PUBLIC SPEAKING – COM 201

Fall 2024 / Spring 2025

Dr. Louis Shwartz

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Room 300, Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:20 to 12:40

Office Hours by appointment.

**Course Description**

Designed as a year-long practicum in effective public speaking, COM 201 pushes students to develop foundational skills for their intensive training in the Humanities, and prepares them for a successful career after college. Elements of classical Aristotelian rhetoric emerge from a varied schedule of performances; for example, “Praise of a Hero” elicits a grand ceremonial mode; “Defense of Catholic Morality” mirrors courtroom-style litigation; “Project Proposal” demands persuasion and speculation about the future. All performances will be recorded and distributed immediately to the respective performers, who must first watch and then constructively critique their own efforts. Finally, the students themselves constitute a warm, stable, and encouraging audience, fostering compassion and comradery while providing feedback to their peers.

**Evaluation Criteria**

*Performance* – 60%

Each student performance will be assessed according to three qualities: **Confident**, **Clear**, and **Convincing**. Written feedback will highlight strengths and weaknesses, and will track progress throughout the year. A sample assessment form is attached to this syllabus. Here follow specific components considered in the assessment of the three general qualities:

**Confident**: body posture; facial expression; attire; eye-contact; hand-gestures;

filler-words; ticks and quirks; reliance on notes; overall poise.

**Clear**: organization; transitions; vocabulary; pacing; logical reasoning.

**Convincing**: expression; use of fitting images and examples; tone of voice; conclusion.

*Audience Participation* – 20%

Students serve one another as members of the audience and must behave in a polite, dignified, and encouraging manner. Students must provide their peers with honest feedback immediately following performances; identifying the strengths and weaknesses of others helps in discovering one’s own.

*Self-Assessment and Improvement over Time* – 20%

Students must watch recordings of their own individual performances and, on their speech assessment forms, must critique their efforts and develop plans for improvement. Students are ultimately assigned a grade based on their growth over the course of the year.

Description of Performances

*First Semester*

Poetry Reading *2-3 minutes*

Students select a poem, which must be approved by the professor, and then read it before the class to practice diction, timing, poise, and expression.

Classmate Biography *5-7 minutes*

Students first interview a classmate outside of class, then develop and present a brief biography which reveals to the audience “who this person really is.” The student being described will sit next to the presenter at the front of the class during the speech.

Praise of a Hero *6-8 minutes*

Students choose a role-model or “hero” – be it a saint or world leader, a historical figure or personal mentor – and praise this person, discussing stories and examples from his or her life while highlighting specific virtues and achievements. The presenter must explain which of the hero’s characteristics are most to be admired and imitated, explaining why these traits are so excellent and how they may be incorporated into one’s own life.

Informational Briefing *7-10 minutes*

Students select, with the professor’s approval, a specific and complex topic, then craft a PowerPoint presentation which explicates this challenging subject to a general audience.

Description of Performances

*Second Semester*

Job Interview *7-10 minutes*

Each student chooses a “next step” after graduating from SMC and interviews for that “job,” which could involve applying to graduate school, preparing for marriage, entering a religious community, teaching in a primary school, working in a business, etc. The professor interviews the “candidate” before the entire class. Students will know some questions beforehand, but others will be posed “spur of the moment.”

Defense #1: Catholics confront Secular Society *5-7 minutes*

Each student collaborates with the professor to select a specific topic which requires the student to defend Catholic morality in the secular public sphere. Students assume that they are speaking before a hostile audience already predisposed against their position and must address the imagined auditors with tact and respect while firmly challenging their prejudices.

Defense #2: Tradition and the Modern Church *5-7 minutes*

Each student again selects a specific topic which this time requires the student to uphold traditional Catholic teachings and practices in the face of a modern liberal Church. Students assume that they are speaking before an open but incredulous audience relatively ignorant of the traditional Catholic practices encouraged by the SSPX. Establishing principles and charitably spelling out their implications are key qualities of a good performance.

Project Proposal *7-10 minutes*

Students, after consulting the professor, seek to persuade a receptive audience about implementing a major change which will directly impact community life at SMC. This could involve proposing a new class, club, outing, athletic event, work-study plan, tuition costs, meals, daily schedule, refurbishing of existing space, expansion of the college, electives and majors, graduation requirements, etc. Use of PowerPoint is optional but certainly not required. Be creative! The sky’s the limit … but that limit must be presented as both desirable and practically attainable.

A different option for this assignment would be to teach a portion of a primary or secondary-level class, again subject to prior approval.

Schedule of Performances

\*\* Note: for the Academic Year 2024-25, Dr. Andrew Childs taught COM 201 through mid-October, at which time Dr. Louis Shwartz took over the course; because of this transition, the Informational Briefing assignments were moved to the start of the Second Semester.\*\*

October 22

* Distribution of Syllabus and Discussion of Course Policy

October 24

* Planning

October 29

* Classmate Biography #1

November 5

* Classmate Biography #2

November 7

* Classmate Biography #3

November 12

* Classmate Biography #4

November 14

* Lessons Learned

November 19

* Planning

November 21

* Praise of a Hero #1

November 26

* Praise of a Hero #2

December 3

* Praise of a Hero #3

December 5

* Praise of a Hero #4

December 10

* Lessons Learned

CHRISTMAS BREAK

January 14

* Model Briefing

January 16

* Planning

January 21

* Informational Briefing #1

January 23

* Informational Briefing #2

January 28

* Informational Briefing #3

January 30

* Informational Briefing #4

February 4

* Informational Briefing #5

February 6

* Lessons Learned & Planning

February 11

* Job Interview #1

February 13

* Job Interview #2

February 18

* Job Interview #3

February 20

* Job Interview #4

March 4

* Model Defenses

March 6

* Planning

March 11

* Defense #1

March 13

* Defense #2

March 18

* Defense #3

March 20

* Defense #4

March 25

* Defense #5

March 27

* Defense #6

April 1

* Defense #7

April 3

* Defense #8

April 8

* Defense #9

April 10

* Defense #10

April 29

* Lessons Learned & Planning

May 1

* Proposal #1

May 6

* Proposal #2

May 8

* Proposal #3

May 13

* Proposal #4

During Exam Week …

* Recap of Year