

English 287
Argumentation in the Twenty-First Century
Spring 2007

“We make worlds with our words.”

—Donna Haraway

“Mobile phones have very much become part of the semiotic system that shapes subjectivity.”

—Gerard Goggin and Christopher Newall

“E-mail has just erupted like a weed, and instead of considering what to say when they write, people now just let thoughts drool out onto the screen.”

—R. Craig Hogan

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Catalogue Description

Argumentation is a baseline course for the business and technical sequence in the Writing Minor. It provides students with experience in arguing from sources as well as in using persuasive strategies to reach an audience. The course stresses logic and clarity of thought.

Prerequisites and Satisfactions

There are no prerequisites for this course. Argumentation is a baseline course for the Writing Minor and does not count toward the English Major.

Course Rationale

In the course of an ordinary day, you make thousands of arguments, and you hear, see and even feel thousands more. Without thinking about it consciously, you and others automatically adjust your arguments to make them more persuasive, paying attention to factors such as audience, purpose, language, medium, emotion, and logic. The goal of this course is to help you approach arguments (your own and others') clearly, reflectively and critically. Our specific focus is what "argumentation" means in the 21st century—a world in which argumentation may take place by text-message as well as in the pages of a (print) newspaper, and in which digital media have become our major sources of information.

This course treats argumentation from a rhetorical point of view. The emphasis is not on "winning" conflicts; rather, it's on finding effective ways to operate within a given rhetorical situation. A rhetorical situation is any situation in which certain elements are present, such as an audience, an author, and a purpose. For example, a class is a rhetorical situation; so is a movie; so is having dinner with your family on Thanksgiving. Argumentation may involve coming to agreement as well as conflict; it may involve sharing points of view as well as besting an opponent; and it should involve lots of listening and reflection as well as speaking and writing.

In order to help you identify your own purposes and to present them as persuasively as possible, we'll learn specific elements of argumentation such as claims, warrants, appeals, fallacies, and ways of using evidence. You'll gain experience in researching and evaluating sources for use in your arguments. Projects will include informal exercises, both in-class and take-home; peer response; discussions in class and on our class web site; formal essays, each written in several drafts; and a collaborative project in which you build a web site and present it to the class.

Course Objectives

<i>Your thoughts on this objective (January)</i>	<i>Your thoughts on this objective (May)</i>	<i>Objective</i>
		Identify issues and questions that are relevant and arguable for a particular audience.
		Develop a stance on a particular issue or question.
		Revise your stance through interaction with others, both in person and through reading.
		Identify assumptions embedded in your own and others' writing.
		Recognize and apply rhetorical strategies such as claims, warrants, appeals, and fallacies.
		Identify appropriate sources through various research methods, including Internet research, periodical research, interviews, and observation.
		Incorporate sources effectively into your writing.
		Analyze and make arguments in multiple media, including oral, aural, visual, through movement, and in electronic environments.

Required Texts and Materials

- Andrea Lunsford, John Ruszkiewicz, and Keith Walters, *Everything's an Argument*, 4th ed. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004. Get the edition **without readings**. It's okay to buy the edition with readings, but it's more expensive, and we won't be using the readings in the textbook. **Do not buy the 3rd edition.**
- Article-length readings distributed in class or available on WebCT or the Woodruff Library's databases.
- A style manual that's comfortable for you. If you don't have one, I recommend Andrea Lunsford's *The Everyday Writer*, 3rd ed. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2005.
- A dictionary.
- A three-ring binder in which to keep your work and all handouts.
- Manila folders (one or two). You'll use these to turn in your essay and its supporting materials.
- At least two writable CDs and/or a flash drive to save your web site.

Required Writing

- Two research reports.
- One academic essay, written in multiple drafts. Each draft must be at least 1,000 words (that's 4-5 pages) or more. **There is no maximum word limit for essays.** Each time you turn in a draft, it must be accompanied by all supporting materials (research reports, previous drafts, peer and teacher response). **Do not make clean copies for your folder, except of your most recently completed draft;** I want to see marked-up copies.
- One Web site, completed collaboratively with a small group, to be presented to the class. This project constitutes your fourth-hour enhancement for this class.
- Short written assignments, some completed in class and some at home.
- Peer responses.

