

CMN 2040

Argumentation and Critical Thinking

3 Credit Hours | Spring 2017

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Office Hours: M 11:00-12:00 /// TR 1:45-3:15

Course Overview

This class will study how to build, critique, and adapt arguments within a climate of disagreement. You will practice gathering and evaluating evidence, selection and evaluation of reasoning, and the production, criticism and refinement of both oral and written arguments.

Course Objectives

- 1) Identify strong and weak arguments **and** know what factors contribute to each.
- 2) Evaluate and select the best evidence and reasoning to use in building an argument.
- 3) Formulate and articulate solid arguments in a brief amount of time.
- 4) Be able to anticipate and refute opposing arguments.
- 5) Be a critical audience member who is able to fully consider and analyze all relevant information in making an informed and justified decision.
- 6) Practice applied critical thinking skills while engaging contemporary social issues, policy debates, value disputes and ethical concerns.

Course Requirements

Student Standards Statement: All faculty in the Department of Communication Studies uphold the standards of good scholarship and expect our students to do the same. We expect that students earning a degree in Communication Studies will develop superior reasoning/critical thinking, argumentation, writing, and presentational skills while also building a comprehensive knowledge of their content area. Students in Communication Studies classes will be expected to read all assigned materials, write extensively, complete their own work, and engage in respectful interactions in the classroom. We, as a faculty, agree to hold our students to these standards.

Attendance: It is impossible to earn an A for this course if the student misses the equivalent (or more) of two weeks of class (i.e. 6 days if the class meets 3 times per week, or 4 days if the class meets 2 times per week). It is impossible to earn an A or a B for this course if the student misses the equivalent (or more) of three weeks of class (i.e. 9 days if the class meets 3 times per week, or 6 days if the class meets 2 times per week). There is generally no distinction made in the reasons for missing class under this policy, including illness, unless an exception is merited, which is determined at the sole discretion of the instructor. Therefore, the student should plan to attend class every day and miss only when absolutely necessary. **NOTE: This requirement is distinct from the participation requirement.**

Participation: You are expected to attend class every day. You will have an opportunity to earn credit while in attendance through participation. It is normally expected that if you are attending class then you are participating and earning these points. However, if your participation is

unsatisfactory then you will be notified by the instructor (examples of unsatisfactory participation include but are not limited to: appearing to sleep in class, being disruptive, cell phone use, regularly coming to class late, etc.). If your participation is unsatisfactory on any given day, then your participation grade will suffer the deduction described below.

When it comes to your participation, the total is greater than the sum of its parts, therefore your score will be determined by means of a deduction system. Students begin with 100 points, and the deduction of participation points will occur as follows. If you are not attending class (for any reason other than participation in a University-sponsored event, religious observance discussed prior to the absence with the instructor, or another prearranged just cause), then your participation is considered unsatisfactory for that day for the simple reason that you are not participating at all. You will be deducted 10 points, or 10% from your total participation grade for the semester for each day you do not participate or your participation is deemed to be unsatisfactory by the instructor. Once deducted, participation credit cannot be made-up, and note well that participation is worth **100 points, or 10%**, of the semester grade. This requirement is further discussed under the “Policies” section of this syllabus. **NOTE: This requirement is distinct from the attendance requirement.**

Worksheets: During the semester, you will be assigned worksheets to complete. Most will be required to be completed in class, though some may be assigned to be completed outside of class. Worksheets are collectively worth **25 points, or 2.5%**, of the semester grade.

Weekly Papers: We will be covering a vast array of material in this course, both in and out of class. The basic way that students will be asked to react to this material in writing is with a weekly paper. The prompt for the paper each week will only be given out verbally in class, so part of completing this assignment will be acquiring the prompt while in class. All papers must be typed in Times New Roman, 12pt font, double-spaced, using 1” margins, conform to competent standards of spelling and grammar, contain approximately 250 words (not less than $\frac{3}{4}$ page, but no more than 1 page), and substantively respond to the prompt. In order to be complete, a printed and legible hard copy of the paper must be brought to class on the day it is due within the first 10 minutes of the class period. However, in the event that a student cannot deliver a hard copy to class on time, each student is permitted a maximum of two email submissions that must bear a time-stamp showing the email was sent before the paper would otherwise be considered late. Late submissions will not be accepted, and thus a weekly paper must be turned in on time or it will be considered incomplete. Further specific details on this course requirement will be given in class verbally. Collectively, the weekly papers are worth **150 points, or 15%** of the semester grade. Important Note: It is impossible to earn an A for the semester unless ALL weekly papers are completed on time. It is impossible to earn an A or a B for the semester unless all but one of the weekly papers are completed on time.

Cooperative Argumentation Assignment: This assignment will involve teams engaging each other in a structured forum. After completing a research component, you will be asked to engage in cooperative argument formally on important issues. This assignment is worth **300 points, or 30%** of the semester grade.

Course Content Evaluation: The purpose of this evaluation is to demonstrate an understanding of course content. The evaluation is **worth 300 points, or 30%** of the semester grade.

