COMMUNICOLOGY 453: PRACTICUM IN DEBATE AND FORENSICS  
Spring 2013

Character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion. 
- Aristotle

Course Director: Dr. Robert R. Boller E-mail: boller@hawaii.edu  
Assistants: Sterling Higa (shiga@hawaii.edu) & Daniel Hugo (leeda@hawaii.edu)  
Phone: 956-3324  
Office: 317 George Hall  Office Hours:  
M 11:00-12:00 pm & T 11:00 - 12:00 pm and by appointment  
Comg Department Website: http://manoa.hawaii.edu/communicology/

Course Overview:  
"Forensics" is a word rooted in the Western world's classical experience. The Greeks organized 
contests for speakers that developed and recognized the abilities their society felt central to 
democracy. These exercises acquired the title "forensics," derived from Latin and and closely 
related to the word forum. Forensics loosely means evidence based public reasoning. Because 
training in the skill of public advocacy, including the development of evidence, found one of its 
important venues in the law courts, the term "forensic" has also become associated with the 
science of legal investigation, evidence, and argument. In the classic sense, forensics 
encompasses skills of argumentation and public advocacy through a variety of rhetorical 
activities that focus on ethical, pragmatic, and philosophical issues. Comg 453, “Activities in 
Debate and Forensics”, is focused on student preparation for national and international forensics 
competitions and the development of a local intramural program.

All currently enrolled undergraduate students at UH are eligible for participation in Comg 453, 
but enrollment will be limited to instructor approved students that meet certain criteria. Debate 
and Forensics is a perfect place for students who want to become better critical thinkers and 
communicators, desire a social outlet that is constructive, and have a strong interest in local and 
world affairs in addition to literature. It is also a perfect place to be creative, competitive, and 
collegial! Argumentation and verbal aggression are not synonymous...this is good natured, yet 
sophisticated, organized dialogue! Forensics classes evolve team atmospheres which support 
outstanding students in their academic and professional pursuits. Central to debate is intellect, 
wit, and creativity, while pursuing issues related to ethics and social justice. Come 
expecting to laugh, learn and broaden your perspectives and knowledge on a wide range of topics 
and issues.

Contemporary Ethical Issues (E or ETH)  
As Comg 453 carries an E designation, contemporary ethical issues will be presented and studied 
in a manner that is fully integrated into the main course content. We will begin with a review of 
a variety of ethical frameworks such as Mill’s Utilitarianism and Kant’s Ends vs. Means 
orientations to ethical social decision making. Monash’s First Principles exercise will be your 
first assignment and will be a large overview of ethical and philosophical principles and theory. 
As the class is geared around preparation for inter-varsity debate tournaments, ethics will 
inevitably play a central role in every debate of value and policy that you will encounter. By
learning theoretical and pragmatic ethical frameworks, you'll not only be a more competitive
debater, but a more ethically sophisticated citizen beyond the course.

Inter-varsity debate teams are keenly focused on ethical issues as undergirding every debate
encountered, whether be related to political, environmental, personal matters, etc.. Debate
is inherently contentious and non-prescriptive. The UH Debate (supported by Comg 453)
team learns about a variety of approaches to ethics and justice, but no specific frameworks or
theoretical approaches are prescribed. Ethical frameworks such as the Social Contract,
Rawl’s theory of justice, Nicomachean Ethics, Post-structuralism, and Moral Relativism will
be offered as potentially legitimate frameworks for analysis of issues or as focuses of debate
in and of themselves.

**General Course Learning Objectives:**
The primary student learning objective of Activities in Debate and Forensics is to develop oral
rhetorical ability through good spirited competitive and non-competitive speaking activities. The
course is undergirded by the principle of seeking greater understanding of the history and
practice of reasoned discourse as a sound basis for ethical public involvement.

**Specific Student Learning Outcomes**

In this course students will:
1. Develop written and oral argumentation skills in a workshop/team atmosphere.
2. Focus on understanding the complexities of ethical decision making in pluralistic societies.
3. Research and develop advocacy briefs on controversial local, national and international topics.
4. Use research to extemporaneously and orally present arguments on philosophical and practical
topics and the ethical issues that undergird them.
5. Engage in the local debate community by attending in and out of class debating events such as
debating tournaments, public debates and workshops.
6. Develop critical thinking skills and maturity as they become aware of the pervasive presence
of debate and controversy in their academic and social lives.
7. Develop skills in audience analysis and cross cultural communication as they learn to research
and orally defend positions that they may or may not personally believe in to diverse
populations.

