

COMM 239: ARGUMENTATION

MW 6:00-7:15 PM

MCM 160

Professor: Andrew Rosbury
Office: Luter 255
Phone:
Office Hours: Monday 2:00-5:00 PM
Wednesday 2:00-5:00 PM
(and by appointment)

Electronic Mail:

Class Overview

This course examines the art of persuasion as a public, symbolic practice in which language is invented, crafted, and used to influence audiences for either good or nefarious purposes. The course is designed to give you hands-on practice in constructing, advocating, refuting, and understanding arguments. Students will participate in debates, evaluate debates of their peers, research and write arguments, and critique arguments read or heard in class. Through readings, discussions, and critical reflection, this course hopes to cultivate argument as *equipment for civic living*.

Learning Objectives

Throughout the course, students should be able to:

- 1) Understand and follow the theoretical requirements for formal argument.
- 2) Research and prepare arguments for debates on both sides of a question.
- 3) Competently and effectively analyze and critique arguments.
- 4) Evaluate a formal debate fairly, critically and constructively for the participants and the audience of the debate.
- 5) Understand identify and avoid fallacious reasoning in arguments.
- 6) Understand the purpose of formal reasoning, argument and debate in society.

Textbook and Additional Materials

- Jay Heinrichs - *Thank You for Arguing: What Aristotle, Lincoln, and Homer Simpson Can Teach Us About the Art of Persuasion*
- Additional readings will be provided as PDF documents on Blackboard.
- Students will also be required to stay up to speed on current issues in public argument.

Classroom Policies and Etiquette

Attendance: Attendance is mandatory. Each class session will be jam-packed with tasty educational goodness. Therefore, each absence will directly affect your participation. If you are absent, it is your responsibility to learn what you missed and to recover notes from a classmate. You are allowed two absences throughout the semester. Any additional absences will result in a half-grade deduction per day. Late arrivals will count as half a class missed, so be on time. If you miss more than five classes, you may be asked to withdraw from the course. Written work may be turned in during the following class period with a one-grade-level penalty—but only if I find your excuse particularly moving and/or creative.

Be prepared: Finish all readings on time. Read thoroughly and take notes. Come to class with prepared thoughts and questions. Take responsibility for making our discussions the best they can be. While I ultimately steer the discussion, I can't foster quality conversation without your active engagement. Think carefully about the questions I ask and be ready to engage with the issues. Responding with a nonchalant "I don't know" will make me angry. You don't need to have all the answers, but you must demonstrate—both in class and in your writing—that you're grappling seriously with the ideas we're exploring.

Pay attention to fine details: It shouldn't be hard to have something to say about our readings and discussions. What will be hard is having something insightful to say about the finer points and subtle details. Push beyond the surface-level observations and work to uncover deeper, more meaningful insights. This requires diligence and stamina. Keep going until you land on something that feels substantial—even if it's just a great question rather than an answer. Anything worth doing is worth doing well, and you can't do well in this course without close attention to the details.

Take pride in your work: Don't take yourself too seriously, but do take your work seriously. Take the time to polish your writing—there's no excuse for sloppy structure or shallow arguments. Make an effort to express your thoughts clearly and eloquently. Don't subject the class to a string of disjointed ideas littered with fillers like "um," "like," "you know," and "whatever."

Class etiquette: Monitor yourself so that you don't dominate the conversation and crowd others out. That said, don't hold back meaningful contributions out of fear of "talking too much" (as an excessive talker, I feel your pain). Good discussion requires good timing (or, as the Greeks called it, *kairos*) and persistence. A key skill is knowing when to dig deeper on a topic—and when it's time to move on. Another is timing your contribution so that it adds value without scattering our focus. If your point doesn't fit the flow in the moment, ask us to circle back later. Repetition isn't redundancy—hard ideas deserve multiple passes. Progress happens when we challenge ideas (not people) with respect and goodwill. Make the most of discussion by staying on topic. Don't waste time.

Grades: Grades remind me of the "paradox of hedonism"—the idea that people who chase pleasure above all else are less likely to find it. Likewise, students who obsess over grades often miss out on the best learning experiences and may even hurt their final performance due to stress and distraction. Focus on the work. Keep your nose to the grindstone, and your grade will reflect your effort and ability.

Be bold: We all have fears—many of them are useful. But some are best faced head-on. I know that speaking in front of others can feel dreadful. Still, this class should not be a source of fear.

Worrying about saying something silly or admitting ignorance is natural, but take the risk anyway. Think of us as a group of friends trying to understand ourselves and the world better. Yes, put thought into your contributions—but don’t let fear of imperfection silence you. If we refuse to speak up until our thoughts are fully polished, we may lose good ideas before they have a chance to grow.

Be yourself: It can be tempting to adopt a different persona in a new setting, but speak as your authentic self. Say what you mean, simply and clearly. While complex topics may call for specialized language, plain English is often the clearest path to understanding. Don’t let fancy words obscure your meaning.

