

Course Syllabus: Fall 2025



COM 2031: ARGUMENTATION AND DEBATE

Dr. SKIP RUTLEDGE - FALL SEMESTER 2025

Section 1 Tuesday/Thursday - 1:30 to 2:45 in Cabrillo 102

Office hours: Tues/ Thur 11:00 to 11:45, 1:00 – 1:30, 2:45 to 3:45, and by appointment

OFFICE: CABRILLO 103, Office – 619.849-2391

CELL PHONE: 619.655.0112 (10 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.)

Debate Team Practices: Tues/Thur 4:00 –6:00 in COM 202 and/or Cabrillo Annex Speech Lab

COURSE DESCRIPTION: A study of the development of argumentation from classical rhetoricians to contemporary research theories. Practical application of this study through participation in debates and other forensic experiences. (3 units)

OVERALL GOALS: THROUGH THE CRUCIBLE OF DEBATE, WE WILL TRY TO PROVIDE EACH YOU REAL WORLD LIFE ENHANCING AND EMPOWERING SKILLS THAT PROMOTE PERSUASION, CRITICAL THINKING, TEAMWORK, COMMUNICATION, RESEARCH, ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATIONAL SKILLS THAT WILL HELP YOU IN OTHER CLASSES, CAREER READINESS, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, GRADUATE SCHOOL PREPERATION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, LOCALLY, NATIONALLY AND EVEN INTERNATIONALLY.

COURSE OBJECTIVES AND LEARNING OUTCOMES:

1. THEORY: To develop an understanding of the theory and forms of argumentation and debate.
2. PRAXIS: To learn to apply argumentation theory successfully by preparing and/or participating in various exercises in written and/or oral persuasive communication and debate.
3. SKILL: To demonstrate specific skill development in the areas of reasoning, critical thinking, questioning, and organizing ideas and research into logical proofs, or arguments. What? You thought we were going to sit around holding hands and singing Kumbaya? 😊
4. FUN: To prepare students to explore and participate in an enjoyable and successful experience in intercollegiate competitive Parliamentary debate taught in a game-like learning atmosphere. And remember the best games are the ones you try the hardest to do well in.
5. PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT: To gain confidence in defending or positing a persuasive view in an adversarial situation, this can enormously benefit the student in real world situations concerning matters of faith, personal well-being or conviction, family, career or public service and ministry. Be the difference you want to see! (Sorry, too cheesy? But it is real).

PLNU General Education Mission Statement

PLNU provides a foundational course of study in the liberal arts informed by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In keeping with the Wesleyan tradition, the curriculum equips students with a broad range of knowledge and skills within and across disciplines to enrich major study, lifelong learning, and vocational service as Christ-like participants in the world's diverse societies and culture.

COURSE PARADIGM: or (WHAT IS IN IT FOR YOU)

I have four strong foundational presuppositions for debate, aside from the conviction that all things are possible through Christ Jesus (which is not a bad fallback position for any challenging class). Feel free to cross apply it to other situations at no extra charge. ☺

1. The first is that **Debate is a Game**. It is a fun game that teaches life-enhancing skills. But at its core, it is still just a game. That means it is to be played with, experimented with, enjoyed, and practiced with a view towards how to improve one's mastery of the skill taught by the game. It is not something to be feared! You are not baring your insides to have strangers attack everything you hold dear. You are instead playing an assigned role, like a role-playing game or charades. Win or lose, you simply play the game again, and try to improve on your old mark. Eventually, elsewhere you will better be able to advance causes you passionately believe in through the skills developed in this game, and you help to overcome any fear of public speaking or debate or advocacy. And maybe you learn some current events along the way.
2. The second belief is that **you can do this far better than you initially suspect**. The major limitations you will face will be those you place on yourself through your own beliefs in your potential horizons or limitations. If you are willing to go for it and commit yourself to growing, learning and ultimately winning, you will be amazed at how much you will learn and improve. My hope is that my belief in you will be contagious, and you will believe more in yourself. The real key to being an effective debater, as with most other things in life, is that you must believe in yourself first, before others will believe in you.
3. The third truth I have learned about participating in debate is that **learning to debate well can change the world around you**. You will no longer look at the world or yourself the same way. Most people are just observers in life, not agents for change or improvement. Most go along to get along. There is more. You will learn to become a much better observer, which is a critical skill, and more importantly, you will learn how to find what is wrong and discover a way to make it better. This cognitive and developmental leap usually comes from analyzing the critical thinking and speaking skills you learn in the game, carefully and prayerfully assessing where they should be applied, and then applying them for the betterment of those around you.
4. The fourth principle may be the most important communication lesson you ever learn. As with all communication activities, you should **strive to be courteous and respectful at all times, putting yourself in the position of the others in the activity**. Be considerate of your partner, your opponents, the critic and the audience if any. Read Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, or Tim Sanders' *The Likability Factor* for support and further suggestions on this important concept. Good communication begins with Respect. And one of the best ways to garner respect, is to freely give respect to others. Here are some specifics as it applies to the activity of debate, which some might view as sort of an aggressive activity.