Project Assignments

Please see the separate handout, "About Projects," for specific assignments and information on formatting and presenting your essays. Due dates for each draft appear on our class calendar.

Accommodations, Disabilities, and Academic Support

I assume that all of us learn in different ways, and that the organization of any course will accommodate each student differently. For example, you may prefer to process information by speaking and listening, so that some of the written handouts I provide may be difficult to absorb. Please talk to me as soon as you can about your individual learning needs and how this course can best accommodate them. If you have a documented disability, I recommend that you register with the Office of Disability Services in MacVicar Hall (270-5289), since they can help you

coordinate accommodations in all your courses. Other support services, including the Writing Program and the Learning Resources Center, are available to all students.

Plagiarism and Academic Honesty

All academic writers use ideas, words, and short passages from others in their own writing. This is a skill you may already possess; if not, you will learn it in this class, because reference and citation is a required part of academic writing. Material from other sources, whether quoted, paraphrased, or simply referred to, must always be accompanied by acknowledgement of the source. Failure to acknowledge the contributions of others' words or ideas to your work is plagiarism, a violation of Spelman College's Academic Integrity Policy (available at <http://www.spelman.edu/academics/catalog> by clicking on "Academic Integrity Policy"). Penalties for plagiarism may include a failing grade on a particular assignment, a failing grade in the class, or suspension from the college. Understanding what plagiarism is and how attribution works can be complicated, so be sure to ask as many questions as you need to.

Work From Other Classes

Within the category of "academic honesty" comes the issue of submitting any work which has/will be submitted to fulfill another academic requirement. This practice, identified in the College's Academic Integrity Policy as "multiple submissions," is a violation of academic honesty. However, I realize that—like most authors—you may find yourself returning to sources you've read previously, or topics that you've found compelling in the past. For example, you may wish to include a reading from another class in your research for an essay, or you may wish to re-visit a topic that you've already discussed in a current or previous class. If this is the case, *you must discuss the situation with me before work on the project begins*. Failure to do so will be considered a violation of academic integrity and subject to appropriate penalties.

Attendance

Our English 287 class is interactive and discussion-based. Without each member's presence and active participation, the class doesn't work. Therefore, attendance, preparedness and participation are required.

You may miss two classes without penalty. These "free" absences are intended to accommodate for unpredictable circumstances, such as illness, so try not to use them early in the semester. Aside from exceptional circumstances, being sick does not entitle you to extra "free" absences. Whether or not any additional absences will be excused must be discussed with me individually.

You will be considered absent if you are unprepared for class or are absent from a substantial portion (15 minutes or more) of any class meeting. Missing a scheduled conference or workshop also counts as an absence. Absences beyond the two "free" ones will pull down your final grade at the rate of one grade level for every additional absence. For example, a total of four absences (two "free" and two not) at the end of the semester would make a "B plus" into

a “B minus.” Tardiness affects your attendance record as well: every three tardies equals one absence. You are responsible for keeping track of your own attendance record, but you’re welcome to check your records with me any time.

If you will be absent from class for a full week or more, or need to discuss other issues regarding attendance, contact the office of the Dean of Students.

Punctuality

Being prepared includes having the work due that day in hand at the beginning of class. I cannot accept late work unless you’ve arranged for an extension ahead of time, or in extraordinary circumstances (to be determined on a case-by-case basis). If you find yourself beginning to fall behind, see me right away. I’ll work with you to help you get back on track.

Grading

Please see the separate handout, “About Grading.”

Fourth-Hour Enhancement

For your fourth-hour enhancement project, you will work collaboratively with a small group to develop and present an argument that is delivered as a Web site. See the separate handout, “About Projects,” for more details on this assignment. This project is not designed to be completed in our regular class time. We may occasionally work on it during class, but you should expect to earn the fourth-hour credit for English 287 by devoting time *in addition to* our class’s regular hours for in-class work and at-home reading, writing, and studying.

Communication is Key

As you may have gathered from this syllabus, I can be fairly flexible about some course requirements (due dates, structure of assignments, etc.), *so long as you are communicating with me*. The converse is also true: If I’m not hearing from you, it becomes much more difficult to work with you, and hence to extend flexibility. Don’t hesitate to speak with me at any time about concerns or questions you have, or just to share observations about your writing and/or the class. I will appreciate learning from you.

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