
ARGUMENTATION AND CRITICAL DECISION MAKING

Caroline S. Parsons, The University of Alabama

INTRODUCTION

Debates as a teaching strategy date back over 2,000 years to Protagoras in Athens (481-411 B.C.) and remain a curricular staple in modern colleges and universities. Recognized as one of the best methods for learning and developing critical thinking skills (Freeley & Steinberg, 2014; Snider & Schnurer, 2002) and oral communication skills (Williams, McGee & Worth, 2001; Combs & Bourne, 1994; Cronin & Glenn, 1991), debates cultivate active learning and engagement through social interaction with others (Vygotsky, 1978).

The active learning provided by in-class debates engages students in higher-order thinking which requires them to analyze, synthesize, discuss, and apply the content they have read. Gass and Seiter (2018) noted that active learning in groups equips students to detect fallacies and faulty reasoning. Brooks (2013) described the time-consuming yet rich interaction that takes place in small groups. Among other desired student learning outcomes, in-class debates challenge students to define a problem, evaluate the credibility of sources, identify and recognize the biases and assumptions in arguments, and prioritize the relevance and salience of various points within an argument (Kennedy, 2007). The course in argumentation and critical decision making empowers students to listen to others, develop empathy, and develop other skills necessary to overcome polarization, equipping them with the ability to engage in thoughtful civic discussion.

The need for speech and debate training has never been more obvious. Since the U.S. Senate passed a resolution marking "National Speech and Debate Education Day" in March of 2016 (S. Res. 398, 2016), our country has witnessed some of the most contentious and polarizing presidential campaigns in U.S. history. For example, Hogan (2017) decried the striking demagoguery of the 2016 presidential campaign as a "decline of public argumentation and debate...meanwhile, congressional debates have become even more partisan and unproductive, while so-called 'debate' shows on cable TV and talk radio have become little more than forums for 'fake news' and other forms of propaganda" (p. 83). It is no wonder that Americans have become more polarized than ever and unable or unwilling to talk reasonably with one another about public issues.

Students who enroll in speech and debate courses today will no doubt be future leaders in this country. The course in argumentation and critical decision making is in a unique position to provide these future leaders with instruction in the kind of reasoned critical thinking and group deliberation necessary for effective group decision making.

Several scholars of communication pedagogy have pointed to debates as one of the most effective assignments in speech and rhetoric courses, appealing to students' desire for collaboration and participation (German, 1985; Wentzlaff, 1988; Jensen & Williams, 1998). The course in argumentation

and critical decision making meets students' need for collaboration and participation through the debate assignment, along with the speeches, activities, and assignments that build up to the debates.

This introductory course in argumentation and critical decision making teaches students to think critically for the purpose of participating in the process of public decision making and understanding how discussion, argumentation, and persuasion function as communication forms for that process. At several universities, this course meets the general education requirement for both humanities and oral communication.

The syllabus included in this article provides a course description, course objectives, course assignments, weekly schedule, course assessments, and course policies for the course in argumentation and critical decision making. This course meets three times a week, face-to-face. Two of the meetings are with each student's section and one of the meetings is a weekly Assembly of all sections.

As indicated in the course syllabus below, this course meets several desired student learning outcomes. After taking this course, students should be able to:

- think critically and communicate effectively in groups;
- listen to the discourse of others actively, evaluate it fairly, and respond thoughtfully;
- actively participate in discussions, dialogues, deliberation, and debate;
- use research skills to find credible sources of information, to evaluate them critically, and to rely upon them in deliberations;
- exercise self-awareness and intercultural awareness during group deliberations;
- build group consensus through careful deliberation; and
- adapt communication ethically with respect to the values and diversity of others.

Student engagement and discussion is highly valued in this course. As such, attendance and participation accounts for 20% of the course grade. This course challenges students to participate actively in deliberations that occur both during Assembly and in their individual class sections. Instructions about effective ways of engaging in discussion and deliberation are holistically integrated throughout the syllabus.

The active engagement required in this course necessitates the implementation of a "no phones or laptops in class" policy. The consistent eye contact and concentrated focus required during classroom proceedings deters most students from thinking using their phones during class. However, in the event that a student is found using a phone during class, he or she is counted absent unless the instructor was notified before class that a family emergency may warrant the student's use of a phone during class.

While instructors may adopt a variety of approaches to teaching this course, the syllabus shared in this article is offered with the special feature of a weekly Assembly gathering of all course sections. During Assembly, students have an opportunity to practice critical thinking, communication, group deliberation, and public decision making. For example, in the first Assembly, students negotiate how voting (e.g., one vote per section, one vote per student) will take place in the course. In another Assembly, they decide how many exams they will take during the semester and which chapters should be covered in each exam. Later in the semester, they discuss and decide on the topics to be deliberated during speeches and debates during the semester. The final negotiation in the course challenges students to deliberate and decide whether the final assignment in the course should be a speech, a paper, or an exam.

