

SPCOM 420: Persuasion

Faculty of Arts, Department of Drama and Speech Communication, Fall 2013
Friday: 10:00-12:50, ML-117

Professor Robert Danisch

Office Hours: Thursday 1:30-3:00 & Friday 9:00-10:00

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Course Description:

This course examines the communicative, psychological, and sociological aspects of persuasion and persuasive messages, with attention to interpersonal contexts, the role of images, and persuasion in the media and public discourse. This course will explore the ways in which the sending and receiving of persuasive messages involve cognition, emotions, and social norms in everyday contexts. We will examine theories of how and why persuasion works in public discourse, and have opportunities to practice applying the skills of critical thinking to the principles of persuasion in assignments, class discussions, and everyday life in and outside of the classroom. Essentially we will learn how and why people are convinced to do things by words and symbols.

Course Objectives:

- Promote students' ability to think critically, clearly and analytically. This means understanding the ideas and concepts raised throughout the course, their origins, strengths, weaknesses, and their relationship to larger themes in this class, in your education, and in your view of the world.
- Improve students' abilities to persuade others and to improve students' abilities to analyze and resist the ways in which others try to persuade them.
- Improve students' abilities to read and listen critically, to respond reflectively and reasonably to others, and to distinguish successful and unsuccessful arguments.
- To gain a conceptual and practical understanding of the background, elements, processes, and contexts of persuasion from psychological and sociological perspectives.
- To increase your understanding of how perception, attitudes and beliefs, and social norms are active in shaping the sending and reception of persuasive messages.
- To better understand the relationship of rhetoric/persuasion, critical questioning, and democracy.

Course Policies and Procedures:

- *In the Classroom* – This class will be a mixture of lecture and discussion. During some class periods, I will deliver a lecture on the topics outlined on the course schedule. However, that does not mean I expect you to be passive consumers. At times I will be asking you questions and I will expect you to ask me questions. In addition, I will ask you to provide examples of

concepts we talk about in class, and so participation in lectures will be encouraged in a variety of ways. I expect this to be a lively class. The Philosopher Plutarch once said (and I happen to agree with him): “There are those who think that the speaker has a function to perform, and the hearer none. They think it only right that the speaker shall come with his lecture carefully thought out and prepared, while they, without consideration or thought of their obligations, rush in and take their seats exactly as if they had come to dinner, to have a good time while others work hard. Those people bite.” Also, please turn off all ringing electronic devices when entering the classroom. The sound of a cell phone (or any other device) is extremely distracting to your professor, and I assume to your fellow classmates, and it is rude and offensive. Finally, no texting in class. Period. End of story. Leave the cell phone in your bag. No texting. Please don’t text in class. That’s no texting in class. In case it wasn’t clear, do not send text messages while in class.

- *Attendance* – Your presence in class is mandatory. You should be aware that the best way to do well in this course is to show up to every class, prepared and attentive. Inevitably, at the end of the semester, students who missed classes do poorly, while students who show up consistently do well. I do not post lecture notes on the Internet, nor do I respond to emails that say “what did we talk about in class on Tuesday.” We cover lots of material in class and for that reason it is critical that you attend in order to do well. Attendance also means refraining from playing with your cell phone, reading the newspaper, surfing the internet, using other electronic devices or doing other coursework while in the classroom. If I notice you engaged in some activity that does not pertain to what is happening in the class, I will ask you to leave. This course is designed for courteous, motivated students who attend each class, do all the reading, and ask questions when they don’t understand something. If you miss class, you are responsible for getting materials we covered from a classmate. Students who fail to meet these basic and reasonable expectations can assume that their performance on assignments will suffer. Students who miss an excessive number of classes can expect to lose points from their final mark.
- *Academic Integrity* – I expect that the work you complete for this course will be your own, which is to say that cheating, plagiarism, and other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Any written assignment that borrows from other sources without giving proper credit or that is plagiarized in whole or in part from another source (including other student’s work) is grounds for an “F” on the assignment, or depending on the severity of the crime, is grounds for an “F” in the course.

