Texas A&M University
Core Curriculum
Initial Request for a Course Addition to the Fall 2014 Core Curriculum

Foundational Component Area: Communication

In the box below, describe how this course meets the Foundational Component Area description for Communication. Courses in this category focus on developing ideas and expressing them clearly, considering the effect of the message, fostering understanding, and building the skills needed to communicate persuasively. Courses involve the command of oral, aural, written, and visual literacy skills that enable people to exchange messages appropriate to the subject, occasion, and audience.

The proposed course must contain all elements of the Foundational Component Area. How does the proposed course specifically address the Foundational Component Area definition above?

COMM 243-Argumentation and Debate: Argumentation is the study of practical reasoning. When we argue, we engage in the process of justifying decisions under conditions of uncertainty in the presence of competing values or opposing viewpoints. Debate is the application of argumentative strategies in order to demonstrate differences in factual, evaluative, or policy positions. Both topics carry equally rich history and relevant application to social and political interactions. This class is designed to enhance and improve skills in engaging public argument through written and spoken assignments, as well as a semester-long group assignment culminating in a formal debate. The semester focuses substantial time on topics such as persuasion, ethics, critical thinking, and public advocacy, all inherently tied to the larger subject of argumentation. Assignments are designed to let students demonstrate their knowledge and application of key concepts and to prepare their involvement in this important subject in their personal and social lives. Students in this class are supported in critical thinking with the presumption that every issue and argumentative claim has multiple viewpoints and distinctive values. Recognizing this dimension of living a pluralistic society is a cornerstone to this class. Numerous assignments and exercises ask students to assume a point of view other than their own. As the syllabus states, “it is natural to disagree. It is not okay to approach an argument with an attitude that builds an unfair, immature, or hostile environment for mutual discussion and discovery. Knowing what you believe is an important place to start, but knowing how to effectively argue your position is the essential step toward a meaningful exchange with others.”

Core Objectives

Describe how the proposed course develops the required core objectives below by indicating how each learning objective will be addressed, what specific strategies will be used for each objective and how student learning of each objective will be evaluated.

The proposed course is required to contain each element of the Core Objective.

Critical Thinking (to include creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, and analysis, evaluation and synthesis of information):

1) Evaluate and critique arguments (individual claims and extended argument chains) using standards of argument construction, identification of fallacies, type of evidence, and source credibility.
   Students produce formal, full-sentence outlines for each of the graded speeches and debates. Through the use of readings, lecture, outline templates and argument diagrams, students are lead through the principles claim, evidence and warrant. Outline and diagrams are both planning and invention documents as well as a documents that are diagnostic in nature. The outline also establishes a common vocabulary to use in criticism of invention, arrangement, language, style and critical thinking. Students cite sources in the body of the outline using MLA style and include a complete bibliography or
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works cited page. Students are required also to cite sources orally during the delivery of their speeches and debates. Students participate in peer evaluation of speeches. Each student must complete a self-evaluation of each of his or her own speeches. These evaluations include criticism of delivery, too. Outlines, diagrams, peer-evaluations and self-evaluations are evaluated by departmental rubric.

2) Produce arguments (individual claims and extended argument chains) that adhere to standards of argument construction and avoidance of fallacies.

Students receive instruction through readings, lectures and video examples of effective arguments and fallacious arguments. Deconstruction of fallacies of reasoning is modeled. Students engage in mock debates that feature signals to the speaker when fallacies occur. Critical listening is key. Arguments are evaluated by means of Departmental rubric.

3) Research, select, and develop appropriate background and supporting material to support arguments with consideration for the audience.

Students receive instruction on source credibility, question interrogation, evaluation of information and use of information to prove and to explain claims made in the speech. Student are instructed in the “COMMLab” computer room on the use and evaluation of pertinent databases, ejournals, and other quality secondary resources. Students are encouraged to pursue primary sources as possible and to avoid tertiary sources. Students receive writing assignments and lectures on providing appropriate evidence to support claims. A grading rubric based on National Communication Association standards is used to assess the extent to which the supporting material is well researched, appropriately selected and well developed and audience adjusted.

Communication (to include effective development, interpretation and expression of ideas through written, oral and visual communication):

3) Research, select, and develop appropriate background and supporting material to support arguments with consideration for the audience.

Students receive instruction on source credibility, question interrogation, evaluation of information and use of information to prove and to explain claims made in the speech. Student are instructed in the “COMMLab” computer room on the use and evaluation of pertinent databases, ejournals, and other quality secondary resources. Students are encouraged to pursue primary sources as possible and to avoid tertiary sources. The syllabus features a direct link to the Constitution of the United States of America. Students receive writing assignments and lectures on providing appropriate evidence to support claims. A grading rubric based on National Communication Association standards is used to assess the extent to which the supporting material is well researched, appropriately selected, well developed and audience adjusted.

