

Student theories about the aims of argumentation

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1. The question.

Teachers like argument; it's an important aspect of what we teach, in disciplines throughout the university. We want students in every field to examine evidence critically, to reach conclusions prudently, to present those conclusions eloquently and to listen carefully to the responses they get back. Therefore we keep up specialized classes in debate, argumentative writing and informal logic, and also incorporate argumentative speaking and writing exercises in classes across the curriculum.

So teachers think argument is good. But what do *students* think? At a minimum, we need to know this in order to motivate students to learn. A negative attitude towards argument could undermine students' willingness to actively engage course material. After all, no one would want to hone a skill that will only "help" them anger their friends, pick nits, and make the weaker argument appear the stronger. Moreover, recent learning theory suggests a stronger reason to probe students' views. According to the "constructivist" approach (e.g., Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000), students never come to class with empty heads. They bring their own conceptions of the phenomena being studied with them, conceptions which have proven adequate to their needs (as the results McGrath, Maguire and English report from their own classrooms document so well). Any material the teacher presents will be fit into the pre-existing views, even if doing so requires it to be twisted out of recognition. Thus if students start with negative views of argument, it is likely that this view will distort whatever they encounter. For example, in an argumentation class students may hear all mentions of words related to "critical"—as in "critical thinking, critical questions, argument critique"—to mean "harsh and derogatory" as opposed to "careful and judicious," despite repeated warnings not to. If we want, as Maguire and English put it, for our students to *internalize* what we teach, we have to deal with the ideas they start from.

Unfortunately, there are at least some signs that students do not share the teacherly optimism about argument, holding instead a negative view of the subject. Gerald Graff has summarized his experience in the composition classroom in not-unfamiliar terms:

For many students, the very word "argument" . . . conjures up an image not of spirited conversational give and take, but of acrimonious warfare in which competitors revile each other and make enemies yet rarely change each other's minds. Disputes end up producing winners and losers or a stalemate that frustrates all parties; either way they are useless except for stirring up bad blood (2003, 56).

Nor are these suspicions ungrounded in the research. A strong negative streak turned up in the early studies of ordinary attitudes toward argument (Benoit, 1983; Scheerhorn, 1987; Trapp,

1986; Walker, 1991). Others have pointed out that a tie between argument and warfare is built into the English language (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and U.S. culture (Tannen, 1998).

Still, we'd be guilty of hasty generalization if we assumed that in our classes we always faced students with allegedly ordinary views. If we want to know what our students think, we should ask them. Over the past few years, I have been developing a research project to do just that. In previous work (2003, 2004), I have explored student attitudes towards formal debate exercises in non-debate (i.e., content-area) classes, and have presented the results of a class exercise meant to elicit and confront students' negative views. In this paper I hope to extend this work by exploring the aims students bring with them to a class devoted to argumentation and debate. These students, presumably, want to learn to argue better; they must hold some positive view or "theory" of what argument can do. *What theory?*—that is the question I want to ask.

Let me make this question more specific by narrating how it arose during my own development as a teacher. The first chapters of our argumentation and debate textbooks already preach a theory about the aims of argumentation. Consider this from the ninth edition of Freeley's text:

Debate is the process of inquiry and advocacy, a way of arriving at a reasoned judgment on a proposition. Individuals may use debate to reach a decision in their own mind; alternatively, individuals and groups may use it to bring others around to their way of thinking.

Since debate provides reasoned arguments for and against a proposition, it also provides opportunities for critical thinking. Society, like individuals, must have an effective way of making decisions. A free society is structured in such a way that many of its decisions are arrived at through debate. Law courts and legislative bodies are designed to utilize debate as their means of reaching decisions. In fact, any organization that conducts its business according to parliamentary procedure has selected debate as its method. Debate pervades our society at decision-making levels (1996, 3).

This passage is dominated by what I will call a *social* theory of the aim of argumentation. It stresses the importance of reaching epistemically better grounded solutions to collective problems. The primary benefit of argumentation is to society at large.

When I talked with my students, however, they spoke of their goals in taking an argumentation course in rather different terms. In particular, they often told me that they thought that the course would help them gain "self-confidence." This suggests what I will call somewhat awkwardly an *individualistic* theory of the aim of argumentation, one that stresses the importance of argument in supporting personal growth. I found such remarks striking and curious: I wasn't clear on what "self-confidence" was, nor why they thought they didn't have it, nor how learning how to argue better would help them cultivate it.

So in this study I want to examine whether students hold individualistic theories about the aims of argumentation, and if so, to fill in what those individualistic theories propose. In the

following sections, I will briefly discuss the method I adopted for answering this question, before sketching the results so far and summarizing what I have learned from them.

2. The class and the evidence.

The students whose views I study here were those who chose to enroll in an upper-division class in "argumentation, critical thinking and debate" in the current Fall semester. As one of many courses satisfying some majors' advanced communication requirement, it attracts students from across the university. Most were traditionally-aged juniors, with a few seniors and one sophomore. The class is practice-intensive, with a fairly formal whole-class debate about every two weeks for the first two-thirds of the course, and final small-group debates at the end. Nineteen of the 21 students enrolled at midterm consented to participate in the study. In the appendix, I attach the course syllabus.