Identify and Share Argument: The purpose of this assignment is to give the student a chance to identify and share an example of public argument. Identified arguments may be presented and discussed in class. This assignment is **worth 25 points, or 2.5%**, of the semester grade.

Final Exam: Argumentation will be summarized and analyzed. Note that students are required to complete the final exam, in accordance with university policy, during the scheduled time and at the scheduled location. The final is **worth 100 points, or 10%** of the semester grade.

***Position Paper:** This paper is not “required” of anyone, but anyone wishing to work toward earning an A for the semester **MUST** “choose” to complete it – no exceptions. This may be the first time you have encountered an assignment of this nature, so be sure you understand it. This is how it works. This assignment is in fact optional, and you may freely choose not to complete it. However, completion of this assignment is a prerequisite to earning an A for the semester in this class, and it is therefore impossible to earn an A for the semester without completing this assignment. Note, then, that you will receive a B for the semester if your earned course percentage falls between 80-100% and you have not completed a position paper. Note also, however, that even if you complete a position paper your earned course percentage must fall between 90-100% in order to earn an A for the semester, so completion of the position paper does not by any means guarantee the student of an A for the semester. The position paper itself is not given a particular point value and is therefore not calculated into your course percentage, but it must be “completed” as a prerequisite to earning an A for the semester. The position paper will not be due until the end of the semester, so you will be able to make an informed choice as to whether you would like to complete it or not. Further details and explanations concerning this optional assignment will be given in class.

All assignments will be described in detail when and where necessary.

Students are strongly encouraged to keep track of their grade throughout the semester. To help facilitate this, a semester breakdown and records chart is supplied at the end of this syllabus. Students should keep track of each grade and thus be able to determine their standing at any time for themselves.

***The Position Paper is a required prerequisite in order to earn an A for the semester. Note well that this syllabus also includes other requirements for earning an A, as well as conditions that make it impossible to earn an A under any circumstance.**

Grading Scale and Criteria:

90-100% plus other conditions met = A
80-100% without other conditions met = B
70-79% = C 60-69% = D Below 59% = F

Grades are administered based on performance, meeting assignment criteria, applying in-class concepts, punctuality/attendance and original thought.

A = Exemplary work that far exceeds the expectations of the assignment.
B = Commendable work that exceeds the expectations of the assignment.
C = Satisfactory work that meets the expectations of the assignment.
D = Below satisfactory work that does not meet the expectations of the assignment
F = Failure to complete the assignment by falling significantly short of requirements

Please note that because CMN 2040 is a core class for majors in Communication Studies, you must earn at least a C in the course to receive credit for the major core.

Policies

Students Must Keep Track Of Their Own Grades: Students are responsible for understanding the grading system in this course and keeping track of their own grades at all times. A tool for doing this is provided at the bottom of this syllabus. This is a basic, fundamental skill for all

college students, and as a result performing this task is itself a part of the skill set to be practiced this semester by all students. For this reason, the instructor will assist students in understanding how to determine their own grade, with reference to this syllabus, but the students should at no time reply upon the instructor to tell students grades for assignments that have already been handed back or calculate student's grades for them.

Contacting the Instructor: Students should direct all remote communication to the instructor via the email address at the top of this syllabus rather than telephone. The student's email to the instructor should be sent from the student's official EIU email account and contain identifying information, including the student's full name and which course/section they are enrolled in. Students are also encouraged to meet with the instructor in person during regular office hours.

Preparation: This course requires both in-class and out-of-class work. In order to be prepared for in-class work, you will need to have prepared yourself by completing the out-of-class work. Reading assignments will be made, and all students will be expected to complete these reading assignments prior to coming to class.

Participation: All students are expected to actively participate in class. In this class, participation means both listening as well as speaking. Throughout the semester, controversy and disagreement can be expected as normative. This means that both mutual respect as well as vigorous argumentation must be paired together, and a lack of either of the two is indicative of diminished participation. All students will be both encouraged and challenged in this unique opportunity to contribute to a rewarding engagement in applied critical thinking.

Late Work Policy: Late policies for each assignment will be given in class verbally.

Academic Honesty: Learning and teaching take place best in an atmosphere of intellectual freedom and openness. All members of the academic community are responsible for supporting freedom and openness through rigorous personal standards of honesty and fairness. Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty undermine the very purpose of the university and diminish the value of an education.

Do your own work. If you are confused about what constitutes plagiarism, please ask and see the policy.

Standard I. Eastern *students* observe the highest principles of academic integrity and support a campus environment conducive to scholarship.

Violations of this standard:

- A. Conduct in subversion of academic standards, such as cheating on examinations, *plagiarism*, collusion, misrepresentation or falsification of data.
- B. Theft or the unauthorized possession of examinations; alteration, theft, or destruction of the academic work of others, or academic records, library materials, laboratory materials, or other University equipment or property related to instructional matters or research.
- C. Submitting work previously presented in another course unless specifically permitted by the instructor.
- D. Conduct which disrupts the academic environment; disruption in classes, faculty offices, academic buildings, or computer facilities.
- E. Complicity with others in violations of this standard.

