PARRhesia Program for Public Discourse

PARRhesia Program for Public Discourse Mission

Rooted in the University of Chicago’s principles of freedom of expression and academic inquiry, the Parrhesia Program for Public Discourse offers an innovative curriculum in the theory and practice of public discourse and deliberation. It strives to foster open and inclusive public discourse by developing students’ abilities to articulate and communicate their ideas effectively, thereby allowing them to engage productively in civic deliberation and dialogue. Theory-driven as well as practice-oriented, the Parrhesia Program for Public Discourse offers courses at multiple levels of instruction, such as courses on the history and theory of free discourse and rhetoric as well as on the principles and practices of public speaking, deliberation, and dialogue. The curriculum aims to develop communicative competence within a wide variety of communities, including academic, professional, and civic. The Parrhesia Program for Public Discourse will be integrated into the College’s distinctive undergraduate curriculum and reflects the conviction that open discourse can advance probing and challenging critical thought.

PARRhesia Program for Public Discourse Courses

PARR 13000. Public Speaking: Theory and Practice. 100 Units.
Public Speaking: Theory and Practice emphasizes clear, direct, and concise presentation of complex, specialized, or controversial ideas. Through the study of rhetorical theory and examination of speeches and other public discourse, the course prepares students to communicate in a variety of academic, professional, and civic contexts. Course assignments and exercises actively engage students in the rhetorical process of research, evidence evaluation, argument construction, audience analysis, and presentation preparation and delivery. The course includes three outside of class speaking sessions to be arranged in consultation with students.
Instructor(s): L. Brammer, R. Solomon Terms Offered: Autumn Spring Winter

PARR 14300. Traversing Borders: The Rhetoric of Immigration. 100 Units.
Borders are not simply things - i.e. physical boundaries; rather, they are symbolic constructions that manifest in multiple forms - from language, to dress, to appearance - with the aim of distinguishing insider from outsider, those who belong from those who do not. Both the physical and symbolic borders of citizenship are proliferating, with the result that border-crossings of various kinds are becoming more dangerous. This course will examine the rhetorical construction of borders in the US and other parts of the world, including Europe and South Africa, through analysis of official documents, speeches, and news accounts. The course will also consider the way that migrant rights groups, through their activism, challenge the border logic of citizenship and seek to orient an understanding of citizenship toward a global context. The major assignments for this course will include a rhetorical analysis of relevant public discourse (speeches, social media, examples of activism) related to immigration debates in the US or abroad, as well as a public online forum that will focus on immigrant rights issues.
Instructor(s): R. Solomon Terms Offered: Winter
Equivalent Course(s): GLST 24300, CHST 14300

PARR 15700. Pandemic Politics: Deliberating Public Health. 100 Units.
The Covid-19 pandemic underlines the importance of science in public life, as well as its contested nature. Science is crucial in helping us make sense of world, but translating scientific findings into the public sphere - which is defined by different standards of evidence, conflicting values and political agendas, and distrust of experts - presents a particular rhetorical challenge. Using HIV/AIDS and Covid-19 as case studies, this course will examine the way that public science is mediated through discourse. Students will study the background of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the stigma that resulted, and the important role of activists and scientists in challenging that stigma and fighting for life-saving treatment. In particular, students will analyze AIDS denialism in South Africa, which threatened to undermine the country’s treatment program, and the role of activist groups in defending the work of medical experts. We will then use the public controversy over HIV/AIDS to critically assess the present conflict over Covid-19, with the aim of learning how to better support effective public deliberation of important scientific issues. The main assignment for the course will be an analysis project, focusing on relevant texts that students choose related to either the HIV/AIDS or Covid-19 case studies. The course will finish with a group project in which students develop a Covid-19 vaccine campaign.
Instructor(s): R. Solomon Terms Offered: Spring

PARR 16300. Public Deliberation and Community Engagement: Chicago to the Obama White House. 100 Units.
This course explores important decision points in Chicago history and the Obama Administration. Through deliberation theory and historical, social, and community-based research, students will understand and translate critical decisions through designing deliberative materials for use in Chicago schools and communities. Public deliberation theory explores how to inform and engage citizens in inclusive informed deliberation and collective decision making. Course readings in community deliberation, decision-making, and argument and scaffolded assignments provide the foundation for students to research, frame, and develop materials for use in the community. Students will choose their area of focus: either Chicago and/or an Obama decision-and through
peer testing and review learn about a variety of civic issues and tools to navigate and facilitate effective public engagement and decision-making processes.

Instructor(s): L. Brammer
Terms Offered: Spring
Equivalent Course(s): CHST 16300

PARR 16600. Political Rhetoric: Presidential Inauguration, Transition, and Legislation. 100 Units.
Presidential transitions provide unique and particularly robust moments for ritual, transition, and potential transformation on policies and politics. Through the lens of rhetorical theory on inaugurations, political communication, and transition, this course will examine the beginning of the Biden Presidency. Students will examine inaugural addresses, symbolic rituals, speeches, legislative agenda, and executive orders and directions executed in the first few weeks of the new administration. Course readings and discussions will review and synthesize relevant theory in relationship to emerging discourse, events, and proposals. In assignments, students will utilize theory to analyze and critique discourse and legislative and political developments.

Instructor(s): L. Brammer
Terms Offered: Winter