

Overview:

A discussion of the connection between feminist theory and feminist activism seems particularly relevant, especially as the academy reckons with the current political climate that seeks to suppress voices from marginalized communities. This paper details the development of an undergraduate communications course designed to provide students with tools to actively address gender equity issues on campus and in their community. Over the course of a semester, undergraduate students learn the strategies and tactics behind successful advocacy campaigns, including website design, coalition building, social media constituency development, op-ed writing and persuasive public speaking. By the end of the semester, students have identified a policy they wish to change in their community, the entity with the capability to make the change, and how they must go about appealing to that group within the confines of their bylaws and/or policies. The semester flows around a group project: a classroom simulation of a real-world scenario where the students appeal to stakeholders and decision-makers, with each student assigned the role of advocate or skeptic. Following their oral presentation, students receive immediate peer and faculty feedback on both their reasoning and delivery skills. Though there are known challenges to the group project as a pedagogical tool, I argue the benefits outweigh the limitations for would-be political activists.

In the five years that I have taught the course, students learned the strategies and tactics behind successful advocacy campaigns, including website design, coalition building, social media constituency development, op-ed writing and persuasive public speaking. Over the years, students have become more passionate

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about social engagement, continuing to seek effective ways to advocate for the issues they believe in while increasingly feeling disenfranchised from the political process. The course elucidates concepts and controversies to students they have always already been dealing with but offer them the tools and language with which to shape their own response. The course has been successfully adapted to a week-long intensive summer session for high-school students. Student evaluations reveal this course has offered a vision of what extra-political engagement can look like, offering possibilities to those students who see little hope for themselves and their communities in the current administration.

An Evolution From Corporate Communications to Social Advocacy

This class came to fruition as a combination of my academic and teaching backgrounds. While my doctorate is in American Studies, my master's degree is in mass communication, and I worked for many years in public relations and marketing before I returned to graduate school. While working on my dissertation, I taught a course on persuasive communications at served as a visiting assistant professor at Cornell University's School of Hotel Administration in the Marketing and Management Communication Department from 2007 through 2009, where I taught courses in managerial communication with an emphasis on persuasive public speaking. During the day, I taught my students argumentation and research, with an emphasis on bottom line, measurable, results. At night, I was using feminist theory to parse political campaign communications. At the time, it felt disjointed to move back and forth between these two disciplines, yet when I was given the opportunity

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to design my own course on women and advocacy work, I found myself falling back on some of the concepts, and even the exact assignments, that I taught in my managerial communications class.

The Development of COMM 2011: Advocacy, Politics, and Women

When I took a position at Tulane University with Newcomb College Institute, was given the opportunity to design my own course within the Communication department as a low-level elective. In this new permanent role, I wanted to take part in engaged teaching approaches, but directly working with community partners in my new community seemed out of reach, particularly as I was not yet aware of what those challenges were without making assumptions based on a superficial understanding of the city. Instead, I chose a project-based approach, offering students the chance to identify their own areas of concern and expertise. Students select their own group members of no more than four to five, and over the course of the entire semester, work together to develop a policy proposition, an oral presentation, and a written research report. The syllabus offers a holistic vision of the course with very general language and clear learning outcomes:

- Students will be able to demonstrate knowledge of major principles of the persuasion process and be able to demonstrate application of these principals in written, oral, and visual communications.
- Students will be able to articulate a critical, informed position on an issue and engage in productive and responsible intellectual exchanges that demonstrate the ability to grasp and respond to other positions as well as

to set forth their own.

- Using class concepts, students will learn how to critically analyze U.S. media and popular culture for intersectional representations of gender and sexuality.
- Students will be able to identify challenges involved in practicing feminism and gender-focused politics in the public sphere.

The full syllabus can be found in Appendix A.

For their graded assessments, students are tasked with assignments that would mirror the kind of persuasive communications pieces they would develop and circulate in the real world. Other than the midterm exam, each assignment engages with the topic selected by the students. These include:

- A one-minute “elevator pitch” that summarizes their position on the policy change they are pursuing.
- Midterm exam that tests reasoning skills by identifying common fallacies, persuasion theory, argumentation tactics, familiarity with rhetorical devices
- An op-ed on the issue to the publication of your choice appropriate to the policy under consideration (for instance, the campus newspaper or regional news outlet)
- A 40-minute oral presentation as a group, with an accompanying “leave-behind” research report of no less than 25 pages
- A “skeptical review” that analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of your

assigned opponent's policy presentation.