- Always **respect your partner's** ideas and input. Never make your partner look bad or feel bad about themselves or their arguments. Believe it or not, some debaters do this in the false hope that it will make them look better. It does not. Not only is this poor form, but also it is counterproductive as it hurts your in-round personal and team impression management. You may have a better way, or completely disagree with your partner, but find a way to do so respectfully. I am guessing that couple's counselors might provide this advice to their clients.
- Always **be courteous to your opponents**. Deontologically, it is the right thing to do (you know, that *love one another* thing), but it also makes sense strategically. If they want to take the low road and get ugly or nasty, let them. Good critics love to favor the abused side, not only from an instinctive "*sticking up for the underdog*" motivation, but also to teach the other team better manners. In life and debate, always try to understand what the opposition believes and why. Do not just assume that they are idiots because they disagree with you. Respect their reasons, then politely correct them, or if they are right - admit it and move on to the real point of contention (notice the strategic framing). You then become the reasonable **seeker of truth** persona. Judges are more likely to side with people who appear reasonable in this activity.
- Also, **be considerate of the critic/judge** at all times. Most of the time these are bright, educated, over-worked, underpaid people volunteering their time to help you learn important skills. Be appreciative of their sacrifice. Strive to make the round as easy to follow (organized and impactful) as possible. There are far too many arguments in most rounds. Filter them down to several BIG issues that favor your side of the resolution and show how they outweigh or subsume all other items. Try to be personable and entertaining as well as clear, compelling and logical. Be alert to the judge's reactions to all major arguments and respond accordingly. Ride that wave. Agree with them where you can and gently steer them in another direction when you must. It is easy to respect the judges that vote for you, but good debaters work on being respectful to those that drop you and try politely to find out how to do better the next time. BTW, one form of debate (IPDA) prides itself on using completely non-trained, inexperienced judges who usually know far less than do you. Welcome that; do not fear it. Help them decide correctly.
- Finally, **be respectful of the audience**. Even if the audience is pulling for the other team, never alienate the audience. Instead use charm, humor and logic to convince, cajole, guilt, educate, or reason them into treating you and your arguments more fairly. Alert judges will see and appreciate your approach and discount their shameless shilling for their friends.

Good luck, God bless, and have fun.

- **TEXTS:**
- Gary Rybold, William Neesen, Kelly Kehoe. IVC Project Debate. (Free to you, study this one thoroughly, as it will be the main textbook for the class.)
- Steven L. Johnson ((2009). *Winning Debates: A Guide to Debating in the Style of The World Universities Debate*. IDEA Press. International Debate Education Association (New York, Amsterdam, Brussels) (Free to you, but only an extra resource, not required reading for assignments or exams.)
- One good daily newspaper such as the *San Diego Union Tribune*, the *LA Times*, the *New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, etc.

Electronic versions are fine, and often less expensive. Pay particular attention to the front-page section and the opinions of the editors (Op-ed) pages, especially on Sundays. The USA Today usually runs a daily debate in this section, pulling in editorials on both sides from recognized experts in their fields. You can access many of these through our library as students. Review PLNU's Phineas Library homepage

- One comprehensive weekly news magazine such as Time, Newsweek, U.S. News and World Report. The Economist is possibly the best single magazine for international stories and does a nice job with national stories as well. Again, electronic versions or alternatives are fine, if you try to find balanced viewpoints.
- Also the best single source for extensively covering a single new issue each week is CQ Researcher <https://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/static.php?page=aboutcqr> This started in the 1920s I think as Editorial Research Reports, and is somehow related to Congressional Research Quarterly. Many research librarians first recommend this before any other sources.

