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November 18, 2015

English 5328

**ENGL 5328 Risk Communication and Intercultural Rhetorics Proposal**

**Summary**

The issue of water conservation in the state of California is an on-going discussion since the California Water Wars that took place between 1913 between Los Angeles and ranchers in the Owens Valley area of East California. Water shortages, and the growing population of Los Angeles is an issue that has haunted inhabitants since the city was founded.

As a result the stage for risk, a concept attributed to the work of Beck in Risk Society: Toward a New Modernity, has been set since the birth of the city. The potential for a catastrophe and perceived risk of water shortages is constant in Los Angeles County, as is with other areas of Southern California. This project will be a literature review and artifact analysis. Articles and books that cover issues such as environmental rhetoric, and areas of technical communication and risk communication that address water conservation, and/or similar environmental issues such as behavior changes and health communications, in addition to works that discuss rhetorical choices in facilitating engagement. These articles and books will help me situate this issue in rhetoric in an attempt to research how rhetoricians have talked about water conservation and/or similar topics and issues. These sources will serve as the theoretical framework for which I will use to analyze how information is communicated to the inhabitants of Los Angeles County, and the rhetorical choices made by the government, and water agencies.

**Need, Gap, Research Questions**

This issue of water conservation addresses the need to study how a risk was staged, using Beck’s theories, and can bridge the gap between theory and practice. This is not only a result of looking at how the risk was staged, but what has changed as a result of continued low water levels in the state of California. It can serve as a current, and real world example of staging a risk, reacting to the risk, and what the involved parties do as a result of the communication of risk regarding the drought.

The issue of water conservation in California follows a three-tier system, as set by water levels that determine their reaction and actions taken in the communication of the issue with the public. It is clear that the information shared with the public exemplifies rhetorical choices, but rhetoric does not inform their actions. That is to say, the water companies, agencies and government do not turn to rhetoricians, but to engineers and scientists, in addition to focus groups, to inform their decisions. There exists a gap between what informs their rhetorical choices, and how they measure the reactions, or behavior changes by the public.

In my attempt to limit this issue to rhetoric, I am focusing the research questions on understanding the scope of environmental rhetoric, tying it to communicating information to the public, or possibly, its influence on policy and/or behavior change.

Specific areas of interest and research questions are:

What is the history of water conservation in Southern California?

How does work in environmental rhetorics approach/address the issue of water conservation?

How has work in environmental rhetorics addressed issues of environmental risk and perceived risk?

How is water conservation communicated throughout California in the context of risk?

**Proposed Project and Significance**

My proposed project is a to assist in immersing myself in these areas of rhetoric. I believe that before I can analyze the information communicated with the public I must first understand how this issue of water conservation, and/or similar issues that could inform research on water conservation, is approached, theorized and put in practice by rhetoricians. This project will be in APA format, and the minimum will be 7.5 single-spaced pages.

The significance of this paper is two-fold. It will give me more practice writing a literature Review, and allow me to apply information obtained in the Literature Review when conducting an analysis of artifacts used by the government and water agencies to communicate with the public. As a native of Southern California it provides me the opportunity to become more informed about an issue that impacts my community and learn more about how risk communication is used within my community.

**Methodology**

Drawing on scholars researching in environmental rhetoric, I will attempt to find voices that will set the groundwork for a comprehensive compilation of sources that exist on this topic, or topics that are similar wherein I can substitute their subject with water, or water conservation.

This literature review should contain no less than 10 sources, but may have to become broader and include more sources so that the scope is wide and well informed. This theoretical framework will be necessary to understand the ways in which rhetoricians approach issues of risk communication. I will begin with the works of Grabill, Herndl, Simmons, and Druschke to situate myself in how the field of rhetoric approaches issues of water, water conservation, and/or health issues and communicating risk. Then, I will branch out to include other scholars in rhetoric that deal with similar issues. There may not be many articles that deal directly with issues of water and/or water conservation, but I will broaden my scope by reading works by scholars, such as Dr. Scott, than can serve as an example for a way to potentially analyze artifacts, and approach my issue in the future. This will also help to support that a gap does exist, and that it is centered on not only how this information is relayed to the public, but how changes in behavior are or are not monitored.

I will then analyze the methods of communicating the issue of water conservation to the public. This paper will include an analysis of the various forms used by government agencies and water agencies that serve the public, but are not themselves a government agency. The artifacts will be compared against each other. For example, I will analyze the different methods used in communicating with the public based on time of year (seasonal messages), demographics (minority population) and socioeconomic status.

**Working Reference List**

Druschke, Caroline Gottschalk and Carrie E. Seltzer. “Failures of Engagement: Lessons

Learned from a Citizen Science Pilot Study.” Applied Environmental Education and Communication 11.3-4 (2012): 178-188.

Druschke, Caroline Gottschalk. “With Whom Do We Speak? Building Transdisciplinary

Collaborations in Rhetoric of Science.” Poroi 10.1 (2014): Article 10.

Druschke, Caroline Gottschalk and Silvia Secchi. “The impact of gender on agricultural

conservation knowledge and attitudes in an Iowa watershed.” Journal of Soil and Water Conservation 69.2 (2014): 95-106.

Herndl, C (1996) Green Culture: Environmental Rhetoric in Contemporary America.   
 Edited with Stuart C. Brown. University of Wisconsin Press

Herndl, C. G., & Licona, A. C. (2007). Shifting agency: Agency, kairos, and the possibilities of social action. *Communicative practices in workplaces and the professions: Cultural perspectives on the regulation of discourse and organizations*, 133-154.

Herndl, C. G., & Bauer, D. A. (2003). Speaking matters: Liberation theology, rhetorical performance, and social action. *College Composition and Communication*, 558-585.

Rosteck, T., & Frentz, T. S. (2009). Myth and multiple readings in environmental

rhetoric: The case of An Inconvenient Truth. Quarterly Journal of Speech, 95(1),

1-19.

Simmons, Michele (2007) Participation and Power: A Rhetoric for Civic Discourse in

Environmental Policy. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007.

Simmons, Michele (1998) Toward a Critical Rhetoric of Risk Communication: Producing

Citizens and the Role of Technical Communicators. Technical Communication

Quarterly, 7.4

Think of the methodology as the systematic way you will approach your

research questions. So, a literature review is meant to create the basis

for your research question. You are essentially situating what you are

doing within the context of previous work. Based on this literature

review, a reader would be led logically into your questions. In other

words, Given that A, B, and C, these questions arise.

Then, the methodology explains something to the effect of: To answer these

questions, I will analyze \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and compare \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Or, I will

need to conduct a survey and focus groups. So you can do an analysis of

certain artifacts. You just need to explain the theoretical and conceptual

framework informing your analysis. This will let your reader know that you

are not just analyzing haphazardly or loosely but in a more meaningful and

“disciplined” way.