**Course Activities:**

1. **Competitive forensics activities:** Will include Parliamentary “Austral Asian” Debate,
   “Worlds” style debate, Lincoln-Douglas Debate (one on one), the interpretation of literature
and platform speaking events. There will be opportunities for weekly competition in
meetings, at Intramural tournaments, and potentially at inter-varsity tournaments at U.S.
mainland and international universities

2. **Non-competitive activities:** are diverse and might include the organization of tournaments,
civic focused field trips, and judging high school debate tournaments. Other non-competitive
activities will revolve around development of the Debate program at UH Manoa (E.g.
institutional knowledge development, recruitment efforts, and publicity).

**Course Materials**

Materials are frequently posted on Laulima or other debating websites for students to
access. Other materials can be accessed via the UH Library or purchased by the student.
Competitive debaters develop extensive libraries related to debate theory and strategy in
addition to specific issues. Students are expected to stay up to date on world events by
closely following credible news periodicals (E.g. The Economist, Al Jazeera, BBC, NPR,
The New Republic).

Although each debate tournament has different resolutions and issues under contention,
there are certain ethical issues that standardly and routinely arise that will be focused on
in weekly classes and practices. The first 10 ethical issues and accompanying readings
will be focused on one week at a time. The required texts should be read as soon as
possible.

**Required Texts:**

**Neil Harvey Smith’s Practical Guide to Debate WUDC:**
Debate First Principles - Monash Debate Society
On Rhetoric - Aristotle
Art, Argument, and Advocacy: Mastering Parliamentary Debate - Kate Shuster and John Meaney

**General issues and accompanying reading list:**

**Ethical issue #1** - Is the right to personal **privacy** more important than government access to
information that affect national security concerns?
Reading - The Patriot Act
Watch - 60 minutes segment on Julian Assange from Wikileaks

**Ethical issue #2** - Will the **tragedy of the commons** inevitably lead to environmental
destruction on Earth?
Read - "The Tragedy of the Commons" - Garrett Hardin (selected excerpts)
Movies - An Inconvenient Truth and The Cove
Ethical issue #3 - Is the right to bear arms an outdated amendment that should be modified due to changing social conditions?
Read - Point/Counterpoint - 2nd Amendment opinions
Movie - Bowling for Columbine

Ethical issue #4 - Is civil disobedience a just reaction to unjust laws and rule?
Reading - Walden - Henry David Thoreau (selected excerpts)
Movie - The Great Debaters - Denzel Washington

Ethical issue #5 - Should American intervene in foreign affairs or be more isolationist?
Read - The “Isolationism” Canard - Justin Logan of the Cato Institute
Research and read - back Economist articles related to U.S. foreign policy, past or present, in at least two of the following regions: Central America, Afghanistan, The Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Iraq.

Ethical issue #6 - When does life begin and should abortion be legal?
Read - Roe Vs. Wade Supreme court opinion.
Read - What Roe Vs. Wade Should Have Said - Jack M. Balkin (selected excerpts)
Watch - 60 Minutes segment on George Tiller (Abortion doctor murdered in 2009).

Ethical issue #7 - Do the Geneva Conventions do an adequate job of setting guidelines for war conduct?
Browse - International Criminal Court (ICC) website - http://www.icc-cpi.int/Menus/ICC

Ethical issue #8 - Can liberal Feminism and Islam co-exist in a society?
Read - Orientalism - Edward Said - (selected excerpts)
Listen - Feminism in Our Time (BBC webcast)
Read - Stansell, Christine (2010). The Feminist Promise: 1792 to the Present. - (selected excerpts)

Ethical issue #9 - Does the State have a right to implement capital punishment?
Watch - How to Kill a Human Being”, BBC Horizon TV program documentary, 2008.

Ethical issue #10 - Should we test products on animals to find out if they are safe for humans?
Read - PETA policy on animal testing. www.peta.org
Read - “Why use animals?”. Association for Biomedical Research. 2005.
**Class Policies**

**Attendance:** Regular attendance will be taken and punctuality is essential for success in this course. Brief assignments and debates that cannot be made up and could ultimately affect your final assessment. Any more than three absences is considered excessive and can jeopardize your receipt of credit. Be on time is also crucial, particularly for competitive and non-competitive events.

**Participation:** Active participation is essential to the effectiveness of this course for you, your classmates, and for the instructor. For the purpose of this course, active participation means arriving on time and contributing to the learning environment. This necessitates active listening and relevant, oral participation in class discussion. Please refrain from doing work for another class during this class.

