

## COM 121 Syllabus

### Course Instructor

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Dr. Bennett (com121)  
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### Basic Information about the Course

Course title: Honors Critical Decision Making  
Course number: COM 121  
Course discipline: Communication

Course description: This course is an introductory level, performance course designed specifically for students in the University Honors College program. Non-honors students should take COM 122.

This course assumes that an important goal in a liberal arts education is preparing students to become active participants in society by developing critical thinking skills and applying those skills purposefully to the process of public decision-making. With Aristotle's treatise on rhetoric as a philosophical foundation, this course assumes that students need the ability to think critically about public discourse and mediated messages, i.e., to question matters analytically in terms of relevant values and beliefs, in order to form independent judgments, based on ethical and aesthetic constraints, rather than merely to respond to public discourse as conditioned by media sources. Accordingly, students are required to focus on contemporary issues of public concern, to examine critically actual discourse on those issues, and to formulate reasoned judgments about them. Throughout the process, students are discouraged from merely accepting information or rejecting it automatically, without any thought, and are encouraged to question and to assess all communication efforts in terms of specific values and beliefs.

Course date: Thursday, August 26, 2004 through Tuesday, December 14, 2004  
Location: Phifer 345  
Meeting day (s): Tuesdays and Thursdays  
Meeting time (s): 2-3:15  
Prerequisite (s): Enrollment in the University Honors College or with instructor's approval  
Scheduled time for Course Final: 12/14/04 from 8-10:30 a.m.

### Purpose of the Course & Specific Goals

Course goals: This course has been designated as a HUMANITIES course because it teaches what has traditionally been recognized as humanistic mode of thought, i.e., rational decision making. Specifically, it uses the text of Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, because of its philosophical perspective that critical thought is necessary to preserve human interests and dignity in public decision making about the public welfare.

Clearly, the primary objective of the course is to develop the ability to determine what constitutes ethical criteria, to think critically, and to analyze communicated messages fully, for the purpose of participating responsibly in the process of public decision making.

Secondary objectives include introducing students to Aristotle and the classical tradition of rhetorical education and acquainting students with the advantages and disadvantages inherent in the various forms of communication (viz. discussion, argumentation, persuasion) typically used for public decision-making within democratic societies.

In addition, in view of the changes in social cognition introduced by new media, there are four specific goals for using technology in this course --

1. to learn not only how to find information, but also to determine what medium best delivers the kind of information needed
2. to give experience constructing electronic messages, both as traditional texts delivered electronically and as website texts, including graphic and layout dimensions
3. to create awareness of the advantages and disadvantages of the various media as conduits for public decision making
4. to develop diverse skills in critical thinking and communication, rather than reliance upon primarily one set of skills – whether print, oral, or electronic

### **Administrative Policies Pertaining to the Course**

Introduction: **COLLEGE OF COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION SCIENCES POLICIES**

The College has designated the classrooms in this building as NON-SMOKING, EATING, OR DRINKING AREAS. Though others may violate this policy, it is the rule. Please engage in these activities elsewhere, before coming to class. Do not bring them with you.

Communication majors must earn a "C" or better in all required and elective courses in their majors. A "C" or better is required in all external courses required by the major, whether they serve as a prerequisite to a major course or are simply required by the major.

**"A university is a place where the universality of the human experience manifests itself." -- Albert Einstein**

In keeping with the spirit of Einstein's viewpoint, the College is committed to providing an atmosphere of learning that is representative of and tolerant of a variety of cultural and intellectual perspectives. In this class, students are expected not only to be tolerant of different perspectives, but also interested in examining such perspectives objectively in the process of decision making.

Sexual harassment is strictly prohibited and will not be tolerated at The University of Alabama. The University's policy regarding sexual harassment is clear and explicit. It may be viewed at <http://www.ua.edu/shpolicy.html>.

Students with disabilities are encouraged to register with the Office of Disability Services, 348-4285. Necessary course-related accommodation or special needs should be discussed with the instructor at the beginning of the term.

Additional information:

**ATTENDANCE POLICY**

Students who do not attend the first meeting of this course will be administratively disenrolled, as consistent with the College of Communication and Information Sciences policy on initial attendance in a course.

