SCOM 203H, PUBLIC SPEAKING, FALL, 2015, DR. CONRAD

Contact Information:

c-conrad@tamu.edu
(979) 845-5530
202 b Bolton Hall
11:00-12:30 T Th and by appointment

DESCRIPTION AND LEARNING OBJECTIVE: This course is designed to introduce students to the theories, strategies, and practice of public discourse. It is based on the assumption that understanding rhetorical acts depends on an awareness of communication theory, the ability to critique communicative acts, practice in constructing and presenting rhetorical acts, and an awareness of the inter-relationships among these elements. The only prerequisite for the course is honors standing.

READINGS:

Text: Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Susan Huxman, The Rhetorical Act, 4th ed. (the 5th ed. also is acceptable but it’s lots more expensive)

Additional readings will be distributed via email

ASSIGNMENTS:

**Note: if any speaking dates conflict with religious holidays that you normally celebrate, please let me know immediately so that we can make alternate arrangements.

Speeches: There will be five, four of which will be graded.

#1: A brief extemporaneous analysis of the core values and frame of reference of a member of your audience. Non-graded.

#2: A 3-5 minute speech in which your goal is to influence your audiences' beliefs and/or behavior by providing INFORMATION and a PERSPECTIVE FOR MAKING SENSE OF IT. 75 points possible.

#3: A 5-7 minute speech in which your goal is to influence your audience's beliefs and/or behavior through the DEVELOPMENT OF A COGENT ARGUMENT. After this speech you will be asked questions by at least two members of your audience who have prepared to do so in advance. 100 points possible.

#4: QUESTIONING A SPEAKER. Your goal is to reveal weaknesses in evidence and/or errors in argument. Topics will be provided well in advance in order to allow you to familiarize yourself with the relevant subject matter. 25 points possible.
Term Project:

One of the most important developments in the human sciences during the past decade has been the recognition that persuasive communication (rhetoric) plays a significant role in activities and theories that once were viewed as objective, scientific, wholly informative activities. Since we all know that page limits are silly in an age of word processors, I will not list one--my goal is that you understand the issues that are inherent in this assignment as fully as possible in one semester's work. I doubt that you can give your topic justice in less than ten pages. In any event, I promise to read 10 pages from each of you and to read more if the paper is good. However, I will read more than 20 pages only if I think you should consider submitting it to a professional journal. (FYI: “A” papers written for the two most recent sections of this course ranged from 8 pages to 44 pages, double-spaced 12 pt type. Four eventually were published). **100 points possible.** Suggested “starting points” (sources) will be distributed during the first week of class. Due by the end of our last day of class, although early submissions are not only acceptable, they’re encouraged.

Assignment for non-COMM Majors: In this paper you will examine the role of rhetoric in the area(s) of research which characterize your major (honest, there is published literature on the rhetoric of accounting, the rhetoric of chemical laboratories, economics as rhetorical action, and on almost any other topic of interest). If you’ve not chosen a major, or wish you hadn't chosen the one you did, or for any reason would like focus the paper on a different topic, you should talk to me about an alternative.

Assignment for COMM Majors: In this paper you will examine the role that rhetoric has played (or is playing) in an important public policy debate. My goal is for you to produce papers that are strong enough to be selected for an undergraduate honors conference, at least after minor revision.

Examinations:

There will be two. Both are in a “take-home” format. Copies will be distributed during the first class session after the end of the drop-add period. The first is due one week after you give your second graded speech. The second is due at **the end of the final examination period established for this class by the University Registrar. 50 points possible** on each exam. Early submissions are acceptable and encouraged.

CLASS SCHEDULE

9/1 *Introduction to Rhetoric*

_Readings:_ Stephanie Hammel & Ruth Guzley, “Dissent and the Generational Divide,” in
Stephen Banks, ed., *Dissent and the Failure of Leadership*. OR

**Discussion Question:** is there any hope for your generation, either in a course like this or in any activity that requires critical thought and/or rational advocacy? Why or why not?

