

COMS 215: Argumentative Analysis and Advocacy

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➤➤ Text

Rybacki & Rybacki – Advocacy and Opposition, 5 th ed. Allyn & Bacon, 2004.

➤➤ Objective

The general aim is to obtain practical experience in the formation, presentation, and criticism of arguments. For our purposes, library research (and other resources such as the WWW) will be important in obtaining information/evidence to use in supporting or attacking claims. As you will note, the course is heavy on reading in the initial weeks, then heavy on research, presentations in the remaining weeks. Of necessity, you will need to keep on top of the reading in the early going as you will be expected to make use of the text's concepts in formulating and critiquing arguments.

➤➤ Learning to Argue

In the first weeks, our focus is two fold: First, reading the text and beginning to acquire a 'comfort level' with concepts/terms related to argument. Second, selecting 2-3 'themes' around which arguments will proceed. In assessing the role of evidence and argument types, we will participate in in-class arguments early in the quarter; these will be non-graded; we will decide on claims to be argued (based on one of the "themes") in advance and assign "sides" with respect to practicing argument in as non-threatening an atmosphere as can be created. The experience will be akin to organized chaos at times. Example : a theme that is currently debated in society is that of gay marriages—there are several claims that might be advanced here that in one way or another seek changes in the status quo, from arguing for a constitutional amendment to sanctify marriage as "same-sex" only, to affirming the right of same-sex marriage, to provisions for granting gay couples the legal rights that accrue from marriage while banning their legal right to marriage itself.

➤➤ Graded Argument

1. Argument 1:

1) **Option 1:** Each person will develop an oral argument (5-6minute presentation) in relation to one of the themes; following presentation/critique of that argument, it will be revised (expanded/alterd) in written form for submission. In addition, a critical analysis of the argument's intended audience, and reasons for its likely response, will be formulated (approx. 2-4 pages). The purpose is to think through not only what your position is, but how that position will be received—and why it is necessary to continue even if the response is destined to be negative (not all argumentative positions can be made universally or even marginally acceptable—that does not necessarily mean they should therefore not be articulated; why an unpopular position

should still be heard will be a critical element should this be the result of your analysis; in addition, using the text as a basis for evaluation will be critical).

2) **Option 2:** Two persons can establish agreement on an “Aff-Neg” position in relation to one of the themes and follow the analysis above—though in a more collaborative manner from oral presentation of arguments for/against the “claim” being advanced (Neg will follow Aff oral presentation) to collaboration on the “critical analysis” (approx 4-6pages). (note: if this is a popular choice and if we end up with an uneven number in class, someone may end up w/option 1 by default).

2. Argument 2:

For this assignment, students will select from one of the “themes” NOT chosen for #1; a primary focus of this experience will be cross-examination techniques. We will form 2 person teams; each team will decide on a specific claim in relation to the theme (duplication may exist), and develop in relative isolation their approach to the claim. Each will also seek to develop CX questions that seek to bolster their own position as well as illustrate weaknesses in their opponent's position. Each “side” will turn in an outline of their respective “case” and list of prepared questions following the oral presentation.

3. Argument 3:

(time permitting) For this assignment, students who worked as a “team” in # 2 will switch sides and duplicate efforts in arguing for the opposite position. The same focus/responsibilities as in # 2 will apply. If time does not permit, we will substitute a written analysis assignment with same “value” toward final grade, with specifics presented in class as needed.

➤➤ **Oral Presentation Grades**

1. Oral Presentation: 15%; Written “brief” – 10%; Critical Analysis – 10% = 35%; #2 : Oral Presentation: 20%; #3 : Oral Presentation: 20%; Participation in class critiques: 5%. (80%).
2. Mid-term Exam: There will be a “take home” exam over text materials. Specifics will be presented in class. Value: 20%

➤➤ **Reminders that should go without saying**

1. Plagiarism:

A warning B using web-based or other resources can get you into major trouble if you are not extremely careful; the penalty for using work without attribution, thus creating the impression it is your own, will range from a failing grade on an assignment to a failing course grade.

2. Participation:

Attendance will be expected. A part of the success of this learning experience is in taking in ideas/observations/criticisms from peers—you can't participate in that

process if you aren't in class. The effort you put forth will have an impact on a final grade—either positively or negatively (and attendance is part of a measure of “effort”). I do reserve the right to quit grading assignments in process or to be completed should you miss significant class time (as in 2-3 or more absences regardless of cause).

►► Tentative Schedule

| Date | Topic/Reading |
|-----------------|---|
| <u>3-29</u> | M Establishing the Atmosphere C-1,2 (read post-class) |
| <u>3-31</u> | W Propositional Analysis C-3-4 |
| <u>4-5</u> | M Evidence C-5-6 |
| <u>4-7</u> | W Reasoning C-7-8 |
| <u>4-12</u> | M Debate Strategies C-9-12 |
| <u>4-14</u> | M #1 – 1-8 |
| <u>4-19</u> | M #1 – 9-16 |
| <u>4-21</u> | W #1 – 17-24 Exam out |
| <u>4-26</u> | M #1 – 25-30 |
| <u>4-28</u> | W CX, Prep time |
| <u>5-3</u> | M CX, Prep time Exam due* |
| <u>5-5</u> | W #2 – 1-4 Revised # 1 due (1-8)* |
| <u>5-10</u> | M #2 – 5 -8 Rev # 1 (9-16) |
| <u>5-12</u> | W #2 – 9-12 Rev # 1 (17-24) |
| <u>5-17</u> | M #2 – 13-15 Rev #1 (25-30) |
| <u>5-19</u> | W #3 – 1-4 |
| <u>5-24</u> | M #3 – 5-8 |
| <u>5-26</u> | W #3 – 9-12 |
| <u>5-31</u> | M Memorial Day – No Class |
| <u>6-2</u> | W # 3 –13-15 |
| <u>6-7~6-11</u> | Finals Week |
| <u>6-12</u> | Graduation (undergraduate) |