CELL PHONES:

Electronic interruptions in class are rude, distracting and unacceptable. You must turn all such devices off (not just to silent) before entering the class. Any electronic interruption of class or personal use of mobile communication device will result in a 10-point reduction from your overall grade for the first offense; a second offense will result in a 50-point grade reduction – the equivalent of half the points on a final exam. A third such interruption may result in even harsher disciplinary actions. This warning includes using any device for catching up on e-mail, communicating with others, doing outside work, etc, anything beyond note taking or relevant research purposes for this class. Most profs dislike or ban the use of any electronic devices and for good reasons. I would like to be able to allow them though since we are often researching or fact checking on the internet on current events for discussions or drills or debates. But if they get misused, I will be forced to discontinue their use entirely. *Don't make me pull this classroom over to the side of the internet highway!* Oops, slipped into angry dad mode, ;-) Won't happen again, . . . much.

PLAGIARISM, ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE & ETHICS:

Your integrity and character are the truest measures of your worth. Status, money, power, fame, family, friends, looks, grades, etc. can all be misleading and fleeting indicators of who others think you are at best, and can be taken away by outside forces in a blink of an eye. Only you can truly diminish your own character and integrity, as it is what you are when no one else is looking. Guard this jealously. What you are truly worth is entirely up to you. Please debate with integrity and high ethical standards.

Assuming credit for another's work (even AI) without providing complete and accurate references is plagiarism and is strictly prohibited. If this occurs, the offending student(s) will fail the assignment and probably the class. A recommendation to suspend or expel the student may also be forwarded to the provost. Ignorance is no defense. Ask ahead of time if you have questions. Plagiarism is one of the worst possible offenses in most colleges and universities. That is especially true in a university attempting to promote Christian ideals. Fabricating or falsifying evidence to support your view or claim is even worse in academic debate. Lying is unacceptable, even in this game-like environment of debate. I have heard and seen individuals that seem to believe that lying or cheating on small things is acceptable because the issue is so small, like stealing a newspaper or sneaking into a second movie. Have you considered that it is not the cost of the paper or the movie that we are discussing but instead the worth of your character or

integrity? Don't place too small a value on your character please. Relying on Chat GPT or other Artificial Intelligence aided research is also unacceptable as anything but a research tool.

CURRENT EVENT AWARENESS:

Students will be required and expected to keep up with the daily news of local, national and international importance. Not only is this a hallmark of a well-educated person it is critically important to faithfully uphold one's citizenship responsibilities in a democracy. What good is the right to vote when votes are based on ignorance? It is not enough to simply know the big picture or even the big details. You should dig for opposing views and try to analyze issues at a deeper level. Expect quizzes and debates to include questions on these current events. Especially, know your leaders, both nationally and internationally. Who currently holds cabinet positions (or try), who are the foreign heads of states, etc.. One other advance warning, know your U.S. Constitution! Read it. Learn it. Love it. And yes, it could be on the test. ☺ Finally, for those of you that know and respect the power of prayer, please *pray for your leaders daily*. Awareness of specific issues and particular leaders can allow for a more focused and effective prayer life.

GRADING POLICY:

Grade points will be awarded for each assignment as listed below. Grade points will also be awarded for attendance, class participation, and tests as follows:

1. Tests and Quizzes 200
2. Assignments 300

TOTAL POSSIBLE GRADE POINTS 500

To receive an "A" or a "B" grade, a student must satisfactorily complete every assignment, meaning that even if your points suggest an A is earned if you did not satisfactorily complete an assignment, the best you can earn is a "C+". The grading scale is demonstrated here for the "B" range: 80-81 % = B-, 82 – 87% equals a B, 88-89% = B+. Cross apply scale to the 90s for "A"s , 70s for "C"s, etc. .

