

COMM 243H: Argumentation Theory and Practice
Spring, 2019

Professor: Dr. Mercieca

Email: Mercieca@tamu.edu

Office Hours: Thursday: 10:00-11:00, and by appointment.

Office Location: 202 G Bolton Hall

Course Description & Prerequisites:

Principles of argumentation and skills of debate, including reasoning, evidence, refutation, and briefing. Prerequisites: none.

Course Overview:

This course is designed to acquaint students with the techniques, theories, and practice of argument construction and criticism. Through assigned readings, classroom discussions and debates, and written papers students will learn theories of rhetoric, ethics, the public sphere, and reasoning. Our class will be organized as a public sphere itself, thus students are encouraged to bring in complaints, curiosities, and confusions about issues in the public sphere for the class to discuss. Assigned readings will draw from Argument, Rhetorical Theory, and mass media effects.

Learning Outcomes & Objectives:

Students will be enabled to critically analyze and evaluate arguments in the public sphere.

Required Reading:

ALL readings are posted on eCampus. The readings will acquaint students with the elements of argument and help to contextualize the practices of argument in the public sphere and debate.

Grading & Assignments:

1. There will be a total of four debates over the course of the semester. Practice debates are loosely modeled after Parliamentary debate with the whole class debating a pre-determined topic. One week prior to the debate the class as a whole will choose a topic, write a claim, and define the terms of debate. Each student will be required to turn in a **two page** argument supporting their side of the debate (minimum two references), and participate during the debate. The final debate will be a much more formal debate in which you will pick a partner and work as a team to research, write, and defend your side of the argument. For the formal debate you and your partner will turn in a six page case (three arguments, minimum six references).
2. We will begin each class period with a discussion of some item of interest in the public sphere. Each student will sign up to lead a public sphere discussion.
3. There will be a midterm exam that covers the basics of argumentation and debate. This is a skills-based exam that will ask you to identify claims, fallacies, reasoning, etc.

4. We will focus our attention on the basic elements of argumentation. Students will demonstrate their understanding of these elements of argument through the completion of a Toulmin diagramming assignment.
5. Students will work in teams to analyze arguments made in the public sphere by President Donald Trump about the Mueller investigation. Using the Trump Archives teams will: 1) conduct an “argument hunt” to find out if Trump has made more than the 240 arguments found by Beckwith; 2) conduct an “argument history” that traces the origins and uses of the arguments; 3) conduct a “fact check” on the 240 arguments made; and 4) suggest an argument “organization framework” that classifies the arguments in a useful way. We will meet with *Time Magazine’s* Ryan Teague Beckwith to learn more about how he compiled the 240 arguments and the difficulties that he has had with the project. Students will submit their projects at the end of the semester for a grade and we will share our analysis with Beckwith and *Time Magazine*.

Grading:

Your work in this class will be graded carefully and strictly. I assume that you are capable of writing mature arguments. Plagiarism (including cutting and pasting from the internet without citing the original source) will not be tolerated. Every paper you turn in will be graded according to the quality of your Prose, Intellectual Content, and Argument.

- 1) Prose: writing that shows both advanced academic writing and no grammatical errors.
- 2) Intellectual Content: insightful analysis, not mere summary.
- 3) Argument: you have made a clear argument and supported it with solid evidence.

A = Exceptionally Strong Work that demonstrates excellence in all three of the above categories.

B = solid, strong work that misses one category while still achieving excellence in two categories.

C = work that addresses the criteria of the assignment while exhibiting serious flaws in one or more categories.

D = work that is poorly written and is structurally flawed. Such work requires, at the very least, immediate office consultation with me.

Final course grades will be determined as follows:

Public Sphere Discussion leader	5
Practice Debates (three, 10 points each)	30
Midterm	25
Formal Debate	20
Team Argument Analysis Project	20
<hr/>	
Total	100 points

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact Disability Services, in Cain Hall, Room B118, or call 845-1637. For additional information visit <http://disability.tamu.edu>

Academic Integrity

For additional information please visit: <http://aggiehonor.tamu.edu>

“An Aggie does not lie, cheat, or steal, or tolerate those who do.”

Make-up Policy:

See Student Rule 7 for details about University Approved absences:

(<http://studentrules.tamu.edu/rule07>). Make-up exams are given only in cases of University excused absence on **Wednesdays at 9:00 a.m. in BLTN 107**. In cases where a student has a TAMU class on Wednesday at 9:00 a.m., the Undergraduate Office in Communication will assign the student a make-up time later in the day on Wednesday. You must provide evidence of a University approved absence to me prior to taking the exam.