This course is configured to meet twice weekly (e.g., MW or T/Th) for 50 minutes in individual sections and to meet once weekly (e.g., Mondays) for 50 minutes in an Assembly of all sections. However, this

course could also be configured to meet as individual sections (e.g., MWF, T/Th) for 150 minutes per week and not convene in an Assembly of all sections. In such a format, Assembly negotiations and discussions would take place during individual sections.

The highly interactive nature of this course, along with the transformative pedagogical influence it routinely has on student development, makes it a truly enjoyable course to teach. Because this course teaches students to think critically, communicate effectively, listen and work well in teams, actively participate in dialogue and debate, manage conflict, it is one of the most unique and important courses that students can take during college.

SYLLABUS: ARGUMENTATION AND CRITICAL DECISION MAKING

"An orator is concerned with the future, urging us to do or not do something." – *Aristotle*

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This is an introductory course in thinking critically for the purpose of participating in the process of public decision making and understanding how discussion, argumentation, and persuasion function as communication forms for that process.

In a representative democracy, individual freedoms are gained and granted largely through messy, complicated, and ongoing processes of collective decision making. As a Humanities course and an Oral Communication course, this course assumes that an important goal in a liberal arts education is to prepare students to become concerned, active, and vocal participants in those processes.

Using Aristotle's *On Rhetoric* as a philosophical starting point, we assume that such participation requires the ability to think critically -- i.e., to question matters analytically in terms of relevant values and beliefs -- and to form judgments based upon both ethical and aesthetic constraints, as well as the ability to communicate responsibly. To that purpose, this course is primarily designed to help students become more comfortable participating in civic discourse and engaging in the process of public decision making about a wide range of current topics and situations by applying their learning in a public assembly with other students each week. A secondary goal is acquainting students with the advantages and disadvantages inherent in group discussion, argumentation, and persuasion as decision making processes typically used for public decision making within democratic societies.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

After taking this course, students should be able to:

- think critically and communicate effectively in groups;
- listen to the discourse of others actively, evaluate it fairly, and respond thoughtfully;
- actively participate in discussions, dialogues, deliberation, and debate;
- use research skills to find credible sources of information, to evaluate them critically, and to rely upon them in deliberations;
- exercise self-awareness and intercultural awareness during group deliberations;
- build group consensus through careful deliberation; and
- adapt communication ethically with respect to the values and diversity of others.

REQUIRED READING

Butler, W., & Parsons, C. (2021). *Critical Decision Making*. Dubuque, Iowa: Great River Learning. You can purchase and register for this online textbook by going to www.grlcontent.com.

OTHER READINGS

Critical Decision Making Course Packet. Print the packet and keep it with you at your desk.

Students will locate and read news articles and scholarly research to support their arguments.

Civility and communication (pp. 19-22). In Herbst, S. (2010). *Rude Democracy*. Temple University Press.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

READING QUIZZES (150 points, or 15%) – Four quizzes will be administered. Quizzes include 10 multiple-choice or short answer items. A study sheet is provided in the course packet. Carefully mark your calendar with the quiz dates listed in the course calendar.

EXAM(S) (150 points, or 15%) – Exams include 25 multiple-choice or short answer items. A study sheet is provided in the course packet. Procedures for exams (e.g., number of exams, section-specific exam or common exam) will be established during Assembly. *See details in packet.*

WRITTEN ARGUMENTS (150 points, or 15%) – For the group dialogue, advocacy presentation, and debate, you will submit a written outline of your main argument(s), along with a bibliography in APA or MLA Style. See sample arguments and outlines in the course packet.

GROUP DIALOGUES (100 points, or 10%) – The dialogue assignment allows you to take a position and provide support for it (2-3 minutes) in order to promote a group discussion with your classmates. To prepare for this assignment, you will collect research about your topic and organize it into an outline. **You are required to submit an outline and bibliography. At least one citation of a credible news source is required.** You will know your topic in advance, as it is listed in the course calendar. Group dialogues are a "town hall" type of forum, in which you will take an active role in dialogues with your classmates. *See details in the course packet.*

ADVOCACY PRESENTATION (100 points, or 10%) – A 3-4 minute oral presentation advocating a specific position toward a public policy, followed by 2-3 minutes of fielding questions from the audience in defense of your position, for a total of 7 minutes. **You are required to submit an outline and bibliography. Two source citations required.** Be sure that your evidence in support of your position is credible (e.g., Toulmin style), and be sure to show how your position helps solve current problems surrounding the issue. Topics for this assignment will fall into one of four or five sets of issues, which will be decided during the Assembly. Advocacy topics from past semesters include, "the USFG should substantially increase its nuclear energy capacity in the U.S.," "Cancel culture hinders free speech and democratic values in the U.S.," and "automated vehicles make driving safer." You may choose to advocate in favor (pro) or against (con) the public policy. *See details in course packet.*

