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AUTHOR Rodriquez, Carol J.; Paddison, John
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ABSTRACT

In the broadest sense, rhetoric and rhetorical studies are primarily concerned with using language in context and, thus, must focus on the collaborative, negotiated dynamics of discourse and discourse production. These broad principles provided the basis for the "Lyceum Project" (named for the public forum first developed by the Greek Sophists in the fifth century B.C.), recently initiated and developed at Northern Arizona University (NAU). The project was underwritten by an instructional development grant providing funding for lecturers from various fields and professions to speak on the unique characteristics of their own specific discourse situations. The goal was to improve teaching and learning in both the English Composition and English Rhetoric programs at NAU, promoting classroom discussion and enriching students' understanding of course content in the context of real world situations. Among the 7 speakers recruited were the county pretrial services director, a local attorney, a psychotherapist working for a family help center, and the composition director at a major state university. Some speakers were better prepared for public discourse than others, yet student responses to the lectures were fairly similar in overall response to each presenter's credibility and effectiveness. The overall object was to be sure that the lecturers had sparked the students' critical interest. Guidelines have been developed for future lyceum projects. (Contains six references.) (CR)

The Lyceum Project: Rhetoric and Real World Situations

Carol J. Rodriquez and John Paddison

In the broadest sense, rhetoric and rhetorical studies are primarily concerned with using language in context. Therefore, these studies must focus on the collaborative, negotiated dynamics of discourse and discourse production. These broad principles provided the basis for what we call the "Lyceum Project," a project that we recently had the opportunity of initiating and developing at Northern Arizona University. Our purpose for the project was to show rhetoric in context, specifically in the context of the discourse communities that our students could and should participate in. The project was underwritten by an instructional development grant that provided funding for lecturers from various fields and professions to speak on the unique characteristics of their own specific discourse situations. The goal of our project was to improve teaching and learning in both the English Composition and English Rhetoric programs at NAU and it therefore involved nearly all of the English Department's lower- and upper-division rhetoric and composition classes. As the project evolved, it provided us with interesting insights into the nature of teaching and rhetoric.

Historical perspectives of the project: the lyceum

Our project was patterned after the tradition known as the lyceum, or the public forum. As early as the fifth century B.C.E, the Greek Sophists viewed and taught language as being a socially constructed discourse—one which had democratic usefulness (Jarratt 1990). The concept of the lyceum, which originally referred to the gymnasium near ancient Athens where Aristotle taught, grew out of a common need for public gathering places at which to hold lectures or public discussions. For Aristotle, the Greek concept of *Arete* was the act of achieving virtue and excellence through the public discourse of citizenship. Indeed, classical rhetoric stressed the ideal that effective communication was inseparable from public discourse involving the common good. As classical scholars have reported, the lyceum came to represent an institution or movement providing public lectures and concerts and furthering the education of citizens.

With its tradition of democratic participation, America has been the scene of numerous versions of the classical model of the lyceum. For example, the passions of a growing, evolving American democracy have always been inspired by such civic forums as Benjamin Franklin's Junto society, the Federalist Papers, and the Lincoln-Douglas debates (Graham 1994). This probably accounts for why the lyceum saw its apex in American society during the Age of Romanticism, when "lyceum lecture courses took their place in the civic order alongside the church, the schoolhouse, the courtroom, the saloon, and the jail" (McQuade et al., 428). In addition, during the burgeoning growth and development of America in the mid-nineteenth century, a rudimentary form of the lyceum was tied closely to education, particularly adult education, for the purpose of inquiry, debate, and personal improvement (Woytanowitz 1974). In fact, the history of liberal education has been one in which oratory has been closely tied with citizenship education and with the creation of consensus on public issues. Yet while the lyceum came to be both a means for public debate and an educational institution, a marked decline in such forums has been noted by contemporary rhetoricians (Halloran 1983).

Given these traditional purposes of personal improvement, public inquiry, education, and debate, we became intrigued with how the lyceum provides a common forum at which issues can be presented and controversies can be discussed. And this, then, became the objective of our project.

The Northern Arizona University Lyceum Project

For NAU's Lyceum Project, speakers from various fields and professions were invited to campus to speak about their own unique discourse situations. This exploration of the community-university connection was intended to supplement classroom instruction; the undergraduate students in our rhetoric classes were able to participate in the ongoing conversations of discourse communities beyond the university classroom. We felt this project was important because as liberal studies courses our classes drew in students from across the disciplines.

As our project unfolded, we agreed that its purpose should be to promote classroom discussion and enrich students' understanding of course content in the context of real world situations. Ongoing improvement of teaching and learning in both the English Composition and English Rhetoric programs became our primary objective. Through the establishment of an open forum provided by the lyceum format, our students would become part of broader professional conversations.

The classes that were directly tied into the project were the following: English 210, Principles of Rhetoric; English 310, Advanced Composition; English 311, Style; English 314, Principles of Written Argumentation; and English 410, History of Rhetoric. The students participating in the project represented a fairly typical sampling of college students: predominantly ages eighteen to twenty-five years old, with a moderate number of returning middle-aged students; roughly equal gender representations; some, though not significant, ethnic diversity; representation from all disciplines and

majors, the largest being English; and all levels of class standing including the customary range of high achievers to the barely passing.

