



---

Theses and Dissertations

---

2005-08-06

## Educating for Democracy: Reviving Rhetoric in the General Education Curriculum

David M. Stock  
*Brigham Young University - Provo*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

---

### BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Stock, David M., "Educating for Democracy: Reviving Rhetoric in the General Education Curriculum" (2005). *Theses and Dissertations*. 651.  
<https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/651>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact [scholarsarchive@byu.edu](mailto:scholarsarchive@byu.edu), [ellen\\_amatangelo@byu.edu](mailto:ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu).

EDUCATING FOR DEMOCRACY: REVIVING RHETORIC IN  
THE GENERAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM

by

David M. Stock

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of English  
Brigham Young University

December 2005

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

David M. Stock

This thesis has been read by each member of the following graduate committee and by majority vote has been found to be satisfactory.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Grant Boswell, Chair

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Gregory Clark, Reader

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Gary Hatch, Reader

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Nancy Christiansen, Graduate Advisor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Edward Cutler, Associate Chair for  
Graduate Studies

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

As Chair of the candidate's graduate committee, I have read the dissertation of David M. Stock in its final form and have found that (1) its format, citations, and bibliographical style are consistent and acceptable and fulfill university and department style requirements; (2) its illustrative materials including figures, tables, and charts are in place; (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory to the graduate committee and is ready for submission to the university library.

---

Date

---

Grant Boswell  
Chair, Graduate Committee

Accepted for the Department

---

Nicholas Mason  
Graduate Coordinator

Accepted for the College

---

John R. Rosenberg  
Dean, College of Humanities

## ABSTRACT

### EDUCATING FOR DEMOCRACY: REVIVING RHETORIC IN THE GENERAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM

David M. Stock

Department of English

Master of Arts

This study is, in part, a response to arguments that claim higher education fails to prepare students with fundamental communication skills necessary for everyday life and indicative of “educated” persons. Though the validity of such arguments is contestable, they nonetheless reflect fundamental inadequacies in current educational theories and practices that have evolved over centuries of curricular, cultural, and socioeconomic

change. Current theories and practices in higher education, specifically general education, reflect a misunderstanding of both the purpose of education in a democracy and the role of the liberal arts, specifically rhetoric, in accomplishing that purpose. The consequences of rhetorically-impooverished general education curricula are manifested not only in the declining literate and communicative practices of recent college graduates but also in the declining civic and democratic practices of a growing number of Americans.

By tracing the histories of and relationships among education, rhetoric, and composition instruction, this thesis highlights the purpose of education and the role of writing instruction and rhetoric in accomplishing that purpose. This review demonstrates that the introductory composition course, when informed by epistemic rhetoric, provides curricular coherence in general education while clarifying and accomplishing the primary purpose of education: to facilitate the development of autonomous citizens capable of participating in the democratic practices of their communities. This outcome relies on rhetorical education, or rhetorical training in the language arts, which allows students to understand and articulate their identity as individuals in relation to the various communities to which they belong and with which they interact.

The misconception of rhetoric and relegation of writing instruction calls for a university-wide reconceptualization of the purpose of education and the complementary roles of general education and writing instruction in accomplishing that purpose. This thesis invites novice and experienced composition instructors to explore further the relationships among education, democracy, language, and rhetoric to recognize the central role of composition instruction in enabling individual autonomy and sustaining a healthy democracy while improving literate and communicative practices.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	IV
INTRODUCTION	1
OVERVIEW	7
CONCLUSION	11
CHAPTER 1	13
ANCIENT RHETORICAL INSTRUCTION	13
<i>Isocrates and Plato</i>	17
<i>Isocrates' School of Rhetoric</i>	19
MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE EDUCATION AND RHETORIC	21
HIGHER EDUCATION THROUGH THE NINETEENTH CENTURY	22
HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY	26
<i>Curricular Coherence</i>	30
<i>Miscommunication and Misconceptions</i>	32
CONCLUSION	36
CHAPTER 2	39
PURPOSE OF EDUCATION	39
<i>Negative and Positive Freedom</i>	40
<i>Rhetoric and Civic Engagement</i>	43
RHETORICS IN COMPOSITION	44
<i>The English Department</i>	46
RHETORICS AND CITIZENSHIP	49
<i>Transactional Rhetoric and Democracy</i>	50
RHETORIC IN GENERAL EDUCATION	52

<i>Harvard Report</i>	54
<i>Communications Course</i>	59
<i>Epistemic Rhetoric</i>	60
CIVIC DISENGAGEMENT	63
<i>Causes and Consequences</i>	66
CONCLUSION	69
CHAPTER 3	70
TECHNOLOGY AND PSEUDO-EVENTS	73
<i>Technological Determinism</i>	77
<i>Vestiges of Bias and Determinism: Reading at Risk</i>	78
<i>Nostalgia</i>	82
TECHNOLOGY AND LITERACY	84
<i>Technology and Remediation</i>	85
TECHNOLOGY AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT	86
CONCLUSION	93
CONCLUSION: RHETORICAL EDUCATION	95
BURKE AND EDUCATION	95
RHETORIC AND NARRATIVE	98
SCIENTIFIC NARRATIVES	101
CONCLUSION	102
WORKS CITED	104



## Introduction

Higher education has long been subject to sundry criticisms, ranging from discriminating against minorities and reinforcing the status quo to corrupting moral character, poorly preparing students for practical work, and failing to stimulate intellectual development (Fuhrmann 96-97). A commonplace symptom used to support such criticism is the literate and communicative skill of recent college graduates. A recent example is found in the 2005 publication of *Ready or Not Here Life Comes*, in which Dr. Mel Levine argues that the majority of college graduates manifest cognitive and linguistic deficiencies such as “difficulties in processing language or communicating (both speaking and writing), an inability to focus attention or reason quantitatively,” as well as “a serious lack of problem-solving skills” and “incomplete comprehension” (qtd. in Chronicle Review B11).

Levine’s diagnosis is one of the most recent in a long history of arguments documenting the “illiteracy” of the rising generation. As early as 1636, English colonists were concerned that succeeding generations, without proper language arts training, would develop language practices that would begin a “creole degeneracy” (Miller 21). More recently, in 1939 Harvard President James B. Conant reported, “From all sides, academic and nonacademic, we hear complaints of the inability of the average graduate to write either correctly or fluently” (qtd. in Berlin, Rhetoric and Reality 91). In 1950, James I. Brown wrote in The Journal of Higher Education of the “widespread recognition of the gross ineptitude and distressing mediocrity of the writing of many college students” (17-18). In 1961, Joseph Mersand, past president of NCTE, noted that the popular press was running stories that highlighted the inability of students to “read, write

or talk properly” (231). In 1978, Donald C. Stewart noted the proliferation of articles in the popular press lamenting student composition skills, particularly the December 1975 issue of Newsweek featuring the cover story ““Why Johnny Can’t Write”” (171). Even as recently at 2003, top-tier schools such as Princeton, Duke, and Brown have acknowledged that they have “not been doing a good job of teaching students how to write” (Bartlett A39). Indeed, nearly all public education institutions of higher education, especially research institutions, are now facing the dilemma confirmed by the Boyer Commission in 1998: “all too often [students] graduate without knowing how to think logically, write clearly, or speak coherently” (6).

These consistent critiques of students’ inability to communicate effectively seem to confirm James Berlin’s claim that “[n]o group of entering students—not Harvard’s or Columbia’s or Michigan’s or Stanford’s—has ever been able to manage the rhetorical tasks required in college without the college providing instruction in writing” (Rhetoric and Reality 25). But apparently the writing instruction most students receive in higher education is failing to help students develop literate capabilities.

But more significantly, these critiques demonstrate that language arts skills, particularly writing, have long been the traditional standard and expectation of an educated person. Such expectations for educated persons to demonstrate literate proficiency are certainly not unique to the modern university. The art of eloquence has always been the concern of rhetoric and, consequently, education. Berlin argues that because cultures have always expected schools to teach students to “read, write, and speak in the officially sanctioned manner,” literacy has always remained “the center of the educational enterprise,” even though rhetoric, despite historical precedence, is no

longer perceived as existing at “the center of learning” (1-2). But for most of its institutional history, college-level writing instruction, which is more accurately described as a course in literacy, has not been recognized by faculty, administrators, or students as the center of learning or the center of an undergraduate education, but rather as a required or remedial course that has no bearing on the “real world.”

The rise of the modern research university, with its emphasis on specialized knowledge and professional development, has contributed to the marginalization of rhetoric—and all other subjects of liberal education—in higher education during the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Although the vehicle of liberal education—general education—has an institutional presence in higher education, the cultural and academic forces that prioritize research and specialized learning over general education further diminish the centrality of rhetoric in education. The marginalized presence of rhetoric in higher education prevents students and faculty, who encounter relentless cultural forces devaluing general education, from recognizing the centrality of liberal arts training in providing a liberating, civic, and holistic education. These forces affect general education, which is also subject to scientific and meritocratic worldviews of society that result in students’ perceiving general education as a collection of independent and unrelated but nonetheless required courses. The lack of purpose and coherence in the general education curriculum, as well as a cultural bias towards liberal learning and the ensuing misconceptions, prevent educational reformers from recognizing and students from experiencing the purpose of education, which is to help students become conscious, autonomous, rational individuals and citizens.

Despite the divergence of the modern university from rhetoric and rhetorical instruction, there remains a persistent cultural expectation that education, particularly higher education, enable good men and women to demonstrate their learning and wisdom by speaking and communicating well. Though the need for better writing and communication instruction is becoming widely acknowledged, current critiques of higher education tend to criticize current conditions without acknowledging the social and cultural demands influencing the development of educational theory and practice. All too often, critiques of higher education tend to, in David Russell’s words, “hark back nostalgically to a golden age of academic community where Johnny could both read and write [in] ‘plain English’” (22). But Russell argues that such an age “never existed in the modern university” nor in the “old college,” and that such critiques tend to assume there is a “simple past to which we can return” to uncover curricular methods or pedagogical practices that can fulfill the demands on colleges and on students to become literate (22).

This thesis agrees with the growing consensus that many students often graduate from college or universities without having developed language arts skills—reading, writing, listening, and speaking—adequate for everyday life. However, this thesis does not blame higher education per se, but rather explores and critiques the cultural, political, economic, and social forces that have contributed to problematic practices of general education, specifically writing instruction, and resulted in inadequate training in essential language skills. This thesis argues that current educational practices in higher education reflect a misunderstanding of both the purpose of education in a democracy and the role of the liberal arts, specifically rhetoric, in accomplishing that purpose. By tracing the general history and relationship between rhetoric and education, this thesis attempts to

provide a basic understanding of the purpose of education and the role of writing instruction in accomplishing that purpose. When informed by an appropriate interpretation of rhetoric, writing instruction can add coherence to the general education curriculum and accomplish the purpose of education in a democracy.

But undergraduate education currently lacks the coherence and purpose once manifested in the classical curriculum, a curriculum in which rhetoric played a central role in learning. The absence of a rhetorically-based undergraduate education in a democracy has had a significant civic side-effect. Martin P. Wattenberg, political science professor and member of the Center for the Study of Democracy at UC Irvine, noted in 1998 that “the national [voter] turnout rate has plunged almost continually over the last four decades” (par. 5). This trend of political disengagement among younger people, who “have always had the lowest turnout rates,” continued through and set a record low during the 1996 elections, when the turnout rate for people under 25 was about “40 percent below the national average” (pars. 35-36). Although voting is merely one indication of civic engagement, and arguably not the most important one, the low turnout is indicative of a growing lack of interest in political activity among the rising generation, as well as the general public. For instance, Wattenberg observed heightened “political apathy” among college freshmen in 1998, when “27 percent said that keeping up with politics was an important priority for them, compared to 58 percent among the class of 1970” (par. 37). In a more substantial review of civic engagement, Robert D. Putnam has cited a general decline in civic participation since the mid 1960s, a decline that gives little indication of reversal.

Though many factors influence social, civil, and political engagement, it must be noted that one significant factor that generally leads to increased engagement—namely, education—has not been as reliable an indicator of civic engagement as it once was. Wattenberg notes, “The low voter turnout of young people today is paradoxical given that they are one of the best educated generations in American history” (par. 38). Putnam also notes that “despite the rapid rise in levels of education,” Americans are “15-20 percent less interested in politics and public affairs, roughly 25 percent less likely to vote . . . and roughly 40 percent less engaged in party politics and indeed in political and social organizations of all sorts” than the previous generation (42). Not only are levels of civic engagement lower, but skepticism about government and political activity has increased substantially. Putnam reports that in April 1966, “66 percent of Americans *rejected* the view that ‘people running in the country don’t really care what happens to you.’ In December 1997, in the midst of the longest period of peace and prosperity in more than two generations, 57 percent of Americans *endorsed* that same view” (47). Regardless of the accuracy of either view of the government, the latter is worrisome because, as Putnam explains, such cynicism “undermine[s] the political confidence necessary to motivate and sustain political involvement” (47).

These data are admittedly dated and do not account for the recent rise in political activity during the 2004 presidential election, which activity I will address in chapter three. But the larger issue these statistics underscore is that the traditional correlation between increased education and civic engagement is disappearing. Although many factors exist to explain the decline in political activity, one of the most important influences—education—apparently no longer prepares citizens with the desire or civic

skills necessary for living in a democracy. The decline in civic and communicative skills among the rising generation is not coincidental, as this thesis will demonstrate.

### *Overview*

The primary concern of this thesis is to recover the rhetorical roots of education in a democracy, and the potential for writing instruction to reinvigorate those roots, in order to illustrate how rhetoric is central in enabling general education to accomplish its most important purpose: to free the minds of students while preparing them to participate in the civic discourses of their communities. Ensuring that rhetorical instruction in the language arts is central to the general education curriculum will improve the likelihood that general education will enable students to become rhetorically literate citizens capable of engaging in the discursive practices that lead to sustained, effective civic engagement and freedom.

Before summarizing each chapter, I should clarify some key terms relating to education and rhetoric. I frequently refer to general education and liberal education, but I mean to maintain a slight but important distinction between them. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) defines liberal education as “a philosophy of education that aims to empower individuals, liberate the mind from ignorance, and cultivate social responsibility” (par. 1). Liberal education “usually includes a general education curriculum that provides broad exposure to multiple disciplines and ways of knowing . . . and forms the basis for developing important intellectual and civic capacities” (par. 1). For this thesis, liberal education refers to the philosophy of education as an intellectual experience with social relevance, and general education refers to the curriculum meant to embody the ideals of liberal education.

In general, the term rhetoric in this thesis refers to “the self-conscious study of the power of language” (Bizzell and Herzberg 21). This broad definition is meant to allow rhetoric to refer to all manner and methods of public communication, rather than more specific categories such as persuasion or oratory. Throughout this thesis, I refer to various theories, interpretations, and applications of this general definition as applied to education and writing instruction, but I eventually endorse a specific interpretation of rhetoric that seems best suited to accomplish the purpose of education.

The terms rhetorical instruction and rhetorical education are used by some scholars interchangeably. For the majority of this thesis, rhetorical instruction refers to instruction in oral or written communication that is informed by some theory of rhetoric. However, some methods of rhetorical instruction, which will receive attention throughout this thesis, are more effective than others in accomplishing the purpose of education. Rhetorical education broadens the scope of rhetorical instruction to include, in Greg Clark’s words, “the instruction of individuals in a collective identity” (“Transcendence at Yellowstone” 147). Clark explains that in order for people to “do the practical rhetorical work” of establishing shared beliefs and actions, they must “understand themselves as identified and interdependent with others” (147). Although rhetorical education thus conceived suggests that “education in a collective identity” precedes the “formal rhetorical [instruction] that enables participation in public discourse,” I will argue that the two may occur in complementary, if not simultaneous, ways in the composition classroom when rhetorical instruction is informed by epistemic rhetoric (147).

Despite the definitional discrepancies, rhetorical education and rhetorical instruction share the same purpose: to help students develop rhetorical literacy. Literacy



is generally perceived as a performative skill rather than a dynamic critical capacity (Gurak 181). The term rhetorical literacy is meant to avoid this limitation by describing literacy as a critical capacity that reflects both receptive and productive capacities characteristic of an autonomous individual. In this sense, rhetorical literacy is only possible when a person has developed the intellectual skills necessary to become an autonomous, or educated, person. Rhetorical literacy also intends to contextualize all language arts—speaking, listening, reading, writing—in the broader act of communication. This conceptualization accomplishes several purposes: first, it allows rhetoric to apply to communicative acts, regardless of medium or method of delivery; second, it emphasizes the social nature and function of language, thus creating ethical exigencies for those engaging in communicative acts.

Specifically, rhetorical literacy means the ability to reflect self-consciously and to engage responsibly in public communication. “Self-conscious reflection” describes the ability of a student to become critically aware of the power of language (logos). “Self-conscious” refers to an autonomous student capable of reasoning and rational judgment. “Reflection” in the context of communication describes the process of both receiving and producing messages in communicative situations. “Responsible engagement” invites participants to recognize and adhere to social obligations inherent in all public communicative exchanges.

Finally, the intended audience of this thesis is graduate instructors who teach first-year writing. Whether they are novice or experienced, composition instructors will benefit from understanding the histories and relationships of education, rhetoric, composition, technology, and literacy, as well as the potential impact composition

instruction can have on the minds and lives of students. Hopefully the insights generated from considering these concepts will shape instructors' teaching philosophies and pedagogical practices to ensure their students will experience a genuinely liberating, rhetorical education.

Chapter one traces general trends in the evolution of higher education, beginning with Isocrates' school of rhetoric in Athens, moving through medieval and Renaissance education to the American colonial college and the modern research university. It briefly reviews major philosophies, developments, and reforms of American higher education during the twentieth century in order to contextualize the current dilemmas preventing general education programs at American universities from accomplishing their purpose.

Chapter two defines the purpose of education and the role of rhetoric in accomplishing that purpose. It reviews moments within the history of writing instruction in higher education during the twentieth century while highlighting how various interpretations of rhetoric have resulted in various methods of composition instruction and why certain rhetorics have prevailed over others. It also traces the general decline in civic engagement over the last half of the century and the general increase in individualism and social isolation, arguing that such trends correspond with diminished rhetorical education.

