

Project 1: Engaging a Public Debate

Unit Prompt

In this first project, you and a group of your classmates will decide on a public issue that is sparking debate in the local community. Throughout the course of the entire semester, your team will investigate who is participating in the public discussion, analyze what is being said, and, eventually, voice your own opinion(s) on the topic.

The topic you choose be intriguing and rooted in the local community (the College of Arts & Sciences, the wider campus, or the City of Lexington). Furthermore, this should not simply be a hot button issue (like legalization or reproductive rights) but should allow for the nuance and considered debate that is central to public conversations of all types. It helps to choose a topic that you find intriguing, that is resonating at both the national and local level, and that you have a vested interest in understanding.

Once you have chosen a topic, your first task will be to convince your classmates that it is an important debate – one that is worth delving into and getting involved in. After taking a look at the different topics proposed by your classmates, you and 3-4 other students will collaborate on a shared topic – examining both the debate and those who are already engaged in it. After you get a sense of who is already speaking out on the issue, your team will be asked to weigh in on the issue as well. In other words, you will position yourselves as stakeholders in the debate that you will have been studying.

Throughout this project, you will present a short persuasive speech, compose an analytic essay, and develop a collaborative website that will allow you to jump right into this debate. Each communicative acts, as well as the material produced for Project 2, will be closely connected, *so you should choose your topic carefully.*

Part 1: Project Pitch Presentation

The first major project in our course will be a 4-5 minute presentation on a debate that you are interested in. This is your chance to convince your classmates that a public conversation or debate is important enough to get involved in. In order to do this, you will need to do some preliminary research into what your chosen public debate entails, who is involved, how it has progressed, and what is at stake (*why it matters*). This may seem like a lot, but if you want to convince your classmates, you will need to present a well-rounded understanding of the public controversy. After all, this will be at the center of the next four months of the course.

For example, if I wanted to pitch a project focused on the lack of parking on campus, I would need to do more than simply rant for 4 minutes about how I cannot find a spot near



Whitehall without risking a ticket. That is too personal and does little to acknowledge the various perspectives or opinions that have shaped parking policy on UK's campus. In order to effectively claim that this debate matters, I need to dig a little deeper. Why, for example, has the university limited the number of spaces for students on campus? What have they done to respond to complaints? Who else might influence the decisions about when and where to make parking available? How does the university prioritize parking availability? Does the scarcity of spaces on campus even matter? While you do not need to have all of these answers, persuasive arguments, as we will talk about, rely on a clear understanding of the issue at hand and why it may matter to the audience being addressed.

Once you have found a public debate that you are passionate about, your goal will be to prepare a **4-5 minute** speech, and corresponding PowerPoint Presentation, that persuades your classmates to pay attention to this ongoing conversation. This presentation will be presented in class with a short (1 min.) feedback period.

After everyone has presented, you will be asked to rank those topics (other than your own) that you find intriguing. Based on this feedback, I will assign each member of our course a collaborative team centered on a shared topic.

Parameters

Your presentation should be **4-5 minutes** long. You will need to compose a speech outline and develop a corresponding PowerPoint Presentation.

It will be presented on **January 31st**, **February 2nd**, or **February 5th**. Your presentation time will be determined using a Canvas Scheduler link that I will provide later in the semester. (If you are not sure how to use Canvas Scheduler, please let me know.)

This presentation will be worth **10%** of your final grade and will be assessed using the rubric found on Canvas.

Evidence

Your persuasive presentation requires at least **three credible sources** that help you explain the debate to the class. These should be valid and trustworthy sources, but they do not have to be academic.

All research must be appropriately cited, both orally and in the body of your slides, and incorporated into your presentation in a significant and meaningful way. *A final slide should present a Works Cited list, similar to those found in traditional written essays.*

Part 2: Rhetorical Analysis Essay

After we consider the various debates put forward in the Project Pitch, you will be grouped with 3-4 other students into teams centered on a shared issue of interest. As a team, you will spend the rest of the semester delving into and engaging with this public debate. But before entering the debate yourselves, you will be asked to take a closer look at *who is already involved*.

When trying to get a grasp on a public controversy, the first step you should take is to find out who is involved and where they stand. These various perspectives are often grouped into "*stakeholder positions*" – a stakeholder being any person, group, or organization that plays a part in a public debate. A critical stakeholder could be a single individual with a cause or an entire segment of community (as long as they are united by a shared motivation and concerns).

