

Sp Com 322: Argumentation, Critical Thinking & Debate

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226 Pearson, TR 11-12, M 2-3

Goals:

This class promises to make you a skilled arguer in debates on issues of public importance.

Among other things, you will learn:

- most importantly, to listen, understand, and respond to those you disagree with;
- to construct clear, powerful, and complex arguments, both orally and in writing;
- to assess the quality of arguments, both your own and others';
- to evaluate information you find in your research, especially on the Web;
- to engage in debate, vigorously and civilly;
- to design debate formats that will fairly and efficiently achieve your purposes;
- what role (if any) arguing should play in your life and communities;
- self-confidence, since you will know your own skills as an arguer.

Why should you want to become a skilled arguer?--why do you want to learn these things? As the last bullet point suggests, that is a question you'll be asked to figure out for yourself.

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 goal:

1. *Responsibility.* It's my job to do everything I can to help you learn. But fundamentally, your progress is in your hands, especially in a course like this, where you're learning how to *do* something. It's primarily up to you to take advantage of the opportunities and freedoms this class will offer, to invest your time wisely and whole-heartedly, and to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of your own learning.
2. *Accommodation.* Everyone learns differently. Therefore everything in this syllabus can be changed—if you ask, and give me a good reason. Hint: Tell me how it will help you learn.
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 (group's) name to must be your (group's) own. If it is not, it 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 basic paper & speech guidelines on the course website and talk to me immediately!

General overview of the path to come:

In the first ten weeks we will work on basic argument skills by debating a series of cases related to genetically modified (GM) crops. Tuesdays will in general be *practice* days, devoted to group debates or peer-reviewing of individual papers. Thursdays will in general be *concept* days, devoted to learning about and trying out new ideas. So you can generally expect to prepare a debate or paper each Tuesday, and to take a quiz each Thursday.

In the eleventh week we'll pause, review and assess progress with an exam.

In the final month of the course, you will research, develop and present a group 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, revising .

Resources for getting from starting point to goal:

1. *Class time.* Class attendance only required the last day of class, in the sense that there is no grade penalty any other day. But there is this automatic penalty: you'll miss what we do. In particular, you will miss a unique opportunity to practice your arguing skills.

2. *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—unless your group fires you, or you ask to leave. 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 course website for suggestions about group work.

3. *The instructor.* 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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4. *The course assistants.* Amanda Lee and Ryan O'Donnell, two students who took the class last year, have come back to help this year. They are VERY available to help tutor you as individuals or as a group, so take advantage of this unique resource.

5. *Readings.* Three books (Weston, *Rulebook for Arguments*; Alexander & Tate, *Web Wisdom*; Ruse & Castle, *Genetically Modified 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 course webpage will store copies of all course policies and assignments and link to useful resources. Check it out for some questions on the quiz Thurs. of first week:

<http://www.public.iastate.edu/~goodwin/spcom322/index.html>

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 failed.

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 26	Genetically modified crops—should we be making them? Introduction to the class. Class survey.	---
R	28	First quiz—on syllabus. What is a good argument? Groups assigned.	This syllabus. Write your 1st paper. Case: The Neighbors (online).
2 T	Sep 2	Debate: The Neighbors.	As a group, prepare for your assigned role in "The Neighbors."
R	4	Peer- and self-review of papers. What does arguing look like?	As individuals, write your 2nd paper. Why argue?—some views (handout).
3 T	9	Debate: why argue—if at all? The burden of proof.	Two sets of suggestions for effective group work (online). As a group, meet with course assistants, negotiate and write up your group contract. As individuals, draft your personal goals essay (3rd paper). As individuals, do the "learning styles" homework.
R	11	Argument basics.	3 ways of thinking about arguments. (handout) One minute eloquence (handout). <i>Rulebook</i> , Introduction & chap. 1. Case: Golden Rice (online).
4 T	16	Debate: Golden Rice.	<i>Genetically Modified Foods</i> , pp. 29-64. As a group, prepare to debate your assigned role. Feel free to contact your course assistant for help.
R	18	Analyzing and using information. Plagiarism.	<i>Rulebook</i> , chap. 4. <i>Web Wisdom</i> , chap. 2. Guidelines for papers and speeches (online). Cases #3 and 4 (online; TBA).
5 T	23	Peer review of papers. Introduction to debate formats. Analyzing information—some examples.	<i>Rulebook</i> , chaps. 7, 8, 9. Individually, draft your Golden Rice paper (4th paper). Individually or as a group, do the web analysis homework.
R	25	Note: Class hopefully will meet in a computer lab. Analyzing web information. CAs demonstrate one or two web searches they've done for their debate.	<i>Web Wisdom</i> , chap. 4 Finalize your Golden Rice paper (4th paper), working with your CA if you wish.
6 T	30	No class; individual meetings with instructor to determine grading standards.	---
R	Oct 2	"Flowing" a debate. Arguing about examples and analogies. Counterargument and refutation.	<i>Rulebook</i> , chap. 2 & 3.
7 T	7	Why argue?—JG Debate: Case #3 (TBA)	<i>Genetically Modified Foods</i> , pp. 11-19, 80-87, 115-122. As individuals/group, prepare either to debate, or write your 5th paper.
R	9	Religion and public argument. Arguing	Weston, c. 5.