PUBLIC FORUM DEBATE (100 points, or 10%) – This assignment is a two-on-two style debate; one side affirms a proposed resolution, and the other side negates it. You will be paired with another student and work as a team to analyze critically the position taken by another pair of students. The side you are debating (pro or con) is decided by a coin flip at the debate. You may not switch teams or partners. A 5-10 page outline of the argument construction, along with a bibliography, is required from each debater. This document will be created as a team and submitted by each debater. **3 credible news articles must be cited by each debater.** Each debater speaks for 5-7 minutes, delivering both a

constructive speech and then actively participating in the refutations, counterarguments, extensions, and rebuttals that evolve during the debate. *Details in packet.*

CLASS ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION (150 points, or 15%) - You are required to attend class as directed. Oral and/or written activities will be graded on quality of contribution, promptness, and evidence of preparation. Written assignments are required in class on key dates. For example, an annotated bibliography, which is a short summary of articles listed in an APA or MLA style bibliography, is required before each presentation. You are also required to participate in a dialogue survey and to evaluate your partner's speeches.

ASSEMBLY PARTICIPATION (50 points, or 5%) – In addition to your regular class meetings, you are required to attend the weekly Assembly as directed. Voting about procedures (e.g., number of exams, style of exams, how debates are graded) will be established during Assembly. *See Assembly details in packet.*

FINAL EXAM, PRESENTATION, OR PAPER (50 points, or 5%) – Procedures for the final assignment will be established during Assembly. If selected, the final exam (comprehensive) contains 50 multiple choice or short item questions. The policy presentation is a 3-4 minute speech in support of a specific public policy with the goal of facilitating change and action. Two source citations required. The final reflection paper is a 4-6 double spaced page paper demonstrating your proficiency in four designated communication competencies. *Details about each of these options for the final assignment can be found in course packet.*

COURSE POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

ATTENDANCE: Your grade will be affected if you are not in class. You have two absences to use as necessary, however, your final grade drops one letter grade for each additional, unexcused class that you miss.

PHONES AND LAPTOPS: You will be counted absent and/or asked to leave the classroom for using a mobile device during class. Alert the instructor ahead of time if an emergency may warrant the use of your phone.

MAKE-UP WORK: No make-up work (e.g., speech, outline, quiz) is accepted without appropriate documentation. All make-up work must be resolved within a week of original due date.

MAKE-UP WORK (PARTICIPATION): Participation activities cannot be made up, even with an excused absence.

CLASSROOM DECORUM: You will be asked to leave the classroom if you display distracting conduct, such as sidebar conversations, phone usage, chronic lateness, or other interruptions to the classroom environment.

TENTATIVE DAILY CALENDAR

gray boxes = Assembly agenda items.

*Assembly agenda items subject to change.

<u>DATE</u>	<u>TOPIC</u>	<u>READINGS</u>
Week 1	Introduction to Critical Decision Making	Chapters 1-2

	Rhetoric and Argumentation Traditions: Evaluating Public Discourse Assign Syllabus Quiz Assign Peers and Peer Introduction	
Assembly	ASSEMBLY: Explain rules & voting procedures	
Week 2	Analysis of Audience: Participants and Interested Stakeholders Bias, Stereotypes, and Assumptions; Finding Common Ground Email Your Peer to Prepare for Peer Introduction	Chapter 3
Assembly	ASSEMBLY: Negotiation of exam procedures	
Week 3	Introduce Your Peer in Class Due: Syllabus quiz	
Assembly	ASSEMBLY: Dialogue description and example	
Week 4	Becoming an Active, Mindful, Critical Listener Assign Dialogues Selecting and Researching Your Position for Advocacy Evaluating Source Credibility: What is "Real" News? Using Online Research Databases at the Library Discuss in Class: Answers to Dialogue Survey	Chapters 4-5 Dialogue assignment description
Assembly	ASSEMBLY: Dialogue practice (students)	
Week 5	Structuring and Outlining Your Argument <i>Begin collecting articles on dialogue topic and preparing outline + bibliography.</i> Due: Quiz 1 (Chapters 1-3)	Chapter 6 outline samples
Assembly	ASSEMBLY: Exam 1 (Chapters 1-5)	
Week 6	Using Supporting Evidence Due: Annotated Bibliography (two sources) <i>Short summary of two articles on dialogue topic, along with bibliography.</i> Due: Outline and Bibliography for Dialogue Dialogues (Speaker #1-5) <i>Social Media Ethics</i>	Chapter 7
Assembly	ASSEMBLY: Negotiate advocacy/debate topics	
Week 7	Dialogues (Speaker #6-10) <i>Reality Television</i> Dialogues (Speaker #11-15) <i>Court Trials on TV</i> Due: Quiz 2 (Chapters 4-6)	
Assembly	ASSEMBLY: Advocacy description and example	
Week 8	Dialogues (#16-20) <i>Celebrities as Advocates</i> Persuasive Use of Language, Persuasive Designs and Stock Issues <i>Begin collecting articles on your topic and preparing your outline and bibliography.</i> Assign Advocacy Presentation	Chapters 8-9 Advocacy presentation description
Assembly	ASSEMBLY: Exam 2 (Chapters 6-9)	
Week 9	Evidence, Proof and Argumentation, Syllogisms and Toulmin Model Ethical Persuasion, Fallacies, and Persuasive Delivery Due: Annotated Bibliography (two sources) <i>Short summary of two articles on your topic, along with a bibliography</i> Due: Outline and Bibliography for Advocacy Pres.	Chapters 10-12
Assembly	ASSEMBLY: Debate description	
Week 10	Advocacy Presentations (#5-8)	

