PROPOSAL FOR AN UPPER DIVISION CLUSTER COURSE

Faculty: Amanda Feller, Instructor (SP/UNST) & Director of Forensics
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Title of proposed course: SP 399 Debate & Forensics
Course offered: Fall, Winter, & Spring every year
Cluster Coordinator: Amy Spring

A. COURSE DESCRIPTION

This is a course designed to provide an intensive environment for students to learn and practice a range of communication skills, particularly the intersection of critical thinking and public speaking. By taking this course, students take the first step in becoming a member of PSU Forensics team. Students learn debate and argumentation, along with a host of general public speaking skills. They apply these skills in the team environment by attending intercollegiate competitions throughout the term. Following a tournament experience the students and instructor/coaches evaluate and apply feedback from ballots.

B. COURSE DEVELOPMENT

This is an existing course that is a natural fit for the leadership cluster.

C. GENERAL EDUCATION GOALS

Having participated as a faculty member in the University Studies program, I am confident that SP 399 Debate & Forensics fulfills the goals of a cluster course. Forensics activity brings together the best elements of an education environment and a training environment. Students learn a number of skills and concepts in a variety of ways.

Skills: Forensics provides an environment in which to learn communication of all types from interpersonal (debate partners) to group (team interaction) to organizational (forensics community) to public speaking (actual speech making) to mass media (interpretation and application of news events). Additionally, a successful forensics student must develop critical thinking skills. For example, quick and sharp thinking is needed in order to focus on the vital concepts in a debate and set aside nonvital issues. Social responsibility and character development are central to the philosophy of the PSU forensics team. For example, as the head coach I teach the students about negative trends that have emerged in competition that can dominate argumentation. The students learn how to develop their ethos and avoid those trends, rising to the spirit of argumentation: honesty and goodwill. Becoming an excellent speaker and critical thinker depends upon a development of one's ethos, logos, and pathos. In addition to learning public speaking and critical thinking skills, students learn the essence of teamwork and leadership. A successful forensics team depends on students that are self-motivated, self-directed, aggressive in their education, and teach one another. Ultimately the forensics course provides a facilitated learning environment to develop leadership skills.
**Concepts:** Forensics is truly a multidisciplinary activity. In order to become successful in the activity, students learn not only about the processes and dimensions of public speaking, they must also learn about a wide range of events. Students learn philosophy, political science, economics, psychology, communication theory, science, history, etc. Debate topics range from “this house would arm the KLM” to “Resolved: entertainment is to blame”. One must know current events, history, and theory in order to effectively argue for or against these resolutions. Individual events range from platform speeches to interpretations of literature. Students are required to research their passions for platform speeches. Students that engage in an interpretation of literature must think critically and creatively about literature.

All of these skills and concepts happen not just as a matter of a typical classroom environment. The course is an intensive, collaborative, experiential, and competitively-positive learning environment.

**D. COURSE OUTLINE**

This course is already underway (has been offered fall, winter, and spring for three years running) and will be taught again next year. The course is highly individualized in terms of specific assignments.

Essentially each week is dedicated to an hour of lecture/discussion on principles of communication and critical thinking (specifically public speaking and argumentation) as well as content-specific information, i.e. history, philosophy, psychology. The second hour of each class meeting is application, where students practice speeches and debate. They work in small groups with the instructor and/or teaching assistants. Each student is expected to prepare three speeches by the first tournament (usually four weeks into the term). Each student will compete at the tournament with these three prepared events and in impromptu speaking. They will also have a debate partner and compete in debate. Following each tournament the students will receive their ballots and review those ballots with the instructor. Reading includes public speaking text and handouts, research on specific speech topics, an argumentation text, a dictionary of philosophy, etc.
Amanda Feller  3 May 99  5-5358  Dan AHDAL  Date  Phone  Dept. Chair  Date
Priya Kapoor  3 May 99  5-3243  Dan KICHL  Date  Phone  Dept. Chair  Date
Dave Ritchie  3 May 99  5-3243  Dan KICHL  Date  Phone  Dept. Chair  Date
Leslie Good  3 May 99  5-3243  Dan KICHL  Date  Phone  Dept. Chair  Date
Charles Tracy  3 May 99  5-3243  Dan KICHL  Date  Phone  Dept. Chair  Date
Kathleen Cusumano  3 May 99  5-3243  Dan KICHL  Date  Phone  Dept. Chair  Date
Judy Sabal  3 May 99  5-5112  Larry WESLEY  5-4-99  Date
Bill Greenfield, Robin Deal  3 May 99  5-3243  Dan KICHL  Date  Phone  Dept. Chair  Date
Michael Toth  11 May 99  5-3620  JIM E  5/17/99  Date
Michael Toth  3 May 99  5-3243  Dan KICHL  Date  Phone  Dept. Chair  Date
Samuel Henry  5/17/99  5-3302  Dan KICHL  5-17/99  Date
Barron Messer  11 May 99  5-5179  Sy ALDEN  5-17-99  Date

Sim Lipp  5/21/99  5-5405  Lon CLAYCE  May 21  1999  Date
Dan Dan  5/20/99  5-6218  Lon CLAYCE  Date

Faculty participant  Date  Phone  Dept. Chair  Date
Faculty participant  Date  Phone  Dept. Chair  Date
Faculty participant  Date  Phone  Dept. Chair  Date