

**CST 612-02**  
**Critical and Rhetorical Approaches to Michelle Obama**  
**in Communication Studies**  
**Syllabus**  
**Wednesday, 5:30-8:20, 303 Curry Bldg.**  
**Fall 2019**

**Instructor:** Dr. Elizabeth (“Jody”) Natalie  
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Office Hours: Wednesday: 3:30-4:45 p.m.; Or by appointment

**Purpose of the Course:** This seminar will encompass a topical study of Michelle Obama as both rhetor and cultural icon in her role as first lady. We will engage the theoretical ideas and frameworks in the communication paradigms of critical-cultural studies and rhetoric. Our goal is to learn how to read and do research in these two paradigms as we discuss and debate the studies that have been published on Michelle Obama. We expect to produce a comprehensive theoretical understanding of the rhetor-icon, and each student in the seminar should produce a paper suitable for conference presentation or capstone/thesis foundation by the end of the semester. Because seminars emanate from the expertise of the professor, this course is part of Dr. Natalie's work in feminist rhetorical theory, women’s public speaking, and first ladies communication.

**General Objectives:** The objectives stated below are situated within the context of the Communication Studies graduate program mission and student learning outcomes. Seminars are intense, small group courses where the primary objective is to discuss the material being studied. That we will do! Our basis for discussion will be selected readings, the course bibliography, new sources we discover, the directions we choose to go in regarding analysis of Michelle Obama, and the evolution of our ideas over a semester. Literally, we will come to the table each week, and I will ask, "What new ideas have you got for me tonight?" I will facilitate the progress of our work, but each seminar participant must be self-motivated and disciplined to stay with the process.

Upon completion of this course, the student should be able to:

1. discuss the role of Michelle Obama as a rhetor and a cultural icon.
2. offer an original analysis of some aspect of Michelle Obama’s communication from either a critical-cultural or a rhetorical perspective.
3. evaluate critical-cultural and rhetorical theoretical literature in general.
4. extend theoretical knowledge through the discovery of new sources and/or the creation of new ideas.
5. evaluate the influence of Michelle Obama’s public communication on society.
6. demonstrate information literacy and research skills at the graduate level.

**Textbooks:** None at this time. We will read selected items, but you choose what to buy for your own academic library. I will make suggestions and point out sources along the way.

**Students with Disabilities:** If you have specific physical, medical, psychological/psychiatric, or learning disabilities that may require accommodations (see full list at <http://ods.uncg.edu/Student-services/register-with-ods/>), please contact the Office of Accessibility Resources & Services, Suite 215 EUC at 336-334-5440 and <http://ods.dept.uncg.edu> to register and set up an accommodations system. It's best that you inform me of your needs as early in the semester as possible, so that we can coordinate our efforts.

**Academic Integrity/Honor Code:** Integrity and ethical conduct are important to your success at UNCG and in later life. Academic integrity is based on five values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. As a member of the UNCG academic community, I expect you to know, understand, and uphold the Academic Integrity Policy. You should familiarize yourself with the Academic Integrity Policy by reading the material available at <http://academicintegrity.uncg.edu/>. The practice of academic integrity extends to all work for the course, including your service with a community partner. Every member of the class is expected to foster the spirit of academic honesty and respect at all times and to encourage that spirit among others. ***Any infraction of the Academic Integrity Policy can result in an automatic F for the course (at a minimum).*** Please include the following Academic Integrity Pledge on all public work (papers and presentation materials):

*I have abided by the UNCG Academic Integrity Policy on this assignment.*

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Finally, selling class notes for commercial gain or purchasing such class notes in this or any other course at UNCG is a violation of the University's Copyright Policy and of the Student Code of Conduct. Sharing notes for studying purposes, or borrowing notes to make up for absences, without commercial gain, are not violations.

**Class Norms:** I am generally a focused, disciplined person who likes a learning environment with no distractions and behavior that maintains a safe and productive space for all. If you could honor that spirit by engaging the following, your classmates and I would really appreciate it:

- Please, no cell phones or personal electronic devices in the classroom. Find a private space to make calls before class or during break. I do not want to see phones out on desks, etc. Ear buds and headphones need to be put away.
- I understand most graduate students are organized electronically. If you use a laptop for taking notes or accessing e-reserve readings, be discreet and restrict your work on the laptop to the matter at hand. If you choose to do other work or spend class time on social media or email, I have the right to ask you to put the computer away.
- Go to the restroom before class and during break. It is very distracting when people get up during class and wander in and out.
- Eat during break. We will have snacks and food, I am sure, but let's be sensible. Be discreet with drinks or water bottles.