From the work in this course I draw two sources of evidence about students' theories of the aims of argumentation. First, a variety of exercises in the class encourage students to reflect on their own goals and progress in learning how to argue. An initial class survey asks them to formulate their overall learning goals for the class. After each formal debate exercise, they are also invited to reflect on their experience and to articulate what they learned, both in informal papers and open discussion. Finally, at the end of class, each will hand in an overall self-assessment of their what they learned throughout the course.

Second, a series of assignments ask the students to state and defend their views of the purpose of argument, as practice on achieving the overall course goal that students be able "to explain what role (if any) arguing should play in your life and communities." Early in the semester, an in-class exercise and follow-up paper allows them to explore the attitudes towards argument they bring to the class (using the "what does arguing look like" exercise I describe elsewhere, 2004). In later assignments, they are asked to respond to brief readings and in-class discussions and state in increasingly sophisticated forms what their answer to the basic question, "Why argue?" The readings are quite varied, and include themes such as the relationship of argument to personal freedom, to liberation of the oppressed, to developing one's individual views, and to reaching good collective decisions in addition to more negative themes such as argument and domination. As part of the final exam, students will be required to state their "philosophy of argument" in its final, hopefully best-developed, form.

Some work in both categories are anonymously submitted "one minute papers" written in class. All except for the two final projects is either upgraded or graded on a "check/no credit" basis, with credit being awarded for any timely answer showing more than a couple of minutes thought.

I examine the student work using the techniques of the "cluster analysis" approach to rhetorical criticism. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper formally to defend rhetorical criticism as a method for the scholarship of teaching and learning, I do note that using it is in line with the methodological pluralism proposed for SoTL by Mary Taylor Huber in her essay, "Disciplinary Styles in the Scholarship of Teaching" (2002). As she argues, our individual "disciplinary styles empower the scholarship of teaching, not only by giving scholars a ready-

made way to imagine and present their work but also by giving shape to the problems they choose and the methods of inquiry they use." A familiar technique or method within rhetorical criticism, cluster analysis in particular encourages the critic to pay close attention (in Kenneth Burke's famous phrase) to "what goes with what" in a text. The critic starts with terms that are salient in their frequency or weight; collects other terms or themes that are associated with these key terms; and finally tries to observe the overall patterns that provide clues as to the speaker's underlying worldview (Foss, 1996). As such, it is an ideal technique for reconstructing a "thick" theory from the "thin" evidence of individual student reflections.

This preliminary study is based on all the written work of the semester except for the final self-assessment and final statement of philosophy. The oral in-class discussions, although they informed my thinking about student views, were not recorded. Where the immediate context of the student work is important to understand the response, I note it. Where the work was not submitted anonymously (as with some of the self-reflections), the author is identified by code number. Any identifying information within the quotations has been edited out. Finally, I silently correct misspellings but not other anomalies of student talk.

3. Results.

Let me start by admitting that students hold to multiple theories of the aims of argumentation. At least some of them agree with the standard, social view, at least some of the time. After an online "public forum" debate, in which each class member had had a chance to submit their own views and respond to those of others, I asked the students to reflect what sort of function such an activity might contribute to society at large. Several of the responses included themes like those in the following:

When I used to hear the word "argue" I would think of angry fighting or heated debates. Since I began this class, however, I have begun to think of argumentation as a necessary tool to advance society. Argumentation allows all perspectives and opinions to be voiced and considered by the public. They may bring awareness to people who did not know that an issue existed or they may lead to compromise between two opposing viewpoints. These results of argumentation allow people with different ideas to live together in a society....Discussion of these views expands public knowledge and can lead to a more informed society that can work together to make change (1).

Arguing is valuable to our society. It gives a chance for everyone to include their input into a decision that will affect them as a group, It allows people to make decisions that will solve problems and be for the common good (7).

Both these passages stress the importance of argument to society at large, in forming plans that all can live with.

Alternative themes emerged, however, even in the personal goals survey done on the first day of class. Ten students said that one of their goals for the class was to learn how to argue "fast," "impromptu," "on their feet," "on the spot" or even "on their toes"—that is, from a very unstable position. For example, one wrote: "I am concerned with my ability to debate

'impromptu' or verbally construct an argument on my toes" (6). Or another: "I want to learn how to build strong arguments with knowledge I have and be able to debate on the spot" (1).

Let us take this as a key term from which to begin the analysis, and ask: why this concern for "on the spot" arguing? In part, students are recognizing that argument skills exercised under such challenging conditions are demonstrations of *power*. Thus after one successful experience, a student wrote:

[The exercise] helped me to better think on my feet as well as take information better. I was able to recall the little details and cite what had been said in various articles (even though I couldn't remember the authors). I truly felt empowered by the debate and it felt good knowing that we came off strong (16).

Here the student's recall of even "little details" during the flux of the debate is the basis of a sense of personal "empowerment." Similarly, after an early debate student (2) expressed his/her sense of competency in being able to answer questions relevantly, which changed his/her attitude from one of nervousness to one of "accomplishment and competency":

Tuesday's debate over [topic] was an eye opening experience for me in regards to the feelings I experienced leading up to the debate, during the debate, and after our final remarks. Although I had done much research . . . I must admit that I was very nervous to present and questioned whether I would be able to answer questions of the board. To be an effective speaker I believe that one must have confidence and I can honestly say I was lacking that before the class period started. However, my anxiety soon diminished during the opening remarks when I became acquainted to the debate forum and saw that the [board's] questions were not hostile. Every time a question was asked I felt that I had a very strong and relevant rebuttal but was not able to speak up in time because I feel that the board seemed to address the two that gave the opening remarks. I can honestly say that I became frustrated with not being able to speak on certain issues, especially when I felt I could have given a better answer. I did feel a sense of power and confidence when I was able to answer questions in a credible and informative manner. ... Although I was very stressed leading up to the debate I did feel a sense of accomplishment and competency in respect to how I feel our group performed (2).