Note: you should start reading your textbook, beginning with chps. 1-2, 8-10

9/3 & 9/8 *Speeches of Introduction*

9/10 *Audience Analysis*

Readings: Text, chap. 3 & 11
J.A. Campbell, "Darwin . . ." Note: the parts of this article that deal with Scottish philosophy, are the least important part for our purposes. OR
T. Peterson, et al., "Using . . ."  

**Discussion Questions:** (1) if you were asked to persuade the West Texas Conservative Baptist Club to accept Darwin's theory of evolution, how would you adapt your message to your audience? How would your strategies differ from Darwin's (note the J.A. Campbell article)? OR (2) if you were asked to design a persuasive campaign to reduce preventable farm and ranch accidents, what arguments and appeals would you use? Why? (the Peterson, et al. article will be helpful in answering this question).

9/15-9/29 *Speeches that Strive to Persuade via Information and/or Perspective*

9/29 ***TOPICS FOR SPEECH #3 ARE DUE***

10/1-10/13 *Resources of Evidence and Argument*

Chps. 5-6 from 4th ed. (includes “standard” material about uses and abuses of evidence).

Deborah Stone, “Numbers,” *Policy Paradox*.

As part of this unit we will, as a group, construct a speech arguing that the SAT should not be used in undergraduate admission/placement decisions. I will provide background readings via email later in the semester. You are, of course, welcome to conduct related research on your own and share it with the class.

10/15-10/29 *Speeches with Prepared Questioning*
11/3-11/10 **Resources of Persuasive Appeal**

*Readings: Text, chps. 7 & 12  
Witte & Morrison, "Using Scare Tactics to Promote Safer Sex Among . . . Youth"

*Discussion questions:* According to Witte & Morrison, what kinds of appeals are likely to influence health-related attitudes? health-related behaviors? What factors complicate those appeals? Why do the appeals seem to be less effective in West Texas than elsewhere?

11/12-11/17; 12/1-12/3 **Speeches Using all of the Available Means of Persuasion.**

*Note: this speech schedule will be rudely interrupted by the National Communication Association Convention and the Turkey Day break*

12/8. **Catch Up, Make Ups, Assessment**

**GRADING INFORMATION**

I've been told that Aggies, even honors Aggies, are somewhat concerned about grades and grading. Since the grading of speeches is a bit more individualized than the grading of multiple choice exams, I thought that some information about how I grade speeches would help you feel more at ease. I will be listening for two overall elements—**speech composition and speech delivery.** The former will always be weighted more heavily than the latter, although the weighting will become more equal as the semester progresses and you develop more extensive delivery skills.

Under **speech composition,** I will consider five areas: how clearly you present your arguments, how your speech, how logically and appropriately you develop those arguments, how well you provide evidence to support the ideas that you present, how effectively you respond to questions about your speech.

Under **speech delivery** I also will consider five factors: how conversational you appear to be while giving your speech, how effectively you use nonverbal cues to enhance your organization and emphasize key ideas, how poised your are as you give your speech, how clearly you speak, and how effective your presentation seemed to be with this particular audience in this particular situation.

Each of these factors has degrees of competence associated with it; they are not simply "present" or "absent." In the section below I will describe, in general terms, the differences between an A, B, and C speech.

The "C" speech. To receive a grade of "C" a speech must basically **competent.** Nothing major goes wrong; the introduction gets the speech started appropriately by capturing the audience's attention and directing it toward your speech's theme; it adapts the topic to the audience's interests in some clear way; it establishes your credibility on the topic; and leads smoothly into the body of the speech. The **body** of the "C" speech is divided in a way that is appropriate to the topic, is developed with appropriate supporting materials, and is cast into language which accurately and clearly expresses ideas. The
ideas/arguments that are presented are cogent and coherent. The conclusion fulfills the minimum essentials—it summarizes either your main theme or major points and gives the speech a definite sense of conclusion. The topic of the speech should be socially, politically, philosophically, or personally significant and it is developed in sufficient depth to encompass what an average college-educated adult might be expected to know about the topic. (Since you are all products of the television generation, perhaps a TV analogy might help clarify this point—a "C" speech will tell your audience about as much as people would learn by watching each of the networks’ evening broadcasts about the topic. It would tell them much more than even the best politician’s speech).