ASSIGNMENTS:

A. WRITTEN: POSSIBLE POINTS - 200

1. Government Brief & Affirmative Case 100
2. Opposition or Negative briefs 100 (2 such briefs are required per person or dyad.)

B. ORAL: POSSIBLE POINTS - 100

1. In Class Debates 50 points (weighted on your later, better rounds, so participating in more I practices will likely result in a better performance score for this area of assessment)
2. Compete in 1 Debate Tournaments and watch or judge another (or 4 extra practice rounds beyond in class practices) 50 points
 - For example competing in one, and judging in one tournament works, or earn more extra credit by exceeding this minimum.

Extra Credit: compete or judge in that second tournament for extra credit rather than just watching it.

C. EXAM(S) – 200 (Midterm and Final)

Exam Points Possible 200

RESEARCH ASSIGNMENTS:

Each person will be responsible for researching, constructing and submitting two well-crafted briefs: a negative and an affirmative position and or case surrounding one of various current event issues. You will select these issues in class based on which current events you are most interested in learning more about. You will, with the approval of the instructor, select a resolution and research arguments for and against that resolution. Your research will begin as concept briefs with different quotations from various expert sources supporting pertinent arguments. These arguments will be developed into two negative briefs (including at least one disadvantage and either a harm mitigation brief, or a counterplan or critique brief), and one affirmative case per person. The points per assignment are listed above. For the negative Briefs assignment, you may submit two different disadvantages against the same case.

TESTS:

A midterm and final exam will also be given. Please also be prepared for periodic (though not necessarily pre-announced) quizzes covering the assigned reading and material covered in class, and current events. Your in-class debates will be open note, open computer, so feel free to access whatever material you have accumulated for your practices. The midterm is difficult, so study hard. I have been known to sometimes waive the final for those that excel on the midterm. Make it count.

ATTENDANCE POLICY:

Snooze - ya lose! Success in this class requires strong attendance. Excused absences include only: A) Provost's approved college activities, and B) written Doctor's excuse for emergencies. This is a performance-oriented class. Practice debates must start at the very beginning of class. Tardy entries and early departures create rude disturbances that may negatively impact your classmates' concentration and your grade. Try to be considerate and arrive a bit early. Three tardies = 1 absence. **Excessive absences (beyond 2 class periods) will result in lowered grades. Missing two weeks of synchronous classes is grounds for failure.** Please do not assume that medical appointments, job issues or family gatherings, unauthorized breaks, or even hurting friends that need your help are excused absences. They are just absences. Bathroom breaks and water cooler appointments are on your time, not class time. Thanks. Please plan ahead.

DUE DATES AND DEADLINES:

Written assignments missed due to an excused absence must be made up by the following class. Missed written assignments due to unexcused absences may be turned in up to 1 class late for half credit. Oral assignments will be made up on a time available basis only (with no guarantees that time will be available. If it is not, the assignment will be awarded a grade of F). **Don't even think of missing a practice debate.** This negatively impacts 3-5 other grades and throws an entire class session off and cannot be ignored or condoned!

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS:

While all students are expected to meet the minimum academic standards for completion of this course as established by the instructor, students with disabilities may require academic accommodations. At Point Loma Nazarene University, students requesting academic accommodations must file documentation with the Disability Educational Access Center (EAC),

located in the Bond Academic Center. Once the student files documentation, the Center will contact the student's instructors and provide written recommendations for reasonable and appropriate accommodations to meet the individual learning needs of the student. This policy assists the University in its commitment to full compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities (ADA) Act of 1990, and ADA Amendments Act of 2008, all of which prohibit discrimination against students with disabilities and guarantees all qualified students equal access to and benefits of PLNU programs and activities.