The successful achievement of the course objectives can only be assured by the active and responsible participation of every class member at all times. This course is necessarily a performance course; one cannot perform without being in class.

Therefore, attendance is expected from the first day of classes, and all absences from class will be recorded. **The accumulation of six or more absences, for whatever reason, will result in an automatic failure of the class.**

Students are advised to save absences for emergency situations or unavoidable conflicts and are personally responsible for discovering material and announcements made in class during their absence. Because attendance is presumed, except in the most extraordinary circumstances, students who have been absent from class will not be allowed to make up any in-class assignments.

Students failing to perform on the date they have been assigned risk their own class status, as well as inconvenience others. Accordingly, any students with known conflicts for performance dates should notify the instructor as soon as possible. Failure to assume this responsibility may mean that a late performance would receive a grade of zero.

Legitimate medical emergencies which arise should be reported to the instructor NO LATER THAN THE DESIGNATED DATE for the assignment or the examination and MUST HAVE SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS immediately upon return to class.

In conclusion, though the attendance policy for this course allows for real emergencies or unavoidable conflicts with scheduled classes, it does not accommodate non-attendance. Students who find such a policy too rigid or who anticipate numerous conflicts with attending class regularly should withdraw from this course.

### **GENERAL CLASS POLICIES**

Please remember that all students are expected to consult the course calendar in WebCT at least once a week for changes and additions. All assignments and grades will be posted in WebCT.

Assigned readings should be done before class so that we can have meaningful class discussions over the material. Aristotle is not easy reading, but class time will not be used for re-reading the assignments. For maximum benefit from the class, students must not only prepare for the class, but also come ready to ask questions, to discuss the material, and to participate fully in the class sessions.

We shall be practicing making judgments, not restating the text or reviewing answers. Everyone should get accustomed to voicing ideas and to participating in the class decision making process. **You can not expect to do well in this class, if you do not participate in class.**

Any student who has an unavoidable conflict with a scheduled assignment must arrange with the instructor IN ADVANCE an alternative time. Failure to assume this responsibility will result in the student not receiving credit for what was missed.

### **Required Texts**

*Cooperative Argumentation: A Model for Deliberative Community*, Josina M. Makan and Debian L. Marty, Waveland Press, 2001, 1-57766-139-7

*Reading and Writing Ideas As Well As Words*, Daniel Kurland, available at <http://www.criticalreading.com>

*On Rhetoric*, Aristotle, available on the Internet--refer to the links

### **References**

*Electronic Reference Formats Recommended by the APA*, American Psychological Association, available at <http://www.apastyle.org/eleceref.html>

*The Columbia Guide to Online Style*, Janice R. Walker and Todd Taylor, Columbia UP, 1998, available at [www.columbia.edu/cu/cup/cgos/idx\\_basic.html](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/cup/cgos/idx_basic.html)

### **Course Assignments**

**Introduction:** Class lectures and discussion will be supplemented with a number of ungraded exercises designed to help students engage in critical thinking and master skills necessary for effective critical decision making.

**Requirements:** Students will participate in actual decision making in class during three graded oral performances: a group discussion/presentation, a two-person debate, and a persuasive argument. Full participation in these three performances is necessary to passing the course.

Students are expected to be working on their group's problem continuously throughout the term.

**Examinations.** There will be one examination, consisting of short-answer or essay questions, over the readings in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* during the final examination period. It will be submitted online.

**Written Assignments.** There will be various online written assignments -- using critical thinking skills, including a problem analysis, a needs analysis, and audience responses to class performances. All of these assignments must be submitted electronically.

### **Grading**

The final grade for the course will be determined by the average of the letter grades received for each assignment. Regardless of points possible, letter grades received are equally weighted.

Students failing to attend class on the days for which other students are assigned to perform will be assessed a point reduction in their own grade for that particular assignment. Students are credited for their class work throughout the term in two ways: the written work submitted online, including responses to the performances of others, and active participation in class discussions, decision making, and critical assessments. See below.