This student also makes two connections between argument power and "self-confidence" in particular. On one hand, the successful outcome of the experience led him/her to "a sense of power and confidence." At the same time, "to be an effective speaker one must have confidence"—or as we might say more technically, confidence is an important aspect of *ethos*.

It should be noted that this idea of argument competency or empowerment—a power *to*—fades naturally into the idea of argument as a power *over*—that is, the ability to *win* an argument. This theme was expressed especially in reflections after a discussion in which a student had vigorously defended a theory that victory is the primary aim of argument; for example, one student commented:

"Be dominated or dominate," has some truth in it. Everyone seems to always be in a battle for power and if you are knowledgeable or "win" a debate I think it gives a person a sense of success and power (2).

This, then, is a first cluster of terms, suggesting a first student theory of the "individualistic" aim of argument. It links argument with power in the senses of both power *to* and power *over*. From the teachers' point of view this theory is if nothing else useful, because it encourages students to recognize and voice their enjoyment of the basic class activity: debating. Self-reflections like the following are quite typical:

I was particularly proud of the way I performed during the debate. All year I have been reluctant to speak up even when I think I have something valuable to contribute. I made it my goal to go into this debate with more confidence in voicing my opinion. Once I got over the initial fear of speaking up, I became eager to state my case. I did a lot of preparation for this debate and I wanted to show it!...I am glad that I finally took the opportunity to speak and hope that it will make me be more confident in the future (1).

And other reflections echoed this theme, speaking of the debates as "fun" and "exciting" because of the sense of empowerment they encouraged.

But "empowerment" is not students' only theory of why "on the spot" argument performance is so vital. After the same discussion of victory in debate, many students' reflections specifically disavowed a connection between argument and winning. For example:

I believe that debate is about getting my voice heard and gaining respect. Some will debate to win--eventually this type of debate will happen for everyone, but generally speaking, that is not why I argue. . . . When your voice is heard, you are teaching someone else about your views. . . . Arguing to me isn't always about winning the fight; it's about people knowing what my feelings are about a subject (14).

Being a good arguer is not necessarily about winning or dominating others, rather it is about self-discovery and knowledge. The people that want only to win the argument seem to be narrow minded and resort to poor arguing tactics such as lying etc. (7).

Common terms in such responses seem to include "voice," "respect," "self-discovery" and "knowledge"; let us follow this cluster up and see where it leads.

Students frequently articulate their sense of what they are doing in argument by using spatial terminology related to being "on the spot." For example: "It felt good to *take a position* and sometimes it angered me when we weren't agreed with." Even more common were references to what the student was *doing* in that space, namely "standing (up/for)," a phrase that appeared in responses from at least seven students. So let us take this "stand up" complex as a second key term. At times, the students' "standing" references seem literal: when they argue, I *do* generally make them stand up. The following student, for example, may be speaking just of that physical act when he/she says: "I thought standing up in front of class speaking and giving our side was a good experience, but was kind of frustrating because we needed more evidence

and proof to stand behind us." But notice that the physical "standing up" is even here coupled with a nonliteral "standing behind." Frequently in the students' reflections the act of "standing" has a such a wider significance, both positive and negative:

Having skills as a debater would help me stand up for things I want or am passionate about in general (14).

I dislike conflict because I am forced to stand up for my own views and I tend to feel that my self--worth is under attack. I don't feel conflicts are worth my feeling bad about myself or my views so I just avoid them (3).

Notice that students are "standing up" for quite personal things—what they are "passionate about," their "*own* views." In related responses, "standing up" is taken also as a way of standing *out*; and what is being "put out" in public is specifically one's *self*:

I think that if you are arguing you are putting yourself out there in a way (5).

I personally prefer the research part of the debate because if I do eventually have to put myself out there to be attacked I want to have as strong a defense as possible, to protect myself from humiliation (3).

So it appears that in these students' views what happens when one argues "standing" "on the spot" is a public revelation of the self.

As the passages from student (3) suggest, some experience self-revelation in argument as decidedly risky. When you "put yourself out there," you can be attacked:

I felt sort of trapped and I needed to explain myself which I'm not used to.

I felt nervous as if I were in front of a firing squad. I was worried that when it came to my turn I wouldn't have anything to say.

Arguing values also leaves people vulnerable. To argue your values leaves you open to scorn and ridicule from people who don't agree with you (13).

The "vulnerability" mentioned in the last passage was expanded upon by student (19), who had had considerable experience in public speaking prior to the class:

Standing before a [large] audience . . . creates an incredible sense of vulnerability. As a speaker, offering yourself so wholly to an audience creates a human interaction whereas you are judged and examined for your ability to communicate but also the speaker experiences acceptance or rejection from the audience. . . . Opinions about you are quickly formed by the other person. Debating puts a person in the position to be examined by another (19).

If one fails to meet the challenges of the argument, the consequences to the self can be severe. Student (3)'s negative view was quoted twice above—his/her feeling of having "self-worth" under attack, and being faced with "humiliation."

