COMM 226 – Argument and Evidence
Syllabus for Online Course in May Term 2017

Contents

Instructor Contact Information

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Course Description

The study of analyzing communication and the construction of points of view for issues, problems, and challenging topics. Emphasis will be on evaluating the source of communication, message structure, use of evidence, and overall message effectiveness in class exercise and larger projects with a strong emphasis on development of argumentative writing skills. Recommended for pre-law students.

Prerequisites

COMM 211- Fundamentals of Human Communication

Required Materials

1. No required text. Readings will be placed on Blackboard. Students are responsible for reading all required material. There will be no PowerPoints discussing the material.
2. Access to *New York Times*. As a Wesleyan student you have unlimited access when you sign up using your Wesleyan email. The link for this is under Mobile Apps on the Library website. Click here.

Technical Requirements

1. Internet access with adequate bandwidth for viewing videos as well as uploading and downloading documents.
2. Installation and ability to use Microsoft Office programs: Word, Excel, and PowerPoint.

Course Outcomes

Students completing this course successfully will be able to
        1. identify and state an arguer's central argument.
        2. analyze and evaluate an arguer's basic assumptions and implications.
        3. establish an argument based on reasonable assumptions.
        4. provide supporting evidence that is relevant, effective, and adequate for the purpose, audience, and situation.
        5. anticipate and deal effectively with possible objections or opposing arguments.

Nature of this course

The activities in this course include readings and reading worksheets, discussions surrounding different topics, and a policy proposition paper. When faced with a concept you do not understand, make your first step identifying all

that you do know about the problem. Identify resources that can help you fill the gaps in your understanding. These will include Blackboard resources, your classmates, online academic support resources, and your instructor. Many times as you try to put your understanding into writing, the light will dawn.

Organization of Course:

The organization of this course is in modules. Each module has its own set of modular outcomes. Each module is located in a separate folder in the Content section of the course. To begin the course, go to the Content section at the left of the course home page. Click on the Start Here folder. This first folder sets the stage for the class and must be finished by end-of-day (11:59 PM) on the second day, May 9. Specific due dates for all remaining activities are specified within the instructions and also noted on the calendar for the course.

Module	Activity Time	Topics	Assignments Due
Start Here!	May 9-10	1. Navigate the course 2. Syllabus 3. Locate the support resources for the course 4. Introduce yourself to the members of this learning community	**DB** **PP Topic**
1	May 11-14	1. The basics of arguments and arguing 2. Argument and deliberation	**DB** **PP 1/4** **WS 1**
2	May 15-21	1. Audiences and fields of argument 2. The grounds for argument	**DB** **PP 2/4** **WS 2**
3	May 22-28	1. Types of arguments 2. Building arguments	**DB** **PP 3/4** **WS 3**
4	Due June 3 (Last day of class)	1. Refuting arguments	**DB** **PP 4/4** **WS 4**

Assignment Descriptions

Discussion Board Guidelines:

Discussions are an important part of this course. A discussion board is the centerpiece of our activities within each of the four modules.

Due Dates: Original posts are due each Wednesday by 11:59 pm. Responses to posts are due each Friday by 11:59 pm. After the due date for the initial blog post, there is a 48 hour period for responses. These dates are noted on the Blackboard calendar. My aim is to provide enough flexibility in the calendar to allow for your various schedules. At the same time, we have to keep up a certain pace to make certain that we work methodically through the assignments and avoid a pile-up of assignments at the end of the course. You can always make these posts sooner than the date due and even work ahead.

Discussion Board Etiquette:
How you post a message to a topic is just as important as what you post. If your behavior does not follow the course etiquette standards stated below, the grade you receive for a posting may suffer.

- The instructor reserves the right to remove any discussion messages that display inappropriate language or content. Do not use offensive language.
- Rudeness or "slamming" will not be tolerated.
- Show respect for your fellow students, even if you disagree with something that was stated.
- Clearly state what you believe, even if it means that you're disagreeing with someone. Never, however, respond in anger – take care to discuss ideas, not the person.