Make the most of things: It’s easy to take college for granted, especially when you’re grinding through classes and assignments. But this course offers the chance to think about important topics—so there’s less danger of it feeling like a dull burden. I work hard to make class discussions lively and engaging. Still, the ultimate value comes from your attitude. Be an active learner. Seek out meaning. Don’t let this opportunity slip through your fingers.

The Finer Details

- Plagiarism is hard to spell but easy to spot. When you use another’s words or ideas in a paper, for instance, you should indicate that you are doing so with appropriate citation. Plagiarism of any assignment will result in a failing of the assignment and may even result in a failing the course. The school will toss something even nastier at you, so just don’t do it.
- All written work to be handed in must be typed. If it’s handwritten it doesn’t exist. The standard is Times New Roman with 12-point font and one inch margins. I know all about playing with font, sizing, margins, so don’t try it. Most submissions will be done online.
- While in discussion please be considerate. Some of the topics and viewpoints may elicit a powerful response from you. We all have ideas and opinions we hold dear, but we must share them objectively and for the benefit of everyone at the appropriate time. Try to think critically about the topic at hand and respond accordingly.
- I’m going to go out on a limb and trust you with technology. I encourage you to utilize digital copies of our text if you have the means to access them via a tablet or laptop. Please, please, please don’t jump on Facebook, browse Reddit, or “quickly” check your email. It ruins your experience in the classroom. Seriously. You are more likely to prepare less, participate less, and study less if you use your classroom time distracted by the internet. As a result, you end up learning less, earning a lower grade, and disliking the course. Your classroom experience is brief and precious and the temptation to quickly check Facebook or your email will inevitably detach you from our discussions and diminish your educational experience. Being present, in the most all-encompassing sense of the term, is a vital trait that faces too many technological pressures. Please don’t break my trust on this issue – this is one of my biggest pet peeves.
- Discussion is a very important aspect of this class and is a reflection of your abilities to

speak in a group. However, speaking just to hear the sound of your own voice does not merit active discussion.

- If you have a grade dispute you must set-up an appointment with me to discuss the issue. Allow me enough time to review my notes so we can have a thoughtful, productive conversation.
- Feel free to contact me via email with any questions or concerns you may have. I will do my best to reply within 24 hours. I am also more than willing to discuss upcoming assignments with you. Stop by during my office hours or set up an appointment for such discussion.
- Bring your readings to class. And some paper. And a pen or pencil.
- Names – each one of us has one, so please try to use them.
- Have fun. (As if you weren't already.)

Students with Disabilities

In order for a student to receive an accommodation for a disability, that disability must be on record in the Dean of Students' Office, 3rd Floor, David Student Union (DSU). If you believe that you have a disability, please contact Dr. Kevin Hughes, Dean of Students (594-7160) to discuss your needs. Dean Hughes will provide you with the necessary documentation to give to your professors.

Students with documented disabilities are required to notify the instructor no later than the first day on which they require an accommodation (the first day of class is recommended), in private, if accommodation is needed. The instructor will provide students with disabilities with all reasonable accommodations, but students are not exempted from fulfilling the normal requirements of the course. Work completed before the student notifies the instructor of his/her disability may be counted toward the final grade at the sole discretion of the instructor.

Success

I want you to succeed in this course and at CNU. I encourage you to come see me during office hours or to schedule an appointment to discuss course content or to answer questions you have. If I become concerned about your course performance, attendance, engagement, or well-being, I will speak with you first. I also may submit a referral through our Captains Care Program. The referral will be received by the Center for Academic Success as well as other departments when appropriate (Counseling Services, Office of Student Engagement). If you are an athlete, the Athletic Academic Support Coordinator will be notified. Someone will contact you to help determine what will help you succeed. Please remember that this is a means for me to support you and help foster your success at CNU.

Academic Support

The Center for Academic Success offers free tutoring assistance for CNU students in several academic areas. Staff in the Center offer individual assistance and/or workshops on various study strategies to help you perform your best in your courses. The center also houses the Alice F.

Randall Writing Center. Writing consultants can help you at any stage of the writing process, from invention, to development of ideas, to polishing a final draft. The Center is not a proofreading service, but consultants can help you to recognize and find grammar and punctuation errors in your work as well as provide assistance with global tasks. Go as early in the writing process as you can, and go often!

You may drop by the Center for Academic Success to request a tutor, meet with a writing consultant, pick up a schedule of workshops, or make an appointment to talk one-on-one with a University Fellow for Student Success. The Center is located in the Tribble Library, second floor, room 240.