At the same time, most students considered the rewards of self-revelation in argument to more than outweigh the risks. In part, students portray "standing up" as an opportunity—or compulsion—to consider more deeply "where I stand." As one student put it, "I felt defensive, but it made me think harder about my stance." Another student with extensive prior experience articulated his/her view thus:

The more you're forced to defend an idea, the more you really grow to understand and gain a better view of your own opinion. I spend a lot of time defending [a topic]. Each time I find myself defending that issue, I just become that much more passionate about it and understand better why I believe what I do. Being challenged, and being forced to defend my own view only creates better understanding of where I stand. It gets to the point where I welcome a challenge because I always grow stronger as a result (9).

And again, what can grow stronger through argument is not only one's "own *view*" but one's *self*. "Being forced to define your ideas also forces you to define yourself," as one student explained. Others similarly pointed out the "personal growth," "self-discovery," self "learning" and self "definition" that can come from argument:

I think arguing creates personal growth in everyone. It does make you listen to the other side of arguments and if nothing else, makes your arguments stronger. As your arguments become stronger, so do you as a person as does your knowledge of the subject and others' views. I think arguing helps us learn about others, but we also learn about ourselves (16).

I think argumentation and debate have helped me define who I am as a person. It forces me to examine the facts and decide for myself what is important to me. People who choose not to take a stand on an issue would have a hard time defining their beliefs and values (7).

The themes in this last passage were picked up by other students who noted the negative effects of *not* "standing up" for things. For student (16)—the experienced speaker—the alternative to "standing up" was to "sit silently where no one can judge your ability to communicate, interact, think, or passions." Several students commented on the personal costs of "sitting" the argument out. For example:

There exists a girl in [an organization that the student belongs to] that holds a very high position. . . . I see her as a giant pushover because she never expresses her views on anything; she simply lets people tell her what to think and how to feel about something. This particular person and situation makes me agree with this statement because I fell like if this girl would stand up and vocalize what she believes in, then I would have more respect for her in such a leadership role. A person should never be ashamed to voice something they believe in. I think that some people don't stick up for something

they think is right because either they don't think it's that big of a deal or they so desperately want to avoid conflict that they won't say anything so they don't make anybody angry with them (6).

So "self-definition" through argument may be painful, but it also seems necessary.

Such self-"definition" is not the only consequences of "standing up" that students note. "Standing up" also gives one a place or "voice" among others. As one student put it, "I believe that debate is about getting my voice heard and gaining respect" (14). Student (9) articulated a similar thought, writing, "there are many reasons to argue, but to me, it's a way to voice opinions and be heard." Having a "voice" is here portrayed as a way of gaining "respect" from others. In another reflection, student (9) added that it is also a way of gaining "respect" *for* them.

I never changed my stance [when arguing one year] but I started to see things from another angle, and after being challenged I also developed respect for the other side. Having respect for the other side only makes you stronger (9).

Still other students spoke of the "respect" as *mutual*. "Argument (debate) brings on respect for one another" (2); another wrote: "Even when you don't agree with others on key issues listening to them can lead to a mutual respect and understand of the fundamental differences between humans" (13). Still another wrote of a significant experience he/she had had:

I started out by thinking that arguing involves and frustration (I think) because I often argued with my parents and felt the emotions of anger and frustration. Then, I moved to Des Moines my senior year of high school to work in the legislature and my views of arguing shifted. I saw people who would "argue" over a particular piece of legislation and still remain respectful and friends afterwards (and during I suppose). Even I would get into arguments with the legislators and it generally strengthened our respect for each other. I learned, by observing and by doing, that arguing can actually be very positive.

To summarize this cluster of terms expressing a second "individualistic" theory of the aims of argument: In argument, people "stand up" for their views and "put themselves out there." This is risky, in that it makes them "vulnerable." At the same time, it can lead them to a deeper knowledge of "where they stand," and indeed to "self-discovery;" further, in giving "voice" to views people also give and gain "respect." The outcome of the entire process can be a positive and well-justified self-evaluation. As one student put it, "It does make me proud that I have a voice" (12). And in a later reflection, this student went on to tie both the terminologies of "standing up" and "power" explicitly to *self-confidence*:

To get up and speak and be respected for what I was saying, even if others did not agree, was truly, as is explained in [one course reading,] exhilarating. There is no other way to describe the feeling when you're in an argument and you're stating your opinion and you know that you're winning. I would like to feel like that again: confident and knowledgeable and eloquent (12).

This, then, appears to be a preliminary answer to the question with which I began.

4. Interpretation.

So what do we know when we know what students think about the aims of argumentation? For one thing, this analysis provides some plausible advice for how to redesign the content of my argumentation course to better meet students' aims. For example, it encourages me not to determine the "winner" of a debate, nor even to force the debate to end with a resolution of the issue. Instead, I should be developing debate formats that both force students to take a stand while minimizing the risks they incur. In retrospect, one particularly successful debate in this class met these requirements: an informal "round table" involving the entire class, it gave students roles in a corporation (allowing them to *pretend*, and thus avoid some of the consequences of self-commitment) while strongly encouraging their individual voices and values. I'm sure that continued reflection, along with students' final course assessments, will reveal other revisions that will allow students to develop the "self-confidence" they look for.

