

CA 310: Persuasion
Dr. Brett Lunceford
T/R: 12.30-1.45
University Commons 1219
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Course Description

This course provides an overview of rhetorical theories of persuasion. In this course, we touch on propaganda, advertising, speeches, and other persuasive texts. We will also examine some social scientific studies concerning persuasive campaigns.

This course has three primary goals:

- Provide students with an overview of theories of persuasion
- Provide students with opportunities to recognize and apply theories of persuasion
- Provide students with tools to evaluate persuasive messages.

These goals will be assessed through two major assignments. First, students will compile a persuasion scrapbook in which they collect persuasive artifacts that reflect particular persuasive theories or principles. Second, students will create and enact their own persuasive strategies by presenting an infomercial in class. As part of this project, students will explain how their strategies enact persuasive theories or principles.

I expect that each student will come to class prepared to discuss the readings for the day. According to the University of South Alabama's Academic Policies and Procedures, "Each hour of lecture usually requires two hours of outside preparation. Thus, a student carrying sixteen semester hours should be prepared to spend at least 48 hours in class and study per week."

Required Texts

Bernays, Edward L. *Propaganda*. Brooklyn, NY: Ig Publishing, 2005.

Simons, Herbert W. *Persuasion in Society*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2001.

Other readings will be available through the library's online course reserves.

Class Climate

The questions that we will grapple with have no easy answers. There will be points where you may disagree with someone else. This is appropriate and, to some degree, desirable. However, respect for others in the class is an essential component of this class. Arguments should be made in a spirit of inquiry rather than as personal attacks.

Attendance Policy

This is an upper division course, so I assume that by now you recognize the value of regular class attendance. This course relies heavily on in-class discussion. Excessive absences will negatively impact your participation grade in this course. If you are not present, you are not able to participate and it is impossible to make up the discussion. You get three absences free—no questions asked. However, after these absences, each absence will decrease your final grade by 5 points (half a letter grade), so use them wisely. In addition, there may be in-class activities, such as the opportunity to lead the discussion, that are impossible to make up. If you are absent, please do not email me asking, “What did I miss?” You missed 75 minutes of discussion and perhaps an assignment. Make friends with your classmates and get the notes from them and/or come to my office hours.

Academic Honesty

From the Student Academic Conduct Policies: “Any dishonesty related to academic work or records constitutes academic misconduct including, but not limited to, activities such as giving or receiving unauthorized aid in tests and examinations, improperly obtaining a copy of an examination, plagiarism, misrepresentation of information, or altering transcripts or university records. . . . Penalties may range from the loss of credit for a particular assignment to dismissal from the University” (*The Lowdown*, p. 249). In short, don’t do it. I don’t like to bust students for plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty but I will. It isn’t fair to others and it isn’t fair to yourself. If you have any questions on what constitutes plagiarism, see <http://www.southalabama.edu/univlib/sauer/plagiarismforstudents.html>.

Assignments

Persuasion Scrapbook: Students will be asked to collect persuasive artifacts, such as advertisements, speeches, opinion-editorials pieces, and describe how these artifacts reflect particular theories of persuasion. Individual portions of the scrapbook will be graded as the course progresses. Late assignments will receive half credit at the most and will only be accepted by the next scheduled class. No assignments will be accepted one week past the original due date. If you know that you will be absent when a portion of the scrapbook is due, have a classmate bring it to class or bring it to my office before the class period on which it is due. I will not accept assignments by email.

Infomercial Presentation: You will form groups (how this is to be done will be discussed in class) and will create an infomercial for a real or imagined product. The aim of this assignment is to enact persuasive strategies. Employing a wider variety of theories will lead to a better infomercial and thus a better grade. This project will be graded as a group. If you know that one of your group members will be gone on a particular day, do not schedule your group to present on that day. Because the schedule is tight before Thanksgiving break, we do not have the time to make up group presentations. If a group member is not present, the group must present on their scheduled day unless they have arranged to trade days with another group (this is an opportunity to use your persuasive skills.) Group members who do not participate in the presentation will receive a zero for the assignment.

Infomercial Documentation: In addition to the presentation, the group will create a document describing the strategies that the group employed in the presentation. I am mainly looking for how you applied theories of persuasion in your infomercial. Explaining in detail why you chose these theories and how you employed them will lead to a better document and thus a better grade. I expect that you will be documenting your choices for the infomercial along the way; this should not be an afterthought. The documentation is due on the last day of class. No late documentation will be accepted.

Participation: This class relies heavily on discussion. I assume that you will come to class prepared to discuss the readings. The readings are quite manageable even for those with the busiest schedules so there is really no excuse for not reading the material. If I get the sense that people are not coming to class prepared, I will simply use quizzes on the readings to assess participation points.

There will be no final exam in this course; the infomercial project will serve that purpose.