Chapter three examines arguments that attribute the decline in literacy and literate practices to technological innovation. It argues that the assumptions of such arguments correspond with the assumptions of arguments explored in chapter two that promote rhetorically-impooverished practices in the composition classroom. It also highlights how

technological innovations are redefining literary practices and civic engagement, and how rhetorical instruction and rhetorical education must account for such changes.

The conclusion briefly reviews how rhetorical instruction in the language arts can function as the unifying element of the general education curriculum while accomplishing the purpose of education.

### *Conclusion*

While rhetoric has been institutionalized as a formal course of study, and even as the organizing principle of first-year writing programs, it has hardly escaped the reductive definition of inflammatory speech, manipulative discourse, or mere flattery. Rhetoric portrayed as a polemical political device rather than as a method of identification and public deliberation creates a false distinction between rational and rhetorical discourse, a distinction that inaccurately portrays language as an objective, transparent tool used to reflect meaning rather than as an organizing power that mediates learning, creates meaning, and influences civic engagement.

This misconception of language and rhetoric inevitably leads to impoverished methods of civic engagement among the general public. Without improved rhetorical training, citizens and students fail to understand the inherent power of language to create meaning and induce action. As information and communication technologies become ubiquitous, students and citizens need to understand how language works for, with, and against them so that they can develop critical communication habits necessary for survival in a democracy. This is why rhetorical education should have a greater presence in discussions about the nature and purpose of education, what constitutes literacy, and what skills and capacities members of society need to ensure that individuals may

identify with each other and function as self-governing, reasonable citizens in their communities and nation.

## Chapter 1

This chapter describes interpretations of rhetoric and methods of rhetorical instruction in Athens, then traces the development of these and other interpretations of rhetoric and methods of rhetorical instruction throughout the history of higher education. The purpose of this review is two-fold: first, to demonstrate how political, cultural, economic, and social forces influence both how rhetoric is interpreted and how rhetorical instruction occurs; and second, to uncover assumptions about the purpose of education revealed in the ever-changing curricula of higher education.

This chapter also evaluates contemporary pressures, motivations, and assumptions informing general education reform in order to assess the impact of general education on students' perception of the purpose of education. The overall purpose of this review is to evaluate the evolution of higher education and rhetoric in order to answer this question: Does current curricular reform probe deeply or directly enough "into the nature and purpose of higher education" (Curtler x) so that such reform may improve education?

### *Ancient Rhetorical Instruction*

John Poulakos compares the differences in rhetorical instruction between the Sophists and Isocrates in order to reveal how political and cultural conditions influence interpretations of rhetoric and methods of rhetorical instruction. This review reveals that cultural and political circumstances during Isocrates' lifetime correlate with contemporary American society. This correlation suggests that Isocrates' theory of rhetoric and education is particularly relevant to contemporary society.

Poulakos first notes how education in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. "assumed a distinctly rhetorical character" with an emphasis on logos (69). However, there arose

divergent interpretations of the purpose of logos and, hence, rhetoric, which led to two distinct purposes for rhetorical training. On the one hand, the Sophists “held a *dynastic* conception of logos,” that recognized the power of language “to impose, to undermine, to violate, to deceive, and to distort,” (70). For the sophists, “[t]he primary function of logos is critical,” meaning to create doubt about existing realities in order to “create new possibilities” (74). This “logocentric” premise, which typically served tyrannical rather than democratic ends, reflected the sophistic emphasis on the “command of logos [as] the means par excellence to personal and political power” (75).

In contrast, Isocrates’ “*hegemonic*” notion of logos reflected his interest in the power of logos as a “civilizing influence on society” and its “capacity to collect, to unify, to lead, to shape, and to facilitate” by “harmoniz[ing] individual and collective purposes” (69-71). Though Isocrates did not deny the dynastic power of logos, he argued that the “principle function of logos is constructive” in its ability to “shape social reality” and “build necessary institutions and create human communities held together by commonly shaped beliefs” that stabilize society (74).

Poulakos acknowledges the social and cultural forces informing both the Sophists’ and Isocrates’ interpretation of the purpose of rhetoric. The Sophists endorsed the “centrifugal” power of rhetoric to destabilize a stable, complacent society uncritical of tradition (81-82). Isocrates, on the other hand, “found himself in a dispersed culture, one plagued with the ills inherent in excessive individuation—conflicting claims and competing interests” (82). Following the Peloponnesian War, “a plurality of forces” arose in Athens, which was no longer the political, economic, and cultural center of the Greek city-states; but these states were insufficiently stable to assert political dominance over

others due to internal discord and factions characterized by political strife, disloyalty, economic disparity, increased litigation, and a pervasive sense of individualism. These forces represented “excessive pluralization” which “precipitated a crisis of disunity and disaffection with traditional authority” (73). Such conditions, with society seeking “new forms of consensus and stability,” influenced Isocrates to emphasize the “centripetal” power of rhetoric, through logos, to reestablish a stable, productive center conducive to self-governance (73, 81-82).

The cultural context in which these interpretations emerged reveals the forces influencing the Sophists’ and Isocrates’ interpretations of rhetoric, and their subsequent approaches to rhetorical training. The Sophistic approach catered to “personal ambition” by promising to produce “powerful” citizens capable of overthrowing the dominant tradition and culture, while “empower[ing] a new class of people by teaching them public eloquence” (77-78). In contrast, Isocrates “sought to compensate for the lack of enlightened statesmanship and mindful citizenship” following the Peloponnesian War by linking rhetoric to “the articulation of wise governance and civic conscience” (75). Isocrates’ emphasis on the civic nature and public utility of rhetorical instruction meant to challenge the increasingly popular view, due to political turmoil, that individual happiness was incompatible with the interests of the state. Isocrates’ approach to education sought to demonstrate the “fundamental interdependence between personal and public-well being” by emphasizing the potential for rhetoric to unite rather than divide individuals and communities (76). Language was central to this objective because unity occurs when individuals articulate “desirable visions” and “common goals” in the public sphere for the common good (78).

The cultural context also explains why the Sophists and Isocrates used different materials for instruction. The Sophists, having come of age during a time “when poetry was still the chief means of inculcating cultural values,” relied primarily on materials from the “mythopoetic tradition” for instruction. However, Isocrates “came into prominence during a period of decline in poetry, growth in history, and instability in politics”; he sought to move rhetoric from the “poetic past” towards the “political present” by drawing on materials from “current sociopolitical issues” without entirely abandoning the use of poetry and myth (77). In addition, Isocrates relied heavily on composition, as the “growth of writing” during Isocrates’ lifetime “afforded new possibilities for rhetorical discourse” (69-70). This was significant because “written rhetoric” had certain advantages over oral rhetoric, such as embodying “permanence and reliability,” reaching—and in a sense, creating—a broader audience, allowing for “contemplation and study,” and “solicit[ing] thoughtful responses” (80-81). In addition to his experience as a logographer, Isocrates probably incorporated “written rhetoric” into this school because it embodied the kind of permanence and stability necessary to broaden democratic discourse among the various city-states, which corresponded with Isocrates’ desire for the city-states to unite under a central government.

Poulakos’ review demonstrates the correlating social and political conditions between Athenian and American democracies. The social conditions that influenced Isocrates’ interpretation of rhetoric—increased litigation, economic inequality, increased individualism, and disaffected political engagement—are equally prevalent in contemporary society. Isocrates recognized that the health of a democracy depends on the ability of its citizens to use language for civic engagement, to deliberate for the ultimate



public good rather than immediate private desires. The principles of Isocrates' theory of rhetoric and methods for rhetorical instruction provide a necessary foundation on which to establish the kind of rhetorical education that should occur in a contemporary democracy.

#### Isocrates and Plato

Michael Leff contrasts Isocrates' "ideal of the orator" with Plato's "ideal of the philosopher" to illustrate how each results in "rival conceptions" of civic education (237-38). Leff provides a useful summary of the central tenets of Isocrates' philosophy of education, which closely resembles his philosophy of rhetoric. Isocrates rejects both Plato's notion of "abstract, objective truth" and the Sophists' "extreme relativism" and instead attempts to reach middle ground by establishing "a practical standard of knowledge that responds to ordinary experience, that develops within the medium of political discourse, and that generally enables [one] to make appropriate judgments in particular cases" (236). Isocrates also recognizes that "good rhetoric" is not mere ornament or flattery but a source for inventing this "practical standard of knowledge" (236). In addition, Isocrates counters the amoral stance of the Sophist by arguing that "rhetorical excellence" is not produced by mastering technical skill alone but is produced through "self-restraint" and must demonstrate the influence of virtuous character (237).

Yet, Leff notes two problems with Isocrates' philosophy: first, Isocrates "marks himself elitist" by claiming that only certain individuals are "capable of deliberative excellence," and the general public should "defer to their better-educated fellow-citizens" in matters of deliberation and governance (236-37); second, because Isocrates' theory

does not actually describe democracy as practiced in Athens, his “educational program is an idealization” (237).

Despite these apparent flaws, Leff notes that Isocrates’ idealized conception of education is, paradoxically, “never completely detached from ordinary experience,” particularly from political matters (237). In contrast, Plato’s abstract, metaphysical program is detached from “all forms of ordinary experience,” especially politics; in this sense, Plato’s philosophy of education works against democracy while Isocrates’ “seeks to reform it” (237). Isocrates’ philosophy recognizes the dialectical tension between the unachievable ideal and the unstable practical in order to provide an education that prepares his students to function in the practical realm (238).

These divergent philosophies reflect divergent interpretations of the purpose of rhetoric. While Isocrates thought education “should form men who are capable of serving the state,” Plato thought education should concentrate on “helping individuals develop their innate capacities for seeking absolute truth” (Bizzell and Herzberg 68). Isocrates saw philosophy not as the pursuit of absolute truth, as Plato did, but as “the study of how to address immediate practical problems,” which made rhetoric a “powerful tool” for dealing with problems in situations where contingent, not absolute, knowledge was available and for “moving people to action for the common good” (67). Isocrates was not concerned with finding sources of “absolute or transcendent knowledge” because such endeavors generally bring “social isolation” (71). Rather, the work of the “philosopher-rhetor” in the educational system is to “try to be a useful citizen and to make useful citizens” (71). Isocrates’ notion of philosophy and rhetoric represents an interest in general knowledge that makes good citizens and leads to serving the public good. “Hence

he is most concerned with developing the probabilistic wisdom used in practical affairs of serious import, a kind of knowledge that is developed and applied socially” (71).

These contrasting philosophies will manifest themselves in contrasting interpretations of rhetoric that inform writing instruction in the twentieth century and will receive more attention in chapter two. Plato’s and Isocrates’ varying interpretations of education represents, as Leff explains, the challenge of “whether we can conceive and design a program of education that is sufficiently realistic to account for the sprawl of democratic practices while it is also sufficiently idealistic to promote civic virtue” (254). This struggle manifests itself in different ways and in varying intensities throughout the history of higher education.

#### Isocrates’ School of Rhetoric

Isocrates’ school of rhetoric, founded in Athens around 393 BC, is considered the first formal program of instruction and training in rhetoric (Bizzell and Herzberg 67).

Isocrates mentored students, who were adolescent boys from wealthy families and sufficiently versed in grammatical training, for several years in subjects that now constitute the liberal arts. Contrary to then current educational practices, Isocrates instructed his students to first compose reflective speeches about serious subjects, often pertaining to “issues in political philosophy,” and then practice reading them aloud (68).

Isocrates’ school “changed rhetorical education from a tutorial enterprise to an institutional arrangement” (Poulakos 70). In contrast with the “short-term, discontinuous instruction” provided by itinerant sophists, Isocrates’ school validated rhetorical instruction as a legitimate cultural practice. While this institutionalization changed the

physical conditions of instruction, it more significantly created the social obligation for rhetorical instruction to prepare pupils for participation in the affairs of the state (74-75).

Isocrates' school illustrates the connection between rhetorical instruction and civic engagement. In Antidosis, Isocrates writes that a liberal education enables students, especially young men, who are susceptible to unreasonableness and immediate gratification, to "govern themselves" by principles espoused in liberal education: disdaining passion, sacrificing money and ease in order to labor in learning, and taking "great pleasure . . . in the good things which spring up in the soul under a liberal education" (qtd. in Rhetorical Tradition 79). As this description indicates, the purpose of liberal education is to develop autonomy, or self-governance, through intellectual discipline. Isocrates' philosophy of education demonstrates the central role of rhetoric in accomplishing the purpose of education in a democracy: to liberate students in order that they may govern themselves.

Isocrates' approach to education had a profound impact on medieval and modern education. He is credited with "establishing a pattern of education" that, albeit elitist, "prevailed throughout Greece and then Rome," then "spread to Europe," was "codified in the trivium" which prevailed through the Renaissance and continues to influence liberal education today (68). Yet, recent changes in higher education have obscured the purpose and marginalized the centrality of liberal education in higher education. The prevalence and longevity Isocrates' philosophy of education, and the role of rhetoric in realizing that philosophy, suggests his ideas and practices have bearing on the undergraduate educational practices in contemporary democracies.

### *Medieval and Renaissance Education and Rhetoric*

During the medieval period, higher education in Western Europe was located in monasteries and cathedral schools (Levine and Nidiffer 53). The popularity of education grew, following Charlemagne's edict in AD 789 for cathedrals and monasteries to establish schools that educated clergy and laymen. "Students gathered around cathedral schools and great teachers, attracting additional teachers and more students. Out of these groupings, called *studium generale*, the first universities developed during . . . the twelfth century" (53-54). The most famous of these medieval universities were Bologna and Paris, which "emphasized advanced degree preparation" (54). The medieval model of the university spread across Europe and, by seventeenth century, most European countries had established universities based on the model of the medieval university (54). However, the universities established at Oxford and Cambridge, though modeled after the medieval university, placed more emphasis on undergraduate education (54).

During the Renaissance, colleges were formed in England "in opposition to the then long-established European universities" and consisted of "a place where students might live together with their teachers for the purpose of receiving a rounded preparation—spiritual, intellectual, physical—for active life" (Committee on General Education 243). The model for this early general education was derived from "the classical ideal of a complete man" and functioned as "a training place for a kind of universal gentleman" (243). This training had an ultimately political purpose: to educate potential leaders and governors (244). These English colleges, in addition to intellectual movements across Britain, influenced the beginnings of higher education in colonial America.

### *Higher Education through the Nineteenth Century*

The first schools of higher education in America were colleges established by colonists and based the Renaissance collegiate model of education established in Britain, which was rooted in the classical ideal of well-rounded, yet aristocratic, education. These colleges were “the almost universal institution of higher learning until the latter half of the [nineteenth] century” (242).

Harvard College, the first American college, was part of a colonial college system that embodied a neoclassical curriculum, where social elites were taught “a basic body of classical knowledge and useful intellectual skills,” in addition to Christian morality and colonial class culture (Levine and Nidiffer 54). The colonial college was a “teaching institution” designed to prepare students “to assume prestigious vocations” such as medicine, law, or clergy (54). The model for Harvard was derived from Emmanuel College at Cambridge, and the curriculum was based on the trivium and quadrivium (54, 66-67). William N. Denman explains that rhetorical instruction in neoclassical curriculum in the colonial college was concentrated in oratory, which emphasized rhetoric’s connection to civic life (3-4). However, this connection changed as the traditional colonial college was influenced by intellectual, cultural, economic, and technological changes through the late-nineteenth century.

The growth of modernism in Europe, particularly in Germany, changed the perception of knowledge from “something that was divinely revealed with perhaps magical qualities to something that could be discovered based on empiricism” (Levine and Nidiffer 55). Empiricism, which emphasized observation and experimentation to arrive at knowledge, instigated the proliferation of “new fields of knowledge” and disciplines in higher education, as well as “a panoply of new institutional models”

including research universities, technical institutes, community colleges, and liberal arts colleges (55-56). These curricular and institutional changes resulted in more opportunities for a greater number and diversity of students to pursue higher education, students who manifested intellectual capability rather than a particular social class (56). The classical curriculum was challenged, attacked, and neglected during such rapid, expansive changes.

As higher education adapted to shifting cultural forces, the classical curriculum that had originated in antiquity and had survived through the middle ages was abandoned. In the context of such changes to higher education, the perceived purpose of education changed. Educational and curricular reform resulted in a more definite engagement of higher education in social life and a closer connection with business and government (56-57). The growing expectation of higher education to serve a public function came from the middle class who viewed education as certification for one of the many new professions created by specialization and the expanding economy (Berlin, Rhetoric and Reality 21).

Economic conditions, in part, redefined public attitude towards the purpose of education, which became a privatized endeavor for self-serving means rather than service to the community through public discourse. Denman describes this change as a departure from “a communitarian ethos” to “a greater consciousness of individual autonomy,” consequently redefining public life as a sphere for “individual self-definition and action” (4-5). This shift from community to individual was reinforced by the nineteenth-century economic practice of “capitalistic competition,” which further shifted the emphasis from “public good” to “economic survival” (5). These conditions created demand for a

specialized workforce. Some colleges, like Amherst in 1827, tried to balance the needs of society by introducing a specialized program of study that paralleled the classical program, whereas new colleges were created, like the Rensselaer School, now Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, which represented the recognition “to move higher education away from classical education” by offering specialized education (5). Specialization created a “culture of professionalism” in which individual achievement was of primary importance, especially among those of the middle class, who were eager to rise in social and economic standing (5). Education was one avenue for professionalization because it provided training in skills that graduates could use to qualify for occupations. Denman notes, “Indeed, the story of the American university is the story of the rise of academic specialization to meet the needs of the professional culture” (5-6). Although higher education had to modify curriculum and instruction to meet social needs, the purpose of education and its role in a democracy was lost in the transition.

In addition to specialization, the “revolution in writing technology” in the mid-1800s, combined with rising student enrollment, led to a rise in writing instruction that diminished “rhetoric’s link with civic discourse” (7). Although speech departments maintained the “link between the teaching of public discourse and civic life,” instruction in oratory became instruction in eloquence and performance as “personal and career goals [became] primary reasons for learning to speak well” (10-11). In addition, the professionalization of the communications field in the twentieth century, with its “growing emphasis upon social science aspects of the discipline,” took precedence over rhetoric in curricula-related matters (11).