- Participate appropriately by not cursing, harassing others, being tolerant of other views, sharing the floor, and being constructive. Side-talking is never appreciated by those around you.
- The professor has the right to remove any student from the class if disruptive behavior becomes a problem.

**Grading:** Your final grade will be based on the following breakdown:

Contributions to Discussion	100 pts. (50%)
Final Paper	100 pts. (50%)
Total Possible	200 pts.

Letter grades based on a 10-pt. scale: 186-200=A 180-185=A- 176-179=B+ 166-175=B  
160-165=B- 156-159=C+ 146-155=C 145-below=F

**Attendance:** Please attend every class session. The course is designed for participation by students and includes discussion as the primary mode of learning—it is half your grade. An excused absence is limited to illness, accident, required attendance at university-sponsored events, death or illness in the immediate family, and unavoidable company travel for fulltime employees. It is imperative to call or e-mail the professor in the event you will be absent. Follow up with documentation. For an unexcused absence, you will receive a letter grade drop off the final grade. A second unexcused absence will result in a drop of two letter grades. A third unexcused absence will result in a WF.

### **Class Meeting Dates, Topics, and Assigned Readings**

W	Aug. 21	Why are we studying Michelle Obama and why critical-cultural and rhetorical methods to do so? Starting the Discussion: What is our expertise and why are we here? What are the paradigms of study in CST? Why is Michelle Obama a person to study from multiple perspectives? How does she see herself as a public figure? How do we as academics see her? Read: Obama, <i>Becoming</i> (2018); Spillers, 2009; Natalle & Simon, 2015.
W	Aug. 28	Legacies and the Burden of Responsibility for Michelle Obama The Legacy of First Ladies The Legacy of Black Women Rhetors The Legacy of American Racism Read: Campbell, 1986; Parry-Giles & Blair, 2002; Logan, 2004; McAlister, 2009; Madison, 2009
W	Sept. 4	Political Campaigning as a Site for Rhetorical and Critical Analysis The 2008, 2012, and 2016 Campaigns

Read:; Moody-Ramirez & Dates, 2014 Vigil, 2015; Natalie, 2019; Ebben & Garza, 2017

- W Sept. 11 The First Lady's Persuasive Agenda: *Let's Move!*  
Read: Natalie, 2015; Kulbaga & Spencer, 2017
- W Sept. 18 The Mom-in-Chief  
Read: Kahl, 2009; Hayden, 2017; Vigil, 2019
- W Sept. 25 **Prospectus for Research Project Due**  
Becoming Through Education: *Reach Higher* and *Let Girls Learn*  
Read: Hanson & Osei-Hwere, 2015; Huggins, 2018
- W Oct. 2 Pulse Check: What have we learned so far?  
See also Handout "Summary of Course Through Midterm"  
Methods Check: Rhetorical Criticism and Critical Analysis  
Michelle Obama as Fashion Icon: Persuasion and Object of Criticism  
Read: Yermack, 2010; Tate, 2012; Hampton, 2018
- W Oct. 9 Resilience: Michelle Obama, the Right, and Transcendence  
Read: Joseph, 2011; Johnson, 2018; See Canvas folder "Criticism of MO"
- W Oct. 16 Lab Discussion on Progress of Each Person's Research  
The White House and Inclusivity  
Read: Lucidon, 2017
- W Oct. 23 The First Social Media First Lady  
Read: Meyers, 2013; Paul & Perrault, 2018
- W Oct. 30 The First and Second Lady: Joining Forces  
Read: Thevenin, 2018; Review Natalie, 2015 on Co-Rhetors
- W Nov. 6 Michelle Obama as Black Feminist Intellectual  
Read: Griffin, 2015; (revisit Ebben & Garza)
- W Nov. 13 Michelle Obama Post White House: The Status of a Cultural Icon  
Read: Chambers, 2017; Duster et al., 2018; (revisit *Becoming*)  
See also Handout "Summary of Second Half of Semester"  
Manuscript Q & A
- W Nov. 20 Present Papers (Meet in Ferguson 118)  
Comparison of Paradigm Approaches  
**Final Papers Due (100 pts.)**
- W Nov. 27 Thanksgiving Holiday. No Class.
- W Dec. 4 Last Day of Class

Course Synthesis and Final Thoughts  
Papers Returned