Grading:
Topic discussion posts will be graded during the week following the date that the discussions are due. 20 total points are possible for each discussion topic. You will post 1 original post and respond to at least 2 classmate's posts each week. The discussion topic will be provided in each module. In determining your grade, the following components are considered (see the *Grading Rubric for Discussions* in appendix for a complete breakdown).

Policy Proposition:

Each student will write a policy position following the guidelines and schedule below. The paper will be completed using Google Docs. It will be a work in progress up until the final day of class. Below are general guidelines for the paper, and a description of what should be included each week.

GENERAL GUIDELINES
1. You will be evaluated on the degree to which the value you prove warrants the policy you advocate, and conversely that the policy you advocate has the capacity to eliminate and/or implement the negative/positive values you prove.

2. You need to motivate your audience at both the value and policy levels. This means (a) carefully and strategically selecting the level of opposition at which you will argue and (b) offering a strong element of dramatism in your argument.

3. Your audience should not be surprised by the organization of the essay; it should flow well and make sense given the choices that you make in the introduction. The body should be a clear series of proofs, all related tightly and immediately to the proposition of policy. You will establish that a serious and inherent

problem exists in the status quo, explain the specific policy that you are advocating for, and demonstrate that the solution is desirable/advantageous.

4. You must incorporate as many sources of relevant and credible evidence as you can. There are no specific requirements as to where such sources come from, and there is no specific number of sources that you must use. However, you will be evaluated on the strength of your evidence, and the failure to include important pieces of evidence, or to address important sources on the issue, will damage your credibility significantly. An essay that argues that the courts ought to uphold state level same-sex marriage laws that does not reference legal precedents and/or sources from the legal community would probably not be very credible. An essay that endorsed a specific policy on global warming that did not draw from scientific literature also would be problematic.

5. The essay will be 2,000-2,500 words (+ a works cited page) typed, double-spaced, with one inch margins on all sides. The essay should have a title page that includes the proposition of policy that you are defending; the name of the venue that you would (hypothetically) be submitting the essay to; the name of the course; the date; and your name.

6. Be sure to proofread your essay – or better yet, have a trusted friend or classmate review the essay after you have proofread it. Essays with extensive (5 or more) spelling/typo-graphical errors and/or common grammatical errors can be penalized up to a full letter grade. While I will be assisting in revising content, I will not correct these errors leading up to the final submission.

PP Topic:
By **Wednesday, May 10**, you need to select a policy you would like to propose, and email it to me. This policy could be at a federal, state, local, or even school level. Do some general reading on the policy to ensure it is 1) something you can write a good proposition with, 2) something you believe in, and 3) something you want to spend the next four weeks working on, and 4) specific. If you are struggling to think of a topic, Google "policy proposition topics." You will find several links to websites with lists of ideas. In the email, a statement as simple as, "For my policy proposition, I would like to work with the topic of…"

You would not argue that "the U.S. government should institute laws that promote job growth" because (a) "the U.S. government" is a vague abstraction that does not act like an agent and (b) instituting "laws that promote job growth" doesn't tell us what the policy is. Rather you might say that "Congress (a specific government body) ought to fund state highway repairs (a specific policy) in order to promote job growth.

PP 1/4:
You must advocate change through the proposition, therefore you must determine the status quo (the existing state of affairs). By **Saturday, May 13**, you need to create a Google Doc, and share it with me (Fabbricatore_j@wvwc.edu).* In the Google Doc, you will officially begin writing your proposition.

Introduction: Introduce the topic in terms of what the existing policy is on the topic.

* If you are unsure of how to create a Google Doc, and its functions, following this link (https://gsuite.google.com/learning-center/products/docs/get-started/).

PP 2/4:
Every proposition has an agent of action (the person that will enact the change). You must determine "who" you want to act. For example, you could have the state government initiate the policy change, or the federal government. You could even have this very campus be the agent of action. Since there is more published

information available on issues of national concern, the preferred agent is the United States federal government. If you just state the "United States," it is assumed that the agent is all levels of government.