	Advocacy Presentations (#9-12) Due: Quiz 3 (Chapters 8-10)	
Assembly	ASSEMBLY Debate example (video, Persian Gulf debate)	
Week 11	Advocacy Presentations (#1-4) Advocacy Presentations (#17-20)	
Assembly	ASSEMBLY: Debate example (video, NAFTA debate)	
Week 12	Advocacy Presentations (#13-16) Group Deliberation: Conflict and Negotiation Civility and Communication from Herbst's <i>Rude Democracy</i> (pp. 19-22) Assign Public Forum Debates	Chapter 13 Debate description
Assembly	ASSEMBLY: Exam 3 (Chapters 10-13)	
Week 13	Constructing Your Debate Case Argument outline - pro and con arguments, first and second speech Refutation, Rebuttal, Blocks, Extensions, Crossfire Due: Quiz 4 (Chapters 11-13)	Chapter 6 (continued)
Assembly	ASSEMBLY: Negotiate the final assignment	
Week 14	Debate Prep: Meet with Your Partner in a Location of Your Choice Discuss in Class: Discuss your debate topic and main arguments (pro and con) with partner; discuss who will speak first and how to manage prep time. Due: Draft of both a "pro" & "con" outline: 3 main arguments w/ source citations. Each student uploads a document that the pair created together as a team. Label the names of both 1 st & 2 nd speaker. Due: Outline and Bibliography for Debate	
Assembly	ASSEMBLY: Use Today's Time for – Debate Rehearsal (meet w/ partner)	
Week 15	Forum Debates (Pair #1 and 2), (Pair #3 and 4), and (Pair #5 and 6)	
Assembly	ASSEMBLY: Use Today's Time for -- Forum Debates (Pair #7 and 8)	
Week 16	Forum Debates (Pair #9 and 10) Bringing it all together: Course overview	Course Objectives (in the syllabus)
Assembly	No Assembly During Finals Week	
Finals Week	Due: Final Assignment (exam, speech, or paper) The final assignment will be submitted during your section's designated final exam timeslot.	

REFERENCES

- Brooks, A. M. (2013). Teams approach to the small group communication class: Learning through communication, choices, and consequences. *Syllabus*, 2(1), 1-12.
- Combs, H., & Bourne, S. (1994). The renaissance of educational debate: Results of a five-year study of the use of debate in business education. *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*, 5(1), 57-67.
- Cronin, M., & Glenn, P. (1991). Oral communication across the curriculum in higher education: The state of the art. *Communication Education*, 40(4), 356-367.
- Freeley, A., & Steinberg, D. (2014). *Argumentation and debate: Critical thinking for reasoned decision making*. Boston, MA: Wadsworth Cengage.
- Gass, R. H. & Seiter, J. S. (2018). When good arguments go bad: An activity for learning about fallacies in reasoning. *Syllabus*, 7(2), 1-8.
- German, K. (1985). Guidelines for implementing an honors program in communication. Paper presented at the Midwest Basic Course Directors Conference, Indianapolis, IN.
- Hogan, J. M., & Kurr, J. A. (2017). Civic education in competitive speech and debate. *Argumentation and Advocacy*, 53(2), 83-89.
- Jensen, K., & Williams, D. (1998). Teaching the honors public speaking course. *Basic Communication Course Annual*, 10(1), 133-157.
- Kennedy, R. (2007). In-class debates: Fertile ground for active learning and the cultivation of critical thinking and oral communication skills. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 19(2), 183-190.
- NCA's Learning Outcomes in Communication (2015). What should a graduate with a communication degree know, understand, and be able to do? *National Communication Association*. Retrieved April 29, 2021 from <https://www.natcom.org/learning-outcomes-communication>.
- S. Res. 398, 114th Cong. (2016). A Resolution Designating March 15, 2016 as "National Speech and Debate Education Day."
- Snider, A., & Schnurer, M. (2002). *Many sides: Debate across the curriculum*. New York: International Debate Education Association.
- Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wentzlaff, S. L. (1988). *Honors students and a basic speech communication course: Techniques for meeting their needs*. Paper presented at the Midwest Basic Course Directors, Dayton, OH.
- Williams, D., McGee, B., & Worth, D. (2001). University student perceptions of the efficacy of debate participation: An empirical investigation. *Argumentation and Advocacy*, 37(4), 198-209.