A detailed description of the group assignment and grading rubric can be found in Appendix B. Supporting assignment descriptions and rubrics for the op-ed and elevator pitch can be found in Appendix C. The assignment details and rubric for the skeptic review can be found in Appendix D.

The first time I taught the course, it was 2012, and I wanted to capitalize on the excitement surrounding the presidential election season, while also centering policy work that happens outside of electoral politics. As I designed the syllabus, I wanted to frame our discussion of “advocacy, women and politics” with a grounding of the basics, beginning with a definition of gender and feminism. While some of my students had taken women's studies classes, not all had. So, I began with the cornerstones of working definitions of these terms, moving into discussions of representations of women in the media, and how involvement in politics should be understood beyond events that happen once every four years on election-day. These kinds of discussions were generally lively and robust, and I have to acknowledge that a group that takes a course with this kind of title is already pre-disposed to holding opinions about these kind of issues, but wanting to become actively engaged in discussing them.

After a firm grounding in the basics of gender analysis, the course readings moved from examples of feminist advocacy writing, like Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richard's classic *Grassroots: A Field Guide for Feminist Activism*, to chapters

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from the persuasive communications Wysocki and Lynch's textbook *Compose, Design, Advocate*, which has an advocacy focus that encourages the writer to use written, visual, and oral communication to effect change in their lives and communities. I shared real world examples with gender at the center, like materials prepared by the Sylvia Rivera Legal Project, particularly a campaign called "Toilet Training." SRLP developed a film as well as a Companion Guide for Activists and Educators with talking points that explained why universal access to public restrooms was necessary for trans and non-binary people. As the syllabus has evolved, different issues have taken on greater centrality. For example, this year's syllabus includes a lecture on maternal politics in the "Black Lives Matter Movement" and a discussion of the motivations and advocates involved in the new campus anti-rape movement. These kinds of examples not only demonstrate persuasion tools and tactics, including directly asking for a change, but also served to demonstrate the work that real activists are doing everyday beyond protest marches and Twitter advocacy.

Texts include not only handbooks on social activism like *Grassroots*, but writings from activist scholars like Haunani Kay-Trask.: "Lovely Hula Hands, Corporate Tourism, and the Prostitution of Hawaiian Culture", from her book of essays, *From A Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawaii*. I used this essay as a way for the students to see how a seemingly unconnected policy issue, (whether or not Hawaii should participate in the tourist industry) can be seen through a gendered lens. Students react strongly to Trask's request in the essay, "If you are thinking of visiting my homeland, please don't. We don't want or need any

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more tourists, and we certainly don't like them. If you want to help our cause, pass this message on to your friends," and this essay opens up an opportunity for them to think about what activism looks like, that it is not always friendly or nice, and that to make change, advocates need to specifically ask for an audience to do, or in this case, not do something. As social psychologist Robert Cialdini notes in his research on the "science of influence", persuasion can only really be measured if individuals do what they are asked to do, requiring a clear and specific call to action. Studying Cialdini's weapons of influence allows these students of feminist activism to deploy the same tools as their counterparts in marketing programs, illustrating for students that learning these skills provides them a way to stay engaged in the issues they are passionate about long after they leave campus.

Tactical readings focus on the building blocks of persuasive communications, from reasoning processes, the strength of logos, pathos and ethos appeals, and avoiding fallacies. Evaluating evidence was also a key component of discussion, how to ensure your research meets criteria of consistency, reliability, and relevance to the debate at hand. In this era of accusations of "fake news," I strengthened this section of the course, requiring students to do a comparison of an online reliable source to one that was generated by a propaganda outlet or otherwise suspicious source.