The specific examples of discourse areas that the lecturers represented were varied and included the discourse communities of politics, law, advertising, teaching, business, and social work.

Each speaker was selected for his or her own unique use of rhetoric in his or her profession/occupation. We identified and contacted individuals representing a broad range of professional and educational experiences from the local community and from the two other state universities. We always attempted to ensure diversity among the presenters; however, the speakers that eventually accepted and participated were predominantly white, male professionals. Only one speaker was an ethnic minority and of the three women contacted, only one participated in the series. After the initial contact and acceptance, we scheduled and advertised each presentation to not only our students, but to the general student body as well.

The Lyceum Project presentations

In total, we were able to recruit seven speakers with varied backgrounds to participate in our forum. Each lecturer addressed various rhetoric and composition classes and analyzed the unique characteristics and dynamics of his or her own discourse community. We met with each speaker before his or her session. During these meetings we requested that the speaker try not to engage in advocacy of his or her own cause, but rather to focus on the rhetorical dimensions of his or her own profession.

Our first speaker was the pretrial services director for the county. In his session, which we called "Rhetoric and the Criminal Justice System," he used personal narrative and examples to describe the ways he had succeeded in a variety of professions, including military service during Viet Nam, work inside the Pentagon, and especially the criminal justice field. For him, language has always been an ongoing process of inquiry and analysis of situations. Using a good deal of eloquence and wit, he emphasized to the students that one's success depends on one's ability to "read and respond to" each situation appropriately.

Our next area of interest was "Rhetoric and the Legal Profession." Early in the spring semester, a local attorney lectured to our rhetoric and style classes on the ways he uses rhetorical appeals in the legal profession. Placing special emphasis on audience awareness, the speaker explained to students how a judge represents a far different audience than does a jury; he used specific cases to show that, because the legal function of each differs, the effective speaker must address the two audiences accordingly and thus negotiate understanding.

Closely related to this topic was the next session, which we presented to the students as "Rhetoric and Local Politics." The director of the local county board of supervisors spoke to the students in back-to-back sessions. He identified with the students, pointing out that he himself was a graduate of NAU. Because of his education, he was able to find a leadership role in the community, one that required skill in communicating with others. Much like the previous speakers, he explained how communication is essentially cooperative in nature; however, he focused more on how communication and cooperation interacted in the overall politics of the community. His lecture was more student centered. For example, he involved students in a series of questions about the local issue of prison overcrowding and ways he was seeking to communicate with community leaders in overcoming the problem. At the end of his presentation, the speaker challenged the students to help him come up with a slogan that would capture the spirit of his endeavor—one that would inspire the community to get behind his cause.

A nice contrast was the presentation that was titled "The Rhetoric of Listening." The single female presenter, a psychotherapist working in the local community for a family help center, was also a graduate of NAU. As she explained to our students, listening—that is, active listening—is not often considered as being a component of rhetoric. Yet her profession demands "creative listening." Through a role-playing activity involving the students, she demonstrated how active listening—that is, repeating what a client says—serves to validate not only the client but also his or her narrative as well. Student response to the presentation, both in class discussions and in written responses, reflected a strong appreciation for the way she communicated through her own unique art of listening.

Our fifth presenter, whose session was titled "Rhetoric and Compromise," spoke on the politics of confrontation and compromise. As the director of communications and marketing for a state environmental group, this speaker had received state, regional, and national recognition for his efforts on behalf of his organization. He was also the youngest of our presenters. Comfortable with the notion of rhetoric in real world situations during the preparation sessions, this speaker brought a newspaper clipping to the sessions to illuminate a communications problem currently confronting him—a land-use dispute in Southern Utah. Copies of the clipping were given to the students, after which the speaker explained the circumstances surrounding the situation. He then read the article with them, pointing out specific information that a reader might otherwise overlook. He was candid about his role and the ways he had put a "spin" on the information to accomplish his agenda for his organization, an admission that the students felt helped to raise his credibility. This speaker made his presentation very much student centered and asked the students for advice on how he could best address the problem with which he was confronted. The dynamic that he presented illustrated well the kinds of discourse problems addressed during regular course work for the classes, and students were quick to make the connections later in the semester.

In the final session, which we called "The Rhetoric of Contention," our sixth speaker was the composition director at one of the major state universities. He informally addressed our combined classes on the topic "Issues of Race and Gender Inside and Outside of the Classroom." The speaker candidly discussed an incident that had recently happened on his university's campus. He read a lengthy yet descriptive narrative of events that began with a teaching assistant and her composition class—events that eventually involved negatively the entire university community and the surrounding metropolitan area. After he described the circumstances leading to what was to become an extremely volatile situation, the presenter explained his role as the responsible administrator. Without placing blame, he sought to help students imagine his situation and posed questions about how he could have more effectively addressed the problems confronting him. He explained the Aristotelian approach: lecturers present opposing views on an issue and the audience

decides who wins; then he explained the more contemporary Rogerian approach: disputants listen to all sides of an issue and seek consensus in a win/win scenario.