Participation

I take class participation to heart and view it as a vital element to any good liberal arts course, especially courses in argumentation. Much like grading an essay, grading participation is more art than science. However, it is important for you know what I expect out of your participation and how your contributions will influence your final grade. Please note that *simply showing up to class does not merit a “C” grade (let alone anything higher)*. I use the entire grading spectrum when I grade participation and if you were silent all semester, then you will receive a grade that reflects your lack of effort. I will do my best to include every student in our discussions, but you cannot wait for me to call on you every class. (Side note: If I *do* call on you, please be prepared to respond thoughtfully. Saying “I don’t know” does not count as a quality contribution.)

Quizzes

You will be given a maximum of five quizzes throughout the semester. These quizzes will vary in structure and content. You may be asked to write an essay response to a single question, answer several short answer questions, and/or answer a mixture of multiple choice, matching, and true/false questions. These quizzes are meant to encourage reading the assigned texts closely (I suggest taking notes as you read) and also to ensure you are attentive during lectures and discussions. They will be short and timed. They will always occur at the very beginning of class. **They cannot be made up.**

Policy Debates

In this course you will participate in 2 debates on to be determined topics. You will have a partner, and you will be debating against other teams in the classroom. This debate will be evaluated on your style, organization, use of proof, and your ability to analyze arguments. Although you will have a partner, you will be graded *individually*. There will be a specific grading criteria sheet available to you on Blackboard, along with some other materials about the format in which the debates will occur.

Debate Analysis

This assignment will be an analysis of a debate that has already occurred. The purpose of this assignment is to further apply and illustrate what we are learning class. This is your chance to analyze a live presentation of an argument and to offer a critique on its strengths, weaknesses and effectiveness.

Major Assignments and Grading

Quizzes (5*20 pts. each)	100 pts
Policy Debate 1	100 pts
Policy Debate 2	100 pts
Debate analysis (4*25 pts each)	100 pts
Mid-Term Exam	100 pts
Final Exam	100 pts
<u>Participation</u>	<u>100 pts</u>
	700 pts total

A	93-100%	B-	80-82%	D+	67-69%
A-	90-92%	C+	77-79%	D	63-66%
B+	87-89%	C	73-76%	D-	60-62%
B	83-86%	C-	70-72%	F	59% or lower

Class Schedule

Subject to revision and alteration. Readings should be read **before** class on the date assigned.

Week 1 (1/12- 1/14)

Monday: Welcome! Course introduction, syllabus, etc.

Wednesday: What is argumentation?

Week 2 (1/19-1/21)

Prelude: Some preliminary ideas surrounding argument and public culture.

Reading:

1) Mill – “On the Liberty of Thought and Discussion”

Week 3 (1/26-1/28)

Making an Argument: The Basics

Monday: 1) Heinrichs – Chapters 1-5

Wednesday: 2) Toulmin - “The Layout of Arguments”

Quiz #1 (Monday)

Week 4 (2/2-2/4)

Making an Argument: Tropes, Figures, and Commonplaces

Reading:

Monday: 1) Heinrichs – Chapters 6-13

Wednesday: discussion of reading.

Scholar: Debate Analysis #1 (Monday)

Week 5 (2/9-2/11)

Argument, Justice, and Persuasion

Reading:

Monday: 1) Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca - excerpts from The New Rhetoric.

Quiz #2 (Monday)

Wednesday: discussion of reading.

Week 6 (2/16-2/18)

Countering an Argument

Reading:

Monday: 1) Heinrichs – Chapters 14-17

Wednesday: discussion of reading.

Debate Analysis #1 due

Week 7 (2/23-2/25)

Public Argument

Reading for Monday:

1) Sunstein – “The Law of Group Polarization”

2) Hofstadter – “The Paranoid Style”

3) Flemming – “Can Pictures Be Arguments?”

Debate Analysis #2 (Monday)

Wednesday: Mid-Term Exam

Week 8 (3/2-3/4)

No Class – Spring Break

Week 9 (3/9-3/11)

Refusing to Argue

Reading:

Monday: 1) Plato – Apology

Wednesday: 2) Foss & Griffin – “Beyond Persuasion”

Quiz #3 (Wednesday)

Week 10 (3/16-3/18)

Offense: Making an Argument Preparation

Schedule meetings with me.

Debate Analysis #2 due

Week 11 (3/23-3/25)

Policy Debate 1

M&W

Debate Analysis #3 (Monday)

Week 12 (3/30-4/1)

Policy Debate 2

M&W

Week 13 (4/6-4/8)

Arguing and Believing

Reading:

Monday: 1) James – “The Will to Believe”

Wednesday: 2) Peirce – “The Fixation of Belief”

Quiz #4 (Monday)

Debate Analysis #3 due

Week 14 (4/13-4/15)

Advanced Offense/Agreement

Reading:

Monday: 1) Heinrichs – Chapters 18-24

Wednesday: 2) Heinrichs – Chapters 25-28

Debate Analysis #4 (Monday)

Quiz #5 (Monday)

Week 15 (4/20)

Policy Debate 2 Preparation

Final Exam: TBA