Above all, I wanted to have the students remember to place their intended audience at the center of consideration. It is not enough to build a case for change on logic, but to bring about actual policy change, an advocate must demonstrate what's in it for the listener to bring about that change. Exhortations about fairness and

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equity are rarely enough to bring about real and lasting change; instead, advocates must point out why a change is better for the listener than maintaining the status quo. Classes in audience analysis need not only focus on quantitative analysis of viewership or click-through rate to be effective for future practitioners of persuasive communications.

Importantly, the final assignment in the class is not the group project or presentation, but is instead a reflection that places the student in the role of critic, or what I refer to as an “assigned skeptic.” Students are required to thoughtfully dismantle another group’s presentation, assessing not the public speaking skills of their peers, but their reasoning, research and persuasion tactics. This exercise forces the students to engage in a topic that they are not as familiar with, and also teaches them the value of developing thoughtful questions in a respectful manner. As the work of higher education scholar Linda Sax reveals, undergraduates, particularly women students, are often reluctant to pose difficult questions in a classroom setting for fear of alienating the respondent or being wrong in their personal assessment. The role of assigned skeptic provides “cover” for them to probe for further information without positioning it as a personal attack on their peer.

Making Change: Evidence of Success on Campus

Each semester, students are provided a list of possible topics to consider that place gender at the center of a controversial policy. Groups are encouraged to choose a topic that they are genuinely interested in, while acknowledging that research may be more tenable with a more general topic. The list of possible topics

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can be found with as part of Appendix B. Suggestions for consideration include an appeal to Orleans Parish School Board to change its abstinence-only sexual education policy or an appeal to the governor of Louisiana to grant clemency to women incarcerated for killing their batterers as a result of intimate partner violence. Students have pursued these topics, and generated their own, like a group who appealed to the American Medical Association to change its policy banning men who have sex with men from donating blood.

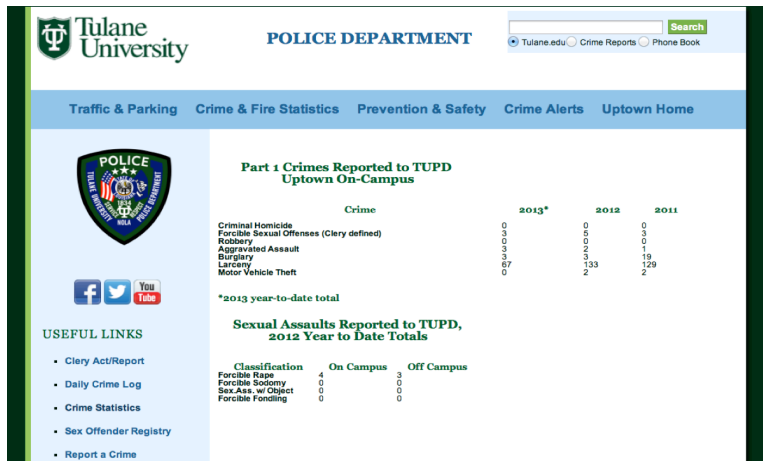
As an instructor, the most rewarding project has been one that addressed real issues of concern on our campus. Tulane University has long struggled with issues of sexual assault endemic to almost all college campus in the United States. Student activists here have successfully lobbied the university's administration to address the problem through a variety of efforts, from shifts in freshman orientation to a campus wide climate survey. My students added their voices to the initiative in a effort to make the number of reported incidents of sexual assault on campus more easily accessible to students, parents, and the general public. As a result of their participation in the class project, for which they prepared the required proposition change and documents, students also appealed to the TUPD via Twitter to set a meeting to meet with then-Superintendent John Barnwell. Their requests were clear and simple:

- A yearly email sent from Superintendent Barnwell or Tulane administration. This email would include last year's statistics of sexual assaults (on- and off-campus) as well as a message and reminder that not all crimes are reported through crime alerts. This email would serve to inform students about

complete statistics and help them to be aware of the available methods for viewing Tulane's crime statistics.

- Add a new section to TUPD's website with a simple, clear, and complete view of past years' crime statistics. This would include sexual assault statistics as well as other crimes, giving students, parents, and the community a way to get a quick snapshot of crimes that occurred on- and off-campus in past years. This section would provide the information in easy-to-read tables organized by the specific offense and would not require much maintenance from TUPD.
- Upgrade to the daily crime log. We propose that it is expanded to reach back further than a few months. While our second suggestion would provide a way to see a numeric representation of crimes occurring, the daily crime log provides additional details about the location, date/time of occurrence, and follow-up actions.

