

Iowa Narratives Project: Rhetoric of Space

Dates (descriptions of process steps will follow in handouts)

Informal presentation of proposed space to examine:

Group collaboration agreement (post to blog):

Process plan and revised formal proposal (post to the blog):

Draft workshop:

Final draft:

Reflection (individual):

Tasks:

Working in a small group, write a 15 page (minimum) report—both in a PDF and posted to the course blog—in which you assess the argument put forth by a local public space. The question your report will seek to answer are “What determines the ways in which a specific public space is used by individuals and organizations? The report will be a synthesis of analysis, description, and advocacy. You will organize your report in sections under headings. Each section will have a distinct purpose, but when combined, the sections will show how specific factors define the ways in which the public space is used by individuals and organizations. Your last section will present an argument that some change is needed. Include photographs (images that you capture or create) and/or other visual rhetoric in each section. Include hyperlinks to relevant resources and proper citation of all research.

The following headings will structure your report:

**Keep these provided headings in your final report*

Overview: In this section, provide a brief summary of your project—a thumbnail sketch of the public space, its features, its users, and a description of the rest of your report. This section will serve as your introduction.

Description of daily activities: What goes on in the public space on a daily basis? Describe the kinds of *activities* you witness in repeated observations of the space. Consider *who* uses the space for *what purposes*?

Description of physical condition of site: What are the physical features of the location? What cultural values do such features communicate to you? Is there any trash, stray clothing, or other evidence of human occupation present? What can you read into this trace evidence of human presence? What rhetoric is obvious or explicit (signs, displays, announcements, etc.)? What rhetoric is obscure or implied (position of doorways or entrances, use of plants or architectural materials, available seating, colors, design, decorations, etc.)?

History of the site: Find out about the history of this public space. When and why was the space constructed? Was it always used in the way that it is being used today? If not, what were the notable changes to the space over time? How has the space been organized and by whom? Learn about important events that happen in or have happened in the space and research these events. Use the [INP Library Guide](#) as a research tool and use [Coggle](#) to organize and

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annotate your sources. Your visual bibliography will be shared with the instructor, and serve as a “research log.”

Stories from the community: Conduct and record at least three interviews with people from the community. Your goal is to collect stories that describe how people use the space. Summarize your interviews in this section of the report. What do these people have to say about the space? How does each understand the site, its meanings, and uses?

- **Note:** You may also choose to interview local groups, institutions, or authorities associated with the space. Please keep in mind that such interviews often require advance notice and planning. Do not wait to organize your interviews. Include interviews in your visual bibliography as a primary component of your research.

Assessment of the public space’s argument: Compose a robust assessment of the public space’s arguments. After doing your field research, historical research, and conducting your interviews, what arguments do you believe are being made by the space? Who is welcome to use the space and for what purposes? Be specific in your claims and support them with clear evidence.

Advocate for a change: Make an argument that the space or its use should change in specific ways. Or, if you believe the space should remain unchanged, make an argument in favor of preservation.

Approach:

1. **Work closely with your group and meet regularly for this assignment.** The task of analyzing a public space and its use will be time consuming. Your report will also benefit from having each group member’s critical gaze leveled on the landscape. You should find it useful to debate your ideas and fun to have a group with which you can observe the space. Phone, text messages, Google Drive, and email are all helpful communication tools.
2. **Choose a space.** Choose a space and present your choice in class. No public spaces may be duplicated by different groups.
3. **Read about the space.** Learn about its history, its stakeholders, any interesting events that have taken place in the space, etc. Record and annotate any useful sources in the visual bibliography your group will create in Coggle.
4. **Visit the space.** Your report will be successful only if you spend considerable time in the space. Visiting your space only once, looking around, and jotting down some notes fails to embrace the spirit of this assignment. You need to get to know the space. Visit it at different times of the day, in different weather, on different days of the week. People watch, talk to people, wander around, and explore the space’s various features. Make sure your reports demonstrate a better than basic, surface-level knowledge about the space.

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5. **Take lots of notes.** Where is this public space situated? A rural or more urban or residential setting? What is nearby? Who uses the space? What do they have to say about the space? Who lives near the public space? What do they have to say about that space? What features does the space include? How are those features used? Are any symbolic meanings attached to these features? How do those meanings operate within the public space? How do you feel in the public space? How do you think you are *meant* to feel? Is the space integrated into the surrounding area? Is the space deliberately designed? If so, what factors determined its design? If not, what factors contributed to its composition and how?

Purposes:

By completing this assignment, you have the opportunity to learn and practice skills such as:

- Rhetorical analysis and critical thinking
- Placing yourself in the context of a city
- Working as a team to accomplish a complicated project
- Presenting a rhetorically effective argument in visual form

Grading Criteria:

Reports satisfying the requirements and fulfilling the purposes listed above will receive a satisfactory grade of between C- and B. Presentations that do not satisfy the criteria above will receive an unsatisfactory grade of D or lower. Presentations that demonstrate mastery of the criteria above will earn a grade of B+ or higher. All grades will be assigned on the percentage scale outlined in the course syllabus.

Report specifications:

- Typed, double spaced
- Page Number upper right: Last names 1/Last names2
- Add captions to photos and images; cite the sources of any images you do not create
- Properly cite your interviews and research material using APA formatting conventions
 - See <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>

Space report process steps

PRESENTATION OF PROPOSED SPACE TO EXAMINE

Present the details of three public spaces that your group is considering for its report. Give a presentation that proposes how those sites could serve as fruitful subjects of the assignment. Present the surface features of each site and information that is readily available about the site. Most importantly, make sure that you present the ways in which you would plan to explore more about the site. The primary focus of your presentation should be what you want to learn about each public space in order to understand it more deeply than on a surface level. With that

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in mind, formulate questions you would need to answer about the space to do this assignment justice.

GROUP COLLABORATION AGREEMENT

Post to the course blog before the start of class

Compose an agreement that spells out the details below. Post to the blog.

- Expectations for group participation
- Group meeting times and places
- Responsibilities of each group member
- Process for coming to consensus
- Process for dealing with conflicts

PROCESS PLAN AND PROPOSAL

Post to the course blog before the start of class

Write a timeline for completing all the tasks your group must complete. Includes all of the tasks related to completing the visiting the site, researching the site, collecting interviews, working together to compose your report, and revising. The timeline should be very detailed and include deadlines for tasks as well as descriptions of each task. These will be shared in class.

DRAFT WORKSHOP

Present a draft of your report to a small group of classmates. Bring a list of questions and concerns about your draft to the workshop. Use your workshop opportunity to your advantage by having a completed version of your report ready to deliver before the workshop date. You will use the class's response to your draft to help you revise your report.

REFLECTION

As individuals, write a 400-word reflection that addresses the following prompts:

- Compose a few paragraphs that describe how well you as an individual have met the expectations of your group's agreement, what you invested in the assignment and what you gained from that investment, and how you could have improved your work in any way.
- Write about how effectively your group-mates met the expectations of your group collaboration agreement. Mention each group member by name and assess their efforts to work together as a team in order to meet this assignment's expectations.
- Reflect on the skills and knowledge you worked to gain in this assignment. How did you challenge yourself to learn something new? What do you know now that you didn't before starting the assignment?

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