Persuasive Speaking and Criticism  
COMX 343

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Hours: W 2-4 pm and by appt

Course Description and Objectives
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 is essentially a course in advanced argumentation. After we get you into the groove of good public speaking, we will focus on the construction and criticism of public arguments relative to shared standards about evidence, reasoning and fallacies. We are currently up to our ears in flim-flammy and demagoguery, and argumentation skills are what will allow us to undermine their power and build alternatives. They provide a basis for just and reasonable decision-making in the public sphere.

These 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. And, as a famous dead Greek once said, it is more humane to defend yourself with speech than with violence.

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 oral arguments that are attentive to audience beliefs, attitudes, values and identities

Texts
Readings 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, get my feedback, and benefit from collaborative activities. If you must miss, talk with your colleagues first and then consult with me. Since speakers require audiences, you need to attend speech days regardless of whether you are speaking.

Evaluation and Grading
Your course grade will be determined primarily by your speech grades, with course participation (attendance, discussion, oral feedback, etc.) nudging your grade up or down the scale. I will give greater weight on speeches that come later in the course, but don’t expect to get an A by half-assing it through the semester and giving one knockout speech at the end.
My general 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 evaluation primarily on 1) the quality of your arguments, 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. 4, you can drop or change grading option without penalty. From Feb. 5- March 24, you need my signature to withdraw or change grade option. After March 24, you must petition to withdraw, and only for extenuating circumstances (not poor performance). I will not permit grading option changes after March 24.

**Students with Disabilities**
If you have a disability that may require modification of some element of the course, please obtain documentation from DSS and then see me to make specific arrangements.

**Personal Conduct, Academic Misconduct**
Persuasive speaking is inherently controversial. Please 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 in order to 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 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 characteristics for a false ideal. It is prohibited by UM’s Student Conduct Code. In this course, you must give credit to others for their ideas, and fairly and accurately gathering and representing the discourse of others. Plagiarism results in an ‘F’ on the particular piece of work and, in some instances, an ‘F’ for the course. Don’t do it.

**Persuasive Speaking and Criticism**
**COMX 343—Spring 2020 schedule**

Readings for each session will be posted on Moodle.

Jan. 14/16 Course Intro. Issues and claims
Jan. 21/23 Reasoning and reason-giving. Review of basic speech components
Jan. 28/30 **First speech**
Feb. 4/6 Factual claims. Research strategies
Feb. 11/13 **Types and Tests of Evidence. Workshop.**
Feb. 18/20 **Second speech**
Feb. 25/27 Policy arguments. Reasoning
Mar. 3/5 Fallacies. Workshop.
Mar. 10/12 Third speech

SPRING BREAK

Mar. 24/26 Debate Formats. AFF and NEG stock issues
Mar. 31/Apr. 2 Refutation. Cross-examination.
Apr. 7/9 Debates
Apr. 14/16 TBD
Apr. 21/23 TBD
Apr. 28/30 Final speeches

Final session: Thursday May 7, 8-10 a.m.