Returning to parking on campus, the stakeholders involved in this ongoing debate range from Lance Broeking (Director of UK Transportation Services) and Eli Capiluto to the commuter students that drive to campus every day to the faculty members that work near Young Library. Each of these stakeholders (and many more) have a distinct take on the issue and have voiced their concerns in public and private considerations of the issue. They all have a “stake” in the outcome of this debate.



For this assignment, your team will be asked to distribute the principal stakeholders in your chosen debate so that each team member can investigate this controversy from a specific perspective. In a *1,800 word* essay, you will be asked to critically evaluate the argument and perspective of your stakeholder as well as the rhetorical strategies that they employ. This Rhetorical Analysis will investigate **how** your stakeholder talks about the controversy, not just what their position is or where they enter the public debate. UK Transportation Services, for instance, have circumvented a lot of concerns about parking by explicitly and implicitly turning attention to the broader issue of “transportation,” even going so far as to drop the word “Parking” from the department title a couple years ago.

This analytical essay should provide a fair examination of the specific stakeholder position you have taken on by closely engaging with at least one specific “text” produced by your stakeholder in an effort to understand the persuasive work done by this individual or group. Your essay will help your team understand the debate at a deeper level and pave the way for effective and meaningful engagement with the issue in later projects.

Parameters

The Rhetorical Analysis Essay must be a minimum of **1,800 words** (approximately 6 pages). It must include an appropriate title and both appropriate in-text and terminal citations.

This project will be worth **15%** of your final grade and will be assessed using the rubric provided on Canvas. This individual essay will be submitted on Canvas by **midnight** on **March 5th**.

Evidence

At the center of this essay is a critical analysis of the rhetoric employed by your stakeholder. Because of this, you will be required to utilize at least **one primary text produced by your stakeholder**. This could be a formal document (an article, a speech, a blog post, etc.) or a casual or temporary “text” (social media, an interview, a conversation, etc.), but it should come from your stakeholder’s perspective.

In addition to this, you will need to incorporate **three** additional sources and at least **two** supporting images and/or graphics. These sources can include more material from your stakeholder or more objective/academic texts. Overall, you will need from **4-6 sources** in this essay, although more thorough research may prove useful in some contexts.

Part 3: Issue-Oriented Website

After attempting to gain a critical understanding of your team’s public debate for most of the semester, you will be asked to join this public conversation. Using your collective understanding of the issue and those invested in the debate, you and your team will construct a website centered on your topic. This publicly-oriented “text” should provide a clear sense of the

controversy (who are the stakeholders, what are they saying, etc.), why it matters, **and**, most importantly, propose solutions that will help resolve the debate.

As you engage in the debate that you have been studying, your website should persuade your audience to agree with your collective take on the issue, framing the debate as you see it and proposing solutions for how to resolve this public controversy. This can be a unique take on the issue or you can throw your support behind another stakeholder – agreeing with their take on the controversy but offering your own opinion about how a solution can be found or consensus reached. Your issue-oriented website should reveal a consistent and unified stance reflective of your team’s unique *stakeholder position*.

Using sites like [Wix](#) or [WordPress](#) (or an application of your choice), your website can take a variety of forms. However, each group member will be required to contribute **1,000 words** (or the equivalent) of *original content*. You could compose two web pages that nest in the larger website, a 5 minute video embedded on the home page, an interview with other stakeholders, original artwork, or whatever contributes to the collaborative project’s persuasive appeal. Once everyone’s individual contributions are brought together in a polished and engaging whole, you will need to “publish” your website by **November 16th**.

Parameters

While the website will have an overall organization, each individual within the group will contribute **1,000 words** (minimum) to the collaborative whole. If an individual chooses to do something more creative than a written text, then I will negotiate a minimum requirement dependent on the nature of the contribution.

This project will be worth **25%** of your final grade: **15%** for your individual contribution and **10%** for the group’s final, published website, as a whole. It will be assessed using the corresponding rubrics found on Canvas.

Evidence

As this is an Issue-Oriented Website with an academic leaning, each individual should cite the appropriate sources to support their contribution. At least **two relevant outside sources** should be used, but this minimum is negotiable, depending on the nature of an individual’s contribution.

Resources for this project can come from previous research or new investigations, as long as it appropriately supports the claims at the center of the collaborative website.