

# Philosophy as Attitude:

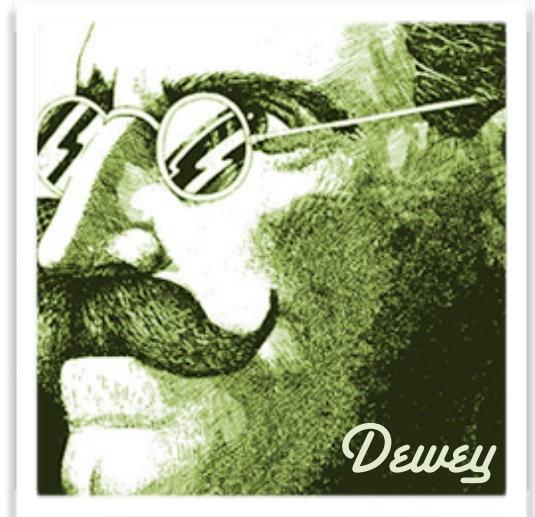
## Rhetoric and the Possibilities of Pragmatism

Course: ENGL 795/895  
Topic: Theories of Pragmatism  
Semester: Summer Doctoral Institute 2017

*John Dewey will be waiting at the end of the philosophical road of postmodernism.*  
—Larry A. Hickman

Dates: June 25—July 8: Distance  
July 10—July 22: In-Class, MTRF 2p—3:20p  
July 23—August 5: Distance  
Location: BAL 2019  
Website: [pragrhet.wordpress.com](http://pragrhet.wordpress.com)

Instructor: Dr. Daniel Richards  
Email: [dprichar@odu.edu](mailto:dprichar@odu.edu)  
Office: BAL 5032  
Hours: By appointment only



### Course Texts Requiring Purchase

Addams, Jane. *Democracy and Social Ethics*. EPUB. \$0  
Dewey, John. *Democracy and Education*. Wilder Publications, 2009. \$5.75  
Jackson, Brian and Gregory Clark, eds. *Trained Capacities: John Dewey, Rhetoric, and Democratic Practice*. Columbia, SC: The University of South Carolina Press, 2014. \$56.95  
James, William. *Pragmatism*. New York: Dover, 1995. \$1.00  
Menand, Louis. *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001. \$13.16  
Peirce, Charles S. *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*. Ed. Justus Buchler. New York: Dover Publications, 2011. \$3.99

Total cost: \$80.85

### Student Workload



## Context & Description

Pragmatism—a distinctly American tradition of thought—emerged in the late nineteenth century out of frustrations with existing philosophical dualisms, such as those between the mind and body, nature and culture, aesthetics and common experience, and theory and practice. This frustration, felt deeply by Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., Charles Sanders (C.S.) Peirce, William James, and John Dewey, allowed for pragmatism to develop not as sets of *a priori* philosophies about the world but rather as attitudes towards it. Thus, it is within larger philosophical debates that pragmatism's unabashed focus on *praxis*, on the insistence that value and meaning be bound up with a thought or action's consequences that the productive possibilities of pragmatist approaches are really exemplified. As a class we will explore what these possibilities are and could be, specifically as they relate to the practice of rhetoric and communication.

These possibilities will be explored within the larger narrative of the class, which positions pragmatism not only as an historical tradition of thought but as an active, viable rhetorical approach as English departments move beyond postmodern criticism. Aside from the core classic texts, we will also read contemporary texts that will help us answer the questions: What changes can a pragmatist attitude achieve? What significance does/can pragmatism have in contemporary English studies? In true pragmatist fashion, approaches and inquiries will be tested as students apply principles discussed in class to a rhetorical scene, debate, or situation of their choice. This will give us a more clear picture of just what is waiting at the end of the philosophical—and by extension rhetorical—road of postmodernism.

## Objectives

- *Understand* the sociopolitical and scientific contexts out of which pragmatism emerged.
- *Identify* the key ideas and attitudes underlying the development of pragmatist philosophies.
- *Locate* the contemporary significance of pragmatism in relation to rhetoric and writing.
- *Create* an artifact couched in pragmatist theory that has personal practical import.

## Policies & Procedures

Should you anticipate yourself missing any classes during the two-week in-class period, you must contact the instructor immediately. Attendance and active participation are mandatory during this time. The same principle applies for religious observances: if you intend to miss any classes for religious observances, do contact the instructor immediately. Should you require any accommodations for learning, physical or mental disabilities, make sure to provide the proper paperwork during the first week of class. It is expected that each student enrolled in the course (a) check his or her Old Dominion email account on a daily basis and (b) visit the primary course website—listed on the first page of this syllabus—on a daily basis to check for any adjustments in scheduling or reading requirements. Any immediate questions students have about the course or course readings can be posed via email to the group, through an established backchannel, or as comments on the course website itself. Grades will be issued in accordance with usual grade-letter associations in English (A=92.5—100; A-=90—92.4; B+=87.5–89.9; B=82;5—87.5; B-=80—82.4; C+=77.5–79.9; C=72.5—77.4; any lower is a failing grade).

