

ARGUMENT & DECISION

SPEECH 112

Alfred C. "Tuna" Snider, Instructor

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Lafayette 403, Tuesday-Thursday 11:00 AM-12:15 PM

SCOPE OF THE COURSE

This course attempts to acquaint the student with the various approaches to the structure, utilization, evaluation, and critique of arguments. A very basic treatment will be given to major theoretical approaches to argumentation (Aristotle, Toulmin, Perelman, etc.). The applicability and usefulness of different argumentative forms in different fields will be examined. Criteria and methods for evaluating arguments within a decision process will be examined. Throughout, students will be encouraged to apply class concepts to real arguments found in everyday experience, arguments offered as part of worksheets, and arguments found in actual instances of disagreement with the ideas of other students and the instructor.

READING MATERIALS

A list of readings will be supplied. They will be disseminated to students based on procedures that are harmonious with current copyright regulations.

Many readings will come from an online text, which can be found at be available on a password protected website. <http://www.uvm.edu/~asnider/argreadings>

TEACHING METHODS

This course will use three primary teaching methods.

First, the instructor will offer reasonably brief lectures. These will highlight both reading material and present new material. Careful listening and good notes will be a must.

Second, there will be on-going class discussions which students will be responsible for engaging in.

Third, there will be a series of exercises involving sample arguments as well as formal argument situations matching one student against another. These will be analyzed individually and/or jointly.

Education is incorrectly seen as a process through which the all-knowing "teacher" imparts the unquestioned "knowledge" commodity to the ignorant and passive "students." To be truly meaningful, the class must involve student and teacher together pursuing answers to questions neither may be truly able to answer conclusively. Disagreement is bound to arise, both about the concepts of argumentation and about the sample arguments we examine. It is essential that each student take part in these disagreements as a critical and active participant in order to learn about argument through direct experience. Learning by "doing" must substantially supplement learning by being "told to" in order for this course to be successful.

The concept of "indirect non—essentialism" (to be explained) will pervade the methods of this course.

REQUIREMENTS

PARTICIPATE: This implies that you come to class, are familiar with the material being discussed, and volunteer opinions and perceptions actively.

TAKE EXAMINATION: There will be a mid-term, format will vary.

ARGUMENT DRILL: Students will engage in two argument drills, where you will be matched against another student on the side of your choice of a topic of your choice.

WRITE A PAPER: You will write a 10-12 page paper analyzing arguments found in an area of controversy selected by the student and approved by the instructor. This typewritten document assumes basic literacy. A paper that fails to meet basic standards for college level work will be rejected.

EVALUATION

Students will be evaluated on the basis of earned points only. There will be no extra credit work available. Each assignment has a basic point value (adding up to 100) of which students will be awarded a portion based on the quality of their work. Final grades will be awarded with an eye towards natural breaks in the distribution of scores.

Point values are: paper 25, mid-term 20, class participation 15, argument drill #1 15, and argument drill #2 25.

Students should be aware of the University policies on academic honesty.

OUTSIDE OF CLASS

Students should feel free to meet with the instructor during office hours or at times that can be mutually agreed on. Feel free to ask for explanations of assignments, class material, grading, or anything else that might be of interest. The instructor's goal is to develop a friendly working relationship with each student in this class.

CONCLUSION

This is a tentative syllabus and may be revised. A day-to-day schedule of events and assignments will be provided.

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GUIDES FOR WRITTEN WORK IN SPEECH COMMUNICATION COURSES

Alfred C. Snider, Associate Professor, University of Vermont

This is a University. Students should have learned to write correctly in high school. If they did not, they should give an angry report back to their school and immediately seek help and instruction. Students who cannot write correctly should not receive credit for improperly written assignments and should not receive diplomas. Here are some of the guidelines you might wish to consider.

SENTENCES:

1. Use complete sentences only. No sentence fragments or run-on sentences should be tolerated.
2. Sentences should be logically related to each other and to the paragraph they appear in.
3. Clarity is important. When you can use fewer words to say the same thing, do so.
4. Do not begin sentences with words like "but, and, or."
5. The verb tense within a sentence should agree unless there is a logical reason why it should not. Properly use the verb "to be."
6. Make sure that your singular and plural words agree.

PARAGRAPHS:

1. A complete paragraph consists of a topic sentence in the beginning, a summary sentence at the end, and in between those two sentences a paragraph consists of sentences explaining, proving, and illustrating the topic and summary sentences.
2. Begin a new paragraph when you begin a new idea.
3. Do not make claims in a paragraph which you cannot prove or support.

WORDS:

1. Spell correctly.
2. Use "sound-alike" words correctly, such as to-two-too, know-no, its-it's-its', their-there-they're, by-bye-buy, etc.
3. Use "direction" words correctly, such as "to, by, for, in, of."
4. Do not use words you do not understand. When in doubt, look them up in a dictionary.
5. Avoid the use of slang and profanity unless it has a valid intellectual purpose.
6. Qualify your statements instead of assuming they are absolute truths.
7. If you use a certain word or phrase in a special way, define it.
8. Avoid the use of contractions.
9. Avoid using accusative language unless justified through explanations. Make an attempt to be objective.

PUNCTUATION:

1. Capital letters at the beginning of sentences and for proper nouns only.
2. Use commas correctly: for pauses, to differentiate between items in a list (remember to use a comma before the "and" in the list), and to connect clauses of longer sentences.
3. Question marks for questions and exclamation marks for exclamations.

FORMAT:

1. All written work should be typewritten and double spaced.
2. Margins should be no more than one inch on all sides.
3. For the purpose of determining length requirements, a page consists of 250 words.

IMPLEMENTATION:

1. Your work will be returned to you if: you have three spelling errors, you commit one sound-alike error, you use a sentence fragment or run-on sentence, you commit two tense of plural errors, or if the correction needed on your paper indicates a failure to produce university level written work.
2. You may not receive a grade on a written assignment until errors are corrected.

This takes a lot of extra time and effort by the instructor, but is certainly worth it. Learn to write correctly or forever have your writing brand you as a poorly educated and trained person. In a competitive world you can ill afford this badge of illiteracy.