Student Responses to the Lyceum Series

Some of the students' responses to these sessions capture well the spirit of what we tried to accomplish with the lyceum series.

- "The speaker series. . . was a worthwhile interruption to the regular class activities. It was not, in fact, an interruption, but. . . an active complement to the subject matter of the class. . . . The speakers made it easy to see how this skill applies to life outside the university."
- "The speaker series. . . has been very useful. This has been the first time my instructors have connected English studies to practical uses. . . . This series showed how English/ rhetoric/discourse is crucial and used in real world settings. . . . It gave us the chance to ask questions about professions and situations. . . . Seeing the discipline [of rhetoric] implemented has made my education seem much more useful."
- "Although the lectures interrupted class time, it was time well spent. The speakers involved the students in active discussions on rhetoric and modern issues. . . . As a result, I have a clear idea of the role that rhetoric will play in my professional life."
- "Overall each presenter posed interesting topics. . . debating hot-seat issues where no real answer was possible. I think it's a good angle to bring in speakers with issues like these. . . . The use of current events makes the lectures more interesting than just dry lecturing on the uses of style."
- "I would encourage the Lyceum Speaker Series to continue in the English Department and any other. I believe speakers enable students to get out of their routine classroom environment and into a broader, educated world."
- "I think the lecture series would have been more beneficial if it was not scheduled right in the middle of classes. I know a lot of people had to miss out on some of the best parts! I know I did. But overall, the lecture series was very interesting and I appreciate all your hard work in organizing it. Thanks. I heard and learned things I otherwise would not have."
- "I personally feel bringing the guest speakers to the university was an excellent idea. I feel they each taught me something new with the different ways they used rhetoric. All their presentations were dealing with ongoing issues in society. I feel this was the main part of the class because it shows the use of Rhetoric 'today.' I learned more listening to the guest speakers than reading about Aristotle and Socrates and their use of rhetoric. I feel. . . that we as students should be taught what's happening now around us."

Pragmatics of the grants: expectations and outcomes

As we planned the series, we had to address several special concerns related to speaker preparation and preservation of authenticity. During initial phases of scheduling and identifying topics for discussion, a key concern involved speaker preparation. How could we best prepare speakers for the audiences they would be addressing without imposing our own classroom agendas—agendas which had the very real potential for limiting the speakers' ability to discuss their "real world" communicative experiences? If we wished to bring the outside into the classroom setting, how could such an activity be placed into a context that fit existing course requirements? Moreover, in the mandatory brief response papers, to what extent, if any, should we ask students to connect the speakers' discussions with the course content, that is, to make rhetorical or stylistic sense of each speaker's contribution at a given point in the semester? Some students demonstrated great skill, willingness, and creativity in making connections between classroom theory and practical applications discussed by the lecturers. Others resisted, asking for more clarification about how each professional's work articulated with what they were learning in class.

During the course of the lecture series, these questions surfaced repeatedly, either from student feedback or during faculty discussions following presentations. It should be noted, however, that the questions varied in degree of importance based on individual speaker's presentations.

Some speakers were better prepared for public discourse than were others, and students were quick to note that fact, though such knowledge did not necessarily influence their overall impression of each speaker's purpose and topic. For example, the psychotherapist, who was accustomed to working in one-to-one situations, felt less at ease with the audience than did the university director of composition. Yet student evaluations were fairly similar in overall response to each presenter's credibility and effectiveness.

In our assessment of the project, we needed to be certain that the series had been successful in giving students a broader sense of the contextual nature of rhetoric and language, and how language and rhetoric function within the broader society. Our overall object was to be sure that the lecturers had sparked the students' critical interest. We used a variety of assessment measures which included student discussion and written evaluations after each session and at the end of the series, as well as presenter and faculty reflective comments. This information has provided us with a wealth of ideas from which to construct future lyceum projects.

In closing, we would like to note that the purpose of our paper has been to provide information to other individuals and institutions interested in establishing such community-university connections. Therefore, we would make the following recommendations:

1. Constantly strive for diversity in the speakers.
2. Contact the speakers well in advance.
3. Prepare the speakers **FULLY** about their purpose and audience.
4. Arrange a common meeting time and place for the sessions—perhaps somewhere off campus, in a more neutral context.
5. Require written feedback from students after each speaker.
6. Encourage speakers to interact with students.
7. Have speakers strive to contextualize their presentations and make connections with students.

These guidelines, as well as those previously mentioned in the paper, will do much to decrease some of the difficulties inherent in this type of project.

Finally, we have found that the successes and the failures of

such a lecturer forum—that is, the tensions and rewards that are created in bringing a variety of unique outside voices to the university classroom—serve to make the lyceum a valuable teaching approach.

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John Paddison is a Professor of English at Central Arizona College. His PhD in Rhetoric, Composition, and the Teaching of English is from the University of Arizona, Tucson. His research interests include critical literacy and critical pedagogy

Carol J. Rodriquez is Senior Lecturer in rhetoric and composition at Northern Arizona University where she is currently pursuing a doctoral degree in curriculum and instruction. Her research interests include the politics of literacy and the history of rhetoric.

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