APPENDIX 1: SYLLABUS QUIZ

1. Describe the content and length of the group dialogues. When do they take place?
2. What printed documents should you bring to your dialogue?
3. How many (and what kind of) source citations are required for the dialogues?
4. Describe the content and length of the advocacy presentation. When is it due?
5. How many (& what kind of) source citations are required for the advocacy presentation?
6. Describe the content and length of the public forum debate. When does it take place?
7. In what three ways must sources be cited in each of the three speeches?

APPENDIX 2: GROUP DIALOGUES ASSIGNMENT

GROUP DIALOGUES

The group dialogue assignment allows you to present your ideas about a current topic and engage in a group discussion about it. You and your classmates will participate in a town-hall style forum for multiple days on designated topics. To prepare for this assignment, you will collect research about your topic and organize it into an outline. You will know your topic in advance; it is listed in the course calendar. Be prepared to speak aloud during dialogue days, along with the days leading up to dialogue when we all participate in a dialogue survey. **You are required to submit an outline and bibliography. At least one source citation is required.** See grading rubric on the next page.

A week or two before dialogues begin, you will participate in a survey and discuss the dialogue topics for the semester. Then, dialogue days begin. On your presentation day, you will explain your position and provide credible support for it before we open up the floor for discussion. Your class does not have to come to any sort of agreement on any given topic, but you must work together to create a respectful environment that builds connections and encourages further dialogue.

Before your dialogue, you will submit:

Outline - A one-page keyword (speaking) outline.

Bibliography - One credible news article must be cited in APA or MLA style.

Cite sources - 1) in your bibliography, 2) orally, during presentation, 3) in the text of your outline.

Locate credible news articles through Nexis Uni and Newspaper Source databases in lib.ua.edu.

Response (Comment) – A response comment that you're likely to contribute during dialogue.

Peer Critique – You will handwrite an evaluation of your peer's speech (submit at end-of-class).

Response Comments – You need to provide response comments for at least two classmates. A good response comment is a well thought-out conclusion, belief, or opinion that draws a connection to a classmate's speech. Try to substantiate your question with evidence and/or context (a personal experience, a news article you read). For instance, "what Jacob said resonates with me because..." or "I had a similar experience and this experience informs my opinion that..." All comments are valued.

Topic Sets for Group Dialogue -

Social Media Ethics - Social media sites (do or do not) have the right to censor posts as they see fit.

Regulation of Reality TV - Reality TV shows are good/bad for society.

Televised Court Trials – Televised court trials (e.g., *Court TV*, *Trials on Demand*) are good/bad for society.

Celebrities as Advocates - Celebrities (do or do not) have the right to share their political statements in public settings.

Sample Structure for the Dialogue Assignment:

Introduction

Attention getter/opener – a hook to grab the attention of your audience.

Your position - what is your stance (pro/con)?

Transition - "Now to a piece(s) of evidence..."

Body

Evidence 1 - "According to (name of news publication) from (month/date/year)____."

Tell how this piece of evidence supports your position and why the source you cited is credible.

Transition - "Moving to my next piece of evidence..." (*if you have more than one evidence*)...

Evidence 2 - "The (name of news publication) reported on (month/date/year) that ____."

Tell how this piece of evidence supports your position and why the source you cited is credible.

Conclusion

"Today, in looking at (this topic), we see that (evidence 1,2) support the argument that ____."

"Therefore, we must (agree/disagree) with the topic because (main reasoning)."

Tie back to the attention getter/opener.

Student Learning Outcomes

Successful completion of this assignment demonstrates students' ability to:

- analyze a persuasive message, identify its strengths and weaknesses, and express opinions about it.
- engage in dialogue and deliberation with a group, consider all perspectives, and build consensus.
- listen to messages actively, evaluate them thoughtfully, and respond mindfully.
- locate, evaluate, and cite credible research sources.
- effectively communicate ideas and opinions in writing and speaking.