		about causes	
8 T	14	Debate: Case #4 (TBA)	<i>Genetically Modified Foods</i> , pp. 301-321; and readings online (TBA). As individuals/group, prepare either to debate, or write your 5th paper.
R	16	Experts and argument. Organization day—what is going to happen for the rest of the semester?	Case: Labeling (online).
9 T	21	Practice in assessing and refuting complex arguments.	<i>Genetically Modified Foods</i> , pp. 131-147. Meet and decide on your final debate topic, with whatever people you want to work with.
R	23	Sign-ups for final debate topics and dates. Debate and personal style. Fallacies.	Fallacies (<i>Rulebook</i> chap. 10): loaded language, persuasive definition, poisoning the well, red herring, weasel word.
10 T	28	Debate: Labeling.	As a group, prepare for your role in the debate.
R	30	Advanced website assessment and web research. Hopefully, class meets in a computer lab again.	<i>Web Wisdom</i> chaps. 5, 7, 8. As individuals, assess Tuesday's debate; (6th paper).
11 T	Nov 4	Course review, sample exam questions. Debate and your <i>self</i> .	Sample questions (online). Fallacies (<i>Rulebook</i> chap. 10): ad hominem; ad misericordiam; ad populum; straw man. As individuals, assess the debate format of your group (7th paper).
R	6	Exam. Last day to declare debate topic.	---
12 T	11	Exam review; group work day.	---
R	13	No class; meetings with instructor.	---
13 T	18	Demonstration debate by course assistants. Judging debates.	---
R	20	Group work day; opportunity to meet with course assistants.	---
		Thanksgiving week!	
14 T	Dec 2	Practice debates with course assistants. Debate format papers due.	---
R	4	Final debates.	In addition to debating, each person will submit a peer assessment of one debate, and a self-assessment of their own (8th & 9th papers).
15 T	9	Final debates.	---
R	11	Final debates.	---
16M	15	(Tentative; see Registrar for official final exam schedule.) 9:45 a.m. Mandatory course evaluation-- attendance required, subject to one step grade penalty. 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.

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:

Quality of practice work (mostly weeks 1 through 10)	40 points
Exam (week 11)	15 points
Quality of oral and written participation in final debates	25 points
Assessment according to standards agreed by you & instructor, and argued by you in your final self assessment	20 points

Notes and policies:

1. "Practice work" is going to include: 10 weekly quizzes (1 point each); 4 group debates (2 points each); 9 small papers (2 points each); and 4 miscellaneous "pop" homework or in-class assignments (1 point each). Almost all of these will be during the first ten weeks of class.
2. Arguing is like a language—you can't learn it the night before the exam, but it isn't that hard if you work on it some, week by week. The purpose of the "practice work" is therefore to keep you practicing your skills every week. But this means I have to be fairly strict about it. I don't accept papers, quizzes or other practice work by email, so if you're not coming to class, either put it in my mailbox or have a friend hand it in at the assigned time. Also, I do not accept late practice work. Therefore if you are going to miss the practice work, see me *in advance*, *not afterwards* to arrange for a special accommodation of your situation.
3. Although you can't turn in work late, you can revise *any* work for extra credit at any time before 12th week. To get the extra credit, arrange to meet with your course assistant or me to go over the work, re-do it following our suggestions, and then hand it in to me, with the course assistant's signature if appropriate. If I see significant improvement, I will give 1 point of credit.
4. The purpose of the last category is to allow me to grade you on what you personally think best represents your learning. What kind of standard can you propose? It is up to you: maybe you want to be graded on your best quality arguing; maybe on effort, or maybe on improvement. I've described these & other ideas I've thought of on the course website, but feel free to brainstorm even more possibilities, and come in and propose them to me. If you do not meet with me to agree on a grading standard for the final 20 points by the end of 6th week (Friday, 3 Oct), you will get a "zero" for this portion of your grade. This will mean that the *highest* grade you can get in the class—if you do everything else perfectly—is a B- .
6. Finally, note that class attendance is required at the exam time, tentatively scheduled by the Registrar for Monday of 16th week (15 Dec.), subject to a one step grade penalty (e.g., B to B-).

Last Year's 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 some of their concerns—hopefully!

Enjoy the time you spend with your group; they will get you through this class. Bring food to group meetings.

I would take this class but be prepared to work and put a lot of time in. End result will be to better argue and express yourself in life in general. Just don't get behind and make sure Goodwin continues to be patient. She expects a lot to make sure you do too.

Don't worry about grades—but learning. Don't fool yourself into thinking they correlate.

I would suggest that you not take this class. By taking this class your attendance in school and caring for knowledge will considerably drop. If you do have to take it I have one piece of advice: Grab a bottle, hunker down, and pray for daylight.

Expect the class to take a substantial amount of time. Expect for it to demand a lot. Don't expect to learn the nature of debate, but enjoy your groups.

This class does take a lot of work outside of class. Keep up on the checks ["practice work"] and really put forth an effort towards the mini-papers, they will be beneficial for the final.

Choose a topic and stick with it! Be honest in your feedback to peers. This class takes a lot of time & preparation!

Keep an open mind and realize she is trying to get you to learn. You will have to work hard, but remember ITS COLLEGE! Concentrate on your group.

This class takes a lot of time. The future students of this class will have to sacrifice their weekends and party nights to meet with their groups. If they don't then they will struggle. I am thankful that I did—my group helped me.

This class isn't as impressive or helpful as it might appear from title. It is good practice in writing and debating but if you already have decent skills this class won't teach you a lot.

Group work is so beneficial, do it and do it well. I took out so much from my group. Utilize that and Prof. Goodwin!

Be prepared to work hard or get out now. Be dedicated to your group, it will pay off in the end.

Don't take this class. You will waste lots of time & not learn anything. And if you do take it, be careful, the last 1/2 of the class is really bad. She makes it so you do fine & then it's too late to drop. And if there is a personality conflict—drop right away, she will judge/grade w/ that bias.

Clear your schedules and make some time. Make sure you're opinionated!! No apathy!! Ask as many questions as possible and keep asking till you get a clear answer. Also, meet out of class with her as much as possible.