## Assignments

### *Discussions*

- Due: Daily, Weeks 1 through 4 (Days 1 through 20)
- Weight: 25%
- Submit to: Individual blog posts on course site using your identifiable Wordpress account
- Description: In essence, students will, on the daily posts on the course site, initiate and participate in online discussions. Students will be expected to: pose questions, locate gaps, articulate applications, identify relevancies, and/or share experiences. This assignment is not quantifiable—there is no set amount of posts students need to make. That is to say, having “15 posts” means little if the posts are just rushed and not thoughtful. I’ll be looking at quality of response and engagement with materials. Go on the day’s board and just start some conversations. Have a back and forth. Pose a question—to the instructor or to peers. Make meaningful and risky connections. Have a take. Share an experience. There are no word limits or minimums. Just be a meaningful contributor to our continued conversation.

### *Portfolio*

- Due: August 5, 11:59pm, for final iterations (drafts due earlier; see calendar below)
- Weight: 75%
- Submit to: Blackboard dropbox
- Description: Includes Experiential Narrative, Visualization, and Artifact in single PDF
  - ▶ *Experiential Narrative* (30%). This project is based upon your reading and interpretation of Louis Menand’s *The Metaphysical Club*, a seminal text in the historicizing of pragmatist ideas. Menand carefully and meticulously situates four key figures—Holmes, James, Peirce, and Dewey—in his attempt at showing how distinct American events served as exigencies for a pragmatist approach to the world. Most importantly, he convincingly reveals how the experiences and relationships of these four men intimately shaped the development of their ideas and principles. In doing so Menand enacts a key pragmatist concept: that philosophies and principles should—and *do*—stem from real lived experiences. I am therefore asking each of you to compose your own “experiential narrative,” articulating how your philosophies, approaches, principles, and/or attitudes developed from real, lived material experiences. It will be best if you focus on one area of your life (teaching, career, parenting, academic, religious, political) and it will be expected that you put your own experiences in some degree of conversation with one of the four narratives presented by Menand. On the first face-to-face class (July 10) you will present a two- to three-minute glimpse into these experiences for the class. These will set the tone for the rest of the summer.
  - ▶ *Visualization* (15%). Visualization is a useful way to understand relationships and situatedness. The process of composing a visual can help identify relationships in ways that purely textual exposition or analysis at times cannot. As such, each of you will create—using a technology, broadly understood, of your choice—a map of sorts: a visual representation of how pragmatist ideas, figures, and/or practices relate to rhetoric. None of the American pragmatists considered themselves to be rhetoricians, but “they consistently leave hints at what American rhetorics might look like—it is [y]our task to follow these hints” (Danisch, 2007, 15). These visualizations should focus on making sense of how rhetoric (as a practice, a pedagogy, or a field) relates to pragmatism.

- ▶ *Artifact* (30%). It would not be a course on pragmatism without attention to *praxis*. I use the word “artifact” here to describe your major project because theories and ideas are just that: concrete tools used for practical purposes. Also in pragmatist form, this artifact will be shaped by your own “felt needs” in a specific context. The major project can be a book review, a conference paper, a proposal for a larger academic/research project, a course syllabus with projects, or anything else I approve of in advance. Given the truncated nature of the course, it is not expected that you complete your artifact during our time together, as it will most likely be in progress by the time we depart each others’ online company. However, a thoughtful, well-researched, and substantial draft, outline, or proposal must be submitted by August 5 as part of the portfolio as a whole. The length of this project will vary but it might be useful to think of it in terms of a ten- to twelve-page paper in terms of the expected research and writing workload. I am allowing the final two weeks to serve as the time spent on this artifact. There are no assigned readings during weeks five and six—only further readings for your consideration based on topic area (e.g., religion, politics, philosophy of rhetoric, pedagogy, etc.). Whatever the artifact you choose to craft, it must be imbued with literature and ideas covered in our time together and also with literature and ideas found through your own personal, tailored research.

Calendar Overview of Due Dates

June 26*	June 27*	June 28*	June 29*	June 30*
July 3*	July 4*	July 5*	July 6*	July 7*
July 10* Narrative Presentations	July 11*	July 12*	July 13*	July 14*
July 17*	July 18*	July 19*	July 20*	July 21* Visualization Draft Due
July 24	July 25	July 26	July 27	July 28 Artifact Draft Due
July 31	Aug 1	Aug 2	Aug 3	Aug 4 Final Portfolio Due

*Days marked with asterisks (\*) are open for discussion on the course site.*