Grading Scale

There are a total of 100 points available in this course:

Persuasion Scrapbook: 30
Infomercial Presentation: 25
Infomercial Documentation: 15
Participation: 30

A=90-100; B=80-89.99; C=70-79.99; D=60-69.99; F=below 60

Statement Regarding Students with Disabilities

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, students with bona fide disabilities will be afforded reasonable accommodation. The Office of Special Student Services will certify a disability and advise faculty members of reasonable accommodations.

If you will need special accommodations please talk to me as soon as possible.

A Note on my Teaching Philosophy

I believe that every student in my class has the ability to succeed in this course. My goal is to create a comfortable environment in which you can explore and improve your ability to think critically and skillfully present your ideas to an audience. I do not “give” grades; students earn grades—no one is entitled to get an “A” in a class unless they earn it. I cannot grade on effort—I must grade what you actually do. My job is to push students to do their best and to then exceed that standard. I recognize that this is futile unless I also provide the support and assistance that each student needs to excel. Therefore, I provide office hours and expect students to use them and am generally available through email. I assume that attaining a university degree is your first priority. If this is not the case, it is less likely that you will excel. Some of you are here because

you want to get a better job. I believe that education should do much more than job training, but if you see it as job training, at least take it seriously. Recognize that you will probably be required to work 40 hours a week (or more) from 8am until 5pm. If you are chronically late, they fire you. If you do not do your work, they fire you. If you drop the ball, you probably will not get a raise, they may fire you, and in some cases legal action may be taken against you. Bottom line—you do your part to excel and I will be there to help you reach that goal.

Reading Schedule:

Week 1

- 8/18 Overview of course
- 8/20 The Study of Persuasion: Simons, Chapter 1

Week 2

- 8/25 The Psychology of Persuasion: Simons, Chapter 2
- 8/27 Persuasion Broadly Considered: Simons, Chapter 3

Week 3

- 9/1 Communication and Persuasion: Simons, Chapter 5
- 9/3 Political Campaigns: Simons, Chapter 11

Persuasion Scrapbook 1: Describe how you would convince others to vote for you for SGA president. Be specific and draw on the readings. Explain why you think such a campaign would be effective.

Week 4

- 9/8 Co-Active Persuasion: Simons, Chapter 4
- 9/10 Framing and Reframing: Simons, Chapter 6

Week 5

- 9/15 Heuristics: Simons, Chapter 7

Persuasion Scrapbook 2: Bring in some persuasive artifact that uses heuristics to persuade. Explain the cognitive processes that the audience is likely to go through. What are the unspoken premises in the argument?

9/17 Reasoning and Evidence: Simons, Chapter 8

Persuasion Scrapbook 3: Letter to the Editor: Bring in a letter to the editor that you find persuasive. Describe the techniques that the author uses to make his or her argument.

Week 6

9/22 Analyzing Advertising: Simons, Chapter 12

9/24 Reichert, Tom. "Sex in Advertising Research: A Review of Content, Effects, and Functions of Sexual Information in Consumer Advertising." *Annual Review of Sex Research* 13 (2002): 241-73. (Available in online course reserves)

Persuasion Scrapbook 4: Bring in an advertisement that uses sex in a way that you find persuasive. Explain why this advertisement is enticing.

Week 7

9/29 Propaganda: Bernays, Chapters 1-3

10/1 Propaganda Continued: Bernays, Chapters 4-6

Week 8

10/6 Propaganda Continued: Bernays, Chapters 7-9

10/8 Propaganda Continued: Bernays, Chapters 10-11, Introduction

Persuasion Scrapbook 5: Email me a link to your favorite infomercial with a description of why you find it persuasive.

Week 9

10/13 Video Discussion: Infomercials

10/15 Persuasion and Ethics: Simons, Chapter 15

Persuasion Scrapbook 6: Bring in a persuasive artifact (advertisement, op-ed, etc. that you feel is unethical. Provide an explanation for why you judge this artifact to be unethical and explain how you would change it to make it more ethical.

Week 10

10/20 Public Persuasion: Simons, Chapter 9

10/22 Campaign Planning: Simons, Chapter 10

Week 11

10/27 Conflict and Persuasion: Simons, Chapter 13

10/29 Social Movements: Simons, Chapter 14

Week 12

11/3 Practice day for Infomercials

11/5 Practice day for Infomercials

Week 13

11/10 Video: Triumph of the Will

11/12 Video: Triumph of the Will (I will be at a convention)

Week 14

11/17 **Infomercial Presentations**

11/19 **Infomercial Presentations**

Week 15

11/24 **Infomercial Presentations**

11/26 **No Class: Thanksgiving Break**

Week 16

12/1 **Last Day of Class: The Uses of Persuasion**

Infomercial Documentation Due

Regarding Changes in Course Requirements

Since all classes do not progress at the same rate, the instructor may wish to modify the above requirements or their timing as circumstances dictate. For example, the instructor may wish to change the number and frequency of exams, or the number and sequence of assignments. However, the students must be given adequate notification. Moreover, there may be non-typical classes for which these requirements are not strictly applicable in each instance and may need modification. If such modification is needed, it must be in writing and conform to the spirit of this policy statement.