4) Express ideas artfully, both verbally and nonverbally, with respect and sensitivity for themselves and their audience.

Students receive instruction on the appropriate use of PowerPoint, and are required to display data in chart and graphs, and photos, as appropriate for supporting material. Instruction in slide composition is provided (color, font, textual density, etc.) with respect to effectiveness and audience adaptation is discussed. Smooth integration of the PowerPoint including appropriate display times, orientation to the display and explanation of the display are taught, too. A grading rubric based on National Communication Association standards is used to assess the extent to which sensory aids (mostly visual aids) are displayed and integrated into the support material.

Students receive instruction regarding the power of language and the use of nonverbal communication as a means of influence, both intentional and unintentional. The artful use of linguistic devices, both common (simile, metaphor, antithesis, for example) and less well known (antistrophe, scala, chiasmus, for example) is discussed and practiced during in-class activities. Cultural awareness and rhetorical sensitivity are discussed in lecture and readings. A grading rubric based on National Communication Association standards is used to assess the use of language and of delivery in speeches.

5) Deliver speeches extemporaneously from a limited set of notes and within a specified time frame.

Students view example speeches of extemporaneous delivery. Additionally, models of converting a full-sentence outline to a limited set of notes are provided in class and in the textbook for the course. Practice is encouraged and a practice room is provided in the COMMLab in Bolton Hall. Students are required to complete the speech within 2 minutes of the target time for the speech. Finally, justification and explanations are offered through lecture and reading for the reasons that
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Extemporaneous, timed delivery is important. Extemporaneous and timely delivery speaking are evaluated through direct observation of the 'limited set of notes' and through the use of a stopwatch. Additionally, each speech is recorded digitally and time can be double checked from that source, too.

6.) Perform responsively the stages of ethical debate with attention to appropriate roles enacted and knowledge accrued.

Students are introduced to ethics of debate through readings and lectures from both a classical perspective, The good man speaking well (Quintillian) and from a contemporary perspective (codes of ethics, both public and personal.) Additionally, students are apprised of the principle that communication and ethics are inextricably intertwined (Miller) and therefore every communicative act carries an ethical responsibility. The final debate, especially, is evaluated according to departmental rubric for ethical adherence. Additionally the use of solid reasoning and adequate source citation contribute to this evaluation.

Teamwork (to include the ability to consider different points of view and to work effectively with others to support a shared purpose or goal):

7.) Engage in civil dialogue with a team to define and explain socially significant topic.

Students are introduced to the tenets of civil dialogue through lecture, readings and with special reference to the principles of the U.S. Founders. Together with a team, students work on a semester long project to frame a civil debate on a topic of significance to our society to day. Performance of the final civil dialogue is evaluated by Departmental rubric.

Personal Responsibility (to include the ability to connect choices, actions and consequences to ethical decision-making):

1.) Evaluate and critique arguments (individual claims and extended argument chains) using standards of argument construction, identification of fallacies, type of evidence, and source credibility.

Students produce formal, full-sentence outlines for each of the graded speeches and debates. Through the use of readings, lecture, outline templates and argument diagrams, students are lead through the principles claim, evidence and warrant. Outline and diagrams are both planning and invention documents as well as a documents that are diagnostic in nature. The outline also establishes a common vocabulary to use in criticism of invention, arrangement, language, style and critical thinking. Students cite sources in the body of the outline using MLA style and include a complete bibliography or works cited page. Students are required also to cite sources orally during the delivery of their speeches and debates. Students participate in peer evaluation of speeches. Each student must complete a self-evaluation of each of his or her own speeches. These evaluations include criticism of delivery, too. Outlines, diagrams, peer-evaluations and self-evaluations are evaluated by departmental rubric.

6.) Responsively perform the stages of ethical debate with attention to appropriate roles enacted and knowledge accrued.

Students are introduced to ethics of debate through readings and lectures from both a classical perspective, The good man speaking well (Quintillian) and from a contemporary perspective (codes of ethics, both public and personal.) Additionally, students are apprised of the principle that communication and ethics are inextricably intertwined (Miller) and therefore every communicative act carries an ethical responsibility. The final debate, especially, is evaluated according to departmental rubric for ethical adherence. Additionally the use of solid reasoning and adequate source citation contribute to this evaluation.

Please be aware that instructors should be prepared to submit samples/examples of student work as part of the future course recertification process.