waves and for their own contemporary visions of social change. In positioning the study of rhetoric as the study of language as it constitutes social relations, power, and knowledge, students become more acutely aware of and fluent in the composition, circulation, and criticism of private and public discourses, the verbal material through which they construct social worlds.