At this point, it's appropriate to step back and see whether the results of this class could also contribute to our understanding in some larger context. Down one path, we could take students' argumentation theories as telling us something important about *students*. In particular, I am intrigued by the echoes between the attitudes towards argument students are expressing in my class and the self-understandings organized by William Perry (1999, orig. 1968) into his well-known model of intellectual and ethical development during the college years. Perry sees students as progressing on a journey towards "commitment," in which the individual, while recognizing the legitimate diversity of views, nevertheless takes and is willing to defend the personal stands which define him/her as a person. There is a small, if a little outdated, body of work exploring intersections between Perry's scheme and communication instruction generally (Orr, 1978; Bizzell, 1984; Burnham, 1986). Down this road, I would proceed by exploring Perry's model more deeply, and by asking how instruction in argumentation could be further refined to "nudge" students along their developmental journey.

But in this paper, I want to take the other path. We've listened to students expressing their theories of argumentation. What I propose is that we take them not as teaching us something about *students*, but something about *argumentation*. In other words, we should take student theories seriously *as* theories. I will briefly explore this proposal here first by sketching how the student voices could contribute to contemporary argumentation theory, and second by going "meta" and pointing out the consequences of my analysis for our conception of communication theory itself.

As I've laid out above, student's views of "why argue" diverge from the inspirational commonplaces of the early chapters of our argumentation and debate textbooks. Where the textbooks preach social goals for argumentation, the students articulate individualistic ones. Now, these textbook prefaces did not appear out of nowhere; they are themselves expressing a conception of argumentation deeply rooted in argumentation theory. They trace their pedigree back to Douglas Ehninger's conceptualization of debate as a method of civic decision-making (1958, 1966, 1970). In Ehninger's synthesis, debate is the way we can cooperate in adversarial process exploring reasons in order to make well-founded decisions. This basic theoretical

orientation has been renewed or independently reinvented by many contemporary argumentation theorists. The pragma-dialectical school, for example, begins by taking argumentation as a cooperative process leading to the rational resolution of a disagreement between people (e.g., van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1984).

The individualistic student theory associating argument with self-discovery challenges this received social view. Are students simply wrong? In fact, it is the case that their views also have echoes in argumentation theory. A generation ago, philosopher Henry W. Johnstone proposed a trenchantly individualistic view of argumentation. Standing against "hopeful" theories of argumentation (1959, 132-3) which asserted that argument is meant to reconcile disagreements, Johnstone focused on the personal experience of the arguer. In his view, the argumentative encounter with someone who disagrees becomes an essential moment of self-formation, since it is only then that a person becomes conscious of her beliefs *as* beliefs, not just as "the way things are." Acknowledging disagreement, the person is forced to defend her beliefs with reasons. Through this process, she may claim her beliefs as her own; they become the commitments that define her as a person. But also through this process, she puts herself at risk, since if she cannot defend her beliefs she must give them up. As Johnstone puts it, "my own position is that argument is in fact essential to those who engage in it—a person who chooses argument does in fact choose himself" (1978, 111).

The choice between individualistic and social theories of argument is consequential. Take the concept of "disagreement," for example. In social theories, disagreements are something to be resolved; argument is aimed to put disagreement to rest. In individualistic theories, disagreements—however painful—are inevitable and irresolvable; they provide vital opportunities for the individual growth that is the aim of argument. Now, within the argumentation studies community, we haven't paid much attention to Johnstone's work recently (Goodwin, 2001). Perhaps it's time to listen to both him and our students, and consider what an individualistic theory of argumentation would look like, when fully worked out?

That project is obviously beyond the scope of this paper. So let me conclude with a brief reflection on what this line of thinking might mean for scholarship—both the ordinary scholarship of research into communication theory, and the new scholarship of teaching and learning. I began this paper by noting why understanding student views is important: so we can motivate them better, and so we can help them (re)construct their own knowledge. It should be noted that both these reasons take students' original conceptions as a *problem* to be dealt with, something calling for *removal* or *modification*.

There is a third possibility: that student initial views are something calling for *respect* and sometimes *critique*.

Bob Craig has encouraged us to consider Communication as a practical discipline (1989). In this conception, theory does not stand apart from practice. Instead, theory is embedded in practice; as ordinary folk go about communicating, they always already draw upon ideas about what they are and should be doing. Further, "quite properly and unsurprisingly," the theories of professionals like those attending this conference "are largely derived from [these] ordinary concepts that people use to manage an make sense" of their everyday practice (1999, 21). Such

"academic research refines, systematizes and transforms" the ordinary conceptions, but does not replace them (22). For the overall goal is not pure theory, but instead theory that will help cultivate the practice. Indeed, Craig uses the same term that Maguire and English adopt—*phronesis*. He explains:

A practical discipline is a relatively coherent intellectual-professional enterprise, the essential purpose of which is to cultivate a field of social practice. . . . A practical discipline "cultivates" a practice by engaging with the community of practitioners in a reflective discourse. . . . The goal is to engage theory with practice in ways that are actually helpful to the development of *techne* and *phronesis*—fine technical skill under the governance of wise practical judgment—within the community of practitioners. It is this final emphasis on practical judgment that distinguishes a practical discipline from a scientific discipline, the ultimate goal of which is a theoretical understanding of nature (1996, 468-9).

So we should feel sorry for biologists, economists, mathematicians and such like. Theirs are not practical disciplines; for them, studying cells and studying students are different acts. We in Communication have it easy. The starting points of our research are ordinary views—the same ordinary views students bring with them into our classrooms. The ending points of our research are likewise ordinary views—the ordinary views developed after reflection that students (hopefully!) take with them from our classrooms. In between, we and our students are essentially co-investigators into communication theory, each learning from each other. Teachers challenge students to articulate their views, consider evidence and eliminate inconsistencies—as is well-evidenced by the other two papers on this panel. Students in turn challenge teachers to think more broadly and realistically about the complexities of communication practice.

