

SAEL 200: SOCIAL ADVOCACY & ETHICAL LIFE

COURSE OVERVIEW

Social Advocacy & Ethical Life addresses the nature and relationship of ethics and oral forms of expression in a variety of socio-political contexts. Students in the course will have an opportunity to critically investigate theories of ethics and principles of spoken advocacy, and to apply their inquiry in a cumulative series of exercises and performances. Both critical and practical, the work undertaken in this course offers a chance for students to: 1) question the meaning and importance of contemporary calls for civility, engaged citizenship, and deliberation, 2) investigate the roots, power, and limits of ethical discourse and its relevance to social and political decision-making, and 3) develop a working understanding of the principles of social advocacy and the ways in which oral communication constructs, supports, and remakes the grounds of ethical interaction.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon the successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Define the idea of social advocacy, identify distinct forms of oral advocacy, and demonstrate an understanding of the respective values and limits of such communicative practices in a variety of social, political, and cultural situations;
- Define sources and functions of ethical reasoning and explain its importance in the development of individual and collective life, identify key ethical concepts and recognize the kinds of social and political issues that provoke ethical questions, and critically analyze and engage ethical controversies that shape personal and social norms of responsibility;
- Understand, perform, and critically assess the ways in which social advocacy can invent, shape, and upset personal and collective ethical commitments and the ways in which ethical frameworks enable, promote, and guide advocacy;
- Understand and explain the fundamental concepts and frameworks that enable social advocacy, including principles of argumentation, ethical forms of persuasion, theories of the rhetorical situation and audience interaction, and modes of listening;

- Apply and demonstrate the basic concepts of ethical social advocacy through the performance of speeches that address a variety of ethical issues and which engage audiences with diverse and conflicting ethical commitments;
- Critically assess the ethical responsibilities entailed in social advocacy and the conditions under which advocacy may be an ethical responsibility.

Assignment overview

Speeches:

1. **Imagining Advocacy**: For this assignment, each member of the course will develop, compose, and deliver a 3 ½ to 4-minute speech that addresses a social, political, and/or cultural problem that provokes their interest and for which they are willing to advocate. The speech will be developed around several specific questions: For what would you advocate? When? To whom? Why? At what risk? In these terms, the speech does not ask the students to fashion a specific case but to introduce, describe, and explain their interest in giving voice to a particular issue. It thus serves three goals: 1) the speech offers an opportunity for class members to introduce themselves to their primary audience for the semester, 2) the speech provides a basis for reflection and discussion about how individuals, groups, and cultures identify, accept, and defend values, and 3) the speech offers a working introduction to principles of informative speaking and the ways in which information may (or may not) be heard by diverse audiences. The assignment is worth 50 points.
2. **Discovering an Issue**: In this second speaking assignment, each member of the class will choose and research a significant social-political-public issue and then develop and deliver a 4 ½ to 5-minute speech addressed to the history, contours, and ethical importance of that issue. Building from the first speech, the goal of this assignment is not to defend a particular position but to provide an audience with a full and clear understanding of an issue's roots, sides, and potential ethical significance. The assignment thus serves several goals: 1) it provides an opportunity to investigate the advocacy of a significant issue through the lens of one or more ethical theories, 2) the speech requires a careful investigation and articulation of the "sides" of an issue, the ways in which issues are composed of different if not competing opinions about what is good, valuable, or appropriate, and 3) the speech lays the groundwork for the course's concern for the motives of advocacy and the role of argumentation and audience analysis in its performance and evaluation. The assignment is worth 100 points.

3. **Making a Case:** This assignment asks each member of the class to develop and present a 5 1/2 to 6-minute speech that proceeds from a specific claim about an issue and which endeavors to generate interest from an audience. Working with the issues taken up in the “Discovering an Issue” speech, the goal of this speech is to move from providing information about a problem to making a specific claim about the meaning, significance, and/or appropriate resolution of an ethical issue. In this respect, the speech may contend that one perspective about an issue is rooted in a stronger argument than its counterparts, or that the issue’s different sides are limited and require a new approach. This work serves several goals: 1) the speech requires the application of argumentation theory, including the formulation and development of a claim that takes a position on the ethical significance of an issue, 2) the speech affords a working understanding of the rhetorical situation, an opportunity to invite an audience to listen critically and to present a case that engages the interests of those with different views of the issue under consideration, and 3) the speech provides the chance to reflect critically on the specific ethical choices and dilemmas entailed in addressing an issue about which people disagree. The assignment is worth 200 points.

Essays:

1. **Critical Speech Analysis:** Each student in the course will write one critical analysis of a historically important speech. You will select a speech from the following webpage: <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/top100speechesall.html>. The paper should be 1,000-1,200 words. This paper addresses the ethical assumptions, claims, and implications of a particular speech, with specific attention paid to the types of ethical-moral reasoning that are employed in the speech and how such reasoning might be heard by a diverse audience. This essay is worth 50 points.
2. **Reasoning about an Ethical Issue:** Each student in the course will develop and compose a paper of 1,300-1,500 words addressed to an ethically significant social, political, or cultural issue. Working from a clear and directed thesis, the paper should 1) detail the issue in question, 2) explain its ethical significance in light of one or more appropriate ethical theories, and 3) draw from relevant ethical theories in order to build a case for how the issue can be productively addressed or resolved. The issue addressed in the paper will be the same issue that you address in your speeches. The paper is worth 100 points.
3. **Addressing Ethical Controversy:** Each student in the course will develop and compose a paper of 2,400-2,800 words that investigates specific ways in which ethical claims provoke opposition and how this opposition can be productively addressed. This paper will first involve a substantial revision of paper #2 (Reasoning about an Ethical Issue) based on instructor feedback and course readings. In

addition, the paper will 1) detail two significant objections to the position defended in the paper, 2) identify how these objections are rooted in specific forms of ethical thought, and 3) draw from specific ethical theories to develop replies to these objections. The paper is worth 200 points.