DATE	READING	DUE	Public Sphere Discussion Leader
Jan 15	Course Introduction & "Berkeley in the Sixties"		NONE
Jan 17	"Berkeley in the Sixties" & discussion		NONE
Jan 22	Argumentation & Rhetoric Basics	O'Keefe, "Two Concepts of Argument"	
Jan 24	Public Sphere Argument Analysis Skype with Ryan Teague Beckwith, senior editor in TIME's Washington, D.C., bureau.	Beckwith, "Read the 240 Arguments President Trump Has Made Against the Mueller Investigation," 1-80.	NONE
Jan 29	Spheres of Argument	Goodnight, "Spheres of Argument"	
Jan 31	Claims	Read Jasinski, "Argument" 25-29.	
Feb 5	Claim for 1st Practice Debate	BRING TWO TOPIC IDEAS TO CLASS	
Feb 7	Evidence	Inch & Tudor, "Evidence," 133-155.	
Feb 12	First Practice Debate	TWO PAGE ARGUMENT DUE	NONE
Feb 14	Reasoning	Read Jasinski, "Argument" 29-55.	
Feb 19	Claim for 2nd Practice Debate	BRING TWO TOPIC IDEAS TO CLASS	
Feb 21	Reasoning continued & Fallacies	Read Jasinski, "Fallacies."	
Feb 26	Second Practice Debate	TWO PAGE ARGUMENT DUE	NONE
Feb 28	Public Argument & the Media	Read "Rich Media, Poor Democracy"	

DATE	READING	DUE	Public Sphere Discussion Leader
March 5	Claim for 3rd Practice Debate	BRING TWO TOPIC IDEAS TO CLASS	
March 7	Toulmin Diagramming	Read "Toulmin on Argument"	
March 12	SPRING BREAK	NONE	NONE
March 14	SPRING BREAK	NONE	NONE
March 19	Third Practice Debate	TWO PAGE ARGUMENT DUE	NONE
March 21	Toulmin Diagram Practice	BRING TOULMIN EXAMPLES TO CLASS	
March 26	Midterm	NONE	NONE
March 28	Formal Debate assignment explained, pick partners	Read, Jasinski "Burden of Proof," "Debate," "Case Construction," "Presumption," "Stock Issues," and "Values" (16 pages total)	
April 2	Work with opponents on claim, but do NOT define terms	CLAIM	
April 4	Team coaching for formal debate, ALL PRO TEAMS	BRING YOUR BACKGROUND RESEARCH, THREE ARGUMENTS	
April 9	Team coaching for formal debate, ALL CON TEAMS	BRING YOUR BACKGROUND RESEARCH, THREE ARGUMENTS	
April 11	Formal Debate 1		
April 16	Formal Debate 2		
April 18	Formal Debate 3		
April 23	Formal Debate 4		
April 25	Formal Debate 5		

May 7 8:00-10:00 am	Final Exam	TIME Trump Argument Analysis Assignment DUE	
---------------------------	------------	---	--

Practice Debates

These are entire-class debates on topics to be determined by the class. As a class we will come up with some “claim,” that is, some statement over which there is disagreement. The claim may be a statement of fact, value, or policy. Any of these are fine as long as the claim is debatable. We will define the terms of the resolution in class.

Your job is then to construct **one argument** or one reason why your side is right. The goal is to come up with a defensible position (something that you can defend when questioned). Each person must turn in one typewritten argument with two references. That means you have to find two pieces of evidence to support your argument. This means library research. You will be assigned your side of the argument in class after the terms have been defined.

The debates in total are worth 30% of your grade. You will be graded on both your arguments and your contribution during the debates. I will be available to answer any questions you might have during the process of creating your argument. Feel free to use me as a resource on these practice debates. This is your chance to get coaching on argument construction before the formal debates begin. Remember to make a claim in your first paragraph that contains the word “because” in it. Your argument must be typed and free from punctuation and spelling errors and you must have a reference page. Additionally, make sure that you can defend what you wrote.

Formal Debate Procedures

1. You and your partner must come up with three arguments to support your side of the debate. As with our practice debates, each argument must have at least two pieces of evidence for support. Thus, when you are done your team will turn in your three typed arguments (approximately six pages).
2. You must bring your sources into class on the day of the debate. Your opponents may request to see your sources at any time during the debate.
3. **On the day** you debate you must turn in 1) **your case**, 2) **your reference page**, 3) and an **evaluation of your partner’s contribution to the team** (rate them 1-10), I will use these to help me to determine the final grade for each person.

Specifics about the cases:

Each team will turn in a copy of their case to me. Each case will have **three** arguments that together form the best possible attack or defense of the status quo of the issue – find out what the status quo is before you decide what to argue. You may choose to have more arguments but you may not have less than three. You will decide how you wish to present them. For example, you may choose to have the first partner deliver the first argument and then have the second partner deliver the second and third. Or, you may choose to have the first partner deliver all arguments and then have the second partner defend and support them. It is your decision. Be careful that you have some strategy in mind or else you are doomed to fail.

The Pro side of the argument has the burden of proof. They are trying to change something they perceive as wrong in the status quo so they must prove that a problem exists. **The Con side must uphold the status quo. If your claim is not written so that the Pro side makes a change in the status quo, you will not be able to debate.**

Both sides get to use their own **definitions**; that means you have to define each of the terms in the resolution and tell the audience how you define them in your first constructive argument.