Thus the scholarship of teaching and learning communication needs no special defense, because it is simply communication scholarship.

5. References

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Sp Com 322: Argumentation, Critical Thinking & Debate

Fall, 2004

Jean Goodwin

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226 Pearson, Wed & Fri 1-2, Thurs 11-12
and freely by appointment

Goals:

This class promises to make you a skilled arguer when debating issues of public importance. You will be able:

1. to construct clear, strong and eloquent arguments, both orally and in writing;
2. to listen, summarize, and respond to the arguments of others;
3. to evaluate the choices you and others make in constructing arguments;
4. to evaluate sources of information, especially online;
5. to design fair and efficient debate formats;
6. to explain what role (if any) arguing should play in your life and communities.

Why should you want to become a skilled arguer? As the last course goal suggests, that is a question you'll answer for yourself throughout the semester.

Starting point:

I presume that you want to do the work necessary to improve your skills as an arguer. I also presume that you care about some of the issues facing the University community, the city of Ames, the state of Iowa, the U.S.A. and the world generally. I do not presume that you have any previous knowledge of argumentation or debate, although it's very probable that you've argued *sometime* in your life! However, you should be able to stand up and give a sound speech (i.e., you've taken a public speaking class), and you should be able to write a decent short paper (i.e., you've taken a composition class).

Three principles guiding us from starting point to goals:

1. *Responsibility*. Fundamentally, your learning is in your own hands—especially in a course like this, where you're learning how to *do* something. It's therefore *your* responsibility to take advantage of the opportunities and freedoms this class will offer: to invest your time wisely, to cooperate with your peers willingly, and to evaluate carefully your strengths and weaknesses.

2. *Accommodation*. It's *my* responsibility to help every student achieve the highest level of learning. Everyone learns differently. Therefore everything in this course can be changed—if you ask in advance, and give me a good reason. Hint: Tell me how it will help you learn.

I put this principle in every syllabus. But no one seems to believe it. Sad! I suggest you put my commitment to the test by asking for something you need, and see what happens.

3. *Integrity*. This class will work on the honor system. I will presume you are being honest and up front with me. At the same time, I have zero tolerance for plagiarism or any other dishonesty. All work you (or your group) sign your name to must be your own. If it is not, you will receive a “zero” and you *will* be reported for disciplinary proceedings, as required by University rule. Therefore, if you have any doubts about how to use quotation marks or citations to show you are using sources, see the online reading "How Not to Plagiarize" and talk to me immediately!

General overview of the path to come:

In the first eleven weeks we will work on basic argument skills by debating a series of cases related to genetically modified (GMO) foods. Tuesdays will in general be *practice* days, devoted to more or less formal group debates. Thursdays will in general be *concept* days, devoted to learning about and trying out new ideas. So you can expect to prepare a debate or paper each Tuesday, and to take a quiz on the week's readings each Thursday.

In the 11th & 12th weeks we'll pause, review and assess progress with an exam and other evaluations.

In the final month of the course, you will work in a group to research, develop and present a debate on a topic of your choice.

Overall, in line with the general policy for ISU courses, you can expect to spend about nine hours a week on this course—two and a half in class, and about six or seven outside of class. Much of your outside time will be spent on preparing arguments— researching, brainstorming, outlining, writing, practicing, revising—both individually and in a group.

Resources for getting from starting point to goal:

1. *Peer group.* At the end of the first week, you'll be assigned to a peer work group. Most in-class activities will be done as part of this group, and 10% of your final grade will be based on your peers' evaluation of your contribution to group performance. Your final debate will also be done as a group, although for this project you are free to break up or re-arrange members. NOTE: *I expect that you'll learn more from working with your groupmates than from anything else in this course.* But groups are only as good as the members make them; it is up to you to contribute to making your group work. See the online readings for suggestions about group work.

2. *The instructor.* Who am I? See my personal website (www.public.iastate.edu/~goodwin/) for details. It is easiest to reach me via email (goodwin@iastate.edu). I also *strongly* encourage you to come to my office hours (or make an appointment) with any concerns:

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3. *The course assistant.* Crystal Montoya (cmontoya@iastate.edu), a senior who took the class last year, has come back to help this year. She is *very* available to help advise or tutor you as individuals or as a group, so take advantage of this unique resource.

4. *Class time.* Class attendance only required on Thursday, 4 November, during the final debates and during exam week, in the sense that there is no *grade* penalty any other day. But there is this automatic penalty: you'll miss what we do.

5. *Readings.* Three books (Weston, *Rulebook for Arguments*; Ruse & Castle, *Genetically Modified Foods*; Harris, *Genetically Engineered Foods*) are available at the UBS. I'll be handing out a few other readings, and there will be further resources online at the course website.

6. *Course webpage.* The WebCT course webpage will allow you to check your grades, get course readings and see course assignments. You'll also use it to hand in your group's meeting minutes, and for one of the debates. Check it now out for some questions on the quiz Thursday of first week. To access the course webpage, click on "WebCT" at the lower left-hand corner of the ISU homepage. You'll be taken to a page on which you can log in (using your email ID and password) or get help. Ask me or your peers if you need assistance.