This groups materials can be found in Appendix E. As a result of this basic conversation and their compelling materials, the TUPD shifted to an online report, listing in simple terms the number of reported assaults:



Since this time, the university has taken on a more proactive stance in talking about sexual assault on campus. In 2016, they've conducted a campus climate survey, and when the statistics were above the national average, there was reluctance to release the data, and student activists, some of my former students, pushed back against the administration both in the student newspaper and through interpersonal work with senior administration. While the changes in the website were a small component of a larger campaign, the students felt energized to continue this work.

Limitations

Certainly, limitations of the group project have been widely considered in the literature, including, as Ashraf details, "the possibility of free riding; high transaction costs—especially if students are commuting from different places or have inflexible schedules because of other obligations (e.g., family, work); poor product quality; stifled individual creativity resulting from within-group dynamics; and poorly structured projects, which may result in delays." Yet I argue that the merits

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outweigh the drawbacks, particularly for those students who have voiced a commitment to making social change, already an endeavor fraught with complications. Coalition building, solidarity work, and engagement with public policy work are difficult by any measure, and navigating the challenges of a group assignment closely reflects what this work would look like across a variety of communities.

I have considered moving this course from a simulation model to a service-learning model, connecting students with local advocacy organizations. While I would like to paint a portrait of perpetually engaged students, that is not always the case. Students are not typically inclined to building long lasting coalitions over time, and the service-learning model has proven problematic as a tool of white supremacy across disciplines. As John Eby notes in his seminal essay, *Why Service Learning is Bad*, “The limitations of service done in the name of service-learning are often overlooked and possible harm done by to communities by short term volunteers is ignored...Community leaders and agency representatives concerned about fundamental community change raise significant questions when given opportunity.” Commitment to an ongoing issue beyond the end of the semester would be required to make this component meaningful, and

Continuing evolution of the course

In 2018, I successfully adapted this course to a two-week long summer session targeting high-school students, reducing much of the reading for this audience, but focusing instead on the public speaking, research elements, and argumentation

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skills. Offered as a small cohort program, students spent the week together developing relationships and exploring a uniquely intentional space designed for collaboration and consideration of the course materials. Students were expected to read approximately 50-100 pages of provided text before the program began, with additional reading assignments throughout the program, averaging around 30 pages per night. Materials for the high school courses were repurposed from undergraduate courses taught by both of us, and adapted to meet the needs of a less academically experienced audience. This curriculum was developed in conjunction with the other activities of the week such as field trips, guest speakers, and a culminating group project similar to the undergraduate experience. Given recent increases in women's political participation, I expect that this opportunity will continue to attract those young people considering engaging in activist work as well as those that want to pursue positional power through elected office.

As this course continues to evolve to meet the needs of its student and the contemporary climate, I hope to demonstrate to faculty the value of teaching students to connect theory with practice, particularly as part of an analysis of feminist activism. Once armed with an understanding of gender as a category that frames social and political outcomes, students are often enthusiastic about engaging in hands-on social change.

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APPENDIX A

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FINAL ASSIGNMENT

Below you will find the instructions for your final major speaking and writing assignment. Be sure to read the instructions carefully, and complete all stages of the task.

ORAL AND VISUAL COMPONENTS

Instructions: Your team will be presenting an extended argument (or case) for a change in policy at the national, regional or local level. You must argue for some specific change in the status quo--you want to modify present laws, rules, or policies. The issue must have a readily discernable gender component. If you select a local law or policy in one specific organization, be sure that the issue is significant enough that some research has been done and credible evidence exists upon which you can build your case. Assume that your audience is mixed: most are simply concerned citizens (which we all are) but others are the very decision-makers (law-making politicians, perhaps, or the upper management of the organization) who can carry out the change you want.