The delivery of the "C" speech is one in which your language and organization are clear, and your movements, gestures and vocal cues do not impede effective communication. You maintain direct eye contact with your audience most of the time; your voice is relatively free-flowing, loud enough to be heard without the audience having to strain, and free from vocalized pauses. Finally, the "C" speech keeps the audience at least politely attentive throughout. The topic must be interesting and significant enough to be worthy of their time.

The vast majority of speeches in a public speaking classes fall into this category; speeches in honors sections tend to be somewhat better. For most students, being able to present their ideas in a coherent and reasonably well-developed manner while looking poised and confident in front of the audience is an important and significant accomplishment for a semester's work. A grade of "C" on a speech is an indication that you have achieved this level of competence. A grade of "D" or lower indicates that you have failed to fulfill the minimum standards on one or more major considerations.

The "B" speech. To receive a grade of "B," a speech must be more than simply, it must also be interesting. The introduction of the "B" speech is, spends more time and effort, and the body of the "B" speech has a which is to the central theme. The "B" speech also has and employs a (anecdotes, examples, visual aids, definitions, statistics, comparisons, and contrasts), as well as those materials to this particular audience. Often the conclusion of the "B" speech is more fully developed and better integrated with the theme of the speech. To continue my TV analogy, the depth of analysis will be comparable to that provided by a segment on the MacNeil-Lehrer Newshour or NPR's "All Things Considered."

Delivery in the "B" speech is one in which you actually look comfortable and at ease. Your posture is good, you gesture and move naturally and expressively, and your voice is more expressive and emphatic. As a result the audience shows active interest in what you are saying.

The "A" speech is more than interesting, it is. The introduction actively involves us with your topic in some way and makes us want to hear more. Your analysis of the subject is unusual, insightful, novel, or unexpected. Your examples are especially apt, well-adapted to the audience, and compelling. Your language is vivid (employing some effective imagery or sustained metaphor which unifies the entire speech); your organizational structure is memorable (they employ alliteration or are grammatically parallel, for example); transitions between points are varied and appropriate, allowing the audience to know at all times where you are in the speech and how the parts related to the whole. The conclusion of the "A" speech not only rounds the speech out it actually gives the speech a sense of impact or
forcefulness. Unfortunately, the TV metaphor breaks down at this point because the mass media rarely reaches this level of sophistication, although there are segments of "Frontline," "Nova," and comparable programs which do.

Delivery in an "A" speech goes beyond general poise and a sense of looking comfortable in front of your audience; in the "A" speech you are actively projecting your personality to your audience, actively employing voice, gesture, and movement to engage your audience's attention and enhance understanding of your ideas while being flexible enough to allow you to adapt to audience responses.

GOALS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GRADED SPEECHES

SPEECH #2: PERSUADING THROUGH INFORMATION AND PERSPECTIVE

3-5 Minutes; 75 points possible

The goal of this speech is to influence your audience's beliefs and/or behaviors by providing new information on a topic that is relevant to them, or by developing a new perspective on information they already may have. The major question we should be able to answer at the end is: did we learn anything new or understand something differently. It should be a topic that you already know something about and can make interesting to your rather diverse audience. Usually you will need to supplement your current knowledge with information obtained in research designed for this specific speech. Your topic must be significant and worthy of our (and your) time, but not so technical or narrow that it cannot be made relevant to the interests and concerns of an audience that has interests and expertise different than yours. Your topic should be sufficiently focused to allow you to treat it in satisfactory depth in the time allotted. Your audience should fully understand why you think this topic is worth our time. The introduction should prepare us for the ideas that you will present, the body should develop those ideas in an easy-to-understand, organized manner, and the conclusion will "wrap up" the presentation in a way that makes it memorable.