7. *Your fellow students, the ISU community, and the rest of your life.* Basically, if you never discuss this class with someone outside of class, then we've all failed!

A note about a study involving this course:

Is arguing a good thing or a bad thing? How does it fit into your personal, professional or civic life? As a society, how does it help us?

This course asks you to think about these questions—it's course goal #6. To achieve that goal, all of you are required to read the thoughts of others and to write a series of short essays (at home, in class and on the exam) stating and defending your views.

Now, one of my research projects is to investigate what ordinary people—like you—think about these questions.

If we knew what ordinary people think, people who teach argument—like me—would be better able to adapt their courses to students' interests and needs. Plus we would better understand argument itself, since it's very likely that ordinary people are *right* in their considered views.

In order to study what people think about these questions, I will be examining some of the work students do in this class. No one will be asked to do any "extra" assignments for this study. Instead, I will make copies of some of the required work this semester, remove the names and grade, and analyze the ideas. When I present or publish my results, I may quote the work, but I will never identify the person who wrote it.

I've done this kind of study before in other classes. If you're interested in seeing the kinds of things I've written about, I've put copies of my articles online at my homepage, in the teaching section: www.public.iastate.edu/~goodwin/.

Your work will be examined for this study *only* if you consent. You *do not* have to consent. There will be no extra credit for participating in the study, and no penalty of any kind for not participating.

In the second week we'll talk in detail about the study, and you'll have a chance to ask questions or express concerns. (Or you can email me at any time: goodwin@iastate.edu.) I'll also give you a sheet describing the study in detail. If you consent to participate, all you need to do is sign the sheet and give it back to me.

Schedule in detail

day	date	What to expect in class: main activities and topics	What to prepare prior to class: readings and assignments.
1 T	Aug 24	Genetically modified crops—should we be developing them? Introduction to the course. Class survey.	---
R	26	First quiz—on syllabus. What is a good argument? Groups assigned.	This syllabus. Case: The Neighbors (online). <i>Genetically Engineered Foods</i> , 9-29. <i>Genetically Modified Foods</i> , 21-27.
2 T	31	Debate: The Neighbors.	As a group, prepare for your assigned role in "The Neighbors."
R	Sep 2	Peer- and self-review of papers. What does arguing look like?	On peer review (online). On self-assessment (online). Why Argue?—Some Views (online).
3 T	7	Informal debate: Why argue? The burden of proof.	As a group, meet with course assistant, negotiate and write up your group ground rules. Submit your first meeting minutes online. As an individual, complete "Attitudes towards Arguing" and "Learning Styles" homework (handout). Ground Rules for Groups (online). Dealing with Couch Potatoes (online). On Meeting Minutes (online).
R	9	Argument basics.	3 Ways of Thinking about Argument (online). One Minute Eloquence (online). <i>Rulebook</i> , Introduction & chap. 1. Case: Golden Rice (online).
4 T	14	Informal debate: Golden Rice. Listening (reading) and understanding others' arguments.	<i>Genetically Modified Foods</i> , pp. 29-64, and online case readings. How to Abstract (online).
R	16	CLASS MEETS IN 81 DURHAM. Analyzing and using information from web sources. How NOT to plagiarize.	<i>Rulebook</i> , chap. 4. Analyzing Web-Based Sources (online). How Not to Plagiarize (online).
5 T	21	Debate: Golden Rice.	As a group, prepare for the debate, including the written abstracts.
R	23	Does argument contribute to personal growth? Preliminary peer assessment of members' contribution to the group.	Homework: What did the debate feel like? Review: Why argue? Final Exam Questions (online). Case: LEANgeneered Pork.
6 T	28	No class; individual meetings with instructor to set personal learning goals and discuss progress in course.	<i>Genetically Modified Foods</i> , pp. 11-19, 80-87, 111-129.
R	30	Values and how to argue them. Debate formats—why they matter.	Arguing Values (online).
7 T	Oct 5	Debate: LEANgeneered Pork.	As a group, prepare for the debate, including the written abstracts.
R	7	How does religion fit into argument? Midterm review of class.	Case: GMOs, Good or Bad? (online). Homework: web source analysis update.

8 T	12	Predicting the future by arguing causes & examples.	<i>Rulebook</i> , chap. 2 & 5. <i>Genetically Engineered Foods</i> , 30-69.
R	14	Replying to arguments by counterargument and refutation.	Homework: "peer" review an argument. <i>Rulebook</i> , chap. 7, 8 & 9.
9 T	19	CLASS MEETS IN 81 DURHAM. Review the online debate; practice web source analysis again.	Submit your individual online debate paper to the course website, and hand your abstracts in class.
R	21	Does argument contribute to society at large? A preview of the rest of the course.	Case: Labeling (online). Review: Why Argue? Homework: The social value of arguing.
10 T	26	Fallacies and what to do with them.	<i>Rulebook</i> , chap. 10.
R	28	Are women worse at arguing than men? Flowing a debate.	<i>Genetically Modified Foods</i> , 131-147. <i>Genetically Engineered Foods</i> , 70-79. Labeling case readings (online).
11 T	Nov 2	Debate: Labeling.	As a group, prepare for the debate, including the written abstracts.
R	4	Pre-exam review of entire course. Final peer grading of each members' contribution to the group. Attendance required.	Last day to submit your group members & topic for the final debates.
12 T	9	CLASS MEETS IN 81 DURHAM. How to research your final debate topic using web resources.	Homework: Locate a website.
R	11	Final exam.	---
13 T	16	Review the exam. Demonstration debate by course assistant. Judging debates.	---
R	18	No class; group work day and practice debates with course assistant/instructor. Last day to hand in any revised coursework.	---
		Thanksgiving week!	
14 T	30	No class; group work day and practice debates with course assistant/instructor.	---
R	Dec 2	Final debates. Attendance required.	In addition to debating and submitting abstracts, each student will submit a peer assessment of one debate, and a self-assessment of their own.
15 T	7	Final debates. Attendance required.	---
R	9	Final debates. Attendance required.	---
16M	15 9:45 a.m.	(Tentative; see Registrar for official final exam schedule.) Course evaluation-- attendance required. Make-up exam (optional).	Final self-assessment due.