The historical shift from orality to literacy in the nineteenth-century school and its impact on rhetorical instruction reveals an important correlation between technology and rhetoric, specifically the tendency for innovative communication technologies to challenge and transform existing technologies while creating new modes of rhetorical discourse. I will explore this correlation in more detail in chapter three, as well as its implications for rhetorical education. But the point to underscore here is that rhetoric was no longer a central component of higher education.

One final event to consider in this review is the introduction of the elective system by Charles William Elliot, President of Harvard, which system “opened . . . the floods of specialized knowledge then streaming from European universities” (Committee on General Education 37-38). Allowing students to choose courses was “the first long step away from the restricted curriculum of earlier times” (38). Though the elective system was “necessary, even inevitable,” “the exuberance of freedom” afforded to students in choosing from among the vast array of specialized subjects resulted in, among other difficulties, no assurance of “coherence and intellectual discipline” in students’ work (38). David Russell explains how the elective curriculum “compartmentalized knowledge and broke one relatively stable academic discourse community into many fluctuating ones” (21). Though the elective curriculum allowed students more freedom in choosing courses, it was one of the primary contributors to incoherence in the undergraduate education.

Denman rightly notes that the departure of neoclassical education in American higher education is not necessarily a loss because it made higher education “more egalitarian and practical and was an integral force in national development “(3). But

Denman argues that “the disappearance of rhetorically based education” constituted a “significant loss to American civic life” (3). Although language arts continue to be taught in public institutions, they have lost their connection to the “wider goal” of those skills: “the betterment of civic life” (16).

The history of modern higher education is, in one sense, a dialectic between “the forces of the college and the university” (Committee on General Education 245). The debates and arguments during the twentieth century about the nature and purpose of education represent this dialectic between specialized and general learning, individual interests and social responsibility. However, the popularity the modern university as the primary model for higher education has come to dominate this dialectic, while the classical model is further marginalized from the purposes of modern education. But this dominance has inhibited higher education from accomplishing its most important purpose.

#### *Higher Education in the Twentieth-Century*

Following the cultural and institutional shifts of the nineteenth century, important philosophic work on the nature and purpose of education flowered during the turn of the twentieth century, which was a period of great debate about the dilemmas, purposes, needs, and methods of education in the twentieth century. The central arguments about the nature and purpose of higher education reflected the tension between the traditional classical college and the modern research university. Hence, some arguments are more sympathetic than others to the aims of classical education.

On the one hand, Cardinal John Henry Newman favored the classical concept of education of intellectual and moral development, where content is imparted to students

through close, frequent associations with professor-mentors. Robert Maynard Hutchins, President of University of Chicago, also viewed liberal education as the emphasis in undergraduate college. Hutchins favored the creation of a core of great books that would constitute common knowledge. In contrast, John Dewey favored a progressive view of education which was student-centered, required interaction and experimentation to learn, and clearly contributed to societal life (Fuhrmann 88-89). “The ideas first presented by these classic philosophers of higher education remain at the heart of curriculum conversations today” (Fuhrmann 93).

These philosophies cannot be reviewed in adequate detail in this thesis, but mentioning them here demonstrates that the concerns of the classical curriculum—a unified body of knowledge in the liberal arts—continue to inform debates about education. It is important to recognize the philosophical and curricular assumptions informing such arguments in order to trace the development of rhetoric through educational reform in the twentieth century. It is also important to reject the notion that classical learning is opposed to and can only occur in place of specialized learning; such a view presents a false dichotomy of knowledge and learning. Although classical education was elitist in clientele, it is not elitist in purpose. A correct understanding of the purpose of education and the role of the liberal arts in accomplishing that purpose, both of which will be discussed in chapter two, demonstrates that classical learning provides the intellectual habits and skills that facilitate learning regardless of method of discipline, a feature that makes classical learning central to education in a democracy.

Attention towards education and educational reform during much of the twentieth century was prompted by a consistent political concern: to preserve democracy. The post-

World War I period saw an intense movement to establish a definitive general education curriculum that would combine “the breadth of liberal learning with professional specialization,” while providing “a sense of cultural inheritance and citizenship” for an increasingly diverse society (Berlin, Rhetoric and Reality 92). The political motivation for this “mushrooming of the general education movement” was, as Berlin underscores, to “safeguard the American way of life—the social stability provided by the democratic method” (92). It is not a coincidence, then, that among educational reform during this period articulated was articulated an educational philosophy and practice informed by the precepts of neoclassical education, especially rhetoric.

Following World War II, public and government interest heightened significantly in education. Ratcliff suggests the “great impetus” for this renewed interest in education came from the aftermath of World War II, where many wondered how an educated public in Germany, “particularly the intelligentsia, could fall victim to charismatic and totalitarian leaders” (Ratcliff, “What is a Curriculum” 141). The ensuing emphasis on general education demonstrated that reform leaders recognized the necessity of education to enable citizens in a democracy to engage in public discourse in order to preserve democratic freedom.

This realization was emphasized in the 1945 publication of General Education in a Free Society by a Harvard-appointed Committee invited to research existing educational practices and make recommendations for improvement. The report, often called the “Redbook,” surveyed the history and practices of American education and then articulated a theory of general education that was clearly grounded in the liberal arts, specifically rhetoric. The impact of the report was significant: its recommendations were

adopted in nearly every higher education institution in America and prompted the 1947 Report of the President's Commission on Higher Education, which increased accessibility to university education and redirected attention in the curriculum towards general education (Levine and Nidiffer 76). But more significantly, the report demonstrated the central role of rhetoric in the general education curriculum. The influence of rhetoric in the Harvard report will be examined in chapter two.

Because making education democratic, both in terms of availability and content, was a high priority in post-war America, it is not insignificant that rhetoric experienced a renaissance in higher education during the 1950s. Berlin notes that this renaissance, which demonstrated the "role of rhetoric as the basis of education in the past," was due in large part to "the revival of Aristotelian humanism at the University of Chicago" (Rhetoric and Reality 116-117). This revival led to innovative theories of rhetoric and methods of rhetorical instruction both inside and outside the English Department. The establishment of the interdisciplinary communications course, which allowed rhetorical instruction to escape momentarily its relegated status in freshman composition, represents a significant move towards the kind of integrated, interdisciplinary, rhetorical instruction necessary in a democracy. Unfortunately, for reasons explained in chapter two, by the 1960s the communications course was no longer interdisciplinary, and rhetoric was again relegated to freshman composition.

The departure in higher education from the neoclassical curriculum embodied in the colonial college seemed necessary in order to make education widely available and relevant to an increasingly diverse society. But this departure resulted in a loss of the educational theory and curricular practices that prepared students to function as citizens

in a democracy. Although neoclassical education was tailored to a privileged class and reinforced elitism, its curricular content—the liberal arts, particularly rhetoric—were recognized during the twentieth century as necessary for providing the kind of education necessary in a democracy. The neoclassical curriculum not only provided the intellectual training and skills necessary for democratic living, but it also ensured curricular coherence, something that the modern university has not been able to achieve.

### Curricular Coherence

The central question motivating curricular reform since the abandonment of classical education has been one of how to establish unity, or coherence, in higher education curriculum (Committee on General Education 39). Ratcliff explains that the “curriculum of the medieval university” was sequential and integrated, beginning with “study in the trivium (logic, grammar, and rhetoric)” and continuing with “the quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music)” (Ratcliff, “What is a Curriculum” 23-24). But with the explosion and proliferation of knowledge, specialized disciplines, and increased diversity among students, coherence has been difficult, if not impossible, to achieve.

The vague notions of “breadth and depth of study in undergraduate education” have been an attempt to counter the incoherence of undergraduate education (24). Unfortunately, the range of variability in breadth and depth requirements, though allowing for a more democratically inclined curriculum than the prescribed subjects of the liberal arts, have contributed to incoherence in curriculum. The subsequent “variation in learning experiences alters the extent and type of knowledge, skills, and abilities

students acquire” and does not promote “connected learning” among students (Ratcliff, “Quality and Coherence” 145).

This lack of coherence in higher education is one of the reasons higher education has been criticized. In response to this problem, the U.S. Commissioner of Education in the late 1970s called for a common core curriculum in undergraduate education to strengthen social bonds and counter the prevailing sentiment of individualism in society. However, the call for a core curriculum during this period had political overtones. During the Republican Revolution in the 1980s, intellectual and political tensions about the nature, purpose, and aims of higher education resulted in the culture wars. While intellectual forces contested and abandoned canonic texts in favor of previously neglected texts, conservative forces charged higher education with indoctrinating students with radical ideologies rather than educating them in traditional, fundamental knowledge.

Amid the culture wars, social relevance and institutional accountability became key concerns in the public, as well as the concern that students were not learning general knowledge and were ineffective thinkers and communicators (143). The culture wars are an extension of the greater tension in higher education regarding tradition and progress, heritage and change. They also demonstrate the potential problems that arise when diversity is favored over commonality, a point that will be explored in chapter two. But the culture wars renewed interest in educational reform that would create coherence in undergraduate education, an interest that continues to influence reform today.

Surveys conducted in 2000 by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) and Center for the Study of Higher Education at Pennsylvania State University revealed that the majority of universities have been “engaged in general

education change and innovation” over the last decade, that faculty and administrators placed “a higher priority on general education in 2000 than [they] did ten years earlier,” and that most institutions “modified their general education programs in either large or modest ways during the decade,” particularly during “the latter half of the decade” (Ratcliff, Johnson, and Gaff 2, 10). These findings confirm that “general education reform [is] found widely throughout higher education today” (3).

But reform efforts, despite their prevalence and popularity, are failing to effect change in the general education curriculum, most notably in terms of coherence. The results of the aforementioned study conclude that “[w]hile a major motive for general education reform has been to create a more coherent curriculum, the changes reported . . . fell short of their mark in achieving greater coherence” (114). The lack of coherence in the general education curriculum is preventing general education from demonstrating its central, unifying role in accomplishing the purpose of higher education.

#### Miscommunication and Misconceptions

While curricular reform has struggled to create coherence in the general education curriculum, an additional problem has been that of communicating the purpose and importance of general education to students. Moreover, there have been widespread misconceptions about the nature and purpose of general education, arising from shifts in societal interests and values, which have further prevented reform efforts from attaining coherence or validating general education in the eyes of undergraduates.

Despite the increase in perceived importance of general education among faculty and administrators, general education reform has been generally ineffectual in validating general education in the eyes of university students. Data from The Status of General



Education in the Year 2000: Summary of a National Survey illustrates this trend.

Although sixty-four percent of Chief Academic Officers (CAOs) reported that the importance of general education “as an institutional priority” increased from 1990 to 2000, and while 73 percent of administrators and 53 percent of faculty became more favorable towards general education, “62 percent of institutions reported that students’ attitudes towards general education were unchanged from ten years ago” while “21 percent said students were more favorable” and 17 percent said students were less favorable (Ratcliff et al. 8).

According to the report, reasons for lack of interest in general education among students haven’t changed over the years and include low interest level in general courses, rising costs of education, which makes students resent taking required classes outside their predetermined interests, and the assumption that general education doesn’t contribute to career success (15). However, the report notes that universities may be as much to blame for these misconceptions, citing “ambiguous communication” about the purpose and expectations of general education as a primary reason for the sustained lack of interest in general education among students, despite increased interest among faculty and administration (10).

Additional challenges for changing the perception of general education include “developing shared educational values and embedding them in the life of institutions,” “conveying to students the practicality of learning outside their major,” and reversing students and faculty preferences for specialized rather than general and liberal learning, all of which have further inhibited general education from accomplishing its purpose (18).

This last point about preference for specialized learning reflects the pervasive impact of specialization in the modern university on society. Society is heavily entrenched in scientific and pragmatic worldviews that continually ignore humanistic study in order to pursue professional development. The prevalence of specialization in the modern university has facilitated a fundamental misconception about the purpose of education, a purpose that is apparently incompatible with, and results in a biased view towards, liberal education.

As the history of higher education demonstrates, the institutional shift of universities towards specialized education reflects the changing interests and values of society, which values were heavily influenced by changing economic conditions. Capitalism facilitated economic and social mobility, including a greater demand for a specialized workforce, which required training and education. The economic demands for trained workers changed the perception of education to job preparation, or job training. Universities and colleges, to ensure enrollments and funding, have adapted their curriculum to meet these societal needs. In this sense, the current state of higher education reflects the values of contemporary culture: specialized training for a job that will earn money so as to ensure economic stability, if not mobility.

Consequently, the purpose of education according to the general public is to provide job training. Tolerance for general education seems to be growing thinner as financial security becomes more elusive for many middle-class Americans. The oppressive influence of immediate socioeconomic constraints—meaning the lack of financial security and vocational opportunities—encourages an extremely pragmatic view of the purpose of education that prevent students or the general public from engaging in

liberal arts study. Such a pragmatic worldview of education demands an immediate return on investment, and those funding higher education—governments, states, interest groups, corporations, parents, citizens, even students—are increasing the demand for education to provide “practical” knowledge, “useful” skills, and “applicable” training that will allow students to further professional interests. Liberal education is viewed as irrelevant because it does not provide a “useful” function in terms of job training.

The irony of such arguments is that the liberal arts provide training for civic engagement as well as general job skills. Ratcliff cites research on what specific skills broadly categorized under the term “critical thinking” are valued and deemed important by faculty, employers, and policy makers in their line of work (Ratcliff, “What is a Curriculum” 17). The research concluded that these groups “often agree on broad areas of nontechnical knowledge, skills, and abilities” such as “higher order applied problem-solving abilities”; “enthusiasm for learning on a continual basis”; “interpersonal skills, including teamwork and collaboration, and oral and written communication skills”; “sense of responsibility for action (both personal and collective)”; “ability to bridge cultural and linguistic barriers”; and “sense of professionalism” (18). The research suggests that “certain knowledge, skills, and abilities associated with general and liberal learning are highly desired among these external constituents” (18).

Mentioning these benefits of a liberal education is not an attempt to validate liberal education in terms of its applicability to job performance because the purpose of a liberal education is much more important: to allow students to become autonomous agents capable of self-governance. But these benefits help illustrate the applicability of the liberal arts to all areas of study. The neglect of a liberal education has implications for

job performance, but there are more important matters at stake, which are made clear when the purpose of education is clearly articulated.

The current inability of public universities to articulate a clear, compelling philosophy of the ultimate purpose of education, particularly general education, has resulted in an impoverished form of education that is insufficiently preparing students to live as autonomous, rational, engaged citizens in a democracy. Because the general assumption shared by the majority of students, professionals, and universities about the purpose of education is not being challenged or redefined by educational institutions themselves, higher education is failing to accomplish its purpose.

### *Conclusion*

The authors who summarize the AACU and Penn State surveys of general education acknowledge, as an afterthought, that general education “is so deeply embedded in the culture of our institutions . . . that the assumptions on which it rests rarely go fully examined” (Ratcliff, Johnson, and Gaff 115). This acknowledgement may explain the reason reform has not been able to achieve greater coherence: without fully examining the assumptions about the purpose of general education, motivations to reform it will prove insufficient. Incidentally, insufficiently probing the purposes of general education has likely led to the ambiguous communication about its importance and relevance.

This historical review of higher education and general education reform suggests that current reform *does not* probe deeply or directly enough “into the nature and purpose of higher education” (Curtler x). This is because reform does not recall or effectively integrate the principles and curriculum associated with rhetorical education. Those

seeking to articulate or implement curricular changes that achieve coherence must recognize and clearly convey to faculty, students, and the general public the correlation between the principles and curriculum of liberal education and the purpose of education.

Given the “widening array of social demands” placed on universities to prepare students for employment, it is apparent that “no one curriculum and no one institution can be entirely responsive to the vast array of new constituents” and demands (Ratcliff, “What is a Curriculum” 17). Consequently, reintroducing the classical curriculum, as it was structured in antiquity, into the modern university cannot resolve the problem of curricular coherence. But the principles and ideals of the classical curriculum, as illustrated in rhetorical education, are relevant to all areas and methods of learning. Understanding these classical principles and ideals and how to adapt them to address current social demands is necessary to begin articulating a coherent program for general education. As Ratcliff explains, a coherent curriculum will focus on “cognitive skill development,” meaning the skills of “speaking, reading, writing, and related linguistic processes” because they are “instrumental in all areas of learning” (24). The composition course is best suited to contribute to curricular coherence because it provides rhetorical instruction in the language arts skills.

After reviewing the challenges of specialization, diversity, and innovation experienced by general education, the Harvard report identifies the need for an overarching “logic” or “frame” that will allow unity and diversity to operate simultaneously in the educational system and enable cooperative action despite disagreement over individual beliefs or differences (Committee on General Education 41). This kind of frame is embedded in the correlation among education, citizenship, and

the language arts—all three of which are central concerns of rhetoric and rhetorical education.

## Chapter 2

The last chapter argued that the growth of the modern university initiated profound changes to the purposes and practices of higher education. It also argued that the lack of coherence in the general education curriculum, along with the marginalization of rhetoric and rhetorical instruction in the composition course, is preventing students from experiencing the kind of education that promotes civic engagement. It further demonstrated that attempts to create curricular coherence in the general education curriculum are not succeeding primarily because current reform does not retrieve or articulate the nature and purpose of education, nor the curriculum necessary to achieve coherence.

This chapter will first review the purpose of education and the role of the liberal arts in accomplishing that purpose. It will then review three popular rhetorics informing composition instruction during the twentieth century, how these rhetorics have shaped composition theory and pedagogy, and the implications of two of these rhetorical theories for civic engagement. The purpose of this review is to provide composition instructors with, as Thomas P. Miller explains, a “critical awareness of [their] institutional history” that demonstrates the civic implications of their work and indicates which rhetorical theory should inform their teaching in order to accomplish the purpose of education (20).

### *Purpose of Education*

Professor Hugh Curtler, in Recalling Education, argues that the liberal arts allow education to accomplish its purpose, which is to enable students to become intellectually autonomous individuals capable of using their minds to make reasonable decisions, judgments, and actions. Curtler argues that study in the liberal arts fosters the

development of “practical reason,” or reasonableness, more than other subjects because the liberal arts emphasize “theory rather than information, principles rather than facts” and allow students to acquire autonomy through the development of “deeper understanding” and the “application of principles” to everyday situations (6). The goal of liberal arts study is to “liberate the human mind” through the development of intellectual capabilities that allow individuals to reason and act according to “self-determined ends” (6, 24). Because the liberal arts have the capacity to “liberate the autonomous human agent within each of us” (96), they are the means by which education in a democracy occurs. Curtler defines education as “the process whereby rational agents achieve autonomy and are thereby empowered to decide and act for themselves” (42). However, the kind of freedom, or autonomy, a liberal arts education enables is often misunderstood. In order to understand the importance of a liberal education and the relationship between the liberal arts and autonomy, “freedom” must be reinterpreted.

