

CTA 4445: Persuasion
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Catalog Description: Studies persuasion from its early Greek roots through contemporary social scientific studies. Various theories of attitude change will be addressed.

Course Description: Historically the seven liberal arts provide the foundation for collegiate education: three dealing with language (grammar, logic, and rhetoric) and four with numbers. This class begins with an exploration of the traditional liberal art we call rhetoric. Aristotle defines rhetoric as “the study of all available means of persuasion.” We embrace this Aristotelian tradition as the foundation of the study of communication. Since the rise of the medieval universities in Western Europe (i.e., the Sorbonne, Oxford, etc.), Aristotle’s rhetorical theory has played a significant role in education. We associate the rhetorical tradition with humanities in contemporary colleges and universities.

World War I brought significant changes to how people understood the world. Within the discipline we now call communication, the approaches of the social sciences began to inform how we study persuasion. The study of behaviorism shapes psychology, including attitude adjustment and motivation, into the examination of precise measures.

This is a senior level course which hopes to engage students in the abstract realm of persuasion theory. We read at an intense pace. As a group, we read Aristotle’s Rhetoric, Hauser’s Introduction to Rhetorical Theory, and from Gass and Seiter Persuasion, Social Influence, and Compliance Gaining. Additionally, students read a primary text from the rhetorical canon to present to their peers. Students will read an additional 15 articles supporting a research project.

This course includes a significant research focus. Research allows us to shape our individual learning through our passions and interests. I study how texts persuade audiences to understand gender and sexuality, particularly with regard to gay males. I often use examples pertinent to my research in class. In addition, I study local public controversies, including abortion discourse in Duluth. I welcome your using examples from your research projects in class.

When I discuss gender, sexuality, abortion and any other number of topics during class, I am speaking as a scholar who studies these questions. I express my own views of right and wrong as well as my own interpretations of events. My views and interpretations do not reflect the perspective of the Roman Catholic Church, the Diocese of Duluth, the St. Scholastica Monastery, nor the College of St. Scholastica.

Applying for Majors in Communication or Advertising and Public Relations: The CSS Catalog strongly recommends that you apply to your major near the end of your sophomore year. The Department of Communication and Theatre Arts requires you to apply and be accepted into your major at least one calendar year before your graduation date (this May to graduate next May). Whenever possible, you **should** apply to the major the first semester of your junior year. Please inform your advisor of your intended graduation date whenever you meet. Meeting the required deadlines and completing the appropriate paper work is your responsibility.

Required Texts:

Aristotle. Rhetoric. Trans. W. Rhys Williams. Dover, 2004.

Gass, Robert H., and John S. Seiter. Persuasion, Social Influence, and Compliance Gaining. 3rd ed. Boston: AB Longman, 2007.

Hauser, Gerard A. Introduction to Rhetorical Theory. 2nd ed. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 2002.

We use these texts in class to focus our discussion of persuasion.

Recommended Text:

Walcott, Harry F. Writing Up Qualitative Research. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001.

This text will aid students in writing the research paper, especially those not used to academic writing.

Texts on Reserve in the Library:

Bizzell, Patrice, and Bruce Herzberg. The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present. 2nd ed. Boston: Bedford, 2001.

Foss, Sonja K. Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice. 3rd ed. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland, 2004.

Frey, Lawrence R., Botan, Carl H., and Gary L. Kreps. Investigating Communication: An Introduction to Research Methods. 2nd ed. Boston: AB Longman, 2000.

Hart, Roderick P., and Suzanne M. Daughton. Modern Rhetorical Criticism. 3rd ed. Boston: AB Longman, 2005.

Hocking, John E, Stacks, Don W., and Steven T. MCDermott. Communication Research. 3rd ed. Boston: AB Longman, 2003.

These texts will help various students at different points in the semester.

Course Objectives: (modified from the CSS catalog)

1. articulate a critical response to persuasive texts
2. move from intuition to insight through guided practice, research, and reflection
3. explain the role of power and privilege in persuading audiences
4. apply theory to praxis in completing a research project
5. understand the application of persuasion theory to specific communication contexts (i.e., advertising, journalism, etc)

Preparation for Class:

When doing your reading, it may help you to take notes in the following categories: 1) terms for clarification, 2) interesting/confusing quotations, and 3) connections to previous courses or research project. Many college students read passively relying heavily on lectures to fill in the gaps. You need to read actively: underlining passages, looking up words, and asking questions. Reading assignments are due on the date listed.

The Assignments:

Presentations	10%
Short Papers	20%
Examinations	30%
Research Paper*	30%
Participation/preparation**	10%

* You may incorporate either short essay into your research essay but not both.