Warning: An act of plagiarism can result in automatic failure for the course and being reported to the university for further disciplinary action.

Cell Phones/Text Messaging/Electronic Devices: If you have a cell phone or electronic device, please turn it off before class. If there is an emergency situation or other reason for the electronic devices to remain on, please consult with me prior to class. If your phone makes noise or is

otherwise distracting, or you are observed to be text messaging, your participation for the day may be considered unsatisfactory (see participation grading above).

Students with Special Needs: Students with special needs (as documented by the Office of Disability Services) should identify themselves to the instructor at the beginning of the semester in order to arrange any necessary accommodations.

Students with Other Needs: Students with other special needs are encouraged identify themselves to the instructor at the beginning of the semester in order to arrange accommodations that might be fitting.

The Student Success Center: Students who are having difficulty achieving their academic goals are encouraged to contact the Student Success Center (www.eiu.edu/~success) for assistance with time management, test taking, note taking, avoiding procrastination, setting goals, and other skills to support academic achievement. The Student Success Center provides individualized consultations. To make an appointment, call 217-581-6696, or go to 9th Street Hall, Room 1302.

Booth Library

Located in the center of campus, Booth Library is the best place to do research, find expert help, or study in a calm, distraction-free environment. In addition to the many print resources, Booth provides access to high quality e-books, journals and scholarship not freely available on the Web. Stop by the Reference Desk or go to <http://library.eiu.edu> to explore library resources. Get expert help with your research by contacting the Booth Library reference librarians. Visit, call 581-6072, or go to <http://booth.eiu.edu/ask> to connect with a librarian.

The Writing Center

Students are encouraged to make use of the Writing Center, at every stage of writing, for all of their academic requirements. The Writing Center is located in room 3110 of Coleman Hall. For more information online go to: <http://castle.eiu.edu/writing/>

Dealing with Controversy: One of the hallmarks of a true democracy is that reasonable people can and will disagree over any number of social, religious, political, ethical, or cultural questions. One of the ultimate goals of this class is to enhance your ability to evaluate, construct, and refute arguments as a skill fundamental to your own productivity as a responsible citizen. To that end the following guidelines should be kept in mind:

1. You will inevitably be offended by something that I or one of your classmates says this semester. Such is the price you pay for discussing controversial issues. It is not your fundamental right to get through college without being offended, but rather to learn how to engage someone constructively when offense does occur. That said, a sense of civility and professionalism requires that you do not go out of your way to intentionally offend someone, and you should seek to deal respectfully with the opinions of others.
2. If you have strong opinions on the topics we are examining, it is in your own interests as an advocate to listen carefully to opposing views, and even, at times, to argue an opposing view as an exercise. Doing so will ultimately make you a more persuasive advocate for your own position and will foster a better understanding and respect for opinions and positions different from your own.
3. If you do not have strong opinions on the topics we are examining, use this class to help make up your mind. If you are hesitant to argue for fear of not being a nice person, know that refusing to engage in controversy is a bad thing, both for your own personal development and for the integrity of your education.

Argumentation is a process of growth and understanding rather than a vehicle for humiliation and destruction.

Tentative Schedule:

Week 1: Introduction and Orientation
Week 2: Lecture/Discussion/Activities (LDA) – Defining Argument
Week 3: LDA – Why Argue? Other Discussion
Week 3: LDA – Oppositional and Cooperative Argumentation
Week 4: LDA – Contemporary Issues and Controversies
Week 5: LDA – Identifying Public Arguments
Week 6: LDA – Contemporary Issues and Controversies
Week 7: LDA – Preparing for Presentations
Week 8: Presentations
Week 9: Presentations
Week 10: No Class – Spring Break
Week 11: Presentations
Week 12: Preparing for Cooperative Argumentation
Week 13: Cooperative Argumentation
Week 14: Cooperative Argumentation
Week 15: Cooperative Argumentation
Week 16: Working on Final Project

Final Note Concerning Instructor Modifications: If deemed beneficial or necessary, the Instructor may modify aspects of the class during the semester, including any aspect of this syllabus. No textbooks will be added, but other reading can be assigned. Such modifications will not nullify work the student has already completed, but assignments yet to be completed may be modified.

All additional questions and specifics concerning the course that arise will be addressed by the Instructor as needed. Everything the Instructor establishes and communicates in class verbally carries the full authority of this syllabus as hereby provided; and students are responsible for all policies, clarifications, modifications and information given verbally in class on every class day whether they are present or not.

| Summary Grade Breakdown for the Semester | | |
|--|------------------------|----------------------|
| <i>Item</i> | <i>Points Possible</i> | <i>Points Earned</i> |
| Participation | 100 | _____ |
| Worksheets | 25 | _____ |
| Weekly Papers | 150 | _____ |
| Cooperative | 300 | _____ |
| Course Content Eval | 300 | _____ |
| Final Exam | 100 | _____ |
| ID Public Argument | 25 | _____ |
| <i>TOTAL</i> | <i>1000</i> | _____ |