APPENDIX 3: SURVEY ADMINISTERED BEFORE GROUP DIALOGUES

DIALOGUE SURVEY

1. Social media sites have the right to censor posts as they see fit.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree
2. Televised court trials (e.g., Court TV) are a mockery of the U.S. judicial system.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree
3. Reality television is good for society.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree
4. Celebrities have the right to share their political statements in public settings.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree
5. Televised court trials are a helpful, accessible way to learn about the U.S. judicial system.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree
6. It is ethical for social media sites to remove posts that they deem offensive and/or potentially harmful to others.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree
7. Court trials should be televised.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree
8. Social media sites do not honor freedom of speech when they remove posts.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree
9. Reality television shows have no educational or informational value whatsoever.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree
10. Producers of reality television shows should be regulated in their attempts to set up unrealistic and dramatic situations between cast members.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree
11. Televised court trials ruin the chances of obtaining justice.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree
12. Celebrities should keep their political statements and opinions private.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree
13. If I post something on social media, I have the right to remove it but no one else does.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree
14. Reality television is good for society because it vicariously teaches us the consequences of people's (good and bad) behavior choices.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

APPENDIX 4: ADVOCACY PRESENTATION ASSIGNMENT

ADVOCACY PRESENTATION

The advocacy presentation is a 3-4 minute oral presentation advocating a specific position toward a public policy, followed by 2-3 minutes of fielding questions from the audience in defense of your position, for a total of 7 minutes. **You are required to submit an outline and bibliography. At least two credible news sources are required.** Be sure that your evidence in support of your position is credible (e.g., Toulmin style), and be sure to show how your position helps solve current problems surrounding the issue.

You may pick the specific angle you take on your argument, but topics for this assignment will be negotiated during Assembly and announced on blackboard. See grading rubric on the next page.

Before your presentation, you will submit:

Outline - A one-page keyword (speaking) outline.

Bibliography - Two credible news articles must be cited in APA or MLA style.

Cite sources - 1) in your bibliography, 2) orally, during presentation, 3) in the text of your outline.

Locate credible news articles through Nexis Uni and Newspaper Source databases in lib.ua.edu.

Q & A (Answer) – An answer to a question you will likely hear during Q & A.

Peer Critique – You will handwrite an evaluation of your peer's speech (submit at end-of-class).

Q & A - You need to have a thoughtful question for at least two classmates. A good question poses a clear inquiry about some part of the speech and allows the speaker to respond in a meaningful way. Try to substantiate your question with evidence and/or context (a personal experience, a news article you read). All questions are valued.

Refer to the sample outline structure provided in the description of the group dialogues assignment.

APPENDIX 5: PUBLIC FORUM DEBATE ASSIGNMENT

PUBLIC FORUM DEBATE

The public forum debate is a two-on-two style debate; one side affirms a proposed resolution and the other side negates it. You will be paired with another student and work as a team to analyze critically the position taken by another pair of students. The side you are debating, pro or con, is decided by a coin flip at the debate. You may not switch teams or partners. **3 credible news articles must be cited by each debater.** Each debater speaks for 5-7 minutes, delivering both a constructive speech and then actively participating in the refutations, counterarguments, extensions, and rebuttals that evolve during the debate. You'll receive your resolution far in advance of the debate. Your team may be asked to judge another team.

On the day that debates begin, each debater will submit:

Outline of the Case - A 5-10 page outline of the argument construction for both the *pro* and *con* side of the resolution. Both the *pro* and *con* outline should contain **three main supporting contentions** and **six source citations**. Each case must be created as a team, should have both names on it, and should contain the same content. Each student must submit the same outline that his/her partner submitted. Sample outlines are available in the packet, book, and on bb.

Bibliography - Six credible news articles must be cited in APA or MLA style.

Cite sources - 1) in your bibliography, 2) orally, during presentation, 3) in the text of your outline.

Locate credible news articles through Nexis Uni and Newspaper Source databases in lib.ua.edu.

Rebuttal and Closing Argument (Draft) – A draft of the *summary* and *final focus* speech.

Judging Ballot – Your instructor may ask you to handwrite a judging decision of a debate.

A week before debates begin, each debater will submit:

Outline of the Case (Draft) - A draft of the 5-10 page case outline for both the *pro* and *con* side of the resolution. Both the *pro* and *con* outline should contain **three main supporting contentions** and **six source citations**. The draft must be created as a team, should have both names on it, and should contain the same content. Each student must submit the same outline that his/her partner submitted. Sample outlines are available in the packet, book, and on blackboard.