Your group will have 40 minutes to make your case. Plan the presentation to the class, using all member of the team, with time for questions afterward. **No one team member should speak for more than twice as long as the presentation time of the team member who speaks the least.** Plan to use visuals effectively and find ways to hold audience attention for that length of time.

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Allow yourselves plenty of team practice time once the PowerPoint part of the presentation is set.

The focus of this assignment is the logic and persuasiveness of your evidence and arguments.

Specific Tasks: Using your analytical thinking ability, your knowledge of reasoning and argumentation, and your own research, approach the assignment as follows:

1. Formulate a proposition that is clear, controversial, challenging, and balanced. I will ask you for this proposition and at least five credible sources of evidence via email as noted in the syllabus.
2. Research this issue to find enough evidence to support all of your main claims. You will need to turn in a bibliography (or works cited) page using MLA, APA or other recognized format along with your written report.
3. Prepare to respond to skeptical (but not hostile) questions at the conclusion of your presentation.

4. **Prepare at least 3 copies of your slides:** you must provide one copy to your assigned skeptics by 5 p.m. the day before you speak (you may email this copy). One copy you will hand to me at the moment you get up to speak (this may be printed six slides to a page.) One copy will be for your presentation notes—you might print this larger, and mark it up for reading.
5. Other suggestions:
 - Use an attention-getting introduction, a clear preview of the organization of the speech, and a summary in your conclusion.
 - At least one of your visuals should be a **concept overview**: a brief, up-front summary of policy change and why it is important. Another of your visuals must be a **preview of the structure** or organization of the presentation.
 - **Make sure every major claim is backed up with evidence** (watch for fallacies).
 - Don't make new claims in the conclusion.
 - Don't waste words. Edit carefully so you can provide the most persuasive case in the limited time available.
 - Practice your speech to make sure you are fluent and the timing is correct. You should be familiar enough with the material that you can make some eye contact and provide some vocal variety (although I recognize that delivery will be constrained somewhat by the need to present large amounts of detailed, accurate information).

- Avoid ad-libs – every major claim should well considered and articulated
- Begin thinking about this now; begin planning. Ask for help if you are not sure about anything in this assignment.

WRITTEN COMPONENT

Your group will prepare a 20-25 page written proposal that will serve as an accompaniment to your oral presentation. This report will expand on the narrative that your group presented, but will provide a more in-depth discussion of the relevant issues surrounding the policy you wish to change, from the status quo to the change you wish to see brought to fruition. This proposal should include a background of the current situation and problems with the policy, but should emphasize the benefits of the change that you are advocating. These benefits may be both qualitative and quantitative (social benefits, cost savings, etc.) In a real-world scenario, the written proposal would serve as a leave-behind piece that your audience would be able to refer to following the presentation. It is your opportunity to articulate your argument in a more nuanced way than provided in a brief oral presentation. The report may include the statistical information that could be considered too dry for a large audience, but would serve as a persuasive tool for those interested in the quantitative aspects of the issue.

All aspects of the presentation, both written and oral, should be cohesive and presented in one unified voice. Though there will be multiple writers participating

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in the creation of this document, the proposal should read smoothly, as though written by one author.

The group oral presentation will be given on the day noted in the syllabus.

The skeptic review is due via email no later than **one week after the assigned oral presentation**. Final written report, presentation slides and other supporting materials due **May 6 by 5:00 pm** via email.

Evaluation of Group Project Oral Presentation

COMM 2811: Advocacy, Politics and Women
Professor Aidan Smith

Topic: _____

Criteria	
I. STRATEGY AND SUBSTANCE Creates a credible, convincing presentation by	
a. Selecting an appropriate communication strategy based on an understanding of both the speaker's and audience's needs, interests, and positions	
b. Providing adequate details and examples to support assertions	
c. Providing a balance of logical and emotional appeals	
II. ORGANIZATION of the overall presentation. Structures and develops information in a clear, effective manner by	
a. Clearly defining the presentation's overall purpose and governing idea	
b. Providing a clear preview ("roadmap" statement) of the whole presentation	
c. Logically organizing the points	
d. Providing smooth transitions between points and especially between speakers	
e. Closing effectively	
III. VISUAL SUPPORT: Delivers ideas with impact by	
a. Well structured visual support to enhance clarity	
b. Well designed slides to emphasize key points and improve logical or emotional appeal	