**Your participation and preparation cannot exceed the percentage of classes attended.

Presentation on a Rhetorical Text:

Students work in dyads (groups of 2) to read and present a primary rhetorical theory text. The selection can be found in the CSS library in a copy of the book The Rhetorical Tradition. The presentation should take approximately 10 minutes and include a handout.

Brief Papers:

Each student will work independently on two short papers. The first essay deals with the rhetorical tradition, and the second relates to the social scientific tradition. The rhetoric paper must be a neo-Aristotelian critique of a persuasive essay. The paper in the social scientific tradition explains 1) the assumptions of a persuasion theory and 2) its application to constructing effective messages. The essay should not be a "first draft" rather a polished essay that the student has significantly revised and proofread.

Midterm Examination:

This exam covers the rhetorical tradition and principles of rhetorical criticism. The first section of the exam focuses on identification of terminology. The second section focuses on comparing and contrasting various theorists' work. The third section requires a five paragraph essay in which the student conducts a rhetorical criticism.

Final Examination:

This exam covers the social scientific theories of persuasion. The first section focuses on identification of terminology. The second section focus on comparing/contrasting various theories. The third section requires a five paragraph essay in which a student synthesizes the course material.

Presentation on Research Studies

Students will work in groups of two to present two studies using either a specific theory or a particular application. The presentation should take approximately 10 minutes and include a handout.

Research Paper.

This 15-20 page essay demonstrates the student's ability to conduct a semester long research project. The paper should be of conference presentation quality for student submissions (a rubric will be distributed in February). I strongly suggest completing the first full draft of this paper at least 3 weeks before the due date. Your work should be question-based [see questions below]. Your research paper needs to review relevant literature, to articulate a methodology (how do I best answer my question), to present data clearly, to analyze data carefully, and to draw some basic conclusions.

Students will work on one of three research project designed by me. EVERY student needs to write an individual paper. If a student wishes to construct her or his own project, please meet with me as soon as possible during the semester.

I have crafted three research questions for our class research projects. Please select which research question best suits your interests as soon as possible. **If you take too long**, you will be assigned one of the research questions.

How does Crash persuade audiences to understand race, sexuality, and dignity?

Each student researcher will conduct focus groups with approximately 20 CSS students. You may wish to work with a Dignitas professor to help hone your questions or to recruit students for your focus groups.

What fantasy themes dramatize the debate over the Duluth Human Rights ordinance?

This project focuses completing on textual analysis of information from various Duluth newspapers. Students may be assigned a type of newspaper artifact to analyze or a time period.

How do the recruitment materials distributed by CSS use ELM to persuade potential students to attend CSS?

ELM focuses on two persuasive strategies: cognitive and emotional. Please be creative in your definition of recruitment materials.

Classroom Policies

1. I expect students to complete reading assignments prior to coming to class. Based on the work of mediation scholar Walter Ong, my professional judgment suggests taking handwritten notes or typing notes out rather than highlighting or underlining only. If you do highlight or underline, you may find that writing an index note in the back of your book or identifying the concept in the top margin improves your retention and comprehension.
2. I do not set office hours; instead, I post a sign up sheet each week of possible times. I honor all appointments made 24 hours in advance. I accept drop in meetings as well unless I am preparing for class or a meeting. Students should feel free to email me at any time; I do not promise to answer emails before I return to work in the morning, but I do reply as soon as I get to the office.
3. If during the course of a semester, you become significantly ill or incapacitated (i.e., mono, a car accident, etc) or you experience the death of a family member or close friend, please inform me as soon as possible. We will develop a contract to make accommodations.
4. All work is due at the beginning of class. No late work will be accepted. If you are late, you earn a zero.
5. A grade of incomplete will not be given under any circumstances.
6. Cellular phones provide a nuisance within the classroom environment. If I find you answering your phone, sending text messages, or playing a game on your phone, I will ask you to bring me the phone. I will hold onto the phone until you make an appointment to apologize to me for disrupting class. You will also be asked to apologize to your classmates at the beginning of the next class session.
7. Academic honesty directly concerns ethical behaviors which affect both the academic environment and the civic community. Plagiarism and other academic dishonesty, including falsification of data, will result, at a minimum, in failure of the assignment involved, and may result in failure of the course. These failures may lead to academic probation. Repeated or especially serious plagiarism or fraud are grounds for dismissal.
8. Students with disabilities, physical or learning, are entitled to appropriate accommodations. It is the student's responsibility to notify the Disability Resource Center far enough in advance to allow a reasonable amount of time to approve of and provide the accommodation. Students who are taking courses on campus or in a distance format must contact the Coordinator for Students with Disabilities at 218-723-6645 to make such arrangements.