#### Negative and Positive Freedom

Freedom is often narrowly interpreted as the right to decide and act in a given situation with no constraints. Curtler refers to this individualistic notion of freedom as negative freedom and argues that the pursuit of negative freedom alone is unhealthy for a democracy without the balancing force of public or positive freedom (1-3). Positive freedom is the condition of allowing self-imposed restraints, developed through rational deliberation, to inform one’s thoughts and direct one’s action to ensure they correspond with one’s short- and long-term interests (25). Unlike negative freedom, which everyone in a democracy possesses, positive freedom must be earned and is dependent on an individual’s ability to reason, discriminate, communicate, and cooperate. Because many



individual decisions have public implications, a democracy requires its citizens to cultivate positive freedom, which is achieved by exercising the intellectual skills developed through a liberal education for the public good (99). Positive freedom is dependent on the social responsibility of “reasonable citizens” who live independently and contribute to their democracy, which contribution is dependent on intellectual and interpersonal skills developed through a liberal education (19).

Because positive freedom must be earned, education shares responsibility for training its pupils for citizenship, or “reasonable action in the political sphere” (9). Naturally, Curtler refers to educational practices in ancient Greece that demonstrate how classical education prepared students for civic engagement. Civic engagement in antiquity meant “engag[ing] with others in dialogue in order to arrive at reasoned judgments to which [citizens would] willingly submit” (112). The language arts skills (speaking, writing, and listening) along with reasoning and figuring were the central civic skills, which enabled effective civic engagement (97). A liberal education is central to education in a democracy because, as Curtler explains, it “fosters those skills that make involvement in the community meaningful and productive for autonomous citizens” (111). The civic preparation inherent in a liberal education demonstrates that the autonomy acquired from a liberal education is meant to promote positive freedom, which is necessary for maintaining a healthy democracy (17-18).

The tension between negative and positive freedom is inherent in a democracy, but an imbalance of either is detrimental to democratic practices. Yet, negative freedom is privileged in contemporary society at the expense of positive freedom. The social and political consequences of failing to cultivate positive freedom produce ineffective and

imbalanced governance. Summarizing Aristotle, Curtler explains that “healthy states . . . concern themselves with the common good” while “unhealthy states . . . splinter into multiple concerns about particular goods” usually resulting from “the specific demands of particular citizens” (110). When negative freedom is privileged over positive, the result is pervasive individualism, whether manifested in civic disengagement or intensified lobbying from “cabals and factions” and advocacy groups “preoccupied with their own special concerns” rather than with the public good (110).

Curtler argues that such individualism manifested itself in English Departments following the growth of cultural pluralism and multicultural studies. Curtler argues that while multicultural studies initially benefited the academy by offering additional worldviews and voices that enriched the study of literature and culture, it degenerated into “militant multiculturalism,” no longer a “protest for equality” on behalf of “disenfranchised minorities” but a “relativist, reductionist, and intolerant” movement, a “repressive ideology that denies the reality of a shared human nature” by reinforcing and privileging cultural distinctions and racial boundaries (96, 112). Curtler demonstrates that militant multiculturalism contradicts the original meaning of cultural pluralism as coined by Giambattista Vico, who suggested that, despite inevitable cultural differences, “understanding across cultural boundaries is possible because all humans share a common purpose” and a common humanity (114).

In a democracy, individuals must recognize that common purpose—to be free—and transcend individual and cultural differences by working together towards that purpose, or positive freedom. But inordinate emphasis on negative freedom prevents the transcendence and shared responsibility necessary to allow diverse groups to act

collectively. Curtler argues that the civic skills developed through a liberal education allow citizens to resist individualism by recognizing that the “common good” is “coincident with their own good” (110-111). Citizenship “requires the intellectual skills that have always been fostered by the liberal arts” because they unite individuals under a common purpose: to be free (108).

### Rhetoric and Civic Engagement

Militant multiculturalism represents the cultural preoccupation with diversity rather than commonality, primarily because of the prevalent assumption, both within and without the academy, that unity is no longer possible. One consequence of emphasizing difference over commonality is the increasingly divisive political atmosphere in contemporary American politics, which has contributed to a heightened sense of alienation and polarization in civic life. In such a climate, the norm of civic participation is revolutionary rather than deliberative, combative rather than cooperative. Such civic engagement relies on a sophistic rather than Isocratic interpretation and practice of rhetoric. As chapter one illustrated, sophistic education intended to allow individuals to influence the masses through powerful language and direct public action according to narrow interests, whereas an Isocratic education sought to cultivate the power of rhetoric to unify disparate groups for common purposes.

Sophistic rhetoric, in allowing individuals to push narrow agendas for their own purposes, is antithetical to democracy because it privileges negative freedom over positive freedom. Because the rhetoric informing contemporary civic engagement is individualistic and sophistic rather than deliberative or cooperative, rhetoric continues to be misinterpreted as flowery, manipulative language rather than as a means for learning

and practicing civic engagement that accomplishes the common good. The need for rhetorical instruction that inculcates intellectual habits which contribute to positive freedom is essential in creating a healthy democracy, one in which citizens may participate in democratic deliberations in productive ways for public purposes.

The health of a democracy is dependent on the practices of its educational institutions, particularly higher education. The following section reviews the role of rhetoric in composition instruction during the nineteenth century and demonstrates that the kind of rhetoric informing writing instruction provides a model, whether intentionally or unintentionally, for citizenship and civic engagement. Composition instructors need to recognize the kind of rhetoric that informs their instruction in order to understand the model of citizenship inherent in their theory and pedagogy.

### *Rhetorics in Composition*

Although “rhetoric has been a permanent and central part of the college curriculum throughout the twentieth century, just as it has been for the previous three centuries in American and British universities,” the type of rhetoric informing college writing instruction has taken shape according to the social, cultural, and material conditions; consequently, a “plurality of competing rhetorics,” each with different epistemological assumptions, ideologies, and pedagogical practices, has ever been present in the composition classroom (Berlin, *Rhetoric and Reality* 3-5). In examining how classroom practices reveal the type of rhetoric informing those practices, Berlin pays particular attention to manifestations of rhetoric in both theory and practice that provide students with the appropriate training necessary for citizens in a democracy, which makes his research especially relevant to this thesis.

Berlin outlines the “major rhetorical theories” of the twentieth century, which he divides into “three epistemological categories”: objective, subjective, and transactional. Objective rhetorics locate reality in the external, empirically verifiable, material world (9). The most dominant type, and the most dominant of all rhetorics, is current-traditional, which emphasizes “correctness of usage and stylistic qualities” in transcribing observations about the outside world (9). This rhetoric, practiced at Harvard, was committed to making undergraduate education a means for “providing for the meritocracy of middle-class professionalism” (36). Writing was taught laboratory-style, consisting primarily of drills in grammar, usage, and format (41). This type of instruction emphasized developing practical competence, eliminating illiteracy, and cultivating “good language habits” that prepared students for “practical [i.e., professional] living” (36-43, 71).

Subjective rhetoric, or the rhetoric of liberal culture, locates truth within a subject only accessible to “internal apprehension, apart from the empirically verifiable sensory world” (6-7). This rhetoric, popular at Yale, was “openly distrustful of democracy” and “favored class distinctions” and self-cultivation and refinement through aesthetic and ethical experiences in traditional humanistic studies (45). The rhetoric of liberal culture resisted writing instruction altogether, but claimed that “if writing were to be taught in college,” it should only be taught to the few demonstrated advanced skill in writing, in order to stimulate further intellectual development (43). This rhetoric favored the belletristic approach to teaching writing, “put[ting] students in touch with the civilizing influence of culture” which provided “a basis for ethical behavior” (71). Subjective

rhetoric emphasized individual transformation, not social change, as the key to social and personal well-being (74).

Transactional rhetorics see truth as “arising out of the interaction among elements of the rhetorical situation”; the two forms of transactional rhetorics relevant to this thesis are classical and epistemic (11). Classical rhetoric resembles the kind of rhetoric practiced by Isocrates, where truth is “uncertain, open to debate, contingent, probable” and is produced through “the interaction of interlocutor and audience (or discourse community)” (15). This interaction is “central to the existence of individuals and society” because the outcomes “concern the distribution of power in legislation, the courts, and social groups” (15). Decisions are ultimately made “on the basis of public discourse” which requires individuals to interact, cooperate, and negotiate to arrive at courses of action that benefit both the individual and the group (15). These interactions also create new truths and knowledge that guide subsequent action and deliberation (16).

Epistemic rhetoric extends this concept of the socially constructed nature of truth to all epistemological areas, but emphasizes the role of language as central to meaning-making. Because language structures responses to all issues arising in the material world, “[a]ll truths arise out of dialectic, out of the interaction of individuals within discourse communities” (16-17). Rhetoric does not merely describe the truths that arise out of public discourse for political purposes but is “implicated in all human behavior” and knowledge because knowledge is verbally constructed (17).

The English Department

To understand why, despite the variety of rhetorics, current-traditional has been the dominant rhetoric informing composition instruction during the twentieth century, it

is necessary to review the formation of the English Department. Berlin explains that English departments, which came of age during the rise of the modern university, jettisoned the classical curriculum and languages in favor of the English language because, not only was English deemed the language of the modern university, but it allowed the new departments to lay claim to a new body of knowledge that would give them the same “privilege and status accorded other new professions” (21). The English Department, as a product of the modern university, naturally resisted and sought to divorce itself from any remnant of the classical curriculum.

Although the initial purpose of the English Department was to provide instruction in writing, by the turn of the century, literary studies had replaced writing instruction as the dominant practice of the department. An event that validated the shift from writing instruction to literary study was Harvard President Eliot’s introduction of an essay, written in English, as part of the college entrance requirement. The results of the first essay exams, administered in 1874, revealed that “the best students in the country attending the best university of its time had difficulties in writing” (23-24). Rather than concluding that the college should assume more responsibility for teaching composition, the Harvard Board of Overseers blamed the preparatory schools and teachers for inadequately teaching students how to write (24). This precedent of relegating writing instruction to high school or to remedial college courses became common practice in other English departments. Thus the new English department dispelled from their profession all traces of the taxing, non-professional activity of teaching writing, and (more significantly) its accompanying curriculum, neither of which afforded the new

faculty prestige in the modern university or allowed time for professional development and research (21-22).

Current-traditional rhetoric continued to inform English studies, both literary and composition, through the end of the nineteenth century. But when the scientific approach to literary interpretation—the methods of philological and historical interpretation—were criticized and replaced with new literary techniques, composition instruction remained steeped in current-traditional rhetoric. According to Berlin, this occurred because academic literary critics, in order to move into new fields of criticism, had to “point to a positivistic rhetoric in order to establish their own distinguishing and superior characteristics” (28). Literary critics turned the dialectic relationship between rhetoric and poetic into an oppositional one where poetic texts were validated by the “devalored texts” associated with composition and current-traditional rhetoric (28). Berlin argues that, by “tacitly support[ing] . . . the impoverished notion of rhetoric found in the composition course,” academic literary critics thereby privilege the “nature of poetic texts” and ensure their distinguished status in the department (28). And because literary critics “have appropriated . . . all uses of language except for the narrowly referential and logical,” which is assigned to the writing course, any attempt to reconfigure the relationship between the poetic and rhetorical is criticized as “encroachment into the realm of the literary critic” (30). Unfortunately, as Berlin points out, reinforcing current-traditional rhetoric as the primary rhetoric informing composition instruction “impoverishes the rhetorical training for citizenship that our students receive” (30).

This effort to promote literary study and demoting writing instruction on behalf of English Departments is a common theme in the development of composition instruction



during the twentieth century and reveals a prolonged bias towards the classical curriculum, which bias inevitably affects the presence and treatment of rhetoric in writing instruction, as well as the model for civic engagement embedded in composition classes and in the university generally. Literary critics and faculty, in reinforcing the notion that current-traditional rhetoric belongs in the composition classroom, have relied on subjective rhetorics to inform their scholarly work. Comparing the varying methods of civic engagement embodied in both subjective and transactional rhetorics demonstrates this historical division between literary criticism and composition instruction.

### *Rhetorics and Citizenship*

Subjective rhetorics privilege the individual over the group, because the group threatens the individual's identity and distorts his "true vision" (146). This antagonistic attitude towards group participation, and subsequently locating "all truth within a personal construct arising from one's unique selfhood," denies the importance of "social processes in shaping reality" (146, 153). For instance, Berlin explains how Peter Elbow's work demonstrates that the purpose of studying language is to enable students to gain critical distance from themselves in order to gain "greater insight into [their] identity" that "leads to self-understanding" (qtd. in Berlin 154). Although in such epistemologies, particularly for Elbow, "the personal *is* political," Berlin notes that the "the underlying assumption" of such pedagogy is that "enabling individuals to arrive at self-understanding and self-expression will inevitably lead to a better social order" (155). The individualism inherent in subjective rhetorics is not democratic because it emphasizes negative freedom over positive freedom.

In contrast, transactional rhetorics, or the rhetoric of public discourse, provide for “public discourse in a democratic and heterogeneous society” and emphasize “writing as training for participation in the democratic process” (35). For example, composition students are placed “within an intellectual and social context” by reading multiple perspectives on “the traditional issues of rhetoric—legal, political, and social questions of a controversial nature” and then writing about them (51-52). This approach represents “the historical concern of rhetoric for practical action in areas of public concern affecting all citizens” (52).

It is significant to note that the prosperous times of the 1920s saw an increase in subjective rhetoric informing composition instruction, as rhetoric textbooks were replaced with literature in the classroom and self-expression was celebrated (64). But the Great Depression and World War II renewed what Berlin calls “the social reform impulse” which characterized progressive education before World War I (81). This social turn viewed writing as “a social activity” and corresponded with a renewed interest in “collectivist alternatives” to solve national problems, along with a “reawakened sense of communal responsibility” and the “rejection of the ideal of extreme individualism” of the 1920s (81). Berlin explains that this recognition of “the social nature of writing” resulted in a “rhetoric of public discourse” that prepared students to recognize and respond to rhetorical situations as citizens in a democracy (81-82).

#### Transactional Rhetoric and Democracy

Writing instruction informed by the rhetoric of public discourse has clear implications for training in civic engagement and preparing citizens for democratic participation. This is articulated in Warren Taylor’s 1938 essay entitled “Rhetoric in a

Democracy,” in which Taylor argues for “teaching writing in a way that would serve the political role of the individual in a democratic state” (qtd. in Berlin 86). Taylor claims that, because “[d]emocratic conceptions of language and rhetoric” facilitate the creation and preservation of “open communit[ies] for free discourse” where self-expression and knowledge are “available to all,” the level at which “teachers and students alike” understand how language is used determines their ability to participate in a democracy (87). Taylor argues that teaching language “as symbolic action carrying consequences in the material and social worlds” would provide students with “genuine knowledge” by helping them recognize the motives inherent in linguistic forms and performances (86-87).

Taylor sought to clarify rhetoric in terms of its function in a democracy by broadening its definition from the narrowed notion of style or persuasion to “the art of making reasoned evaluations of public utterances, of discovering the worth of the means used to communicate instructive knowledge and to affect opinion” which required ways to interpret and respond to proposed “action designed to solve social problems” (87). Taylor’s conception of rhetoric was not one of “persuasion” per se but one of “elucidation” that revealed “the ways in which ideas and misapprehensions take form in language and in action” (87). Action in a democracy “should be the result of understanding, not of persuasion” and “[c]itizens should argue collectively on a course to be followed for the common good” so that citizens, not manipulative orators, may assume responsibility for actions taken by the state (87-88). Taylor argued that such a notion of rhetoric “should be at the heart of education, preparing individuals for their

social responsibilities,” the fulfillment of which were necessary for their survival “as free citizens” (87).

Taylor’s concern was to provide “language education” fit for democracy (89). Because language skills are central to civic action, Taylor appoints composition teachers as primarily responsible for teaching this “social rhetoric of public discourse” and ensuring that students “realize the value of education in political action” (88). Berlin notes the parallel between Taylor’s interpretation of rhetoric and the rhetoric practiced in “ancient Greece” to “expose error, supply evidence, elucidate courses of action, and defend us from our enemies” (88).

Taylor’s broadened definition of rhetoric makes clear the link between language arts and civic engagement. This interpretation of rhetoric indicates the social nature of language and the repercussions of its use, or misuse, on the state of a democracy and its citizens. By reviving the civic dimension of rhetoric, Taylor also illustrates the responsibility of citizens to engage in democratic practices via language in order to share responsibility for governance. Language arts training, as the central feature of a rhetorical education, prepares citizens to participate in a democracy. Taylor’s observations about the nature of language, rhetoric, and education in a democracy, which will be reiterated by another scholar later in this chapter, demonstrate that rhetoric is central to informing educational practices that attempt to prepare students for citizenship.

### *Rhetoric in General Education*

This same association between education and citizenship occurred prior to and following World War II, which brought to fruition the widespread development of general education programs. Though general education had originally sought to

“encompass the broad educational base of the curriculum of liberal culture,” post-war general education was informed by the notion of the progressive movement in making education relevant to the student and to society (93). The general education movement illustrated the growing perception of the need for general education not only to balance specialized learning but also to prepare citizens to participate in their democracy. Just as interest in educational reform prior to World War II occurred “in response to the Depression and the threats to democracy posed by fascism abroad” (92), the rapid growth of general education following the war demonstrated the belief that education could provide a sense of cultural inheritance and citizenship that would, above all, “safeguard the American way of life” and “the social stability provided by democracy” (92).

As mentioned in chapter one, two important events in the history of higher education demonstrate the centrality of rhetoric in education for a democracy: the publication of General Education in a Free Society, a report commissioned by Harvard, often called the Redbook, and the post-war Communications course. Reviewing the Harvard report’s observations of and recommendations for education in a democracy illustrates the purpose of education, the role that liberal education plays in higher education, and the role of rhetoric in a democracy and the need for general education to implement “language education” or rhetorical instruction in the language arts. The report’s explanation of the purpose of education corresponds with Curtler’s explanation while reviving the civic roots of classical rhetoric by reinterpreting rhetoric and rhetorical instruction as central to general education in a democracy.