Since you cannot magically make the change you are advocating occur, you must use the word "should" in your proposition. This is an acknowledgement that the agent of action ought to change because of the arguments you present, not that it really will. Saying "should" also eliminates the necessity of proving that the proposal is constitutional, or that Senator X would actually vote for it. We're not really concerned whether the policy would be adopted, only that your arguments convince us that it ought to be.

Body Paragraphs (1-2 Paragraphs): Discuss who you want to act. Be specific.

PP 3/4:
Now you must identify what you want the agent to do. The action you propose must indicate both the nature and direction of the change.
> *Nature:* What is it that needs to be addressed? What is your topic area?
> *Direction:* Do we need more or less of whatever it is that you wish to address? Does it need to be banned? Adopted? Strengthened? Reduced?

The words you use should be neutral. Remember the purpose of a proposition is to divide the grounds of the debate evenly. If you use loaded words like wasteful or unnecessary you tilt the debate from the beginning.

Most importantly, you must select a topic and word it is such a way as to make it a true controversy. Remember, the intent is that advocates on both sides of the proposition will have equal opportunity to create compelling arguments.

Your proposition must also be researchable. Compelling argument requires **quotations, statistics, examples, etc.** These are best provided in the literature published on this topic.

> *Sample 1*: Resolved: That the federal government should ban the private possession of handguns in the United States.
> *Sample 2*: Resolved: That the state of California should legalize casino-style gambling.

Body Paragraphs (3-5 Paragraphs): Actually propose your policy keeping the information above in mind while writing.

PP 4/4:
The final part of this paper will be concluding the proposition, and making final revisions. At this point, you should be sure to read over your paper for grammatical errors.

Practicum Worksheets:

The practicum worksheets are in the form of a Word document that should be completed and submitted to Blackboard. They will be used to evaluate your understanding to the content from the respective module. The practicums are due by Saturday at 11:59 pm of each module.

Course Assessments		Total Possible
Start Here		
	Intro Discussion	20
	Syllabus Quiz	10
	Policy Proposition Topic	
Module 1		
	Worksheet	20
	Discussion Board	20
	Policy Proposition 1/4	10
Module 2		
	Worksheet	20
	Discussion Board	20
	Policy Proposition 2/4	20
Module 3		
	Worksheet	20
	Discussion Board	20
	Policy Proposition 3/4	20
Module 4		
	Worksheet	20
	Discussion Board	20
	Policy Proposition 4/4	60
TOTAL PTS		**300**

Above is complete list of all required activities.

Grading Scale

To calculate your grade, divide the number of points you have by 370 (the total number of points in the class.

		86-87%	B+	76-77%	C+	66-67%	D+
90% & up	A	80-85%	B	70-75%	C	60-65%	D
88-89%	**A-**	**78-79%**	**B-**	**68-69%**	**C-**	**58-59%**	**D-**

Late papers or assignments:

Late posts or responses are accounted for within the grading rubric for the discussion board because late posts have an effect on the ability of your peers to finish their assignments. Other late assignments will lose 10% each day late.

Expectations

Time

While the organization and the actual activities of this course may be different for a session offered during a regular semester, the expected learning outcomes and the time commitment required to meet those outcomes is

the same. Translating the class time, the out of class preparation time required over a 15 week semester means that you should expect to spend about 30 hours per week completing the activities in this course. If you find it is taking you significantly more time than that, please discuss this with me so that we can analyze how you are approaching the work.

Communication

You are expected to communicate respectfully. Netiquette. Using formal English. Texting short-cuts not acceptable. Emoticons may be used to help convey feelings, but they are not a substitutes for clearly written statements. Communication concerning course content should be through one of the discussion boards. Personal matters should be discussed with me directly. My preferred means of communication is through email, but I can be reached by phone in an emergency.
Include times of availability and response times.

