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COMX 343.01: Persuasive Speaking and Criticism

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Persuasive Speaking and Criticism

COMX 343

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Office: LA 357

Hours: M 1-2 pm, T 2-3 pm, and by appt

Course Description and Objectives

As distinct from COMM 111, this course emphasizes the “public” dimension of public speaking over the dimension of “speaking.” That is, rather than function solely as an advanced course in speechmaking, the course is intended to help you reflect upon and engage in the rhetorical practices necessary for citizenship in a democracy; namely, the analysis and production of persuasive public discourse.

This semester the course will function as a course in advanced argumentation. We will focus on the construction and criticism of public arguments relative to shared standards about evidence, reasoning and fallacies. At this particularly historical juncture, it is crucial for us to be equipped with the skills to critically evaluate the persuasive efforts of others and advocate effectively on behalf of positions and policies that best serve the public interest. These skills offer us a means for “doing democracy” that can transcend the distortions of tradition and partisanship, get us beyond the idea that we live in a “post-truth” world, and provide a basis for just and reasonable decision-making in the public sphere.

Such skills are critical in the private sphere, too. Your ability to make good judgments about personal issues—your classes, your finances, your career—depends on gathering evidence, sifting through the persuasive efforts of others, weighing options, anticipating pitfalls. Your ability to take a position and defend it is imperative for success. The GRE now has an entire section that tests your ability to analyze and respond to arguments. And, as a famous dead Greek once said, it is more humane to defend yourself with speech than with violence.

So, the skills you will learn in this course are in my view fundamental to becoming a liberally educated person. They have broad applicability to just about any context or situation you confront. The course will integrate a variety of perspectives on public discourse in order for students to better understand how communication is related to democratic life. Central issues will be: the idea of the public sphere and its relationship to rhetoric; dimensions of political spectacle and its resistance to critical analysis; the challenges of audience adaptation in the process of persuasion.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course you should be able to:

- Understand and participate in arguments about the role of rhetoric in public controversy
- Identify the primary points of dispute in any public arguments and systematically address them
- Evaluate the quality of reasoning and evidence used to support claims
- Produce persuasive public arguments that are attentive to audience beliefs, attitudes, values and identities

Texts

The readings for this class will be available on Moodle. The readings will be front-loaded in the semester, with an increasing expectation of reading via research as the semester progresses.

Attendance

Because the class is heavy on application, you will need to attend the class consistently in order to understand the material and perform successfully on assignments. If you must miss, you should *talk* with your colleagues in addition to getting their notes. The course will include workshops and group meetings in which I can give you feedback on your work, and you will have the opportunity to collaborate with your group members. Participation in these activities will affect your grade as I ask you to turn in material from those activities. Finally, since speakers require audiences, you need to attend speech days regardless of whether you are speaking in order to submit oral and written feedback on the work of others.

Requirements

Your grade will be based on four oral speeches plus additional daily work:

- Speech 1: Editorial Response, 10%
- Speech 2: Panel briefing speech, 20%
- Speech 3: Policy Panel, 25%
- Speech 4: Debate, 25%
- Other work: 20%

Arguments: For the first speech, you will produce an argument in response to an editorial or op-ed piece on a public issue. For the remaining assignments, you will work in a shared topic area. Speech 2 asks you to produce a speech that persuasive constructs the facts on a particular issue, Speech 3 asks you to produce a policy argument on the issue, and Speech 4 takes place in the context of a cross-examination debate. Additional details will be circulated on Moodle.

Other work: This will involve a variety of activities: quizzes on basic concepts from reading and lecture and your ability to analyze arguments; homework that typically contributes to your major speaking assignments; impromptu speeches; and feedback on other students' work.

Evaluation and grading: With each assignment, I circulate evaluation criteria. In general, my philosophy is that the default grade is C (moderate effort, average performances) and that you must work to move your grade up or down from there. An A grade is earned only by outstanding performance; your work must stand out from the rest of your colleagues' in order to earn an A. *In this course I base the evaluation of oral arguments primarily on 1) the quality of the claims, evidence and reasoning you use, and 2) your ability to respond to questions and competing arguments. Accordingly, polished delivery of weak arguments will earn a low grade.*

Registration Changes

Through Feb. 10, you are free to drop or change grade option on Cyberbear without penalty.