Grading

I am convinced that each of you can reach the highest level of accomplishment, and I am committed to doing anything I can to help you do so. One of my main roles is to give you detailed feedback on your practice debates and arguments, so you can see what at least one audience member thought about them.

By University rule, I am also required to give you a letter grade at the end of the semester reflecting your actual level of accomplishment in meeting the course goals. If there is a grading method that would best help you learn, come and propose it to me and I will try to accommodate you. Meanwhile, the following will be the basic or “default” method of assessing your accomplishments in order to assign letter grades:

Practice work (mostly the first 11 weeks)	20 points
Best 2 of 3 group debates (weeks 5, 7 & 11)	20 points
Individual online debate paper (week 9)	10 points
Peer evaluation of contribution to group work (week 11)	10 points
Exam (week 12/re-take during finals week)	15 points
Individual participation in final debates (weeks 14 & 15)	25 points
Final self-assessment (finals week)	step up/no change/step down

Notes and policies:

1. "Practice work" includes quizzes, homework, in-class exercises and major self- and peer reviews. It will be graded on a check (C or above)/zero basis. It's meant to keep you on track and learning prior to showing your real skills in the graded debates. Therefore *no late practice work will be accepted*. Further, because of formatting and transmission problems, *do not submit practice work by email*. If you're not coming to class the day some practice work is due, either put it in my mailbox or have a friend hand it in prior to the assigned time. And if you are going to miss the practice work, see me *in advance, not afterwards* to arrange for an accommodation of your situation.
2. Although you can't turn in work late, you can revise any work for extra credit at any time before 14th week. To get the extra credit, arrange to meet with the course assistant to go over the work, re-do it following her suggestions, and then hand it in to me, with the course assistant's signature. If I see significant improvement, I will give 1 point of credit.
3. The final exam will be given in the 12th week. If you're dissatisfied with your performance, you may re-take any section(s) of the exam at the scheduled exam time during finals week.
4. Throughout the semester, I will be asking you to assess your own progress in the class. At the end of the semester, I invite you to look back and assess your learning over the entire term, explaining what you aimed to learn, how your learning strategies worked, and where you ended up. This final self-assessment will be graded on the basis of its insight and honesty. An excellent self-assessment will raise the final grade one step (e.g., B to B+); an adequate one will leave it the same; an inadequate one will lower it one step.
5. **Finally, note that class attendance is required on Thursday, 4 November (for peer reviews), during the final debates in the 14th and 15th week and during the scheduled exam time in finals week, subject to a one step grade penalty (e.g., B to B-).**

Last Year's Student Comments

At the end of the class, I'll ask you to say a few words to next year's students, which I will put in the syllabus exactly as you write them. Here are all the responses from last year. As you read them, keep in mind that I've made many changes in the class to try to deal with their concerns—hopefully! (For example, I've decreased the number of checks and increased the number of letter grades you'll be getting.) If you're interested, I'd be happy to share the full course evaluations with you.

Understand the grading system. Discover what checks mean. Do the work.

Put forth a full effort and have a good attitude and you will learn a lot from this class.

Don't make things harder than they are. This class isn't hard, just do you work & meet regularly as a group.

Be ready to commit a lot of time and energy. Say in for the whole semester or get out early.

Hard work is a must, but will improve your public speaking and abilities to argue.

Be ready to work. If you put the time & effort in, you won't be disappointed. Make your group a part of your ISU family, and hold them accountable.

I'm writing this before I get my final grade...so I'm not yet sure how I feel about the course. I like arguing—you learn a lot about that and other things as well in the course. It's a good class but be prepared for it to drive you crazy and look out for unorthodox grading methods.

Work hard, it's worth it!

This course is not cakework [?]. You cannot skip all the time. But if you really enjoy debating you won't do that anyway, right?

The effort you put in will be the grade that you earn in the end. A lot of out of class time w/small groups only during debate process.

Professor Goodwin does not give A,B,C grades throughout this course, but you will know where you stand by assessing yourself. If you put effort into this class you will do well, if you don't she will know. She always knows!

This course involves a lot of writing & self-assessment. If you're honest with yourself you will learn a lot.

If you put a lot into this course, you will get a lot from it. Work ahead—keep a positive attitude!

Have fun...umm work hard—or you will die!

Don't drop this course! Make yourself take it & you'll be glad you did in the end. I am not a natural student, I don't love school, this was a good experience.

If you stay motivated to complete daily assignments through the first 12 weeks or so, this is a great course. It's fun and informative for all skill levels.

Use your group members to your advantage! It seems hard, but you learn a lot—just stick with it.