Each side must also have a **value** that they are trying to promote through their arguments (like justice, or happiness, or equality, etc.), you must state your value and show how each argument works towards the value. Consider the Stock issues (**Significance, Harms, Inherency, Topicality, and Solvency**) in your case. Address each of these with your argument.

Pro side: The Government

Prime Minister: The Prime Minister (PM) is the leader of the Government's team. This person will be the first and last person to speak in the debate. The major responsibility of the PM is to lay out the Government's case and then to rebut the Opposition's (Opp's) arguments and show the audience why the Government should win the debate. The Prime Minister is also responsible for cross examining the members of the Opp.

Member of Government: The major responsibilities of the Member (MG) are to flow the Opp's case and to cross examine both the Leader and the Member of the Opp. This speaker will have to address the arguments presented by the Opp and refute them in their speech.

Con Side: The Opposition

Leader of the Opposition: The Leader of the Opposition (LO) is responsible for flowing the Gov's case and cross examining the Government. This person should have a firm grasp of both sides of the issue. Additionally, the Leader will deliver a rebuttal speech in which they address the issues raised by the Gov's team and tell the audience why the Opp should win the debate.

Member of the Opposition: Primary responsibilities of the Member of the Opp (MO) are to flow the Gov's case and to cross examine both the Leader and the Member of the Gov. This speaker will have to address the arguments presented by the Gov and refute them in their speech.

Speaker of the House: I'm the Speaker. I give time signals and act as a moderator.

The pattern of the speeches will be as follows:

PM—6 minute constructive speech

LO—7 minute constructive speech

MG—7 minute constructive/ deconstructive speech

MO—7 minute constructive/ deconstructive speech

LO—3 minute rebuttal speech (no new arguments are allowed in the rebuttal)

PM—4 minute rebuttal speech (no new arguments are allowed in the rebuttal)

Each team can and should ask questions of the opposing team when the opposing team has the floor. This is called **cross examining** the speaker. To do this, the debater will rise and ask the speaker if they “will yield the floor for a question?” It is the current speaker’s choice whether or not to do so.

Points of Information & Personal Privilege

Points of Information: A debater may request a point of information—either verbally or by rising—at any time after the first minute and before the last minute of any constructive speech. The debater holding the floor has the discretion to accept or refuse points of information. If accepted, the debater requesting the point of information has a maximum of fifteen seconds to make a statement or ask a question. The speaking time of the debater with the floor continues during the point of information.

Points of Personal Privilege: At any time during the debate, a debater may rise to a point of personal privilege when he or she believes that an opponent has personally insulted one of the debaters, has made an offensive or tasteless comment, or has grievously misconstrued another's words or arguments. The Speaker will then rule on whether or not the comments were acceptable. The time used to state and address a point of personal privilege will not be deducted from the speaking time of the debater with the floor. A point of personal privilege is a serious charge and should not be raised for minor transgressions. Debaters may be penalized for raising spurious points of personal privilege.

Remember, **this is a public speaking class**. You will be **graded** on your ability to *reason, persuade, interrogate your opponents, and your delivery* during the debate *as well as your written argument*. Keen listening and analysis skills are the keys to success in this assignment.

Argument Fallacies

Questionable Cause/ False Cause (post hoc, ergo propter hoc). Bad causal argument, stating one thing (a) is the one and only cause of another thing (B).

1. The cause must always precede the effect in time (A always has to exist before B).
2. The two must always co-exist (can't have an A without having a B).
3. B cannot be attributed to another cause (there cannot be a C that also causes B).

Circular Reasoning – using different words to say the same thing, a tautology.

Slippery Slope – Saying that one thing occurring will start a chain reaction that ultimately causes some highly escalated thing to happen.

Bandwagon – When someone argues that “everyone” thinks something is true/right/wrong. Just because everyone else thinks so, does not mean that it is.

Strawperson – Setting up a weak argument against the point of view that you are arguing for and then refuting that weak argument as if it were the only argument against your position. This technique is used to distract your opponent from the real arguments against your case by focusing the discussion on other points that you can easily refute.

Either-Or – Arguing that there are only two choices in any situation, and attacking one choice and arguing for the other. There are always many choices, the either/or fallacy reduces the many choices to just two.

Hasty Generalization – Reaching a conclusion from too little or no evidence; over generalizing from the evidence provided.

Ad Hominem – attacking the person instead of the argument.

Red Herring – distracting the audience/debater with irrelevant arguments.

Appeal to Misplaced Authority – Granting someone the authority of an expert when they are not.

Non-Sequitur – does not follow. Linking one claim with another when there is not relationship between the two at all.

Non-Topical – making an argument that is not pertinent to the specific claim under question, making an argument that goes against the established parameters of the debates. This is different from the Red Herring because it is procedural rather than an argumentative objection.