**ENGL 491A. English Honours Seminar**

**How to be a rhetorician in a pandemic**

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A good place to begin rhetorical analysis is to ask, “Who is persuading whom of what, and what are the means of persuasion?” Scholars interested in Rhetoric of Health and Medicine (RHM) pose that question in relation to many situations and many topics. Their topics include, for example, mental illness, contested illness, pain, neurodiversity, desire, health inequities, disability, health and race, health and gender, global health, food, pharmaceutical marketing, and vaccination.

Our (post?)pandemic moment is of particular interest for the study of persuasion in health and medicine. Amid a global pandemic, we might have expected (as a response to that initial question concerning the who, how, whom, and what of persuasion) that physicians and scientists would, with expertise and reason, persuade policy makers and the public to do all that is necessary to prevent or mitigate illness. Things have, in fact, turned out differently: speakers with a range of views have persuaded people in a fragmented public space to do a variety of things, including some that do not prevent or mitigate illness at all.

In this course, we will be interested in persuasions pertaining to COVID-19, but we will importantly take up topics in RHM more widely. We will together specify, compare, and assess theoretical frameworks and methodologies within this growing field—and try to sort out the possibilities and the limits of rhetorical criticism and of persuasion itself.