

Featured Faculty

Dr. Eric Leake



Dr. Eric Leake joined the Texas State University Department of English faculty and the MA Rhetoric and Composition Committee in 2013. Originally from Las Vegas, he completed his PhD at the University of Louisville. His research interests include empathy studies, nonrational rhetorics, and civic literacies.

Dr. Leake has published multiple papers on empathy in relation to rhetoric, writing, and teaching. The most recent of those is “Writing Pedagogies of Empathy: As Rhetoric and Disposition,” published last year in the *Composition Forum* special issue on affect. In that article Dr. Leake outlines a two-pronged approach to teaching empathy, first as a means of rhetorical awareness and critique, and second as a disposition that may be cultivated through ways of reading and writing. His article “Empathizer-in-Chief: The Promotion and Performance of Empathy in the Speeches of Barack Obama” was published in *The Journal of Contemporary Rhetoric* and notes how empathy appears as a theme and a rhetorical strategy. Dr. Leake considers empathy from different angles in three chapters featured in edited collections: difficult empathy as a value in literature, the pedagogical and social promise of cosmopolitan empathy,

and how critical empathy supports critical expressivism in composition theory. Those chapters can be found in, respectively, *Countertransference in Perspective: The Double-Edged Sword of the Patient-Therapist Emotional Relationship*, *Rethinking Empathy Through Literature*, and *Critical Expressivism: Theory and Practice in the Composition Classroom*. Dr. Leake currently is working on a piece proposing empathy as a research method and an article in which he analyzes performances of empathy in student writing. His interests in empathy also led him to develop a graduate course titled “Empathy and Writing,” in which empathy is considered in the context of literary studies, rhetoric, and writing pedagogies.

Dr. Leake’s work on empathy may be considered part of a larger trend in studying non-rational rhetorics, those means of persuasion and creating meaning that do not depend upon logical appeals. Dr. Leake’s most recent work in this area is the article ““The Dinner Table Debate and the Uses of Hospitality,” published in *Present Tense: A Journal of Rhetoric in Society*. In that article Dr. Leake analyzes how the domestic setting and ethics of hospitality affected a debate on same-sex marriage. He finds that rather than produce a more congenial discussion, as expected, the demands of hospitality were most notable for how they restricted the host. Dr. Leake this semester is teaching new undergraduate and graduate courses on affect, emotion, and rhetoric. His interest in non-rational rhetorics is similarly evident in the chapter “Composing Place, Composing Las Vegas,” in which Dr. Leake and his co-authors consider the rhetorical significance of names and signs in Las Vegas, including the iconic neon signs and the exotic places they evoke. Dr. Leake also contributed an essay on Las Vegas and attitudes toward the public work of teaching writing in the special issue on place in *College Composition and Communication*. He developed an undergraduate theory course on rhetoric and place, titled “Writing the City.” He and a student from that course last year presented on the rhetoric of maps at the biennial Watson Conference at the University of Louisville.

Before returning to academia, Dr. Leake worked as a newspaper and magazine reporter. That experience informs his interest in civic literacies and composition pedagogy. He has published on citizen journalism in *Composition Forum* and, in *Technical Communication Quarterly*, presented a rhetorical strategy of prefigured accommodation based upon the reporting of Iraqi casualty figures. He is currently working on a chapter concerning civic literacies and the media

awareness in an age of misinformation. College Writing I and Composition Pedagogy are among Dr. Leake's favorite courses to teach, as he enjoys working with new undergraduate writers and with graduate students who are developing their own pedagogical theories and strategies as writing teachers.

If you are interested in any of these topics, or would like to know more about his research and courses, Dr. Leake encourages you to email him. Or you may find him at one of the annual graduate student workshops he helps conduct on applying to doctoral programs and submitting conference proposals.