From Feb. 11-Apr. 3, you need my signature on a drop slip to withdraw (grade of W) or change grade option. Starting April 4, you must petition to withdraw and can only do so if there are extenuating circumstances (major emergency, change in work schedule, etc). It is long-standing policy in COMM to not permit changes to grade option during the last two weeks of the semester in order to mitigate poor performance. Further details are available at: <http://www.umt.edu/registrar/PDF/OfficialDatesDeadlinesSpring2017.pdf>

Students with Disabilities

If you have a disability that may require modification of some element of the course, please notify me ASAP. You will need to obtain the appropriate documentation from DSS and then see me to make specific arrangements.

Personal Conduct, Academic Misconduct

This course requires you to address controversial issues and disagree with others. It is easy for tempers to flare. So, please remember a few things. First, although you should take your issues seriously, keep in mind that the course is intended to function as a model public sphere and a training ground for you. Your argumentation needs to exhibit respect and reciprocity so that we can determine the crucial issues and best arguments on a given topic. Mutual inquiry, not annihilation, should be the goal of your work. Second, criticism and objections should be directed at arguments themselves, not at people. Crossing this line damages trust and, consequently, damages your ability to engage successfully in future argumentation. The Golden Rule is a very good ethic for persuasive argumentation.

Academic misconduct includes cheating, plagiarism, and deliberate interference with the work of others. It is the intellectual equivalent of theft, the aesthetic equivalent of plastic surgery. Like the former, it ruins the trust necessary for a well-functioning community; like the latter, it sacrifices your unique contributions and characteristics and replaces them with a disfigured, false ideal. UM's policies and procedures are in the Student Conduct Code. Read it. In this course, it is primarily a matter of giving credit to others for their ideas, and fairly and accurately gathering and representing the discourse of others (your "data"). It results in an 'F' on the particular piece of work and, in some instances, an 'F' for the course. Bottom line: don't do it.

Persuasive Speaking and Criticism

Spring 2017 schedule

Tuesday Jan. 24: Introduction

Th Jan. 26: Issues and claims

Read Hauser, "Public Judgment" and Browne & Keeley on issues and claims

Tu Jan. 31: Reasoning

Read Rieke & Sillars on reasoning

Th Feb. 2: Intros, conclusions, delivery; workshop

Read handouts from Steve

Tu Feb. 7: SPEECH 1

Th Feb. 9: SPEECH 1

Tu Feb. 14: SPEECH 1

Th Feb. 16: SPEECH 1; Discuss topics

Tu Feb. 21: Arguing factual claims

Read Warnick & Inch on propositions of fact

Th Feb. 23: Research strategies

Tu Feb. 28: Assembling and evaluating evidence

Read Rieke & Sillars on evidence

Th Mar. 2: Fallacies; workshop

Read Browne & Keeley on fallacies

Tu Mar. 7: SPEECH 2

Th Mar. 9: SPEECH 2

Tu Mar. 14: SPEECH 2

Th Mar. 16: SPEECH 2

SPRING BREAK

Tu: Mar. 28: TBD

Th Mar. 30: Building policy arguments/affirmative cases

Read handouts on policy arguments and debate cases

Tu Apr. 4: Audience adaptation

Read Warnick & Inch on audience

Th Apr. 6: Using stock issues to generate questions; Workshop

Tu Apr 11: SPEECH 3

Th. Apr 13: SPEECH 3

Tu. Apr 18: SPEECH 3

Th. Apr 20: SPEECH 3

Tu. Apr 25: Debate resolutions and formats

Read handouts on debate formats

Th. Apr. 27: Cross-ex and refutation

Tu. May 2: DEBATES

Th. May 4: DEBATES

Wed. May 10: DEBATES. Final meeting, 8-10 am.