## Harvard Report

The purpose of the Harvard report was not to create a general education program at Harvard but to arrive at “a concept of general education” to correspond with the nature and needs of a democracy (vii). Because this thesis is concerned with the role of the liberal arts, particularly rhetoric, in general education, the following excerpts from the report are meant to highlight the influence of rhetoric in liberal arts education as the source for the habits and skills a general education in a democracy should inculcate.

The sections of the report that are relevant to this argument appear together in the chapter entitled “Theory of General Education.” The chapter begins by reviewing the aims of liberal education, which serves as the foundation for their theory of general education. A liberal education is meant “to produce a rounded person with a full understanding of himself and of his place in society and in the cosmos” (53). The “touchstones of the liberated man” are the freedom to govern himself, which requires “a mind capable of self-criticism” or examination, and the ability to overcome provincialism and see one’s self as a global citizen. Education in a democracy must ensure that students develop these aptitudes if they are to contribute to democracy; incidentally, such outcomes are the primary purpose of the liberal arts. Curtler’s distinction between negative and positive freedom, and his argument that positive freedom must be learned, correlates with the report’s explanation of the “liberating” purpose of liberal education: to free students to think for themselves so that they may function as citizens and engage in democratic deliberation. The following review demonstrates that rhetoric is central to accomplishing this purpose.

The report distinguishes general from specialized education “not by its subject matter, but in terms of method and outlook,” which demonstrates the general

relationships, unifying elements, and “interdependence of all subjects in American life” and contributes to a coherent view of knowledge (56, 29). To “generate a liberal outlook,” educators must not only impart information—“the basis of any knowledge”—but also the methods used to acquire that knowledge and the “presuppositions” informing those methods (63-64). This outlook enables a coherent view of knowledge that encourages a cooperative view of humanity by “foster[ing] fellow feelings” and emphasizing the “necessary bonds and common goals” of citizens in a democracy to encourage participation in the common good (4, 9).

The next section, entitled “Traits of Mind,” reaffirms the need for education to impart knowledge while cultivating a liberal outlook. Admitting that the average student upon examination “hardly remembers more than 75 percent of what he was taught,” the report suggests that education is not transmitting knowledge or “stuffing the mind with facts” but rather “the cultivation of certain aptitudes and attitudes in the minds of the young” which enable learning (64). These characteristics or “traits of mind” include effective thinking and communication, making relevant judgments, and discriminating among values (65).

While effective thinking entails logical thinking, it does not refer to formal logic but rather to reasoning that citizens can apply to “practical situations” (65). Such reasoning is characterized by an ability “to discern a pattern of relationships,” analyze and solve problems, distinguish relevant and irrelevant information when making decisions, and practice contextualized thinking (65). Effective thinking is also characterized by a degree of creativity or imagination, which allows the mind to “break with habit and routine to see beyond the obvious and to envisage new alternatives” (67).

Effective thinking is necessary for communicating, whether oral or written, speaking or writing, listening or reading, because it produces good, clear ideas, which facilitate clear expression (67). The report argues that “the art of communication” in a democratic society “has a special importance” (68). Unlike a totalitarian state, which “can obtain consent by force . . . a democracy must persuade, and persuasion is through speech, oral and other” (68). Successful communication, defined as the “unrestricted exchange of ideas within the body politic” that secures “intellectual economy,” is the measure of a successful democracy, whereas “[f]ailure of communication between citizens, or between the government and the public, means a breakdown in the democratic process” (68). Because communication can be restricted by linguistic barriers or ulterior motives not apparent in the communication process, the report argues that effective communication takes on moral, or social, dimensions and requires “candor” (68).

Grant Boswell underscores the classical allusions in the report to “the Ciceronian ideal combining wisdom with eloquence” and the ethical dimension of political engagement in Quintilian’s “good man speaking well.” The consistent allusions to rhetoric demonstrate that the report’s articulation of the role of education was informed by principles of classical rhetoric adapted for modern purposes. The clearest adaptation is the report redefining rhetoric not as flowery speech, or even training in oratory, but as “the simple skill of making one’s ideas clear and cogent” (68). Rhetoric, then, is the art of clear communication. The report offers common examples of communication in a democracy to demonstrate how rhetoric is manifest in any communicative setting: “a businessman writing a plain and crisp letter, a scientist making a report, a citizen asking



straight questions, human beings arguing together on some matter of common interest” (68-69).

These examples illustrate that “language need to be neither high learning nor high literature in order to be communication” (69). Indeed, the definition of rhetoric demonstrates its universal relevance to any communicative situation. To link the quality of communication with the state of democracy suggests that a successful democracy is contingent upon its citizens’ ability to understand and use language for democratic purposes. This is why rhetorical training is essential to enable all citizens, not just senators, to engage in conversations and debates about the polis, and why such training ought to be at the heart of general education.

The report more clearly demonstrates the influence of classical rhetoric as central to general education, as evidenced in the title of the following section: “The Good Man and Citizen.” Again referring to the “aim of liberal education [as] the development of the whole man,” the report argues that education is meant to develop “the good man, the good citizen, and the useful man” (74). Central to this development is the intellectual skill of reason, “the rational guidance of all human activity” which produces “intelligence in action” (75). This description of the purpose of education illustrates the practical application of intellectual skills inculcated by a liberal education, specifically rhetorical instruction in the language arts, to arrive at “wholeness” (75). Wholeness here implies a balance not only between general and specialized knowledge but also between individual freedom and social obligation.

Unity of knowledge underscores the wholeness of humanity, which is found in the cultivation of wisdom and its application to everyday living (75). The report emphasizes

wholeness in order to clarify that, in a free society, the aim of developing intellectual skill is to make relevant use of it in democratic situations. Members of a democracy must balance individual freedom and social obligation, “freedom and social living,” because “[d]emocracy is a *community* of free [persons]” which requires “cooperation for the common good” (76). Liberalism divorced from civic practices upsets the balance between “liberty and loyalty,” just as “union” stressed over “freedom” leads to “totalitarianism” (77). When liberty and freedom are balanced by loyalty and union, and when citizens are equipped with critical capacities, the result is the foundation for a “good society [which] consists of individuals who are independent in outlook and think for themselves while also willing to subordinate their individual good to the common good” (77).

Though attaining this ideal balance is the continual struggle of democracy, the mediating force is rhetoric, the art of democratic communication. As the Harvard report and Warren Taylor both observe, failure to communicate results in a failure of the democratic process. When democratic communication fails, “force replaces dialogue as a means to adjudicate differences” (Curtler 112).

Though the Harvard report does not recommend a universal curriculum for all general education programs, it notes that general education cannot be considered “formless,” nor can “all fields and all departments” be considered “equally valuable vehicles of general education” because some courses contribute to the development of these intellectual skills more so than others (57, 74). The report recommends a general education program should have “a pattern of its own, namely the pattern associated with the liberal outlook” and whose form is flexible enough to “adapt a central unvarying purpose to varying outlooks” (58). Liberal education is the unifying yet flexible form to

adapt intellectual skills to various branches of knowledge, and the art of communication is applicable to all courses (74). The language arts, like the liberal arts, are not content courses but teach principles that are applicable to the various educational contexts. This trait allows training in the language arts to function as a unifying element in general education without threatening the disciplinary status of general education courses.

Rhetoric clearly informed the theory of general education articulated in the Harvard report, demonstrating that the principles of rhetoric are central to ensuring that education enables civic engagement through linguistic training. The objectives of general education as articulated in the report—to enable students to develop a liberal outlook that will free them from themselves and help them develop reasoning and communication skills that will allow them to communicate democratically—illustrate the centrality of composition instruction, as a course in rhetorical training, in the general education curriculum.

#### Communications Course

Given the emphasis in the Harvard report on the art of communication, it is not coincidental that the general education movement saw the development and proliferation of communications courses in higher education the 1940s and 1950s. Though short-lived, the communications course demonstrates the possibilities for reviving rhetorical training in the liberal arts for a democracy.

The communications course was interdisciplinary, shared between the English and Speech departments, and appeared in many varieties. Berlin notes that the communications course at Iowa, a prototype for similar courses across the country, taught reading, writing, speaking, and listening as “a set of unified activities” that were parts of

the overall process of communication (Berlin, Rhetoric and Reality 96-97). The course taught common modes of communication—“exposition, argument, and criticism”—rather than literature, it emphasized skills rather than content, and it sought to individualize instruction according to the varying needs of students (97, 99). These characteristics communications courses demonstrate how rhetorical instruction, according to the recommendations made by the Harvard report, can best be achieved in undergraduate education. Unfortunately, the courses were short-lived because their interdisciplinary nature threatened “departmental autonomy and academic specialization” (106). In the absence of the communications course, the responsibility of training students for citizenship has been redirected to its closest relative in the curriculum: the composition course. As Berlin claims, the communications course “gave composition courses a new identity, placing them in a special program that carried with it a commitment to democracy” (106).

The timing of the Harvard report, the revival of rhetoric in education, the increase in general education, and the creation of the communications course reinforced the classical association between rhetoric and education as common, complementary endeavors, and that composition instruction as a course in rhetorical discourse can and should be, as Taylor recommended in 1938, at the heart of general education. This idea is more clearly illustrated through an explanation of epistemic rhetoric.

#### Epistemic Rhetoric

Despite the growing popularity of expressionistic rhetoric in the 1960s, there were scholars who recovered the rhetoric of social discourse, or epistemic rhetoric, which demonstrated the central role of writing instruction in the general education curriculum.

Berlin cites Albert R. Kitzhaber, former NCTE President, whose research in the 1960s on composition courses nationwide, beginning at Dartmouth, led him to reiterate past arguments about composition instruction being central to education, and rhetoric being central to composition (128).

Kitzhaber reasoned that, because writing is central to thought and to the structuring and discovery of knowledge, composition is “at the heart of education” and should occupy “the central place . . . in the total curriculum” (127). According to Kitzhaber, rhetoric as the basis for composition is needed to change the perception of the course from a service course or a course in literature to a “liberal subject” because it is “the only course” students will take where “the quality of [their] thinking and of [their] written expression, together with the principles that underlie both, is the central and constant concern” (129). Again, the liberal arts are invoked to demonstrate that the purpose of composition instruction is to develop cognitive skills rather than proficiency or training in a specialized content or skill.

Kitzhaber’s argument for a “New Rhetoric” focused on, as did Taylor, the centrality of language to thought and action, which are characteristic of epistemic rhetoric. As explained by Michael Leff, “epistemology is rhetorical” because it is a social, historical, linguistic construct (qtd. in Berlin 166). Knowledge and meaning are not attained through empirical observation but are created by “individuals engaging in rhetorical discourse in discourse communities” (166). Discourse communities create knowledge through “mutual agreement” attained by engaging in dialogue. Thus, knowledge is “dialectical,” resulting from the relationship created by the interaction of “interlocutor, audience, reality, [and] language” (166). Because these elements are

“linguistically conditioned,” communication is central to epistemic rhetoric. Language is not private or objective but a social phenomenon that “embodies a multitude of historically specific conceptions that shape experience” and perceptions of reality (166).

In epistemic rhetoric, “language is the key to understanding the dialectical process involved in the rhetorical act. . . . Within each society there is a host of languages, each serving as the center of a particular discourse community,” which communities find and maintain identity and through communication (166-167). The study of rhetoric in this sense is the study of how people communicate and how language operates in communication situations. The purpose of studying rhetoric is to learn how to control and direct language “rather than be unconsciously controlled by it” (166).

This kind of rhetoric “grew out of the activity surrounding the emphasis on general education and its commitment to the communications course, especially the focus on rhetoric as public discourse for a democracy” and on the growing importance of language in learning (167). Berlin explains that this perspective of rhetoric as central to social discourse shifts the scope of composition instruction from a “service course” to instruction that “prepare[s] students for citizenship in a democracy, for assuming their political responsibilities, whether as leaders or simply as active participants” (189).

Epistemic rhetoric demonstrates the centrality of language in democratic deliberation and action, and language education, or rhetorical training in the language arts, to produce citizens capable of contributing to democracy. A natural conclusion of this interpretation of rhetoric is that composition instruction is the primary course that contributes to language education and, as such, should occupy a central role in the general education curriculum.

Recognizing the range of competing rhetorics, their general manifestations, historical roots, and the social, political, and cultural conditions that have contributed to their vitality will allow composition instructors to recognize the forces influencing their students to resist instruction in rhetoric and the language arts.

### *Civic Disengagement*

The remainder of this chapter documents the general decline in civic activity and engagement over the last third of the century, examines the primary consequence of such decline, and argues that such conditions correlate with the diminished presence of rhetorical instruction in the language arts in the general education curriculum. In *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Robert D. Putnam presents extensive research demonstrating a general decline in civic engagement and social connectedness in America since the latter half of the twentieth century. Since the mid-1960s, there has been steady decline in political and religious participation, civic engagement, and vocational and informal social connections, and consequent declines in altruism, volunteering, philanthropy, reciprocity, honesty, and trust. Though Putnam denies espousing the “nostalgic predilection” that “community bonds have weakened steadily” throughout America’s history, he presents substantial evidence to suggest that during “the first two-thirds of the twentieth century a powerful tide bore Americans into ever deeper engagement in the life of their communities, but a few decades ago—silently, without warning—that tide reversed and we were overtaken by a treacherous rip current” (24-27). Putnam’s perspective as a sociologist provides useful terminology and analysis that explains why civic decline is due, in part, to diminished rhetorical instruction in the language arts.

Putnam argues that this decline has resulted in a diminished form of “social capital,” which refers to the value and impact of social networks and “connections among individuals” on communities and society (21). Social capital “calls attention to the ways in which our lives are made more productive by social ties” (19). Putnam notes, “civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations” and that “[f]requent interaction among a diverse set of people tends to produce a norm of generalized reciprocity,” which increases social capital (19, 134). Unfortunately, the decline in political and civic participation has led to a decline in social capital and civic virtue, which has weakened the health of democracy in local and national settings.

Because arguments for declining political participation can be construed as nostalgic, Putnam labors extensively to quantify his claims. Political participation and political knowledge are decreasing. Voting rates have declined by “25 percent or more” since the 1960s (35). Those below age thirty “pay less attention to the news and know less about current events than their elders do today or than people their age did two or three decades ago” (36). “The average college graduate today knows little more about public affairs than did the average high school graduate in the 1940s” (35).

The same trend in decline occurred over the past thirty years at the local political level. Civic participation in its various forms—signing a petition, attending a public meeting, working for a political party, running for office—has declined across the board, particularly the kind of engagement in “organized activities at the community level,” the kind that are only possible when fellow community members participate (44). Putnam notes, “it is precisely . . . those activities that brought citizens *together*, those activities that most clearly embody social capital—that have declined most rapidly” (45). He also



notes that, although individual activities—writing to a congressman or senator or the local paper or signing a petition—haven’t declined as rapidly, they are “expressive forms” of engagement that “are more individualistic and correspond to more narrowly defined interests,” whereas the collaborative activities that are decreasing rapidly “engage broader public interests” (45). Although “voting and following politics” are indicators of civic engagement, they do not create social capital because they can be done in isolation and are primarily national events (37).

Putnam notes that, while the terms “civic engagement” and “democratic deliberation” suggest formal associations and political activism as ideal forms of social involvement, the more informal avenues of sociability that occur every day are just as important in creating social capital (95). Though formal and informal socializing still occur, they occur less frequently every year (97-98). Putnam offers several examples of what constitutes this decline—less conversations at mealtime, fewer visits to neighbors and family, decreased engagement in “leisure activities that encourage casual social interaction,” more passive observation, less active engagement ” (115).

The common theme in all areas of decline, whether political or social, is that those activities requiring congregating with others and communicating face-to-face have declined most rapidly. This kind of engagement, whether civic or social, is rhetorical engagement—engaging in dialogue with neighbors and strangers to discuss matters pertaining to the general public. Without rhetorical instruction or rhetorical education, citizens will not necessarily develop the capacities or inclination to practice civic engagement in a collaborative way. In fact, as Putnam’s research suggests, the tendency to practice civic engagement is to rely on sophistic rhetoric as a means of forceful

coercion to achieve individual interests, rather than employing an Isocratic rhetoric that attempts to wield rhetorical power in order to reach consensus.

#### Causes and Consequences

Putnam demonstrates that the perpetual decline in civic engagement and social connectedness corresponds with a decline in general indicators of social capital, including generosity, volunteering, reciprocity, civility, honesty and social trust (115, 127, 137-42). Putnam also correlates the decline in civic engagement with the “larger societal shift toward individual and material values and away from communal values” (272). This rise in individualism and consumerism, Putnam argues, is an outgrowth of the main cause of civic disengagement: generational succession.

Putnam argues that the “formative years” of the “long civic generation” (those born between 1910 and 1940) differed significantly from those of the baby boomers (those born between 1946 and 1960), which differences have manifested themselves in a greater degree in the X generation (those born between 1965 and 1980) (254). The civic generation experienced World War II, which increased “collective solidarity” in the face of “shared adversity” and inspired “intense patriotism nationally and civic activism locally” (54-55). The belief in and cooperation towards furthering a common cause for collective rather than individual purposes created high levels of social capital and civic engagement among this generation (270-71).

The formative years of the baby boomers were “indelibly marked” by the turbulent events of the 1960s; however, the boomers were also “the best-educated generation in American history” and experienced “unprecedented affluence and community vitality” (257). But noticeable differences arise between the baby boomers

and their parents that negatively affect civic engagement. According to Putnam, the baby boomers are more cynical towards institutions and politics, less interested in politics, less involved in civic and community life, more individualistic and materialistic, less moralistic about drug use, and less respectful towards authority and religion than their parents (258-59). Although the boomers are slightly more tolerant of diversity than their parents, the majority of these characteristics suggest that civic engagement began to decline while this generation came of age.

The X generation, according to Putnam, has merely demonstrated the continuation of civic decline that began with the baby boomers. Although less engaged civically than their parents, the X generation did not experience in their formative years civic engagement to the extent that the baby boomers did (259). The X generation was also raised “in an era that celebrated personal goods and private initiative over shared public concerns,” an era characterized by economic uncertainty and familial insecurity. Most significantly, theirs was an era void of “collective success stories” or “great collective events” characteristic of both the World War II era and the Civil Rights movement (259).