Weight of  
Assignments:

**Oral Performances = 40% of Final Grade**

- Class Discussion & Participation 10%
- #1: Group Discussion 10%
- #2: Case Issue Debate 10%
- #3: Persuasive Argument 10%

**Written/Electronic Assignments = 60% of Final Grade**

- On-line Submitted Work 30%
- Final Examination 15%
- Final Position Paper 10%
- Bibliography 5%

**REFERENCES ON PLAGIARISM**

University of Alabama on plagiarism: <http://education.ua.edu/plagiarism.html>

Avoiding Plagiarism : **Plagiarism** is the intentional use of someone else's words or ideas without proper acknowledgment. That is, plagiarism is intellectual theft and is one of the worst offenses a speaker or a writer can commit. Students are expected to credit any sources they have consulted, both in oral and written assignments, at all times.

On-line resources for learning how to avoid plagiarism are available at:

*How do I avoid plagiarizing?*  
<http://www.hamilton.edu/academics/resource/wc/AvoidingPlagiarism.html>

*How do I cite that?* [http://www.hamilton.edu/academics/resource/wc/MLA\\_Guide.html](http://www.hamilton.edu/academics/resource/wc/MLA_Guide.html)

*What are some common mistakes?*  
<http://www.hamilton.edu/academics/resource/wc/ComMistakes.html>

**ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT DISCIPLINARY POLICY: ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT**

Introduction: Academic misconduct includes all acts of dishonesty in any academically-related matter and any knowing or intentional help or attempt to help, or conspiracy to help, another student commit an act of academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not necessarily limited to, the following acts when performed in any type of academic or academically-related matter, exercise, or activity.

1. Cheating -- using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, study aids, or computer-related information.
2. Plagiarism -- representing the words, data, works, ideas, computer program or output, or anything not generated in an authorized fashion, as one's own.
3. Fabrication -- presenting as genuine any invented or falsified citation or material.
4. Misrepresentation -- falsifying, altering, or misstating the contents or documents or other materials related to academic matters, including schedules, prerequisites, and transcripts.

Additional information: Except in divisions which have an alternate academic misconduct policy which has been approved by the Academic Vice President, academic misconduct cases shall be resolved by the divisional academic misconduct monitor or the academic dean of the division in which the alleged action took place. However, the monitor or dean will consult the monitor or dean of the division where the student is enrolled and, with the concurrence of both deans, the responsibility for resolving an academic misconduct case can be transferred to the dean of the division in which the student is enrolled. Appeals from the monitor's decisions may be made to the academic dean; appeals from the academic dean's decisions may be made to the Office for Academic Affairs.

Penalties for academic misconduct can range from a reprimand to a penalty as severe as suspension for a definite time or even indefinite suspension. Academic deans have the authority to impose the full range of penalties. Divisional academic misconduct monitors may impose penalties only after receiving a voluntary written confession. Misconduct monitors are authorized to impose penalties up to but not including suspension, and may impose penalties of suspension or indefinite suspension if authority to do so has been delegated by the academic dean. All persons who admit to or are found guilty of an academic offense for which a penalty less than an indefinite suspension is imposed will receive a penalty of indefinite suspension if they admit to or are found guilty of another offense of academic misconduct.  
(Faculty Handbook, August 1988, 88-89)

### **UA Academic Honor Code**

Introduction: All University of Alabama students are expected to abide by University policies governing academic misconduct. These policies are discussed in subsection c [of the Student Affairs Handbook]. Each student shall promise to uphold these high ideals of academic integrity by signing the Academic Honor pledge upon registration for each semester and on tests and projects at the discretion of the professor.

Additional information: **The Academic Honor Pledge:**

***I dedicate myself to upholding the ideals of academic integrity at the University of Alabama. I have read the Academic Honor Code, which explains disciplinary procedures that will result from cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, or misrepresentation. I understand that violation of this code will result in penalties as severe as indefinite suspension from the University.***

## Class Calendar Entries



### August 2004

Date	Event
Thursday, August 26	First Class Session - Send Dr. Bennett the Honor Code with a note that you have fulfilled the assignment.
Tuesday, August 31	Unit 1: Leonardo DaVinci & Critical Thinking - Read pp. 1-18 in <u>Cooperative Argumentation</u> .

