

Sp Com 322: Argumentation, Critical Thinking & Debate

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Jean Goodwin

goodwin@iastate.edu

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 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.