

Oral Discourse and Civic Culture

Christina Knopf

Contact: SS382, T. 1:15-2:10 & Th. 2:10-2:40

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Tuesdays, Fall 2004

In a democratic society, average citizens have power only when decisions about politics, community life and neighborhood 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. Yet collective decision-making is a difficult process that requires citizens to have well-developed 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 Text

Stephen E. Franzitch (2005). Citizen Democracy: Political Activists in a Cynical Age, 2nd ed. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Components of the Grade

Attendance and Participation: Regular attendance is essential to successful participation in this class. Students not only need to give presentations, they also need to provide an audience for their 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. Failure to participate during in-class activities or to treat fellow students with civility and respect will also affect the final grade at the discretion of the instructor.

Group Deliberation and Presentation, 40%: Students will be assigned to a group and assigned a chapter from Franzitch. Each group will do additional research on the issue addressed and, after further discussion, adopt a group position on the relevant issue. Each group will be responsible for an in-class presentation based on this process. The first half of the presentation should describe both sides of the issue, as well as the process used to reach agreement on a group position. The second half of the presentation should anticipate the strategies that could be used by activists attempting to reverse the outcome described in the text. Each individual student should participate in the group presentation. The presentation should be a total of 10 minutes in length, with equal time (5 minutes) dedicated to each half of the presentation. Grades will be based on both presentation skills and on the substance of the presentation.

Individual Presentation, 40%: Students will also identify a public affairs issue of interest to them and develop an individual presentation. Topics **MUST** be approved by the instructor in advance. This presentation should persuade others to adopt a preferred position on the issue. More importantly, it should attempt to persuade others to participate in collective actions in order to achieve political influence. Grades will be based on both presentation skills and on the quality of the collective action strategy developed.

Feedback, 20%: Students will be assigned to provide both feedback on the substance of classmates' presentation as well as on their presentation skills.

Schedule of and Assignments

8/31 Introduction to the course

9/7 Discussion of Citizens' Contributions to Democracy
*Read Franzitch, Chapter 1

- 9/14 Discussion of Group Processes and Decision-Making
Groups and Chapters Assigned
- 9/21 Visit E-Classroom for Research and Deliberation.
- 9/28 Group Presentations and Feedback
- 10/5 Group Presentations and Feedback
- 10/12 Group Presentations and Feedback
- Discussion of Persuasive Public Speaking in Public Life
Further Instructions on Individual Presentations Provided
- 10/19 Youth Participation in Public Life
*Review on-line survey results that explore young citizens' public participation.
- 11/2 Individual Presentations and Feedback
- 11/9 Individual Presentations and Feedback
- 11/16 Individual Presentations and Feedback
- 11/23 No Class – Thanksgiving
- 11/30 Individual Presentations and Feedback
- 12/7 Individual Presentations and Feedback
- 12/14 5:45-7:45 (*final exam time slot*) Individual Presentations and Feedback, as needed.

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Feedback, 20%: Students will be assigned to provide both feedback on the substance of classmates' presentation as well as on their presentation skills.

Schedule of and Assignments

- 9/2 Introduction to the course
- 9/9 Discussion of Citizens' Contributions to Democracy
*Read Franzitch, Chapter 1

- 9/16 No Class
- 9/23 Discussion of Group Processes and Decision-Making
Groups and Chapters Assigned
- 9/30 Visit E-Classroom for Research and Deliberation.
- 10/7 Group Presentations and Feedback
- 10/14 Group Presentations and Feedback
- 10/21 Group Presentations and Feedback
- Discussion of Persuasive Public Speaking in Public Life
Further Instructions on Individual Presentations Provided
- 10/28 Youth Participation in Public Life
*Review on-line survey results that explore young citizens' public participation.
*Read Robert Putnam, "The Prosperous Community," in *Principles and Practices of American Politics*.
Samuel Kernell and Steven S. Smith, eds. Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2000. (Available via E-Reserves).
- 11/4 Individual Presentations and Feedback
- 11/11 Class Cancelled
- 11/18 Individual Presentations and Feedback
- 11/25 No Class
- 12/2 Individual Presentations and Feedback
- 12/15 10:30-12:30 (*final exam time slot*) Individual Presentations and Feedback, as needed