University Policies on Academic Integrity:

Academic Integrity: In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility.

Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about “rules” for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the Undergraduate Associate Dean.

When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under Policy 71 – Student Discipline. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy 71 - Student Discipline, <http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm>

Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4, <http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy70.htm>

Appeals: A student may appeal the finding and/or penalty in a decision made under Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances (other than regarding a petition) or Policy 71 - Student Discipline if a ground for an appeal can be established. Read Policy 72 - Student Appeals, <http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy72.htm>

Academic Integrity website (Arts): http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/arts/ugrad/academic_responsibility.html

Academic Integrity Office (University): <http://uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/>

Accommodation for Students with Disabilities:

The Office for Persons with Disabilities (OPD), located in Needles Hall, Room 1132, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the OPD

Required Texts and Readings:

I like books - I like buying them, I like reading them, I like keeping them on my bookshelf, I like talking to people about them. Reading makes you smarter. You should read a lot. I wish I could assign a book a week, but that doesn't seem to be the culture anymore for undergraduate students. During the first class I will ask all of you to write down your email addresses, and afterwards I will construct a class list. What I'm going to do is email the class, each week, a set of pdfs of the following week's readings (or potentially a url link if there is an electronic resource). You should print the readings out or bring some electronic device to class that allows you to read them off a screen. I expect students to access all readings regardless of their location. I will ensure that the readings are available at least one week prior to when we will discuss them in class. BUT. And this is a big BUT. If you are a fantastic student, super bright and eager you should really consider buying the following books: Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, *Words that Work* by Frank Luntz, *Influence* by Robert Cialdini, *The Story Factor* by Annette Simmons, *The Culture Code* by Clotaire Rapaille, *Descartes' Error* by Antonio Demasio, *Decoding Advertising* by Judith Williamson, *How to Win Friends and Influence People* by Dale Carnegie, and *Maximum Influence* by Kurt Mortensen. All of these books are on Amazon.com as paperbacks or used. You should buy them and read them, cover to cover. We will read sections from each but you should really read them all at some point if you are seriously interested in mastering the content

of this class. If you buy the books, then just bring the books to class – you’ll look smarter at least. In any case, I believe that reading a lot is good and so we will try to read a lot this semester. Each week I will give you assigned readings and then I will mention extra reading that you can do to go above and beyond the normal expectations of the course.

Assignments:

- 1) **Think Questions** – You are required to complete the readings prior to each class session – class discussion and class content will build upon the readings assigned for that particular day. The quality of class discussion and your experience will depend on your having made an attempt to read and understand the articles assigned each week. On FOUR occasions throughout the semester I will ask you to write a 1-2 page, single-spaced response to a specific question I pose about the readings. I will ask the question at the end of class about the following week’s readings, and the following week you will turn in your answer. The due dates for the think question are: September 27th, October 4th, October 25th, and November 8th. Each think question will be graded on a scale of 0-25 for a total of 100 possible points. Collectively, the think questions are worth a total of 20% of your final grade.
- 2) **Short Paper #1 – Primary Analysis** –Your first short paper will require you to choose a particular primary example of persuasion in action. You will then take this primary source and apply the concepts from class in an effort to analyze it’s structure, form, effect, intended audience, and language. Your example can be an image, speech, picture, movie, commercial, anything that attempts to convince a particular audience of something. This paper will be 4-6 pages long and due on November 1st. It will be worth 20% of your final grade.
- 3) **Short Paper #2 – Convince Me!** – In your second short paper, you will attempt to persuade me of some particular proposition. I don’t care how you do it, what the proposition happens to be. Only a thoroughly convincing case that has made me believe in the proposition being advanced will receive an A for this paper. Unlike Short Paper #1, this is not a standard academic paper. Sometimes, we ought to violate standards in order to produce effects. I only care that you hand me 4-7 pages of paper, I don’t care what’s on it. And I will evaluate the thing that is handed in based on the effect it produced on the audience (me). This will be due on or before December 6th at 5pm and it will be worth 20% of your final grade.
- 4) **Critical Concept Presentation** – Early in the semester, we will form groups of students (with either 2 or 3 students per group) who will work together on a “critical concept presentation”. This presentation is an oral exercise in brevity and clarity. After you are assigned a group, you will pick from a list of key concepts from the class. As a group, you will be responsible for the research, writing, and presentation of the meaning of the key concept that you pick. After you have researched your concept, you will then pick an example of your key concept in action. You will then describe your example and then you will analyze that example in the light of the concept you explained. For your presentation, you will have exactly 6 minutes, and only 6 minutes. You should use 4 minutes to explain the concept and 2 minutes to explain

