

CSC300, Winter 2009

Debate

due January 22nd–April 9th

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of these debates is to sharpen your critical thinking and writing skills. You will advocate a viewpoint on a topic on which there is some controversy. You will be evaluated on how well your team researches and coordinates their presentation, as well as your individual poise and ability to “think on your feet” (or, perhaps, your ability to type in your seat).

There is also an audience component to these debates. Audience members are responsible for understanding the gist of the arguments presented, and asking questions. In particular, each enrolled student is expected to ask at least one relevant question on a debate other than their own, and it is entirely possible that topics from a debate other than your own could turn up on the final exam.

FORMAT

There will be eleven debates, between teams of two or three members each. The debates will be conducted on the course bulletin board. Here is the format I recommend, but I welcome suggestions for modifications:

INTRODUCTIONS: The pro and con position must simultaneously post introductions (no more than 500 words) to the thread for their debate. This is likely to have been prepared in advance, then copied-and-pasted into the bulletin board.

REBUTTAL: Each team has a 30-minute period to produce and post a rebuttal to the other team’s introduction.

AUDIENCE QUESTIONS: There will be a 24-hour period to allow questions from me, the TA, and your classmates. Team members do not post questions on their own debates.

SUMMARIES: Thirty minutes after the 24-hour mark, each team posts a summary (no more than 800 words), responding to questions, and possibly re-stating or modifying their position.

TIME-LINE EXAMPLE: If the pro and con introduction were posted at 3 pm on Thursday, the rebuttals would be due by 3:30, questions by 3:30 pm on Friday, and summaries by 4:00 pm on Friday.

The introduction should be prepared by the team in advance, and presented by one team member, with the aim of making the strongest case possible for the given viewpoint. The rebuttals should be coordinated on the spot (team members might sit together) and presented by a different member than the introduction is. Debaters should not respond to audience questions directly, but save their responses until they post their

summary. The summary allows an opportunity for reflection, possibly acknowledging or conceding some of the opposing team's points.

NEGOTIATING TEAMS AND TOPICS

I will post a list of topics on the bulletin board, and you may post your interest in, and position on (pro/con), each topic . The first complete team (two–three pro, two–three con) asking for a topic claims it. Once formed, teams must negotiate a start time that begins on the hour or half-hour (EST) of the appropriate Thursday, and post their decision to the board. Decisions should be posted by January 19th, or else you risk missing this component of your term work.