Bibliography - Six credible news articles must be cited in APA or MLA style.

Cite sources - 1) in your bibliography, 2) orally, during presentation, 3) in the text of your outline.

Public forum debate gives you the opportunity to speak extemporaneously, using a prepared outline, along with the notes you have made during the debate. The grade is determined by each speaker's organization and case structure, logical reasoning, signs of adequate preparation, quality of evidence, ability to deconstruct the opponent's arguments, delivery, and overall communication effectiveness. "Winning" is not relevant nor will it be considered when determining your grade.

To prepare for debate, read the National Speech and Debate Association (NSDA) *Guide to Public Forum Debate* available online and view the *NSDA Nationals 2018* video available on youtube.

Speeches and Time Limits

Speaker 1 (Team A, 1st speaker)	4 min	
Speaker 2 (Team B, 1st speaker)	4 min	→ Crossfire (between speakers 1 & 2) for 3 min
Speaker 3 (Team A, 2nd speaker)	4 min	
Speaker 4 (Team B, 2nd speaker)	4 min	→ Crossfire (between speakers 3 & 4) for 3 min
Speaker 1 <i>Summary</i>	2 min	
Speaker 2 <i>Summary</i>	2 min	→ Grand Crossfire (all speakers) for 3 min
Speaker 3 <i>Final Focus</i>	2 min	
Speaker 4 <i>Final Focus</i>	2 min	

**Each team may use up to 2 min of prep time before the summary and/or final focus.*

Student Learning Outcomes

Successful completion of this assignment demonstrates students' ability to:

- analyze a persuasive message, identify its strengths and weaknesses, and express opinions about it.
- engage in dialogue and deliberation with a group, consider all perspectives, and build consensus.
- listen to messages actively, evaluate them thoughtfully, and respond mindfully.
- locate, evaluate, and cite credible research sources.
- effectively communicate ideas and opinions in writing and speaking.

APPENDIX 6: SPEECH EVALUATION FORM

SPEECH EVALUATION FORM

	Inadequate 1	Poor 2	Satisfactory 3	Excellent 4	Superior 5
Content					
Main argument (thesis/proposition) was clearly stated.				1	2 3 4 5
Substantiated main argument with supporting evidence.				1	2 3 4 5
Substantive use of logical proof (logos) and emotional proof (pathos).				1	2 3 4 5
Structure					
<i>Introduction</i>					
Gained the audience's attention and established the significance of topic.				1	2 3 4 5
Main argument was clearly stated.				1	2 3 4 5
Clear preview of sub-points.				1	2 3 4 5
<i>Body</i>					
Clear organizational pattern.				1	2 3 4 5
Supporting evidence was clearly tied to the main argument.				1	2 3 4 5
Thoughtful transitions between main ideas.				1	2 3 4 5
<i>Conclusion</i>					
Thoughtful summary and closing idea.				1	2 3 4 5
Echoed the introduction to provide closure.				1	2 3 4 5
Evidence					
Effectively assembled appropriate, adequate, and varied supporting material.				1	2 3 4 5
Cited credible and valid sources orally, accurately, and thoroughly.				1	2 3 4 5
Connected support material to main argument.				1	2 3 4 5
Delivery					
Effective use of body and voice to communicate ideas.				1	2 3 4 5
Easy to hear and understand; effective volume and vocal variety.				1	2 3 4 5
Eye contact was purposeful and intentional.				1	2 3 4 5
Gestures, facial expressions, and movement were purposeful.				1	2 3 4 5
Expressive and emphatic tone of voice (avoids um, uh, like, you know).				1	2 3 4 5
General Comments (Overall Evaluation):					
Met time limits.					
Clearly related to audience throughout speech.				1	2 3 4 5
Chose language that was appropriate for the assignment.				1	2 3 4 5
<i>As an audience member:</i>					
Demonstrated effective listening; built community within the group.				1	2 3 4 5
Questions for clarification showed clear connection to the topic.				1	2 3 4 5
Was able to serve as a competent debate judge (if needed/relevant).				1	2 3 4 5
Substantiated all arguments with evidence (personal experience, article).				1	2 3 4 5

APPENDIX 7: TOPIC IDEAS

TOPIC IDEAS FOR SPEECH AND DEBATE

RESOLUTIONS FOR THE ADVOCACY SPEECH AND THE FORUM DEBATE

Education

Standardized test scores should or should not be considered in college admissions.
School uniforms should be required in primary and secondary schools.

Domestic Policy

The U.S. Constitution should be amended to allow a six-year maximum for House and Senate terms.
The U.S. should replace means-tested welfare programs with a universal basic income.