Evaluation of Group Project Oral Presentation

COMM -3813 Advocacy, Politics and Women

Professor Aidan Smith

Criteria	
IV. FIRST SPEAKER'S DELIVERY SKILLS	
Speaker's name _____	
a. Developing a positive rapport with listeners; engaging the audience	
b. Conveying a keen interest in and conviction about the topic (energy, confidence, dynamism, enthusiasm)	
c. Demonstrating a professional extemporaneous style (organized but not memorized – conversational style)	
d. Using appropriate nonverbal cues (posture, gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, movement, etc.)	
e. Using appropriate vocal cues (rate, volume, inflection (vocal variety), enunciation, pronunciation, pitch, tone)	
f. Speaking with correct grammar, accurate vocabulary, idiomatic expression, and appropriate level of diction	
g. Using visual support effectively	
V. SECOND SPEAKER'S DELIVERY SKILLS	
Speaker's name _____	
a. Developing a positive rapport with listeners; engaging the audience	
b. Conveying a keen interest in and conviction about the topic (energy, confidence, dynamism, enthusiasm)	
c. Demonstrating a professional extemporaneous style (organized but not memorized – conversational style)	
d. Using appropriate nonverbal cues (posture, gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, movement, etc.)	
e. Using appropriate vocal cues (rate, volume, inflection (vocal variety), enunciation, pronunciation, pitch, tone)	
f. Speaking with correct grammar, accurate vocabulary, idiomatic expression, and appropriate level of diction	
g. Using visual support effectively	
VI. THIRD SPEAKER'S DELIVERY SKILLS	
Speaker's name _____	
a. Developing a positive rapport with listeners; engaging the audience	
b. Conveying a keen interest in and conviction about the topic (energy, confidence, dynamism, enthusiasm)	
c. Demonstrating a professional extemporaneous style (organized but not memorized – conversational style)	
d. Using appropriate nonverbal cues (posture, gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, movement, etc.)	
e. Using appropriate vocal cues (rate, volume, inflection (vocal variety), enunciation, pronunciation, pitch, tone)	
f. Speaking with correct grammar, accurate vocabulary, idiomatic expression, and appropriate level of diction	
g. Using visual support effectively	

Evaluation of Group Project Oral Presentation

COMM -3813 Advocacy, Politics and Women

Professor Aidan Smith

VII. FOURTH SPEAKER'S DELIVERY SKILLS
Speaker's name
a. Developing a positive rapport with listeners; engaging the audience
b. Conveying a keen interest in and conviction about the topic (energy, confidence, dynamism, enthusiasm)
c. Demonstrating a professional extemporaneous style (organized but not memorized – conversational style)
d. Using appropriate nonverbal cues (posture, gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, movement, etc.)
e. Using appropriate vocal cues (rate, volume, inflection (vocal variety), enunciation, pronunciation, pitch, tone)
f. Speaking with correct grammar, accurate vocabulary, idiomatic expression, and appropriate level of diction
g. Using visual support effectively
VIII FIFTH SPEAKER'S DELIVERY SKILLS
Speaker's name
a. Developing a positive rapport with listeners; engaging the audience
b. Conveying a keen interest in and conviction about the topic (energy, confidence, dynamism, enthusiasm)
c. Demonstrating a professional extemporaneous style (organized but not memorized – conversational style)
d. Using appropriate nonverbal cues (posture, gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, movement, etc.)
e. Using appropriate vocal cues (rate, volume, inflection (vocal variety), enunciation, pronunciation, pitch, tone)
f. Speaking with correct grammar, accurate vocabulary, idiomatic expression, and appropriate level of diction
g. Using visual support effectively
IX. SIXTH SPEAKER'S DELIVERY SKILLS
Speaker's name
a. Developing a positive rapport with listeners; engaging the audience
b. Conveying a keen interest in and conviction about the topic (energy, confidence, dynamism, enthusiasm)
c. Demonstrating a professional extemporaneous style (organized but not memorized – conversational style)
d. Using appropriate nonverbal cues (posture, gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, movement, etc.)
e. Using appropriate vocal cues (rate, volume, inflection (vocal variety), enunciation, pronunciation, pitch, tone)
f. Speaking with correct grammar, accurate vocabulary, idiomatic expression, and appropriate level of diction
g. Using visual support effectively

COMM 2811: INSTRUCTIONS FOR ELEVATOR PITCH ASSIGNMENT

In this assignment, you will learn to give a very short, enthusiastic talk that “pitches” your idea and provides enough information on the topic to pique the interest of an audience or move them to action.