Reading

There will be a significant amount of reading in this course. The reading will be posted on Blackboard. When you are reading these materials, you are expected to connect the information read to concepts we are discussing and things you already know. You will be expected to demonstrate your understanding through mini tests and discussion boards.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity violations (including cheating, plagiarism, and facilitating either) are serious matters and will not be tolerated. See the West Virginia Wesleyan College Student Handbook for further discussion. Any violations of academic integrity in will result in, at minimum, failure of the assignment and likely failure in the course. All incidents are reported to the Dean of the College. **MAKE SURE YOU CITE ALL OF YOUR WORK**.

Student Support

I realize that a variety of academic and non-academic issues may arise during the time of this course. What follows are brief descriptions of the types of support available to you during the May and Summer sessions. More details and specific resources can be found in the Student Support course link at the left. It is just below the Content course link.

Withdrawing

During the course, the student should email the instructor and the registrar when they want to withdraw. The add/drop period is the first two days of the term. Within that period, the student is not responsible for the tuition. After day 2 they must pay for the course. If they want to withdraw before the class starts, they just email the registrar.

Special Learning Needs

If you have a physical, medical, psychological, or learning disability that is going to or require accommodation, please let me know immediately. More information is found in the Academic Support and the Accessibility folders in the Student Support course link at the left.

Library

The WVWC Library offers information resources for students at all levels and all disciplines. Library resources are a key component of academic success. Google and Wikipedia as research tools will not lead to acceptable research assignments, papers, or presentations. The library's reference and instructional staff is available by phone, by email, by text, and via reference chat on the library homepage to assist students with research inquiries. Starting place for accessing library resources is here.

Technical Support

I can help with most Blackboard issue but am not your best source for internet or computer issues. The HelpDesk contact information is in the Technical Support folder.

Personal Support

Should you become overwhelmed during this course, there are a variety of avenues for working through this difficulty. Feel free to contact me by email or telephone. Also, at the Student Support course link at the left side of each page, you can find a folder titled "Personal Support." In that folder you have contact information for advisors who can help you. There are also a variety of links to guidance and practices which may help you manage this demanding period of time.

Institutional Policies

The Student Handbook is here along with direct links to the institutional policies on non-discrimination, students with disabilities and academic integrity.

Financial and Registration Issues

This gives you the contact information for issues relating to billing and financial aid.

Appendix A—Discussion Board Grading Rubric

Criteria	Critical Analysis	Relevance to Post	Contribution to Learning Community	Quality of Writing	Timeliness
Exemplary **(4 points)**	Response goes beyond the understanding of the content and includes relevant information from outside sources to support the main points.	Post is relevant to the discussion content and discusses other outside sources relevant to the content.	Attempts to motivate further discussion beyond the required participation. Interacts freely.	Free of grammatical, punctuation, and/or spelling errors. Writing style promotes communication.	Original posts are added during the first half of the discussion period.
Proficient **(3 points)**	Response indicates an understanding of the content including concepts and terminology. Proper citation.	Post is related to the content of the discussion content.	Responses contribute to the discussion by asking related questions, elaborating on relevant topics discussed in post, or making an educated oppositional statement.	Mostly free of grammatical, punctuation, and/or spelling errors. Writing style mostly promotes communication.	Original posts are present, but may have been posted during the last half of the discussion period.
Limited **(2 points)**	Response does not go beyond summarizing the reading. Little or no reference to outside sources or relevant current applications. Incorrect or no citations.	Responses mention the reading, but does not discuss any points from the reading. Response is short and/or irrelevant to the post.	Responses sometimes contribute to the discussion by asking related questions, elaborating on relevant topics discussed in post, or making an educated oppositional statement.	Some grammatical, punctuation, and/or spelling errors.	Original posts are added at the last minute, leaving no time for classmates to respond.
Incorrect **(1 point)**	Little or no evidence that the readings were completed or understood.	Response is all opinion-based or anecdotal evidence. Does not reference the content.	Feedback is irrelevant or says something along the lines of, "I agree with her."	Use of texting/informal language; several grammatical, punctuation, and/or spelling errors.	Post is made after the deadline
Unacceptable **(0 points)**	No post.	No post.	No feedback to fellow student.	No post.	No post.