The increase in materialism and individualism during the last half of the twentieth century has reinforced the misconception that individual, or negative, freedom is positive freedom. The political consequence for increased individualism, as this chapter has demonstrated, is increasingly imbalanced civic engagement and public communication. Putnam notes that those at the political extremes are becoming “more engaged in civic life” as moderates are disappearing (342). Consequently, “the more polarized extremes on the ideological spectrum account for a bigger and bigger share of those” practicing civic engagement (342). This increase explains, in part, the increasingly divisive nature

of contemporary politics and the accompanying changes in deliberations and conversations occurring in social and civic realms. As “more extreme views have gradually become more dominant in grassroots American civic life [while] more moderate voices have fallen silent,” the kind of rhetoric used to pursue narrow interests relies on a sophistic rhetoric that divides rather than unites and that creates deliberation that is “more shrill and less balanced” as individuals refuse to cooperate and compromise for a greater good (342). Indeed, compromise between political extremes is impossible without an actively engaged majority committed to resolving disagreements for the benefit of all.

It is ironic that the best-educated generation would also be the generation during which civic engagement began to decline while individualism increased. Multiple factors likely influenced the rise in individualism during this period, including the prolonged political tension during the Cold War that instilled profound skepticism in Americans towards communitarian efforts to solve social problems. Additional factors include the disappearance of the communications courses by the end of the 1950s, along with popularity of subjective rhetorics informing composition instruction during the 1960s, as well as the deterioration of the general education curriculum during the 1960s and 1970s. Regardless of the specific cause, Putnam’s research indicates that one of the most important factors influencing civic engagement—education—apparently failed to motivate or prepare subsequent generations to practice civic engagement.

Indeed, improving education to promote increased civic engagement is Putnam’s first recommended solution to combating civic disengagement (404). However, what is not present in Putnam’s call for “civic education,” and what faculty, administrators, and

the general public will fail to recognize, is the central role of the composition course, and the role of rhetoric in that course, in enabling students to develop autonomy and engage civically.

### *Conclusion*

This chapter has demonstrated the role of the liberal arts in accomplishing the purpose of education. It has also demonstrated that rhetorics embody models for civic engagement, and that the most important rhetoric to inform composition instruction is epistemic. It has further demonstrated that the decline in civic engagement and the increase in individualism have negatively affected political engagement while promoting the sophistic notion of rhetoric as the primary means for engaging in political exchange. Ultimately, this chapter has attempted to demonstrate why rhetoric must inform composition instruction in order for education to accomplish its purpose. The following chapter will explain how technology has influenced literate practices and civic engagement, an understanding that will inevitably influence a modern-day conception of rhetorical education.

### Chapter 3

The last chapter defined the purpose of education, the role of the liberal arts in accomplishing that purpose, and reviewed the “plurality of competing rhetorics” that informed writing instruction in higher education during the twentieth century (Berlin, *Rhetoric and Reality* 3). It also noted the development of transactional rhetorics, specifically epistemic rhetoric, which recognizes language as the central, mediating feature of all social discourse. Epistemic rhetoric should inform writing instruction in the composition classroom because it demonstrates how language allows students to develop intellectual skills and civic habits necessary for living in a democracy.

Despite the new possibilities for writing instruction to be informed by epistemic rhetoric, writing is generally perceived as a performative, decontextualized skill rather than an intellectual habit shaped by and inextricable from the practices, values, and interactions of members in given discourse communities. This misconception, arising from current-traditional rhetoric, impoverishes rhetorical instruction in the composition classroom and, consequently, rhetorical education. In addition, academic departmentalization and specialization, along with cultural biases towards liberal education, have prevented the composition course from transcending the boundaries of the English department and providing coherence among the various fields of study in the general education curriculum.

The last chapter suggested that the general decline in civic engagement and social connectedness during the last third of the twentieth century and the corresponding rise in individualism in cultural, political, and academic spheres are related to the rhetorically-impoverished undergraduate curriculum. The social isolation resulting from the rise in

individualism suggests that education has failed to provide students with the motivation to engage civically and the rhetorical training that enables cooperative engagement. The resulting imbalance in political participation among more fanatical citizens and interest groups suggests an additional failure of education to instill in students awareness and concern for the common good. The need to recover the central purpose of education, and a corresponding theory of instruction to accomplish that purpose, is more important than ever, for both the vitality of our democracy and the freedom of our students.

Sherry Booth and Susan Frisbie argue that for “every age” rhetoric is constructed in a way that promotes dominant cultural values of a “particular historical moment” (176). For the Greeks and Romans, rhetoric was only the concern of the aristocratic, governing class; in the Renaissance, rhetoric was reduced to a matter of style, schemes, and tropes (176). The authors argue that rhetorical education in the twenty-first century “will reflect—or should reflect—the major preoccupations, media, and modes of our time” (176). How will—or how should—contemporary rhetorical education differ from rhetorical education as practiced in antiquity and in the Renaissance?

As chapter one illustrated, higher education is no longer an elite, neoclassical education with a coherent curriculum for a homogenous group, but a public service with increasingly specialized areas of study for an increasingly heterogeneous population. In this respect, rhetorical education must be made available to a wider audience than aristocratic, property-holding males. But this shift in audience does not necessitate discarding the democratic principles that informed rhetorical training in Isocrates’ school of rhetoric. Indeed, the most important public service that higher education can render is to train its students to become engaged citizens capable of participating in democratic

discourse; but rhetorical education in the twenty-first century cannot be limited to a predetermined governing class.

In addition, a rhetorical education in the twenty-first century must account for multiple modes of discourse that mediate public deliberation. Although literate rather than oral practices have become the primary medium for public discourse, this chapter will argue that technological innovation in the last century has led to forms and practices of communication that have challenged the cultural dominance of literacy and print by reinvoking oral, visual, and even aural literacies as common media for communication. Yet, despite the ubiquity of technology and mediated communication, the relationship between literacy and technology is generally perceived as antithetical. Assuming that literate modes of expression are inherently superior to oral or visual modes conveys a hierarchical rather than dialectical relationship among all modes of discourse that distorts the holistic view of communication and obscures how epistemic rhetoric informs all discourse. When modes of communication are portrayed as competing with rather than complementing each other, ensuing arguments about the superiority of one mode must also demonstrate the inferiority of another.

This chapter will consider three examples of such arguments and trace their influence, motivations, and assumptions to the traditional distinction between poetic and rhetorical texts. This chapter will examine and complicate arguments that attribute the decline of literacy and literate practices to technology in order to reconfigure the relationship between technology and literacy. This reconfiguration, coupled with an exploration of the potential for current technological innovation to transform democratic participation, will help resolve the apparent incompatibility between technology and mass



media and civic engagement discussed in chapter two. This chapter, by emphasizing the relationship between technology and rhetorical discourse, seeks to make place for technology as a cultural product that mediates language as well as a significant force for producing rhetorical texts. These observations about technology are meant to include technology as an integral part of rhetorical education and rhetorical literacy.

### *Technology and Pseudo-Events*

In The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America, Daniel Boorstin reviews and critiques the rise of images, news, and technology in modern society. Boorstin argues that the rise of “pseudo-events,” in connection with the “Graphic Revolution” of the nineteenth century, has increased the “second-handedness” of American experience in the twentieth-century (133). Although the implications of Boorstin’s analysis demonstrates the need for citizens to become rhetorically literate, Boorstin’s critique of pseudo-events and pseudo-images reveals the historical bias towards rhetorical texts, a bias which is implicitly directed towards the technology of such texts.

Boorstin describes a pseudo-event as a “planned” or contrived “happening” intended to be “reported or reproduced” (11). Boorstin offers the example of a hotel which, seeking to increase its prestige and business, plans an “event” to celebrate its thirtieth anniversary and highlight the hotel’s “distinguished service . . . to the community. The celebration is held, photographs are taken, the occasion is widely reported, and the object is accomplished. Now this occasion is a pseudo-event” (10). Boorstin notes that such pseudo-events, as the prefix suggests, are “false, intended to deceive” because they are “man-made” productions that create the information they

purportedly report, and their “relation to the underlying reality of the situation is ambiguous” (9).

Boorstin argues that technological progress gave rise to “pseudo-events” by facilitating their creation, production, preservation, and dissemination. The rise in pseudo-events corresponded with the rise in the “supply and demand for news” in the early nineteenth century. In the 1830s and 1840s, the telegraph “was perfected and applied to news reporting,” allowing newspapers to report “up-to-date reports of matters of public interest written by eyewitnesses or professional reporters near the scene” (12). The Associated Press was founded in 1848, and rotary and high-speed presses came about in the 1870s. Dry-plate photography, the telephone, and the phonograph were invented in the 1870s (12-13). Boorstin continues to chart the rise of film, radio, motion picture, and television to demonstrate that, in less than a century, technology both created and revolutionized the way people communicated and the way they experienced the world. But, due to such revolutionary changes in a short time, the general public failed to adopt a critical perspective of the impact of technological changes on their communicative practices and everyday experience.

Boorstin’s observations about the speed at which technology changes, and how such changes affect society, are even more relevant today, as media and technology continue to make available seemingly endless sources of news, entertainment, information, and modes of communication. But by pairing the rise of technology and “pseudo-events,” Boorstin implies that technology is a culprit rather than a mediating tool in the production of manufactured news and events. This implicit critique of technology foreshadows Boorstin’s bias towards rhetorical texts as valid, valuable vehicles of

communication, which bias is more clearly illustrated in his discussion about the impact of pseudo-events on citizens.

According to Boorstin, the increased amount of pseudo-events creates an imbalance “between what an informed citizen needs to know and what he can know” (17). In attempting to process the overabundance of information provided by pseudo-events, citizens and specialists alike rely on summaries, or “digests,” to comprehend the world (132). The digest was originally “a highly specialized literary form” used for condensing “technical (usually legal) materials” for students who needed to master the essentials of some specialized material (130). But by the “early twentieth century,” digests had descended to “the level of the newspaper reader” and had become “far more popular” than the original texts summarized (133). Because digests represent “ideas without form,” the digest became the form to which information was adapted (133). For Boorstin, public preference for digests rather than the original works foreshadowed the “decline—even the dissolution—of literary form” (138). This dissolution of literary form devalues the experience of encountering literature in its original form (140).

Boorstin’s argument about the demise of literary form is an implicit version of the argument examined in chapter two that claims the poetic text, given its literary form, is superior to the rhetorical, which is merely substance without form. This unwillingness to recognize rhetorical texts, the so-called “pseudo-events” of everyday life, as worthy of critical attention is the same argument that literary critics at the turn of the century endorsed to validate the study of poetic texts in the newly formed English Department. The false dichotomy between valorized poetic texts and remedial rhetorical texts continues to devalue the rhetorical work done in the composition classroom and prevents

rhetorical instruction from demonstrating its applicability to all modes of public discourse. This argument, as chapter two illustrates, impoverishes the rhetorical training students need to become critical citizens capable of participating in democratic deliberations. In addition, this distinction equally devalues the close criticism of the media and technology that produces rhetorical texts, which distinction further marginalizes rhetorical instruction from the students whose experiences and communicative practices are increasingly mediated by technology.

By encouraging readers to “disenchant” themselves by trying to “reach outside [their] images” and envision the world beyond the image, Boorstin seems to encourage a critical stance towards mass-produced and mass-mediated images (260). This kind of approach to media is certainly necessary, because citizens cannot be free if they cannot recognize, at least in part, the forces and motives shaping the production and distribution of images, as well as the messages explicit and implicit in those events. However, Boorstin fails to articulate how citizens may develop this critical stance, how to “reach outside our images.”

This dismissal of non-literary forms as inferior to the original is problematic because citizens live in a world of pseudo-events, which requires the capacity to filter, interpret, and respond to an increasing number of mediated messages, which requires rhetorical literacy. Citizens currently experience information overload to a degree that was likely unimaginable in the 1960s, and the ubiquity of mass mediated information further emphasizes the need for citizens and students to develop a critical approach of mediated communication. But this approach should not criticize the technology that produces mediated information because it draws attention away from the cultural and

human forces that use technology to communicate. Boorstin's bias represents the first step towards adopting a deterministic view of technology, which distorts the role of technology in communication situations.

### Technological Determinism

Neil Postman, ardent critic of technology, draws on Boorstin's analysis of pseudo-events and pseudo-images to claim that technology is threatening the literate practices of Americans. According to Postman, the rise of image culture and the corresponding decline of print culture has inhibited society from practicing sophisticated literate techniques such as "construct[ing] and following[ing] linear and analytic arguments" and engaging in "critical public communication" (qtd. in McComisky 194). Though such arguments are not new, Postman amplifies Boorstin's subtle grudge against technology by claiming that force responsible for the decline in print and the "dumbing down [of] modern American society" is not only the image itself but "the technologies that generate those images" (194). The technology that Boorstin implicitly criticized has become, for Postman, the primary cause for destroying the literary practices of contemporary society.

This attack on technology is extremely clear in Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology, where Postman personifies technology as a "dangerous enemy" that "destroys the vital sources of our humanity," "creates a culture without a moral foundation," and "undermines certain mental processes and social relations that make human life worth living" (xii). He argues that "[t]echnology creates new conceptions of what is real and, in the process, undermines older conceptions" (12). He continues, "When an old technology is assaulted by a new one, institutions are threatened. When

institutions are threatened, a culture finds itself in crisis” (20). Postman’s language to describe technology and its impact—a “dangerous enemy,” “undermines,” “assaulted,” “threatened”—blames technology for cultural crises and overlooks the cultural context in which technology is produced and used.

Postman frames his critique of technology by quoting from Plato’s Phaedrus the exchange between Theuth and Thamus concerning the benefits and drawbacks of the new invention of writing. Postman argues that just as Thamus only saw the negative effects of writing, there are “modern-day Theuths,” whom Postman calls “technophiles,” who only see “what new technologies can do and are incapable of imagining what they will *undo*,” who in their enthusiasm fail to recognize the “ideological bias,” the worldview and values, embedded in technology (xii, 5, 13). It is not coincidental that both Boorstin and Postman have aligned themselves with Platonic ideals in defending the high culture of print by critiquing the impact of technological innovation on literate practices, a point to be developed later in this chapter.

#### Vestiges of Bias and Determinism: Reading at Risk

One final example of this argument distinguishing poetic from rhetorical texts in order to portray technology as a threat to existing literate practices is “Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America,” a report issued by the National Endowment for the Arts in 2004. Survey respondents reported if, “during the previous twelve months, they had read any novels, short stories, plays, or poetry in their leisure time (not for work or school)” (ix). Though the report is prefaced in a dire tone and with claims about the causes of declined literary reading, the actual results of the report are more ambiguous.

Dana Gioia, NEA Chairman who prefaces the report, summarizes the three main findings of the report: first, “[f]or the first time in modern history, less than half of the adult population now reads literature, and these trends reflect a larger decline in other sorts of reading”; second, “literary reading in America is not only declining rapidly among all groups, but the rate of decline has accelerated, especially among the young”; and third, “The decline in reading . . . parallels a larger retreat from participation in civic and cultural life” (vii).

In addition, Gioia includes the following claims about the increased presence of technology and mass media in affecting reading trends: first, “most electronic media” don’t provide the level of “active attention and engagement” that books do; second, “print culture affords irreplaceable forms of focused attention and contemplation that make complex communications and insights possible,” and third, the decline in print culture suggests a loss in the “intellectual capability—and the many sorts of human continuity it allows—[which loss] constitute[s] a vast cultural impoverishment” (vii). Incidentally, these claims are not verified in conclusion of the report. Reviewing some of the main findings of the NEA report will demonstrate that Gioia’s claims regarding the technological threat to the high culture of print are misplaced and therefore suspect.

The conclusions notes that “it is tempting to suggest that fewer people are reading literature and now prefer visual and audio entertainment,” but “the data—both from SPPA [Survey of Public Participation in Arts] and other sources—do not readily quantify this explanation” (30). The report notes that “television does not seem to be the culprit” for the decline in literary reading because people who read literature in 2002 watched “about the same amount of TV per day” as those who did not read (30). The report does

suggest that the Internet could have played a role in declining literary reading, citing that “home Internet use soared” while “literature participation rates declined” (30). Between 1982 and 1992, before widespread Internet availability, literary reading rates “were virtually identical . . . . It was not until 2002 that the reported percentage of adults reading literature dropped considerably” (30). However, the report notes that this correlation may be coincidental. In addition, despite the doubling of Hispanic population over the past twenty years, the report does not attribute literary decline to changing demographics because decline occurred among all groups and at all education levels (30). Furthermore, the summary notes that because surveys are not conducted annually and are only “ten-year snapshots,” the decline in literary reading could be a “short, one-year change” rather than “a pattern of decline over time” (30). The details of the NEA report, then, portray the literary reading habits of American in less dire circumstances.

Given the questionable correlation between the impact of technology on literacy, there seems to be a deeper motivation for blaming technology for decreased literacy, which motivation grows out of the tendency manifested in the NEA report to favor the poetic over the rhetorical text as a valid and valuable means for social discourse and civic engagement. The first evidence of favoring the poetic over the rhetorical is the report’s emphasis on literary reading. Stuart Moulthrop, Professor of Information Arts and Technologies at the University of Baltimore, criticizes this narrowed emphasis, noting that it leaves out “biographies, memoirs, or non-fiction books about history, science, economics, or even popular philosophy” as well as “letters and newspapers” (par. 12).

Second, the association of literature and culture reflects the assumptions of expressionistic rhetoric, which further confirms the poetic bias of the report. There are



multiple references to the cultural impact of declining literary reading: the decline in literary reading indicates “a culture at risk,” an “imminent cultural crisis,” the disappearance of a “cultural legacy,” a degeneracy of “literary culture and literacy in general” (xiii). Nancy Kaplan, also Professor of Information Arts and Technologies, criticizes the suggestion that reading literature has been the “historic norm” by that the “cultural phenomenon [of] reading imaginative works, as opposed to reading philosophy, history, religious tracts, sermons, political theory, or scientific treatises as a leisure activity . . . was hardly widespread until at least the mid-eighteenth century, and it really did not play a significant role in the average American’s daily life until the late nineteenth or even the early twentieth century” (par. 5).