the example. For example, you may be given the term “ethos”. Your group would begin research on the term, on its meaning, its relationship to persuasion, on its central features and place in producing persuasive effects. Then you will find an example of the use of ethos. Obviously you cannot do everything in six minutes – your job is to give the best, most understandable, and concise overview that you can manage. Dates for the critical concept presentations will be assigned in class. If you choose to use AV materials, it is your responsibility to make sure that your AV materials work properly, are queued up, etc. On the day of your presentation, you will submit a script of your presentation along with the bibliography you used (note also that your cover page should include the full names of the group members and the title of your presentation). This script will later form part of an archive that will be distributed to the class. Feel free to approach this as creatively as you wish. You will be graded on the overall quality of your presentation (organization, clarity, coherence, relevance, time, the quality of your research, and the completeness of your script). Your performance will be worth 20% of your final grade.

- 5) **Quiz** – Yes, we will have a quiz. Speech Communication students don’t often have exams of any sort. Well, this class does have one short quiz. It will be in class on the final day of the semester (November 29th). It will be closed notes, closed book, and I’ll ask you a couple of short answer questions about the content of the semester. This will be worth 20% of your final grade. More details as we get closer to the end of the semester.

Grading Policies:

- *How are Grades Calculated?* - For each of the five assignments you will receive a score out of 100 points. Given that each assignment is worth 20% of your final grade, I will take the average of your five scores and that will be your grade for the semester. I do not like giving students numerical marks and I think it is an inferior system of grading. In my mind, I often think in terms of a letter grade. So that you know, your number out of 100 points translates into the following letter grades:

| | | | |
|-------------|------------|------------|----------|
| 90-100 = A+ | 73-76 = B | 60-62 = C- | 0-50 = F |
| 85-89 = A | 70-72 = B- | 57-59 = D+ | |
| 80-84 = A- | 67-69 = C+ | 53-56 = D | |
| 77-79 = B+ | 63-66 = C | 50-52 = D- | |

- *What do the Grades Mean?* – Loosely translated the letter grades mean the following: an A+ is truly outstanding and spectacular work that goes well above and beyond the normal expectations of an assignment and demonstrates a complete mastery of the subject matter. An A or an A- is excellent and exceptional work. A grade in the B range is good to very good work that demonstrates a solid grasp of the material. A grade in the C range is average work that demonstrates a satisfactory but incomplete grasp of the course material. A grade in the D range is unsatisfactory work of poor quality. And an F is failing work that does not meet the minimum requirements for the course. Because grades in the A range are exceptional and grades in the C range are average, A grades are rare and difficult to obtain. I’m telling you this so that you know that if you earn a 75 on an assignment it means that I think the

assignment is good not excellent. If you earn a 95, it means it's one of the best pieces of work I've have ever seen for this kind of class.

- *Extensions* – There are no extensions for any assignment. Assignments are announced well in advance of due dates. If you know in advance that you cannot make a due date for an assignment, please discuss it with me beforehand. Requests for extensions after a due date has passed will only be granted in exceptional and unavoidable circumstances and must include (a) one typed, double-spaced page explaining the reason for missing the deadline, and (b) relevant documentation such as an official doctor's note. The written request for an extension must be in my hands within one week after the scheduled due date. I am under no obligation to accept late assignments; assignments that are accepted may suffer a significant penalty (5 points for each day late).
- *Negotiations and Missed Assignments* - I do not haggle with students over grades, nor do I listen to declarations about why a student deserves an extra point here or there. You and I will not be negotiating your grade for the class – you will be earning a grade based on criteria that are explicitly stated in class. In addition, after the final grades are posted for the semester I will not re-mark or re-consider any grade from earlier in the semester. If you do not understand why you got a particular grade or why you lost points on a given assignment, you should come to my office hours or make an appointment to see me and I will explain your grade. If you do not participate in, or hand in, the final exam or either of the collaborative papers you will receive an F for the course.