Business and Commerce

The USFG should regulate the sale of private consumer information to social networking companies.
Business owners should have the right to refuse services to a customer(s) for any reason.

Transportation and Technology

Increase support for the development of mass transit systems.
Laws that protect cyclists should be more strictly enforced.

Environment and Sustainable Development

Corporate farms should or should not be regulated.
The USFG should adopt a carbon tax.

Sports and Entertainment

Cancel culture hinders free speech and democratic values in the U.S.
Dog fighting should be illegal in all states.

Foreign Policy

Western countries' recognition of Juan Guaidó was in the best interest of the Venezuelan people.
The economic benefits of North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) outweigh the harms.

APPENDIX 8: DESCRIPTION OF ASSEMBLY PROCEEDINGS

WHAT IS ASSEMBLY?

DESCRIPTION OF ASSEMBLY PROCEEDINGS

In addition to meeting with your individual section, you are required to attend Assembly meetings. The purpose of Assembly is to: 1) provide a forum for public decision making to occur; and 2) to provide students with the opportunity to practice their critical thinking and communication skills.

Assembly activities prepare you to participate in group deliberation and dialogue, which is a primary component of COM 121. Assembly is very different from a lecture/lab-style course, in which a professor teaches the course material in a large lecture hall, and the lab gives you practical application. Instead, your individual section instructor provides the majority of the course material and hears your presentations and debates, while Assembly enhances this experience by giving you a chance to practice and prepare for your major assignments.

During Assembly, you will receive instructions about how to complete major assignments such as the dialogues, advocacy presentation, and public forum debate. You will be able to see other students perform sample presentations, and will have several opportunities to participate in those presentations by raising your hand with a question or standing up to speak in support of or in opposition to a topic.

The attendance policy for Assembly states, "You must attend Assembly and participate in proceedings (e.g., ask questions) in order to receive credit for Assembly. You will not be able to make-up work missed in Assembly." You are expected to participate actively and vocally by asking questions. The quality (and quantity) of your arguments spoken during Assembly and in class will be regularly assessed. If you enjoy raising your hand and speaking out, then this is the class for you! If you are able to arrive on time, stay the whole time, and participate vocally, then this is the class for you!

Another purpose of Assembly is to create a forum for students to debate and decide on procedures that affect the Assembly (e.g., number of exams, exam procedures, topics for speeches and debates, how debates will be graded). For example, during the first Assembly, students typically voice their opinions and make decisions about the attendance requirements for Assembly. Assembly proceedings typically include student-led group deliberation, dialogue, and voting.

You'll also take your exam(s) during Assembly. Exam(s) will cover material from the textbooks and areas of focus include types of persuasion, persuasive language, argumentation, evidence, argument construction, refutation, rebuttals, and fallacies. Exam items are multiple choice, short answer, and/or essay.

While participating in Assembly is integral to this course, it is *only one part* of the course. **Most of your time and energy will be devoted to your individual class section.** You present your major assignments (e.g., dialogue, advocacy presentation, debate) in your individual class section. Almost all of your final course grade is determined by the work you do in your individual class section.

APPENDIX 9: DESCRIPTION OF THE OPTIONS FOR THE FINAL ASSIGNMENT

FINAL ASSIGNMENT

(EXAM, PRESENTATION, OR PAPER)

Procedures for the final assignment in this class will be established during Assembly. The final assignment will take place during the final exam timeslot for your individual COM 121 class section, not during Assembly.

Final exam – If selected as the final assignment, a comprehensive final exam will be administered during your section's final exam timeslot. It will consist of 50 multiple-choice or true-false questions.

Final policy presentation – If selected as the final assignment, a 3-4 minute policy presentation will be delivered in support of a specific public policy with the goal of facilitating change and action. The presentation should be addressed to an institutional or policy audience, and should incorporate **at least two credible news sources. You are required to submit an outline and bibliography.** Use evidence and support to substantiate your position (e.g., Toulmin style), showing how your policy or position helps to solve current problems surrounding the issue.

Final Reflection Paper – If selected as the final assignment, this paper will be 4-6 double spaced pages demonstrating your proficiency in the communication competencies listed below. For each competency, describe how the successful completion of a particular assignment in this class (e.g., speech, outline, bibliography, debate, dialogue) demonstrates your proficiency. No sources required. The competencies are: 1) *critical thinking and listening* - the ability to listen to messages actively, evaluate them thoughtfully, and respond mindfully; 2) *assessment of arguments* - the ability to analyze a persuasive message and express opinions about it; 3) *group deliberation* - the ability to engage in dialogue with a group, consider all perspectives, and build consensus; 4) *research skills* - the ability to locate, evaluate, and cite credible research sources; and 5) *communication* - the ability to demonstrate competence in written and spoken communication.