### September 2004

Date	Event
Wednesday, September 1	Last day to register or add a course
Thursday, September 2	<i>Curiosita &amp; Dimostrazione</i>
Monday, September 6	Holiday - Labor Day
Tuesday, September 7	Assessing Interpersonal Skills with Others
Thursday, September 9	Emotional Intelligence and Group Formation
Friday, September 10	Emotional Intelligence
Tuesday, September 14	Listening & Conflict Resolution Skills - Read pp. 54-77, <u>Cooperative Argumentation</u>
Wednesday, September 15	Rosh Hashanah
Tuesday, September 21	Button Pushing Beliefs & Critical Decision Making - Read pp. 18-26, <u>Cooperative Argumentation</u> Button-Pushing Beliefs Feelings & Crit. Decision Making Thinking & Crit. Decision Making
Thursday, September 23	Both Panel Presentations - Read pp. 26-35, <u>Cooperative Argumentation</u>
Friday, September 24	Yom Kippur
Tuesday, September 28	Assessing Problem-Solving with Others - Read pp. 35-54, <u>Cooperative Argumentation</u>
Wednesday, September 29	Sukkot
Thursday, September 30	Discussion of Group or Community Values - Read pp. 81-93, <u>Cooperative Argumentation</u>

### October 2004

Date	Event
Tuesday, October 5	Unit 2: Aristotle & Cooperative Argumentation - Read Aristotle, I.1-8
Wednesday, October 6	VP Debate Transcript Midterm grade submissions for freshmen

Thursday, October 7	Deliberative Communities vs. GroupThink - Read, 93-108, <b>Cooperative Argumentation</b>
	Aristotle on Genres
Tuesday, October 12	Judging Information Knowledge vs. Belief - Read Aristotle 1.13-15
Thursday, October 14	Personal vs. Public Issues - Reasonableness, Claims, Commonplaces Read, 111-22, <b>Cooperative Argumentation</b>
Saturday, October 16	Start of Ramadan
Tuesday, October 19	Aristotle's System of Argument - Read Aristotle 2.18-26
Thursday, October 21	Presumption & Burden of Proof - Read, 122-56, <b>Cooperative Argumentation</b>
Tuesday, October 26	Evaluating Arguments & Refutation Practice - Read Ch 7, 239-84, <b>Cooperative Argumentation</b>
Thursday, October 28	Debates on Class Topics
Sunday, October 31	Happy Halloween!
<b>November 2004</b>	
Date	Event
Tuesday, November 2	Debates on Class Topics <b>Be Sure To Vote</b>
Wednesday, November 3	Last day to drop a course with a grade of "W"
Thursday, November 4	Deliberation Log - Read, 206-23, <b>Cooperative Argumentation</b>
Tuesday, November 9	Unit 3: Aristotle & Public Decision Making
Thursday, November 11	No Class -- NCA Convention - Independent Work
Monday, November 15	The Ethics of Character -- Power Point Slides
Tuesday, November 16	Motivating the Community Ethical Norms - Read Aristotle, 1.9-12 Morris
Thursday, November 18	Understanding & Analyzing Audience Differences - Read Aristotle, 2.1-17 Read Ch. 5, <i>Cooperative Argumentation</i>
Monday, November 22	Position Papers Due
Tuesday, November 23	Planning Ethical Presentations - Read Aristotle, 3.1-19 Read <i>Cooperative Argumentation</i> 195-206; 223-35
Wednesday, November 24	Classes Dismissed - The University officially closes at 5:00 p.m.
Thursday, November 25	Holiday - Thanksgiving
Tuesday, November 30	Final Speeches

**December 2004**

Date	Event
Thursday, December 2	Final Speeches
Tuesday, December 7	Assessing Community Values in Decision Making
Wednesday, December 8	<a href="#">Beginning of Chanukah</a>
Thursday, December 9	Last Class Application to the <i>Polis</i>
Friday, December 10	Classes end
Tuesday, December 14	<a href="#">Final Exam Date</a> <a href="#">8:00 AM to 10:30 AM</a>
Saturday, December 18	Commencement
Tuesday, December 21	All grades due
Saturday, December 25	<a href="#">Merry Christmas</a>
Sunday, December 26	<a href="#">Kwanzaa Begins</a>

