RHET 110 – Meritt
Fall 2012
Essay #1: Rhetorical Analysis

Your first assignment for the term is to write a **rhetorical analysis** of one or two of the eight texts we've read and discussed in our first several classes. As Ramage, Bean, and Johnson write in our textbook, "To analyze a text rhetorically means to examine closely how it is composed and what makes it an effective or ineffective piece of persuasion" **(**156). Briefly, your goal is to write an essay in which you assess the overall argumentative effectiveness of the text(s) you choose, basing that assessment in a close reading of specific elements of the text(s). Put most simply, your essay will answer this question: "Is the argument in this text convincing? Why or why not?" State whether, how, and to what extent you think the text you choose succeeds or fails as an argument and explain why and how you've arrived at this assessment. (This assignment is very similar to the one presented in Ramage, Bean, and Johnson, page 168).

Format and due dates:

The paper should be three or more pages long, typed, double-spaced, and presented in 12-point font or smaller with one-inch margins or smaller. The paper should be titled, and your name, the date, and our course number (RHET 110) should appear in the upper left or right hand corner. The draft of the paper is due **September 10**. The final version is due **September 26**.

Prompts:

Option #1: Choose one of the four texts we've read responding to the controversy surrounding the purpose, cost, and quality of higher education (articles by Mead, Adams, Schneider, and Saxon) or one of the four texts on the question of apparent differences in men's and women's math and science abilities. Write a thesis-driven rhetorical analysis essay answering this question: *To what extent does this text present a convincing/effective argument?* In responding to this question, consider the following factors: 1) the text's use (or lack) of logical reasoning and adequate evidence in support of its main claims, 2) the writer's presentation of (or failure to present) him or herself as credible and fair-minded as seen through the text's tone and style and through the writer's willingness to consider alternative points of view, and 3) the text's appeal to (or failure to appeal to) its audience's emotions or values. In your discussion, consider the degree to which the text's effectiveness depends on the audience reading it and the context in which it occurs (e. g., where it was published). You may also discuss whether your own experiences support or contest the text's claims. Note that you don't have to consider all of these elements in your analysis – just the ones you find most relevant to your assessment. *Base your analysis/assessment in specific examples from the text.*

Option #2: Select two of the eight texts we've read, and write a rhetorical analysis essay answering this question: *Which of the two texts presents its argument more effectively and*

why? In responding to this question, consider the following factors: 1) the texts' use (or lack) of logical reasoning and adequate evidence in support of their main claims, 2) the writers' presentation of (or failure to present) themselves as credible and fair-minded as seen through the their tone and style and through the writers' willingness to consider alternative points of view, and 3) the texts' invocation (or failure to invoke) their audiences' emotions or values. In your discussion, consider whether the texts' effectiveness depends on the audience reading them. You may also discuss whether your own experiences support or contest the texts' claims. Note that you don't have to consider all of these elements – just the ones you find most relevant to your assessment. In fact, you may wish to focus on one or two rhetorical elements for each text. (For example, you might evaluate one text as particularly strong in logical reasoning and evidence, and another as strong in responding to opposing points of view.) Or you might compare and contrast two texts solely in terms of one factor, such as their writers' effectiveness in presenting a credible, open-minded persona [ethos].) *Base your analysis/assessment in specific examples from the texts.*

Criteria for Evaluation:

Below are the categories according to which your paper will be assessed. Use these as guidelines as you draft and revise your essay.

Thesis: Your paper should articulate, focus on, and develop a clear and contestable **assertion** of your **evaluative judgment** of the rhetorical effectiveness of the text(s) you choose to write about – this is your paper's **primary claim** or **thesis**. Note that your thesis should NOT be a simple restatement of the text's main argument (that should come at the beginning of your summary, which, while part of your introductory section, should not be your thesis). Rather, your thesis should make clear your judgment of the extent to which you think the argument(s) you're analyzing succeeds or fails in convincing its audience(s). In addition to being an assertion, an effective thesis is also specific, indicating the main reasons for your evaluative judgment of the text (e. g., "The argument presented by X succeeds [*claim*] in convincing readers that… because it [*reason or reasons presented here*]). We'll work more in class on developing effective working thesis statements to help you prepare for writing your draft. For examples of effective rhetorical analysis thesis statements, see Ramage, Bean, and Johnson, page 169.