Assignment Overview

You will create, develop, and present an elevator pitch. The term “elevator pitch” was coined to refer to a sales pitch that could be delivered during a 30-second elevator ride. Your elevator pitch can be a bit longer than 30 seconds, but no more than one minute in length. The talk must be very concise, well rehearsed, and energetically delivered without notes or visual aids.

Your topic should be some element of the policy change that your group selected for your final project. Because the larger issue may be too broad to focus on for this brief assignment, you may focus on a smaller portion of the issue.

Consider some variation within this structure as you craft your elevator pitch as a paragraph with five sentences:

1. What is the problem?
2. What is your solution?
3. Who are you and why are you the one to solve the problem?
4. What is the benefit in making the change?
5. What is the call to action?

The following steps will assist you in completing this assignment:

1. Select a topic for your elevator pitch.
2. Plan your delivery techniques.
3. Practice your talk numerous times to perfect the timing and flow.
4. Submit your script to the instructor and present your “pitch” to the class.

Your presentation should include the following characteristics:

- An attention-getting opener and a graceful closing with a take-away message.
- An enthusiastic delivery. You must make a connection with the audience members and hold their attention.
- A length of no more than one minute.

If you have any questions about this assignment, email the instructor at asmith41@tulane.edu.

COMM 2811: Elevator Pitch Evaluation Sheet

Presenter: _____ Time: _____

Topic: _____

Grade: _____

Content (50%)—presentation included the following components:

- _____ Attention-getting opener
- _____ Statement relating the topic to the audience and motivated them to listen
- _____ Clear purpose statement
- _____ Information at a level suited to the audience
- _____ Detail appropriate for oral medium
- _____ Detail appropriate for the time constraint
- _____ Examples where appropriate
- _____ Take-away(s) and graceful closing
- _____ Content had logical organization

Additional comments:

Delivery (50%)—the speaker's delivery had the following characteristics:

- _____ Enthusiasm and professionalism
- _____ Eye contact with the entire room
- _____ Natural gestures and movement
- _____ Clearly articulated speech
- _____ Appropriate speaking pace
- _____ Appropriate speaking volume

Additional comments:

OP-ED Assignment Instructions

Op-Ed: *A term referring to the "opposite the editorial" page of newspapers, a page traditionally reserved for columnists, letters to the editor, and other guests. It operates as a complement to the newspaper's own editorial positions, sometimes expressed in an unsigned article and offering the official opinion of the newspaper's editorial board.*

A good op-ed piece is topical, offering a perspective on a current item of interest to the readers of the publication. The writer offers a unique, focused look at the subject, often using both logical and emotional appeals to persuade readers. The writer's tone is balanced and consistent, and his or her voice unique--humorous or cynical, angry or sorrowful, objective or contemplative, but definitely the voice of the writer. Op-ed pieces are the product of an individual, not a committee. Your assignment is to write an op-ed piece on a subject that relates to your advocacy project, but from your particular point of view, in your own voice. You must formulate an opinion about a subject and attempt to persuade your target audience.

Another consideration for op-ed pieces is that it must be *short* and *concise*. Although lengths of op-ed pieces in real newspapers vary--those in the *New York Times* may be longer than those in smaller papers, for example--you should waste no time in getting to your point. For this assignment, I recommend a maximum length of 800 words. If you can't get your opinion across in that many words, you should probably narrow your topic. Likewise, a good op-ed piece cannot be too short. If the opinion can be encapsulated in, say, less than 400 words, then it probably isn't unique enough to be worth writing about in the first place. A minimum length for this assignment, then, is 400 words.

