

Rhetoric, Writing, and Public Discourse 342 : Rhetoric and Capitalism: Exploitation, Precarity and Social Change

From conversations about campaign finance and net neutrality to ethical debates over the labor practices used to produce contemporary communication technologies, capitalism shapes contemporary civic engagement in a variety of important ways. In this course, we will explore some of the key histories and theoretical terms necessary to understand the links between capitalism and public discourse. We will focus on two key trends: capitalism's tendency to translate local human relationships and symbolic actions into abstract, interchangeable processes of exchange (for example through social media, creditor relationships, or monetary exchange), and the ways that capitalism makes some bodies or lives precarious while insulating other bodies or lives from risk and potential harm. Topics covered will include the *Citizens United v. FEC* Supreme Court decision, the increasing global shift to an economy based on communication and information, the relationship between conventional waged labor and other forms of labor (e.g. housework, sex work, black market economies), and the utility of various lenses, from Marxist and anarchist perspectives to feminist, ecological, critical race, and queer perspectives for rhetorically engaging with capitalism's effects. We will also discuss some of the ways that activists have responded to these trends, from traditional labor organizing to the construction of communities removed from capitalism, to digital and social media activism. Assignments will include a mid-length research paper, a series of short reflections, and a discussion assignment. May be taken for credit toward the Indigeneity, Race, and Ethnicity Studies major or minor.

Credits 4