**Electronics:** Please only use electronic devices during class time with the expressed consent of the instructor. Laptops and electronic dictionaries/translators/note taking devices may be used during regular class periods for academic purposes only.

**Travel:** If you travel to debate competitions, you represent our University. You will be required to sign a code of conduct agreement that explicitly states policies and procedures on the road.

**Grading Methods**

**To receive 3 credits:**
- Each student is required to try out for the “travel team”
- Student is required to attend and participate in all of the scheduled debate practices.
- Student is required to do all assigned reading and participate in classroom discussions related to the readings.
- Student will debate in the preliminary rounds of a local debate (usually HPU or UH hosted) or international debate tournament (some students may be selected to represent UH at away tournaments).
- Student will judge at least two rounds of debate at a local elementary, middle or high school speech or debate tournament. (Students may substitute this assignment and receive credit for competing or judging in as second local college tournaments if high school)
- Student will participate in one DFS public event (E.g. Open house).
- Student is required to complete three competition-ready research briefs.
- Student will co-host The News Show on KTUH once.
- Student will help develop the debate program at UHM.

**To receive 1 credit:**
- Each student is required to try out for the “travel team”
- Student is required to attend Monday debate practices.
- Student is required to do all assigned reading and participate in classroom discussions related to the readings.
Student will debate in the preliminary rounds of a local debate (usually HPU or UH hosted) or international debate tournament (some students may be selected to represent UH at away tournaments).

- Student will participate in one DFS public event (E.g. Open house).
- Student is required to complete one competition-ready research brief.
- Student will co-host The News Show on KTUH once.
- Student will help develop the debate program at UHM.

Methods of Evaluation

Students’ quality of research and problem-solving strategies will be assessed through debate brief assignments, specific debate exercises, peer evaluation, teacher feedback, and in-class debates.

“O” and “E” Designation Credit

***Students must complete 3 units of Speech 454 to receive O or E designation.

Grading Scale - Credit No-Credit

5. Tentative Schedule

Debate Tournaments and Events are in bold. As we discuss many contemporary controversial issues, scheduled discussion is subject to change as important events in the world do. Students will revise briefs multiple times and may be required to present them more than once. Due dates for briefs will be announced when assigned.

Week 1:
Introduction to debate - Criteria, definitions, value, policy and fact debates
Discuss planned semester activities, demonstration debate, debate video and adjudication discussion. Ethics as the undergirding conceptual framework of debate.
Ethical issue 1: Privacy

Week 2:
Research briefs assigned - How to write a brief
Format of academic debate and speech structure, How to “flow"
Practice debate
Ethical issue 2: Tragedy of the Commons

Week 3:
Basics of “Worlds style” debate - speaking roles, philosophy, points of information, etc.
Brief Rotation 1: present briefs
2 Practice debates
Novice Speech & Debate Tournament Judging - Hawaii Speech League
Ethical issue 3: 2nd Amendment
Week 4:
Sample briefs—how to use briefs in prep time
Matter, manner, method
Practice Debate
Brief Rotation 2: present briefs
US Open or Nationals - Away tournament
Ethical issue 4: Civil Disobedience

Week 5:
Tournament Debrief—Lessons Learned
Ethical issue 5: U.S. Isolationism

Week 6
Adjudicating debates
Brief Rotation 3: present briefs
Practice Debate
Debating Justice, Utilitarianism and net benefits
Ethical issue 6: Abortion

Week 7:
Matter – Research
Brief Rotation 1: present briefs
Practice Debate
Hawaii Speech League Event
Ethical issue 7: War Conduct

Week 8:
Matter – Versatility
Brief Rotation 2: present briefs
Practice Debate
Debating defense issues
Ethical issue 8: Feminism and Islam

Week 9:
Method – Motion construction and analysis
Brief Rotation 3: present briefs
Practice Debate
Debating Economics, Stakeholder analyses
UH Intramural Debate tournament
Ethical issue 9: Death penalty

Week 10:
Tournament Debrief—Lessons Learned
Short Practice
Ethical issue 10: Animal rights
Week 11:
Method – Role construction and analysis
Brief Rotation 1: present briefs
Practice Debate

Week 12:
Manner – Credibility
Brief Rotation 2: present briefs

Week 13:
Manner – Resonance
Brief Rotation 3: present briefs
Practice Debate
**HPU Tournament Downtown**

Week 14:
Tournament Debrief—Lessons Learned, Preparing for Final Event
Final Debate event

Week 15: Dead Week - no class