

COM 399  
Oral Discourse and Civic Culture

In a democratic society, average citizens have power only when decisions about politics, community life and public affairs are made in groups. Without such collective participation, decisions are made without the input of members of the broader public, and their interests are likely to be overlooked. Collective decision making is easier when people have developed some familiarity with public speaking skills. Specifically, citizens must be capable of developing public goals in a group setting and of coordinating group efforts to pursue those goals. This course is designed to introduce you to the important role oral discourse plays in public life. Considerable time will be spent developing the public speaking skills needed for effective communication in the public sphere.

### **Required Readings**

Several readings will be provided via in-class handouts and the university library's e-reserves. In addition, a packet of materials is available from Shipmates. Please WAIT until you have been assigned a group number before purchasing a packet from Shipmates, as each group will read slightly different materials! Readings will be used as the basis for in-class discussions and activities, so it is important to read materials by the assigned date.

### **Components of the Grade**

**Attendance: Mandatory.** Regular attendance is essential to successful participation in this class. You must be present to participate fully in class activities. You are also not only responsible for giving presentations, but for providing an audience for your classmates' presentations. Attendance will be taken at every class session. Missing more than 1 class without a legitimate excuse (such as a documented family emergency or university travel) will result in a 1-letter grade deduction for each class missed. Your one free absence, however, may not be taken on days when the guest speaker or other students are presenting. Missing class on these days will result in a 1-letter grade deduction from the final grade. If you have perfect attendance for semester, you will receive 5 extra credit points toward your final grade at the end of the semester.

**Participation: 30%.** This course relies heavily on in-class activities and discussions. As a result, you must participate fully in order to learn the communication skills at the heart of the class. The participation grade is based on completing the following activities: participating in all small group and class room deliberations, providing evaluations of group processes, participating in discussions of reading materials, providing an attentive and interactive audience for guest speakers and fellow students, and developing questions during question and answer sessions. Failure to treat fellow students with civility and respect will also affect the final grade at the discretion of the instructor. Various opportunities to earn extra credit toward the participation grade have been provided throughout the semester.

**Mid-Term: 35%.** A mid-term exam will be given to ensure that you are utilizing the course materials to guide your participation in classroom activities and projects. You will be asked to identify important concepts from the readings, as well as to critique the actions of a group participating in citizen politics.

**Group Presentation. 35%.** During the semester, the entire class will use consensus decision-making processes to identify a public problem. You will be assigned to a small group in order to identify an appropriate solution for this problem, as well as a collective action plan for implementing this solution. Your group will describe its solution and plans at the end of the semester, with each group member responsible for providing a 2-3 minutes of the overall presentation. The grade for this project will be divided between the overall group performance (17.5%) and individual performance (17.5%). To prevent groups presenting last from gaining an unfair advantage, an outline of the group presentation must be submitted on the 12<sup>th</sup> week of class. On the last day of class, you will vote on the group providing the best solution and plan. Members of the winning group will receive 5 extra credit points toward their group presentation grade.

### **Schedule of and Activities and Readings**

- Week 1 Introduction to the Course  
Review Syllabus  
Receive “Drunk Bus” Assignment
- Week 2 Readings Due: Materials on Consensus Decision-Making from e-reserves.  
  
Discussion of Consensus Decision-Making  
Assign Groups for the Semester – (Purchase the appropriate Shipmates packet for next week!)  
Group Discussions of the “Drunk Bus” using Consensus Decision Making
- Week 3 Readings Due: Materials on Public Speaking from e-reserves.  
David Matthews, Politics for People (chapters 7 and 8) from Shipmates packet  
  
Review Tips on Public Speaking  
Discuss Politics for People excerpt
- Week 4 Readings Due: Assigned chapters from Communicating for Change  
  
Group Presentations of Assigned Chapters  
Volunteer for Roles in Class Meeting as the Facilitator, Note Taker or Stacker
- Week 5 Group Meeting to Identify a Solution for Drinking Problems on Campus
- Week 6 Guest Speaker
- Week 7 Readings Due: 3 Community Action Case Studies from Shipmates Packet  
  
Discuss and Critique Case Studies  
Use Consensus Decision Making to Select the Topic for Presentations
- Week 8 Mid-Term Exam
- Week 9 Readings Due: Gamson article from e-reserves  
Franzitch, Citizen Democracy, (Chapter 1) from e-reserves.  
  
Discuss the Declines in both Community and Youth Participation in Politics
- Week 10 Groups Meet with Professor Knopf to Prepare Final Presentation
- Week 11 Groups Meet with Professor Knopf to Prepare Final Presentation
- Week 12 All Groups Submit Outlines of Presentations  
Group Presentations
- Week 13 Group Presentations
- Week 14 Group Presentations  
Vote for Best Presentation