In addition, the conclusion of the report notes that “white Americans have the highest participation rates of any ethnic or racial group in almost all literature-related activities,” with the exception of “African Americans listening to poetry” and that “white Americans are almost twice as likely to read literature” as compared to Hispanic Americans, even when factors such as education are held constant (29, 10). Apparently, the “culture” in danger is representative of only a privileged portion of the populace.

Third, the correlation between literature and civic engagement reinforces the bias against rhetorical texts, which bias is embedded in the assumptions of expressionistic rhetoric regarding civic engagement. The report claims that “[l]iterary reading strongly correlates to other forms of active civic participation,” which forms are defined as “perform[ing] volunteer and charity work, visit[ing] art museums, attend[ing] performing arts events, and attend[ing] sporting events” (xii). As noted in chapter two, expressionistic rhetoric is “openly distrustful of democracy,” “favor[s] class distinctions,”

and points to exposure to literature as providing “high ideals of citizenship” and effecting individual transformation (Berlin, Rhetoric and Reality 45, 71-4). Given these assumptions, the claim about the correlation between literary reading and civic participation suggests that literary rather than rhetorical texts are better means and indicators of civic engagement. This claim is problematic because it counters Putnam’s argument that social connectedness, whether in political, civic, formal, or informal settings, is the only means of creating social capital and therefore the best indicator of civic engagement. Evidently, social connectedness occurs more prominently in the realm of the rhetorical rather than the poetic.

In the previous examples, Boorstin, Postman, and the NEA report all manifest concern about the threat that changes in culture, accelerated by technology, pose to current literate practices. The common strategy among these critiques is to distinguish between poetic and rhetorical texts in order to reinforce the superiority of the high culture of print and to portray technological innovation as a threat to existing literate practices and culture. Understanding the assumptions of the rhetoric of liberal culture helps clarify why traditionalists claim that technology threatens literacy.

### Nostalgia

The underlying motivation for traditionalist arguments that technological innovations threaten literate practices is nostalgia for the existing, dominant methods of literacy and communication. Nostalgia motivates praise of current technologies of communication and blame of innovative technologies. Plato manifested this nostalgia when writing began to rival orality as a technology of communication. Through his spokesperson Socrates, Plato voiced his nostalgia for orality in the Phaedrus as he

recounts—and thereby criticizes—the invention of literacy: “[Letters] will produce forgetfulness in the minds of those who learn to use it, because they will not practice their memory. Their trust in writing, produced by external characters which are no part of themselves, will discourage the use of their own memory within them” (qtd. in Bizzell and Herzberg 165). Hence, the technology of writing is “an elixir not of memory, but of reminding” that will only provide “the appearance of wisdom, not true wisdom” (165).

Plato perceived the technology of writing as corrupt because, as Richard Enos explains, writing destroyed “the dynamic and interactive exchange that took place in the (necessarily) oral deliberations of dialectic” (28). Plato supposed that the inferiority of the new technology of writing threatens the existence and vitality of the then-current technology of orality. The innovative technology of the Greek alphabet facilitated the spreading of literacy—and consequently democracy—in Athens (Ong 89). But it did not destroy the oral tradition. Plato’s cultural perspective and social status prevented him from embracing the changes that such technology brought to literacy. Likewise, traditionalists such as Boorstin and Postman who criticize technology inevitably echo Plato’s assumptions and worldview, which prevents them from recognizing the literate characteristics and democratic tendencies embedded in technological innovations.

In contrast to Plato, Isocrates, despite his elitism, embraced the technological changes instigated by writing and literacy. Isocrates recognized the democratic technology of writing and sought to develop an educational program that institutionalized it as a way to teach students to learn how to govern themselves and participate in public life. Rather than privilege orality, Isocrates adopted rhetorical instruction into the new technology of communication and thus allowed rhetoric to

remain a central part of education. Kathleen Welch suggests that Isocrates concentrated his professional and scholastic work on “written rather than spoken texts” because he recognized the “potential power of the new technology of literacy” (Bizzell and Herzberg 67). Technology and rhetorical discourse are apparently complementary.

### *Technology and Literacy*

In Orality and Literacy Walter Ong makes the controversial argument that the technology of writing “has transformed human consciousness” by fostering the development of cognitive characteristics foreign to “primary oral cultures” (77). Such characteristics of literacy include subordination, analysis, objectivity, linearity, and abstraction. In contrast, the cognitive characteristics in a primary oral culture include addition, aggregation, redundancy, agonism, homeostasis, and contextualization (37-49). Based on this distinction, Ong claims that “without writing, the literate mind would not and could not think as it does, not only when engaged in writing but normally even when it is composing its thoughts in oral form” (77).

In distinguishing literate from oral modes of thinking, Ong does not mean to suggest that oral cultures are inferior to literate cultures, or that writing alone creates “a mental capacity that is unknown or impossible in an illiterate person” (Bolter 193). Rather, Ong seeks to demonstrate the transformation of consciousness that occurs when the characteristics and cognitive modes of a literate culture are introduced to and become widespread among a previously illiterate culture. Nonetheless, many contest Ong’s argument that “literacy makes sophisticated, abstract reasoning possible” because it seems to implicitly privilege the reasoning capacity of “a particular Western mode of thinking” over other cognitive practices (192).

The central concept I wish to draw from Ong's argument is not that literate cognition is superior to oral cognition, or that literate practices transform consciousness, but that once literate characteristics and practices enter a culture, they remain part of that culture. Technologies produced by literate cultures are informed by and manifest in their function the cognitive characteristics of literacy that Ong lists. Consequently, technological innovations cannot threaten literacy because literacy is an inherent concept informing technology.

While innovative communication technologies originating in a primary literate culture may alter and even challenge traditional notions of literate practices, such technologies cannot corrupt or inhibit literacy per se. Instead, as Ong argues, "A new technology of the word reinforces the old while at the same time transforming it" (150). Technological innovations transform, or remediate, literacy and literate practices.

#### Technology and Remediation

Jay David Bolter develops this concept of remediation. In Writing Space: Computers, Hypertext, and the Remediation of Print, Bolter explains how "hypertext and other forms of electronic writing [. . .] 'remediate' the forms and genres of print" (xii). Remediation is a process that involves "both homage and rivalry, for the new medium imitates some features of the older medium, but also makes an implicit or explicit claim to improve on the older one" (23). Bolter explains that this remediation occurs in the context of rivaling technologies. When innovative technologies rival existing technologies, they redefine how existing technologies function. The refashioning or remediation of a communication technology occurs as "a newer medium takes the place

of an older one, borrowing and reorganizing the characteristics of writing in the older medium and reforming its cultural space” (23).

However, Bolter also explains that traditionalists like Boorstin and Postman view electronic technology “as a threat to, rather than as an extension of, their literary values” because the apparent transience of electronic technology challenges the “stability, monumentality, [and] authority” of print (162). These characteristics of print establish a “cultural fixity [which] allow[s] texts to remain unchanged” indefinitely (167). Bolter claims that although “digital media are refashioning the printed book,” they are certainly not destroying it (3). Remediations of writing technologies embody an “interplay of printed and electronic forms” rather than the exclusive use of one or the other (4).

Ong’s observation about the cognitive permanence of literate characteristics, along with Bolter’s explanation of remediation, suggest that technology cannot herald a corruption of language or a degeneration of literacy because it cannot eradicate the literate permanence embedded in the culture that produces and uses it. Rather, technology remediates the forms and practices of literacy in a given culture. Nostalgic notions about traditional literate practices and deterministic assumptions about the cultural impact of technology are not only reductive but also counterintuitive because they ultimately overlook the permanence of literacy in contemporary society. The impact of such remediations on public communication and civic engagement is the subject of the following section.

### *Technology and Civic Engagement*

Although Putnam attributes the decline in civic engagement, examined in chapter two, primarily to generational succession, he claims that changes in technology and mass

media have substantially affected civic engagement in a primarily negative way. Noting the rapid penetration of televisions into most American households by the mid-century, Putnam notes an increase in leisure time since the 1960s, and a corresponding increase in the amount of time Americans watch television for entertainment, along with a general decline in civic engagement (222-23). In addition, Putnam observes that the civic generation “was the last cohort of Americans to grow up without television” and the baby boomers were “the first generation to be exposed to television throughout their lives” (272). These correlations lead Putnam to claim that “[t]he more fully that any given generation was exposed to television in its formative years, the lower its civic engagement during adulthood” (257). According to Putnam, “men and women raised in the sixties, seventies, and eighties not only watch television *more* than those born in the thirties, forties, and fifties: they also watch television *differently*—more habitually, even mindlessly” (272). In comparison with a host of other traditional factors used to indicate social participation, “including education, generation, gender, region, size of hometown, work obligations, marriage, children, income, financial worries, religiosity, race, geographic mobility, commuting time, homeownership, and more,” Putnam claims that “dependence on television for entertainment is . . . *the single most consistent predictor*” of civic disengagement (230-31).

Yet, Putnam’s analysis of computer-mediated communication is more ambiguous. Putnam observes that computer mediated communication, meaning communication via the Internet, holds more potential for promoting civic engagement. The Internet allows for greater interactivity by “support[ing] large, dense, yet fluid groups that cut across existing organizational and geographic boundaries, increasing the involvement of

otherwise peripheral participants” (168, 172). These social groups, or networks, are organized by shared interest rather than shared space, and the ease of communication and anonymity result in more participation, more egalitarian communities, and more democratic promise by flattening traditional hierarchies (172-73). Because communication creates connectedness, and because the Internet enhances the ability to communicate, Putnam reasons that the Internet should lead to increases in communities of users and, therefore, increase civic engagement (171).

However, Putnam doubts that “virtual social capital,” if it exists, can be an adequate substitute for interpersonal interaction (176). In fact, Putnam claims that social capital is *only* achieved when political engagement is interpersonal, and that “anonymity is fundamentally anathema” to deliberation that produces social capital (341). Putnam explains that calling into a radio station does not create social capital because the situation does not require “participants” to “meaningfully engage with opposing views and hence learn from that engagement” (341). In like manner, the impersonality of electronic exchanges and lack of social cues “inhibit interpersonal collaboration and trust, especially when the interaction is anonymous and not nested in a wider social context” (176). Depersonalized and decontextualized exchanges reinforce casual rather than committed contacts, complicate the process of arriving at consensus, and facilitate misrepresentation and malicious communication (177). In other words, the Internet may facilitate the use of sophistic rhetoric.

In addition, Putnam notes the “digital divide” between the technological haves and have-nots limits widespread participation and reinforces “culturally dominant social networks” (172). But even though the Internet allows a diversity of users, the tendency



for cyberbalkanization (or the primacy of special interests) may disrupt the communitarian tendency of computer-mediated communication, produce more homogenous and exclusive groups, and reduce social capital (172-78).

Since 2000, when Putnam's book was published, much has changed in terms of computer-mediated communication. Although the impact of technology on civic engagement is still difficult to determine, recent events demonstrate that technology increases civic engagement and makes democratic action possible when it otherwise would not be. The popularity of Internet and cell phone usage, as well as text messaging and blogging, demonstrates that communication technologies are becoming an increasingly embedded part of life. Reviewing innovations in telecommunications and computer-mediated communication suggest that innovative technologies have the capacity to remediate rather than threaten civic practices, just as technology remediates rather than threatens literacy and literate practices. With each remediation, technology is becoming an increasingly prevalent, mediating force in civic engagement. Indeed, the convergence and remediation of technology is having a significant impact on civic engagement.

The Pew Internet & American Life Project, which studies the use and social impact of the Internet, recently compared trends in Internet usage among Americans between 2000 and 2004 and concluded that, in most ways, the Internet has not revolutionized life but rather has allowed people to extend into electronic form activities that existed prior to the advent of the Web (58). For example, email is "the number one activity and time consumer for the vast majority of Internet users," followed by "information searching, then entertainment, then e-commerce" (63). However, the

Internet has also “enabled new kinds of activities,” or at least new ways of engaging in existing activities, such as sharing music and information through peer-to-peer networks and web logs (blogs) (58). In general, the technology of the Internet seems to be remediating the way people engage in traditional activities rather than eliminating those activities.

The Pew Project reported that the Internet is reshaping “politics and community life” by providing more information online and “new opportunities . . . for civic participation” (65). The primary evidence for this claim is increase in blogging. The report recalls the role blogging played during the 2004 presidential election: “It was a blogger who first marshaled evidence to question a story by CBS’s 60 Minutes about President Bush’s service in the National Guard. The ensuing civic storm played out in both the blogosphere and the mainstream media simultaneously, and eventually forced anchorman Dan Rather to retract the story and CBS to fire four senior journalists” (65). Blogging and bloggers increased during the 2004 election year. But blogging is not a mainstream activity. According to the report, only nine percent of online users reported having read political blogs during the 2004 campaign, and although “blog readership increased 58 percent between February and November 2004,” the report notes that “62 percent of online Americans are not even sure what a blog is” (65).

Additional Pew Research suggests that blogging is growing. Data retrieved during November 2004 suggested that seven percent of Internet users, or about 8 million people, “had created a blog or web diary that others could read,” which percentage had grown from five percent in January 2004 (“The State of Blogging” 1). Currently, those who create blogs constitute a fairly homogenous group. Fifty-seven percent of bloggers are

male, 48 percent are under age 30, 70 percent have broadband connection at home, 82 percent have used the Internet for six or more years, “42% live in households earning over \$50, 000,” and “39% have college or graduate degrees” (2). However, those who read blogs are more “mainstream” than those who create them, and since February 2004 “there has been greater-than-average growth in blog readership among women, minorities, those between the ages of 30 and 49, and those with home dialup connections” (2). Blogging appears to remediate public communication for civic and political purposes, and its influence continues to grow as the Internet becomes an increasingly common medium for the general public to gather news and information.

The Internet, though not as popular as the television, is becoming a significant source for political news, particularly among the younger generation. The Pew report noted that during the 2004 Presidential election, television and newspapers were the top two sources all Americans turned to for political news, followed by the Internet and radio (68). This trend was similar for all Internet users surveyed (68). However, those with a high-speed Internet connection at home indicated that, while television was their first source, Internet was their second, and newspaper was their third source (68).

The report acknowledges the generation gap as a key factor in this survey: younger Americans (below age 35) with high-speed access at home tend to rely on the Internet more than the newspaper, while those 35 and older high-speed access at home tend to rely on newspapers more than the Internet for news (68). However, these younger Americans are more likely to research both traditional and “alternative news sources online” to get more information and multiple perspectives on mainstream media (68).

In addition, the convergence of cell phone and Internet technologies has played a crucial role in democratic movements throughout the world. In April 2005 the New York Times reported how an anti-Japanese protest was organized in China, which has outlawed organized protests, through cell phones and the Internet. Although the Chinese government tried to discourage protests by banning coverage in the state media, news about the protests spread quickly “via e-mail, text message and instant online messaging.” The government tried to censor email and instant messages that contained ““sensitive or uncivilized words”” such as ““anti-Japanese protest”” but cell phone text messaging messages containing such words were not censored. The article also noted the role that “cell phone messaging” played in “nascent democracy movements in Lebanon and elsewhere in the Middle East,” and how the “Orange Revolution” in Ukraine was facilitated by “online forums and messaging.” In these examples, technology enabled civic engagement to occur in situations where traditional methods of communication would not have had the same impact. In this sense, technology has remediated the ways in which civic engagement occurs.

Traditional measures for noting civic engagement, such as newspaper readership, are being replaced by Internet. Blogging is also affecting civic engagement, encouraging not merely the consumption but also the production of news. In this respect, the Internet is a new forum for civic engagement. The Internet and blogging seems to hold more promise for democratic deliberation, whereas previous technologies, such as the television and newspaper, reinforced a hierarchical form of reporting rather than the dialectical form embodied in blogging. Given the impact of blogging during the 2004

Presidential election, blogging will likely become a central forum for civic engagement and the prevalence of communication technologies increases.

The convergence of technologies suggests that technology is remediating communication and bringing people together, helping them connect, as evidenced by the popularity of email among Internet users. Increasing the ability to communicate seems to be the goal of these remediations. Technology is increasing the amount of civic discourse. Blogging facilitates the production of civic discourse. Technology is remediating civic engagement, but the remediations place more of a burden on the individual to evaluate the communication. Because users must develop more autonomy in receiving news and information, rhetorical literacy in a digital world is needed more than ever to ensure that individuals may maintain positive freedom through the intellectual skills afforded through a liberal education. Rhetorical education is the ultimate filter in the world of digital communication in the absence of traditional filters of information provided by television and newspapers.

### *Conclusion*

Technology remediates rather than threatens literate practices and civic engagement in contemporary society. The prevalence of mediated communication emphasizes the need for students in a democracy to know how to engage with and through technology for democratic purposes. The prevalence of technology in society and its use as a forum for rhetorical exchanges requires that it be an integral part of rhetorical education.

However, technology should not be the primary focus in the composition classroom. Laura J. Gurak argues that “cyberliteracy” should be at the heart of rhetorical

education. Cyberliteracy describes “a conscious interaction with new technologies” in which students simultaneously critique and embrace technology and are aware of how “the new rhetorics of digital space” affect communication (183). Gurak explains, “To be cyberliterate is to understand the relationship between our communication technologies and ourselves, our communities, and our cultures,” and how technologies changes traditional modes and conventions of discourse (183-84).

Cyberliteracy gained through rhetorical literacy. Rhetorical literacy better describes what Gurak means by cyberliteracy because it emphasizes the nature of communication and the interaction of all elements in the rhetorical situation. Cyberliteracy may unduly emphasize technology over communication, a development that may create an unbalanced perspective of the role of technology in the rhetorical situation. Rhetorical literacy allows for the integration of technology into the rhetorical situation without privileging it.

## **Conclusion: Rhetorical Education**

This conclusion briefly reviews Kenneth Burke's theories on rhetoric and education, which correspond with the principles of epistemic rhetoric, to explain how rhetorical instruction in the composition classroom may accomplish the aims of a rhetorical education, which is "the instruction of individuals in a collective identity" (Clark 147). This outcome of a rhetorical education corresponds with the aims of a liberal education: to allow students to develop intellectual skills that lead to autonomy and citizenship. To contextualize this explanation, I refer to the personal essay assignment in English 115 to show that understanding narrative from a rhetorical perspective initiates rhetorical education.