Development/Support: Your evaluation of the text(s) you're discussing (i. e., your thesis or primary claim) must be based on a close analysis of textual details. In other words, you must provide **textual evidence** – through **quotation** and **paraphrase** – of the points you make about a text and **explain** in your own **commentary** following your quotation or paraphrase how this evidence supports your evaluation. As Ramage, Bean, and Johnson write, "To develop and support your own points, you will need to include textual evidence in the form of examples or short quotations from the argument" (168). For example, if you're arguing that one of the texts is convincing because its writer seems very open-minded, you need to (a) show where specifically in the text the writer demonstrates this open-mindedness (perhaps by quoting a key passage) and (b) explain how the part you're quoting reveals this quality and why this quality makes the

argument more effective. To take another example, suppose you're arguing that the author of the text you're discussing is not fully convincing because he or she does not provide concrete evidence to back up a particular claim. Here you would need to paraphrase the claim in question and explain that no evidence is provided in the text to support it, indicating in your commentary what kinds of support the author might or should have provided.   Grounding your assessment of the text in specific parts of the text (what Ramage, Bean and Johnson call "hot spots") is very important. Be sure to include key examples – through quotation or paraphrase -- of the points you want to make. Also, do NOT assume your quotations and paraphrases will speak for themselves; explain clearly how these examples support your overall point about the text.

Complexity/Alternative Views: Although you must present (as your thesis) an overall judgment or assessment of the rhetorical effectiveness or success of the text(s) you're analyzing, your discussion ideally should not be too one-sided. That is, a thoughtful analysis of any of these texts will show awareness of different perspectives on the text's strengths and weaknesses, particularly with respect to the different audiences that it might address. For instance, if overall you find a particular text successful in convincing a general audience because it provides strong evidence and logical reasoning, you might at the same time think that the writer of that text seems to dismiss or disrespect readers who might come to the issue with a different viewpoint. Alternatively, while you might find a particular argument lacking in evidence and one-sided and so overall unlikely to persuade general readers, you might recognize that that same argument makes effective emotional or values-based appeals to readers from a particular group (e. g., readers of a particular age, gender, or political viewpoint). In each of these cases, you could still present an overall positive or negative assessment, but that assessment is more subtle and reasonable because it is qualified by your recognition of other legitimate perspectives.

Organization: There is no exact formula for how to organize this paper. However, you should follow a few basic structural guidelines. First, your paper should have a clear introductory section, body, and conclusion. The introductory section (1-2 paragraphs) should (perhaps after an engaging opening series of sentences) introduce the topic/issue of the text(s) you're analyzing (in this case, the question of the value and purpose of higher education), a brief summary of the text, and your thesis statement. The order in which you present these elements can vary, but it should include all three. The body of the paper is where you develop your main points and alternative views with specific evidence/examples from the text(s). The number of paragraphs here will vary depending upon how many points you make and how detailed your examples and commentary are. Whatever the case, be sure that each paragraph is focused on a single clear topic usually introduced at the beginning of the paragraph, that transitions between paragraphs are clear, and that you avoid excessively long or short paragraphs. Your one-paragraph conclusion should briefly re-state your overall assessment of the text(s) and comment on the wider significance of the topic or issue it addresses. For a simple and brief guide to overall organization, refer to the chart titled "Organizing Your Rhetorical Analysis" on in Ramage, Bean, and Johnson (169).

Grammar/Mechanics: The final version of your paper should minimize mechanical and

grammatical errors (such as spelling errors, grammatical errors like sentence fragments, subject-verb disagreements, etc.). Also, you should be sure to cite by page number any quotations and paraphrases (MLA format).

For a sample rhetorical analysis essay, see Ramage, Bean, and Johnson 161. Also, I will share examples of successful rhetorical analysis essays on Blackboard.