Please review the following suggestions for this assignment. If you have any questions, please visit during office hours or contact me at asmith41@tulane.edu.

You op-ed piece will be due in class in hard copy on November 3. Please note the intended publication or media outlet for this piece. For instance, you would intend to submit this for inclusion in the Hullabaloo, Times-Picayune, etc.

Tips:

Know your target publication

One of the worst things you can do when writing is to write in a manner inconsistent with your target medium. Be sure to apply your skills of audience analysis to this assignment.

Don't feel you need to keep your paragraphs wholly unified and long. In journalistic writing, it is perfectly legitimate to begin new paragraphs often, even if it means continuing a thought begun in an earlier paragraph. Another consideration about newspaper writing is that you must *grab the reader's attention quickly*. Newspapers are meant to be read quickly, and rarely are they ever read again. And if an article is not interesting, readers generally will not bother finishing it.

OP-ED Assignment Instructions

Supporting your argument

Regardless of who you're writing for, you need to explain your subject and support your argument in ways that are both informative and persuasive. This is especially true of technical or complex subjects, such as economics or science. **Consider the tools of argumentation we have discussed in class, as well as the methods of evaluating evidence.**

One way is to draw comparisons and analogies that the typical reader can relate to. It is no accident that politicians in Washington arguing for a balanced budget compare our nation's spending to a family's financial situation--something most people are familiar with. Other ways to support your argument is to use voices of authority, such as experts and statistics, and to appeal to the needs and values of your readers. Obviously, having experts who agree with you is a boon to your argument. Keep in mind, however, that your readers may not agree who is an acknowledged expert. When Philip Morris issues a scientific report on the harmfulness of tobacco, most people view it skeptically because Philip Morris stands to benefit from a favorable report.

If you do use expert opinion, do so wisely, quoting exactly (if you quote) and establishing the credentials of your expert if he or she is unfamiliar to your readers. Often you can do this quite simply in the first attribution, as in "Harvard physicist Joseph Smith, author of *The Atoms Family*, says..." By explaining that Smith is a physicist at Harvard and has written a book on atoms, you subtly suggest he is an expert who can be trusted. Statistics, too, can and often are used in writing, but you should exercise the same reservations with them as with expert opinion. You should make sure they come from a reputable source, and you should let readers know the source. Keep in mind that statistics can be skewed. If a glass is described as 25 percent empty, it is also 75 percent full. Statistics about gun-related deaths from the National Rifle Association may be skewed to favor the NRA's views on gun control. Also, make sure pertinent terms are clearly defined. A few years ago, the number of farms in one state was reduced by several thousands by changing the definition of "farm" in the government agency that keeps track of such things.

Finally, don't over-rely on statistics. Too many numbers tend to convolute an argument. Whenever possible, you should use statistical information alongside appropriate comparisons or analogies that vividly illustrate the relationships. An argument about the number of drunk driving fatalities, for example, could be compared to deaths resulting from other causes, such as cancer or heart disease. Factual evidence from acknowledged authorities may suffice for a factual argument, but when making value or policy claims (see "Know your opinion"), you may require more. In such cases, it is essential to appeal to the readers' needs and values.

If you are writing for a general newspaper audience, it is a bit more difficult to determine your readers' needs and values, but you should still employ such appeals and hope that decent and reasonable people will share many of the needs and values that underlie your claims.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR SKEPTIC REVIEW

As an officially designated “skeptic”, you will turn in an assessment that applies concepts from the class to critique the *logical elements* (not the oral delivery) of the group Advocacy Presentation you were assigned. Consider:

- What are the main weaknesses in the argument you oppose?
- Were there fallacies present?
- Did the evidence meet the standards for reliability, recency, relevance, etc?

This document should conform to professional communications standards. Essentially, this means it should have an emphasis on audience interest and clear organization, not your personal feelings about the topic or the speaker. The skeptic review should not be longer than three double-spaced pages. It will only be read by the instructor, so feel free to be as frank as possible.

As noted in the syllabus, the skeptic review is due via email no later than one week after the assigned oral presentation. If you have any questions regarding this assignment, please contact me as soon as possible via email at asmith41@tulane.edu