### *Burke and Education*

Kenneth Burke's explanation of the role of language instruction in education demonstrates that epistemic rhetoric should inform composition instruction in order to accomplish the purpose of education. Greg Clark contextualizes Burke's theories on language instruction and education by explaining how the aftermath of World War II and the development of weapons of mass destruction had created a "New Situation" which made successful cooperation and unification among individuals necessary for survival, not just "the good life" (151). Consequently, Burke rearticulated his ideas on language and education in "Linguistic Approach to Problems of Education" (151). The same catastrophic events that precipitated the general education movement also influenced Burke to reinterpret education as training in language and rhetoric in order to prepare students to develop rhetorical literacy necessary for a democracy.

Burke suggests that the purpose of education was not to prepare students for individual success but to teach “attitudes” that encourage students to “undermine the [violent] potential” of competition by recognizing and evaluating the “collective consequences of individual discursive acts” (151). Burke’s definition demonstrates a concern not for content, which is the basis of specialized knowledge, but rather the “habits of mind” and “deeper thinking” that the Harvard report and Curtler argue are the purpose of education in the liberal arts. Burke explains that these “attitudes” are reflected in the “characteristic responses” that enable people “who must live together . . . to confine their conflicts to the rhetorical realm” (151).

Burke reasons that people “who live together” must “identify with each other as an interdependent community” (151). Because language makes possible identification, schools must teach students to recognize “the power of language to create the realities that people collectively perceive,” because people in a democracy must be aware of “the power of each other’s rhetoric” in order to “live constructively, rather than destructively, together” (151). Burke’s explanation of the purpose of education demonstrates that rhetorical literacy—understanding the power of language—is necessary for constructive living and ought to be the primary emphasis of what is presumably a liberal education.

Burke envisions communities of citizens trained to respond to discursive conflict with attitudes and acts that promote cooperation and “transcendence” rather than competition and violence (152). Engaging in collective experiences ranging from religious rites to “hazing ceremonies,” experiences that embody “symbols of authority” and “universal principles,” allows individuals to transcend differences by experiencing “a sense of new identification” and by striving to “adopt as their own a



collective identity” (152-53). Cooperation, engagement, and identification enable transcendence, which results from a “successful dialectical exchange through which individual motives are transformed into motives that are shared with the others with whom the individual is engaged” (158). Again, the central feature of transcendence is grounded in how people use language, how they communicate, how they use rhetoric, to converse, cooperate, identify, and act together.

Burke’s theory of linguistic education corresponds to the principle of epistemic rhetoric, which views language and dialogue as central to the creation of meaning and at the heart of communication in a democracy. These expectations for education and language instruction are the primary concern of composition instruction, which provides a symbolic setting of public exchanges in which students engage and participate in a community and experience Burke’s communal sense of identification. In this way, the classroom functions as a “protopublic spaces,” in Rosa Eberly’s words, where students practice the linguistic habits that are necessary for democratic participation (169). The study of rhetoric has traditionally been, as Burke explains, “the power of each other’s rhetoric.” When students practice using language rhetorically, meaning for the purposes of engaging in dialogue with others for the sake of identification, they are practicing the kind of communication that occurs among citizens in public spheres. Rhetorical engagement in the composition classroom represents civic engagement in the community. In both situations, language is essential to developing individual and collective identities. However, the rhetorical instruction in the language arts in the composition classroom renders explicit the techniques and modes of communication that are generally implicit in the various discourses accompanying civic engagement.

In a democracy, symbols of authority such as the flag and the national anthem embody the universal principles of liberty, justice, patriotism, and citizenship that provide means with which individuals and communities identify in order to become a unified nation. Although rhetorical education in this sense often occurs without formal instruction, the inability of education to motivate and prepare students to engage civically suggests that the rising generation may be rhetorically illiterate, meaning they are not self-conscious of the power of communication in a democracy to influence belief and action. The most common form of rhetorical communication in a democracy, the kind that promotes identification and induces public action, whether in the public or private realm, is narrative. Narrative is the form that most often shapes universal principles and symbols of authority that allow for identification and transcendence. A rhetorical education in English 115 begins by introducing to students the public, or rhetorical, nature of narrative.

### *Rhetoric and Narrative*

In Human Communication as Narration, Walter Fisher proposes a “narrative paradigm” for understanding “the symbolic action that creates social reality” (93). Fisher argues that “narration [is] paradigmatic of human discourse” because “human beings are inherently storytellers who have a natural capacity to recognize the coherence and fidelity of stories they tell and experience” (98, 24). Fisher claims, “We experience and comprehend life as a series of ongoing narratives, as conflicts, characters, beginnings, middles, and ends” (24). This perspective views the function of symbolic language “ultimately as stories meant to give order to human experience and to induce others to dwell in them in order to establish ways of living in common [. . .]” (63).

Narrative embodies a highly rhetorical communicative experience facilitating identification among participants for social purposes. This recognition initiates rhetorical education in the composition classroom. Fisher argues that understanding narrative “can enhance understanding of human communication and action” because social knowledge “is ultimately configured narratively, as a component in a larger story” with particular kinds of personalities, characteristics, worldviews, “self-concept[s],” and “characteristic ways of relating to others” (20, 17). Because narration represents “symbolic actions—words and/or deeds—that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them,” then narrative becomes a universal mode of interpretation and communication (58). Narrative represents in both form and content a rhetorical moment of identification that is universally experienced, though widely unacknowledged as rhetorical.

The narrative paradigm validates narrative, traditionally perceived as irrational due to Aristotle’s strictly rational interpretation of logos, as a means to making decisions about social action. Indeed, Fisher’s explanation of narrative corresponds with the original meaning of logos—“story, reason, rationale, conceptions, discourse, thought” (5). Burke claims, “[w]hereas poetic language is a kind of symbolic action, for itself and in itself, [. . .] rhetorical language is inducement to action” or attitude (qtd. in Bizzell and Herzberg 1337). But Fisher observes that the narrative paradigm allows “[w]hatever [. . .] genre of discourse” to be viewed as rhetorical (143). Narrative both symbolizes and induces action by creating the explicit or implicit expectation for an audience to identify with the elements of the communicative exchange—the characters, message, worldview, or moral.

This process of identification via narrative, when rendered explicit through instruction in the composition course, will help students view communication as a collaborative process in which meaning is made and collectively held, they will more easily abandon the traditional perspective of narrative writing as a monological event, and students will seek to communicate with their audience and get them to identify with them (Clark, Dialogue 3). To present themselves publicly in the essay, students need to view writing as communicative rather than expressive, rhetorical rather than poetic, dialogical rather than monological. As this thesis has demonstrated, writing instruction informed by expressive, or subjective, rhetoric promotes individual expression and experience while disregarding the inherently public nature of language and communication. Such practices in the composition classroom result in inadequate training for the rhetorical demands placed on citizens in a democracy because such use of language does not foster cooperation or identification.

The narrative paradigm demonstrates that narratives serve a rhetorical purpose—to invite audiences to identify with an author. Recognizing and understanding the rhetoricality of narrative necessary for students not only to write public personal essays but also to develop autonomy. Through narrative, students may develop critical distance from their private selves in order to begin constructing a public identity. The rhetorical function of narrative in this instance is representative of the function of rhetoric in first-year writing: to allow students to experience the power of language and rhetoric to both create and enable identity apart from and among individuals. This experience, which is dependent on rhetorical instruction in the language arts, promotes the kind of autonomy necessary for citizens in a democracy.

Engaging in the rhetorical act of communication in the composition classroom prepares students to practice civic engagement in public spheres. Narrating experience for a distinctly rhetorical purpose—to identify with or for the larger community—enables students to contribute to and identify with the various publics they will encounter, either within or without the academy. The narrative paradigm enhances students’ understanding of the form and function of the communication they experience daily. The narrative paradigm will prepare students to recognize, receive, and respond to social discourse in cooperative and transcendent ways. Rhetorical instruction in narrative is the beginning of rhetorical education.

### *Scientific Narratives*

To help their students understand how the narrative paradigm highlights the rhetorical work of language, composition instructors can illustrate the universality of narrative in the academy. Neil Postman demonstrates that the organizing principle for acquiring knowledge is language, or narrative. Postman claims that the natural and social sciences create knowledge through narrative by defining the purpose of the social sciences as the effort to document the behavior and feelings of people as they confront problems posed by their culture. Postman compares the work of the social scientist with the work of the novelists to illustrate that both are engaged in empirical work, “looking at things before drawing conclusions” (149). Postman continues, “Their interpretations cannot be proven or disproved but will draw their appeal from the power of their language, the depth of their explanations, the relevance of their examples, and the credibility of their themes” (154). These observations lead Postman to conclude that natural science, social science, and imaginative literature are all “forms of storytelling—

human attempts to account for our experience in coherent ways,” despite that they “have different aims, ask different questions, follow different procedures, and give different meanings to ‘truth’” (159).

Not only does the narrative paradigm demonstrate the centrality of language in making meaning, but it also reveals the public consequences of narratives. Postman claims that the narrative of natural science undermined but did not eliminate religious belief, providing an additional source of knowledge through an alternative narrative to explain how the world works. However, the social sciences have replaced religious belief with scientism by “applying the aims and procedures of natural science to the human world” (161). In other words, by creating narratives that explain how humans function, the social sciences have assumed the role of providing moral authority for its culture (161-62). According to Postman, scientism is the new narrative that guides human cognition and action.

This brief example is meant to illustrate the centrality of narrative to discovering knowledge. In the composition classroom, narrative is also the means by which students begin to explore their experiences in order to increase self-awareness. But this process of self-exploration must be tempered with epistemic rhetoric so that self-awareness does not reinforce or promote individualism but rather rhetorical education, or individual awareness in relation to, and inextricable from, a larger community.

## **Conclusion**

Rhetorical education demonstrates that language is the organizing principle of social interaction. The outlooks and traits of mind that general education seeks to imbue in students must be developed in relationships, where people are bound to others and to

the material by a common purpose: to experience education. First-year writing should be the unifying course of the general education curriculum because, as a language arts course, the intellectual skills achieved through liberal education—critical reasoning and clear communicating—are necessary to all disciplines. The primary concern of first-year writing is training students in critical thinking and writing skills, which free the mind while providing students with applicable skills in other college courses, in their professions, and in their public lives. The goal of rhetorical education is autonomous citizens motivated to practice civic engagement for transcendent purposes.

My purpose for reviewing the history of rhetoric and writing instruction is similar to Berlin's: "to convince writing teachers of their importance" by demonstrating the implications of writing instruction for student behavior (Berlin, Writing Instruction 92). Because rhetorical instruction in the language arts shapes the behavior of students, composition instructors must understand the social implications of competing rhetorics in the composition classroom and ensure that their instruction is allowing their students to experience a rhetorical education.

## Works Cited

- Association of American Colleges and Universities. 2005. 10 Mar. 2005  
<[http://www.aacu.org/advocacy/what\\_is\\_liberal\\_education.cfm](http://www.aacu.org/advocacy/what_is_liberal_education.cfm) >.
- Bartlett, Thomas. "Why Johnny Can't Write, Even Though He Went to Princeton."  
Chronicle of Higher Education. 3 Jan. 2003: A39.
- Berlin, James A. Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1900-1985. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1987.
- . Writing Instruction in Nineteenth-Century American Colleges. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1984.
- Bizzell, Patricia, and Bruce Herzberg, eds. The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present. 2nd ed. Boston: Bedford, 2001.
- Bolter, Jay David. Writing Space: Computers, Hypertext, and the Remediation of Print. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2001.
- Booth, Sherry and Susan Frisbie. "(Re)Turning to Aristotle: Metaphor and the Rhetorical Education of Students." Rhetorical Education in America. Ed. Cheryl Glenn, Margaret M. Lyday, and Wendy B. Sharer. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2004. 163-78.
- Boorstin, Daniel J. The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America. Atheneum: NY, 1985.
- Boswell, Grant. Letter to the author. 5 Sept. 2004.
- Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University.



- Reinventing Undergraduate Education: A Blueprint for America's Research Universities. Menlo Park, CA: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1998. 15 May 2005 < <http://naples.cc.sunysb.edu/Pres/boyer.nsf/>>.
- Brown, James I. "Freshman English and General Education" Journal of Higher Education. 21.1 (1950): 17-20.
- Burke, Kenneth. Counter-Statement. Berkeley: U of California P, 1968.
- . "From *A Rhetoric of Motives*." The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present. Ed. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg. 2nd ed. Boston: Bedford, 2001. 1324-40.
- Clark, Gregory. Dialogue, Dialectic, and Conversation: A Social Perspective on the Function of Writing. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1990.
- . "Transcendence at Yellowstone: Educating a Public in an Uninhabitable Place." Rhetorical Education in America. Ed. Cheryl Glenn, Margaret M. Lyday, and Wendy B. Sharer. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2004. 145-59.
- Committee on the Objectives of a General Education in a Free Society. General Education in a Free Society: Report of the Harvard Committee. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1950.
- Curtler, Hugh Mercer. Recalling Education. Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2001.
- Denman, William N. "Rhetoric, the 'Citizen-Orator,' and the Revitalization of Civic Discourse in American Life." Rhetorical Education in America. Ed. Cheryl Glenn, Margaret M. Lyday, and Wendy B. Sharer. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2004. 3-17.
- Eberly, Rosa A. Citizen Critics: Literary Public Spheres. Chicago: U of Illinois P, 2000.

- Enos, Richard. "Ancient Greek Writing Instruction." A Short History of Writing Instruction: From Ancient Greece to Modern America. Ed. James J. Murphy. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2001. 9-34.
- Fisher, Walter R. Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action. Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 1987.
- Fuhrmann, Barbara S. "Philosophies and Aims." Handbook of the Undergraduate Curriculum: A Comprehensive Guide to Purposes, Structures, Practices, and Change. Ed. Jerry Gaff and James L. Ratcliff. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997. 86-99.
- Gurak, Laura J. "Ciberliteracy: Toward a New Rhetorical Consciousness." Rhetorical Education in America. Ed. Cheryl Glenn, Margaret M. Lyday, and Wendy B. Sharer. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2004. 179-97.
- Isocrates. "From *Antidosis*." The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present. Ed. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg. 2nd ed. Boston: Bedford/St.Martin's, 2001. 75-79.
- "Internet: the Mainstreaming of Online Life." Pew Internet and American Life Project. 1 Mar. 2005 <[http://www.pewInternet.org/pdfs/Internet\\_Status\\_2005.pdf](http://www.pewInternet.org/pdfs/Internet_Status_2005.pdf) >.
- Leff, Michael. "Isocrates, Tradition, and the Rhetorical Version of Civic Education." Isocrates and Civic Education. Ed. Takis Poulakos and David Depew. Austin: U of Texas P, 2004. 235-54.
- Levine, Arthur, and Jada Nidiffer. "Key Turning Points in the Curriculum." Handbook of the Undergraduate Curriculum: A Comprehensive Guide to Purposes, Structures, Practices, and Change. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997. 53-85.

- Levine, Mel. "College Graduates Aren't Ready for the Real World." Chronicle Review.  
18 Feb. 2005. B11.
- McComiskey, Bruce. "Visual Rhetoric and the New Public Discourse." JAC 24.1 (2004):  
187-206.
- Mersand, Joseph. "What has Happened to Written Composition?" English Journal. 50.4  
(1961): 231-37.
- Miller, Thomas P. "Lest We Go the Way of Classics: Toward a Rhetorical Future for  
English Departments." Rhetorical Education in America. Ed. Cheryl Glenn,  
Margaret M. Lyday, and Wendy B. Sharer. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2004.  
18-35.
- Moulthrop, Stuart, and Nancy Kaplan. "New Literacies and Old: A Dialogue." Kairos.  
9.1 (2004). 2 Mar. 2005 <<http://english.ttu.edu/kairos/9.1/index.html>>.
- United States. National Endowment for the Arts. "Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary  
Reading in America." Washington: GPO, 2004. 15 Mar. 2005  
<<http://www.arts.gov/pub/ReadingAtRisk.pdf>>.
- Ong, Walter. Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word. Routledge: NY,  
2002.
- Postman, Neil. Technopoloy: The Surrender of Culture to Technology. Vintage: NY,  
1993.
- Poulakos, John. "Rhetoric and Civic Education." Isocrates and Civic Education. Ed.  
Takis Poulakos and David Depew. Austin: U of Texas P, 2004. 69-83.
- Putnam, Robert D. Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community.  
NY: Simon & Schuster, 2000.

- Rainie, Lee. "The State of Blogging." Memo. Pew Internet and American Life Project. Jan. 2005 <[http://www.pewInternet.org/pdfs/PIP\\_blogging\\_data.pdf](http://www.pewInternet.org/pdfs/PIP_blogging_data.pdf)>.
- Ratcliff, James L., D. Kent Johnson, and Jerry G. Gaff, eds. Changing General Education Curriculum. New Directions for Higher Education. 125. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004.
- Ratcliff, James L., D. Kent Johnson, Steven M. La Nasa, and Jerry G. Gaff. The Status of General Education in the Year 2000: Summary of a National Survey. Washington: AACU, 2001.
- Ratcliff, James L. "Quality and Coherence in General Education." Handbook of the Undergraduate Curriculum: A Comprehensive Guide to Purposes, Structures, Practices, and Change. Ed. Jerry Gaff and James L. Ratcliff. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997. 141-69.
- . "What is a Curriculum, and What Should it Be?" Handbook of the Undergraduate Curriculum: A Comprehensive Guide to Purposes, Structures, Practices, and Change. Ed. Gaff, Jerry, and James L. Ratcliff. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997. 5-29.
- Russell, David. Writing in the Academic Disciplines, 1870-1990: A Curricular History. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1991.
- Stewart, Donald C. "Composition Textbooks and the Assault on Tradition." College Composition and Communication. 29. 2 (1978): 171-76.
- Wattenberg, Martin P. "Turnout Decline in the U.S. and other Advanced Industrial Democracies." 1998. Center for the Study of Democracy, UC Irvine. 27 Jul. 2005 <<http://www.democ.uci.edu/publications/paperseriespre2001.php>>.

Yardley, Jim. "A Hundred Cellphones Bloom, and Chinese Take to the Streets." New York Times. 25 Apr. 2005, late ed.: A1.