MY GOAL AND COMMITMENT TO YOU: I WANT THIS TO BE THE MOST IMPACTFUL, LIFE ENHANCING AND LIFE EMPOWERING CLASS YOU EVER TOOK, WITH SOLID, REAL-WORLD BENEFITS. BUT TO DO SO I NEED YOU TO DO A FEW THINGS TO HELP IN THIS MUTUAL GOAL:

- GIVE THIS CLASS A SOLID EFFORT AND TRY TO GET THE MOST OF IT, RATHER THAN JUST HAVING A GOAL OF GETTING THROUGH WITH JUST THE LEAST EFFORT. GET YOUR MONEY'S WORTH. YOU DESERVE NOTHING LESS.
- LET ME KNOW IF ANYTHING THAT WE HAVE COVERED, OR ARE WORKING ON IS AT ALL UNCLEAR, AND I WILL MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO BRING GREATER CLARITY TO A LESSON, DISCUSSION, OR ASSIGNMENT. I AM HAPPY TO MEET OUTSIDE OF CLASS, IN MY OFFICE, AT THE CAFETERIA OVER LUNCH, OR WHATEVER FITS BEST WITH YOUR SCHEDULE, GIVEN SOME ADVANCE NOTICE.
- LET ME KNOW PERIODICALLY HOW WE CAN COVER THINGS BETTER. IF YOU ARE WORKING SERIOUSLY ON IT, AND STRUGGLING, OTHERS PROBABLY ARE ALSO. PLEASE NEVER BE AFRAID OR ASHAMED OF ADMITTING SOMETHING IS UNCLEAR. LET ME KNOW SO I CAN HELP. I HAVE BEEN DOING THIS FOR ABOUT 50 years (even though I only look 25 – in leap years) SO I MAY TAKE SOME THINGS FOR GRANTED, and do not want to have you miss something that is unclear.
- I WILL ALSO ATTEMPT TO TRACK TO SEE HOW THE CLASS IS DOING AND RESERVE THE RIGHT TO ALTER SCHEDULES AND DUE DATES OCCAISONALLY TO BETTER COVER THE MATERIAL. BUT I ALSO PLEDGE TO RETURN CORRECTED OR COMMENTED UPON ASSIGNMENTS OR EXAMPS TO WITHIN A WEEK OR TWO OF THEIR DUE DATE, OR ADJUST DUE DATES ON THE NEXT MAJOR EXAM TO BETTER ALLOW YOU TO INCORPORATE NOTED AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT.

FERPA POLICY

In compliance with federal law, neither PLNU student ID nor social security number will be used in publicly posted grades or returned sets of assignments without student written permission. This class will meet the federal requirements by (each faculty member choose one strategy to use: distributing all grades and papers individually; requesting and filing written student permission; or assigning each student a unique class ID number not identifiable on the alphabetic roster.). Also in compliance with FERPA, you will be the only person given information about your progress in this class unless you have designated others to receive it in the "Information Release" section of the student portal. See [Policy Statements](#) in the undergrad student catalog. Obviously, group assignments will include notice to all members of that group, whether in terms of formal grades, or more direct and informal feedback and assessment, with recommendations for improvement and items performed well.

TOURNAMENT PARTICIPATION:

One of the most exciting and unique challenges, opportunities and requirements of this course is that each student is required to participate in one to two intercollegiate tournaments during the semester. The purpose is to allow the students to enjoy using and testing the skills they have developed in class within the ultimate crucible of learning, the real world. Remember a few important items to help reduce the anxiety level.

- **First**, you will be in a Novice Division of other beginners like yourself.
- **Second**, your grade is participation based, not performance or outcome based. As long as you compete and seriously try, you receive 100% of the possible grade points for the tournament assignment. You can lose all your debate rounds combined and still receive an A+ for this part of the grade. This is the Blankenchip Rule, named after an outstanding alum who was a strong student and terrific debater, but never actually won a formal round at a tournament, and still managed to finish with a strong A, and is a terrific public speaker to this day. (He approved naming the rule after him btw - I am not that mean.)
- **Third**, it is a lot of fun (remember that debate is a game, an educational game).
- **Fourth**, you will learn so much more from really participating than you could ever learn just from reading about it. It seems for some that the course really first begins at that first tournament, as that is when the lessons start to make sense and seem more significant.
 - **Fifth and Finally**: Best, and last, is that one of those two tournaments can be to serve as a critic or judge and render a fair decision. More on this later.