Other guidelines: Be prepared to answer questions from the audience (given the nature of this assignment most of these questions will ask for clarification or additional information). An outline of what you plan to say and a brief bibliography of key sources should be presented at the time of your speech. DO NOT ATTEMPT TO MEMORIZE THE SPEECH OR PRESENT IT FROM A COMPLETE MANUSCRIPT. Delivery should be extemporaneous, aided by a minimum of notes.

SPEECH #3: PERSUADING THROUGH ARGUMENTATION

5-7 Minutes; 100 points possible

The essence of persuasion is argument, the presentation of claims and reasons for accepting those claims. The goal of this speech is to influence your audience's beliefs and/or behaviors through the reasoning from available evidence to specific conclusions. In addition to developing arguments which are warranted by the evidence that you present, you should take care to ground your position in the values/attitudes of your audience and take steps to "pre-empt" likely objections to the positions you take. In particular, if you decide to omit consideration of some issues (which is almost inevitable given the brief amount of time that you have available), you need to explicitly justify that decision. Particularly
Effective argumentative speeches begin with relatively broad issues, quickly reduce them to core considerations, and then deal effectively with those central questions.

Other guidelines:

After this speech you will be questioned by at least one member of your audience (who has prepared him/herself for the task) and, probably, the professor. The focus of these questions generally are on lapses in argument, weaknesses in evidence, or important considerations that have been omitted. Effective responses generally keep the overall point of the speech in mind (and do not allow the discussion to move away from the focus of the speech into uncharted topics), are directly relevant to the focus of the question, and provide additional information or more in-depth arguments than were presented during the speech.

Questioning of a speech which persuades through argument

3 minutes; 25 points possible

The goal of your cross-examination is two-fold: to reveal weaknesses or omissions in the arguments of the speaker and to suggest considerations, evidence, or qualifications that the speaker evidently did not consider. Your goal is NOT TO EMBARRASS, BEFUDDLE, OR OTHERWISE INTIMIDATE the speaker. Rather, our objective is to initiate a dialogue on a topic of importance which will increase everyone's depth of understanding. Although you will know the topic of the speech ahead of time, you will not know the specific position(s) that the speaker will take. Of course, familiarizing yourself with the available evidence and arguments on the topic will both enhance your ability to fulfill your goal, while reducing the probability that you will become embarrassed, befuddled, or otherwise intimidated.

Other guidelines:

The key to effective cross-examination is to quickly figure out which of the speaker's arguments are most important to the case that s/he has presented, and to focus on weaknesses in those arguments. In some cases you will need to ask preliminary questions designed to clarify precisely what the speaker believes about those central issues.

Speech #5: Persuading through all of the available means

5-7 Minutes; 100 points possible.

The goal of this speech is to influence the audience's beliefs or behaviors through providing arguments whose effectiveness is enhanced by all of what Aristotle called "inartistic proofs" (language, emotional appeals, etc.) It should support a "proposition of policy," a specific recommendation about how your audience should act on a matter of personal or societal importance. It should conclude with a call for specific action(s) which members of your audience realistically can take to make a difference. Feel free to use any materials, techniques, etc. that are appropriate and potentially effective with a sophisticated, informed audience. Recognize that by this time in the semester you will have established a clear persona in the minds of your audience, one which provides guidelines and constraints for the arguments, appeal, and persuasive strategies that you can successfully employ.
I will distribute a group of “starting points” for your term projects after the end of the drop-add period

Misc. Course Information

- **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Policy Statement**

  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](http://disability.tamu.edu).

- **Academic Integrity Statement and Policy**

  “An Aggie does not lie, cheat or steal, or tolerate those who do.” For additional information, please visit: [http://www.tamu.edu/aggiehonor](http://www.tamu.edu/aggiehonor)

- **Grading Scale:**

  A = 90%-100%
  B = 80%-89%
  C = 70%-79%
  D = 60%-69%
  F = <60%

  *If you receive an * next to your grade on a project or exam, it means that I concluded that something other than your mastery of the material influenced your grade. If your final total for the semester is within 5 points of the next-higher grade, and you had one or more *s, I may bump your grade for the course up to the next letter grade.*