Course Schedule:

Week #1 – September 13th - Introduction to Course – What is Persuasion? Why Persuasion?

Week #2 –September 20th – Ancient Rhetoric, Aristotle, and Character

Readings:

Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, Book 1 – Chapters 1, 2, and 3; Book 2 – Chapters 1, 2, 12, 20, and 22.

Week #3 – September 27th – Words, Magical Words, and Identification

Readings:

Kenneth Burke, *On Symbols and Society* (University of Chicago Press, 1989): 77-125 and 179-191.

Frank Luntz, *Words that Work: It's not What You Say, It's What People Hear* (Hyperion, 2006): 1-33, 71-80.

***First Think Question Due.

Week #4 – October 4th – Argumentation, Reasoning, and Rational Persuasion

Readings:

Chaim Perelman, *The Realm of Rhetoric* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1982): 9-40, 106-162.

***Second Think Question Due.

Week #5 – October 11th – The Psychology of Compliance and the Relationship between Reason and Emotion

Readings:

Robert Cialdini, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion* (HaperCollins, 2007): 1-16, and the rest of the book.

Antonio Demasio, *Descartes Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (Penguin Books, 1994): 165-201 (preferably the whole book).

Week #6 – October 18th - Narrative and Story-Telling

Readings:

Annette Simmons, *The Story Factor* (Basic Books, 2006): 27-48, 105-131, and 157-180.

Walter Fisher, *Human Communication as Narration* (University of South Carolina Press, 1989): TBD.

Week #7 – October 25th – Background Assumptions and the Sociology of Persuasion

Readings:

Lawrence Lessig, “The Regulation of Social Meaning,” *The University of Chicago Law Review*, 62, no. 3, 951-962, 1008-1014 (943-1045).

Clotaire Rapaille, *The Culture Code: An Ingenious Way to Understand Why People Around the World Live and Buy as They Do* (Broadway, 2006): 1-54 and 73-92.

***Third Think Question Due.

Week #8 – November 1st – Visual Persuasion and Practices of Looking

Readings:

Marita Sturken & Lisa Cartwright, “Practices of Looking: Images, Power, and Politics,” from *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2003): 10-44.

Robert Gass & John Seiter, *Persuasion, Social Influence and Compliance Gaining* (Pearson, 2007): 299-323.

***First Short Paper Due.

Week #9 – November 8th – Advertising

Readings:

Kathryn Braun, Rhiannon Ellis, & Elizabeth Loftus, “Make My Memory: How Advertising Can Change Our Memories of the Past,” *Psychology and Marketing* 19, no. 1 (January 2002): 1-23.

Judith Williamson, *Decoding Advertising: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising* (Marion Boyers Publishers, 1978): 15-39.

***Fourth Think Question Due.

Week #10 – November 15th – A Classic of Professional Persuasion in Business, and Don’t Forget Smelling and Hearing, also part of the process

Readings:

Dale Carnegie, *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (Simon and Shuster, 2009): TBD, you should really read the whole book.

Robert Gass & John Seiter, *Persuasion, Social Influence and Compliance Gaining* (Pearson, 2007): 324-343.

Week #11 – November 22nd –

No Class This Week, your instructor is away at a conference. Go out and try to persuade someone of something.

Week #12 – November 29th – Persuasion in Public Culture

Readings:

Ezra Klein, “The Unpersuaded: What’s the Use of Presidential Rhetoric?” from *The New Yorker* (March 19, 2012): 32-38.

***Quiz in class.

***Convince me paper due on or before December 6th at 5pm.