The whole class will be expected to compete in a Tournament at PLNU in Mid-October (Oct 24 or 26, 2025). It is the closest, cheapest option and held at the best time. For the brave there may also be one at El Camino College the last weekend in September, likely on Saturday. And there may be other alternatives so stayed tuned. The class debaters will be responsible for entry fees and judging fees for tournaments, but the team will try to help with the fees for PLNU. Entry fees range from \$30 to \$100 dollars a team depending on the tournament (Grossmont has been \$30 per team), and judges run from \$50-100 per tournament. We will try to help locate judging for the Grossmont tournament (Nov 15 or 16, 2025) from our alumni to minimize these fees. Should either of these tournament dates not work with your schedule it may be possible for you to attend another tournament, but all related expenses would be borne by you individually (for away tournaments remember this includes lodging, meals, and transportation as well as entry fees and judges).

DEBATE TEAM INVOLVEMENT: (also optional and not needed for a strong class grade)

PLNU has an intercollegiate debate team that meets and practices twice weekly (T/R 4:00 to 6:00) and competes against other colleges and universities on weekends. Novices from the class are encouraged to consider joining this team at any point in the semester, but the sooner you decide the better it is, and the easier you will find it. A major part of our school's success (6 times past National Champions) through the years comes from members of this class with no previous experience. Even if you are not interested in joining the team you are welcome to come and watch the meetings and the practice debates. This should help the concepts to make sense, just through seeing them practiced repeatedly. The more rounds you see the easier it is to debate. The more rounds you debate the better you become. Familiarity breeds success.

You should never feel, though, that by not being on the team you are hurting your chances to do well in this class. The course is designed with the assumption that everyone can earn a strong grade without doing anything other than class assignments (those must obviously be done very well for top grades). It is true that typically about a third of the class chooses to be on the team and that through all this extra work - above and beyond class requirements - they polish and perfect class relevant skills that allow them to exceed normal class standards. However, this does not mean that non-team members cannot also do very well; many do. The important thing to remember, as you should with any performance assignment, is that practice makes perfect. The unique difficulty with debate is that practicing alone is very difficult. Whether you join the team or not, partner up with other class members to practice periodically. The class size is too large to allow everyone to practice in class each day.

Note: The toughest yet most important thing to get used to in the game of debate is flowing, the systematic means of note taking. Good flowing skills are essential to keep your thoughts and arguments organized, to respond to your opponent's points, and to leave a good impression with the critic. Watch as many rounds as you can and flow every round you watch. Also, watch with the idea in mind that you are the judge. Who do you vote for and why? The more you flow and judge, the easier it is for you to then debate with the flow and the judge's decision in mind. You organize your attack or defense, and you weigh issues for the critic, explaining why your arguments outweigh your opponents' arguments. That is good debating. Practice flowing lectures, the news, songs, standup comedy, Political Debates, whatever. . .

Some Tournament Tips

1. Dress for success. Professional attire. First impressions are very important.
2. Watch as many practice debates as you can before competing. If possible, even watch actual rounds at a tournament. Always flow when watching a debate round.
3. Practice a couple of times on both sides before competing in a tournament.
4. Plan on arriving an hour early to the campus. Assume it will be hard to find where to park, to meet the team, and to debate. Allow yourself time to get lost, find us, & relax.
5. Bring some money for meals. We often go out to a restaurant after the tournament to compare experiences, and swap war stories.
6. Relax and have fun. It is a game, and you are interacting with other beginners. You get an A+ on the assignment for just competing seriously and trying your best. To help relaxation, forget my ill-timed comment on the war analogy above. ☺
7. Should you advance to the elimination rounds and/or get a speaker award you can earn extra credit for the class.
8. If you regularly attend team meetings (even if you are not on the team), and/or if you compete in extra tournaments, you can also receive extra credit for the extra learning.
9. Always remember the power of nonverbal communication. If you look like you are confident and winning an argument or the round, it is more likely that the critic will agree with you. If you look overwhelmed and clueless it will not inspire confidence in the content of your message. Sometimes you sell the sizzle, not the steak.

10. In debate, as in life, positive mental attitude is the key to success. Whether you think you can or think you can't, you are usually right. Envision yourself eloquently delivering nuggets of wisdom appreciated by the audience and critics and you will succeed.

11. Always practice seriously as if it were a real tournament round, and practice giving your speech over again on your own after being critiqued incorporating the suggestions. In your mind you will remember the perfect speech, rather than the imperfect first attempt.