COURSE CALENDAR

All readings should be completed *before* class on the day they are listed. Some changes may be made to this reading list throughout the semester, but I will do my best to give at least a week's notice.

Note: Things listed as "lecture" or "discussion" are notes about what to expect in class that day. Most classes will contain some form of lecture or discussion whether or not it is listed in the syllabus.

WEEK 0: GETTING STARTED

Thursday, August 18

Introductions and course overview

Read Syllabus

WEEK 1: INTRODUCTIONS

Tuesday, August 23

Read Bitzer's "The Rhetorical Situation" and Aristotle's "[On Rhetoric](#)."

Lecture: The Rhetorical Situation

Thursday, August 25

Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

Read Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman?" at [this link](#) as well as [this one](#)

WEEK 2: THE RHETORICAL SITUATION AND SOCIAL ADVOCACY

Tuesday, August 30

Read "I Have a Dream" by Martin Luther King, Jr.

Read assignment prompt for Essay #1

Read Sandel's "Doing the Right Thing"

Discuss: Contemporary Ethical Questions and Semester Topics

Thursday, September 1

Read Mill's "What Utilitarianism Is" and Sandel's "The Greatest Happiness Principle"

Topic proposal due on Blackboard by 11:59pm on Friday

WEEK 3: ETHICAL REASONING & SOCIAL CONTRACT THEORY

Tuesday, September 6

Read Sandel, "What Matters is the Motive"

Read excerpt from Kant, "Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals"

Thursday, September 8

Read [these writing tips](#) as well as this [review of logic](#)

Bring questions about your essay to class

Discuss: Effective Speaking

WEEK 4: LIBERTY & THE POWER OF LANGUAGE

Tuesday, September 13

Read Plato, The Crito

Lecture: Approaches to Written Argumentation

Essay #1 Due on Blackboard by 11:59pm on Wednesday

Thursday, September 15

Read Berlin's "Two Concepts of Liberty" (excerpted pages tbd)

Read Burke's "Terministic Screens"

WEEK 5: SPEECH #1

Tuesday, September 20

Group 1 gives their speeches

Thursday, September 22

Group 2 gives their speeches

WEEK 6: STASIS THEORY AND ARGUMENTATION

Tuesday, September 27

Read Crawley & Hawhee's "Stasis Theory: Asking the Right Questions"
Read Brockriede and Ehnignger's "Toulmin on Argument"

Thursday, September 29

Read Rawls, "A Theory of Justice"
Read bell hooks's "Language"

WEEK 7: DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE

Tuesday, October 4

Read Nozick, "Distributive Justice" and Sandel, "The Case for Equality"

Thursday, October 6

No readings. Come prepared to discuss and synthesize Rawls, Nozick, and Sandel

WEEK 8: REPRESENTATION

Tuesday, October 11

Read [this interview](#) with our own university comics scholar, Dr. Qiana Whitted
Read [this article](#) about the history of the term "Mary Sue" and its influence on female fans of major franchises
Read [this article](#) by Romano on the controversy surrounding DC's newest *Flash* movie

Thursday, October 13: FALL BREAK, NO CLASS

WEEK 9: REGIONAL/NATIONAL IDENTITY

Tuesday, October 18

Read Gutmann and Thompson's "Democracy and Disagreement"
Read Gutmann's "What Deliberative Democracy Means"

Essay #2 due by 11:59pm on Wed

Thursday, October 20

Read Ian Haney Lopez, excerpt from *Dog Whistle Politics*

Read Harrelson, "The South Saved My Soul"

Read Chavis, "The Day You Discover Race Doesn't Matter"

note: Chavis is a Black veteran of the US Army, and this memoir does record slurs he was called during his service

WEEK 10: SPEECH #2

Tuesday, October 25

Group 1 gives their speeches

Thursday, October 27

Group 2 gives their speeches

WEEK 11: RACE AND TECH

Tuesday, November 1

Read Noble, "Searching for Black Girls"

Thursday, November 3

Read Benjamin, "Engineered Inequity"

WEEK 12: SURVEILLANCE CULTURE

Tuesday, November 8

Read Naijibi, "Racial Discrimination in Face Recognition Technology"

Read Tiffany, "Doxing Means Whatever You Want it To"

Thursday, November 10

Read Malone, "The Algorithm Knows Me"

Read Christians, "The Ethics of Privacy"

WEEK 13: SOCIAL MEDIA ETHICS

Tuesday, November 15

Read Benjamin, "Retooling Solidarity, Reimagining Justice"

Read Firth et al, "The Online Brain"

Essay # 3 due by 11:59 pm Wednesday

Thursday, November 17

Read "Tik Tok Algorithm Error Sparks Allegations of Racial Bias"

Read about the ASMC Scale

WEEK 14: CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Tuesday, November 22

Read Arabpour, "Lights, Camera, (Legal) Action: Expanding Child Entertainment Laws to Protect Children on Social Media"

Read Moscatello, "Un-Adopted"

note: these articles reference child abuse

Thursday, November 24: THANKSGIVING, NO CLASS

WEEK 15: SPEECH 3

Tuesday, November 29

Group 1 gives their speeches

Thursday, December 1

Group 2 gives their speeches