1. **Public Discourse COM 120**  
   Course Level 100-level undergraduate  
   Required foundational course for Communication Studies majors, required for Elementary Education, Communication Arts Literature Teaching, Civic Leadership, an elective for Environmental Studies and Peace Studies, and a General Education elective (fulfills Language and Rhetorical Studies General Education Requirement).

   **Course Size:** 16 students  
   **Course Format:** Discussion/Workshop-based. 4 hours (2 hours twice a week). Small group workshop work.

**Course Summary**  
Public Discourse is a [nationally recognized](#) course that provides rigorous training in research, critical thinking, problem solving, writing, and oral communication—core liberal arts and civic skills.

Public Discourse introduces students to the principles of public advocacy, community-based research, and civic engagement. Students gain knowledge, enhance and hone skills, and thoughtfully consider their place in their communities. Readings, class time, and assignments emphasize the concepts and skills necessary for successful application of rhetorical and argument theory to an intensive community-based public advocacy project. In a discussion and workshop-based classroom, students pursue the project in stages.

**Student Learning Outcomes**  
Students completing Public Discourse:

- Effectively create and present oral, written, and mediated communication.  
  [Effective communication is contextual and contributes to deliberative discourse by identifying issues, adapting to audiences, marshaling arguments and evidence, and employing appropriate presentational standards.]
  *Assessed via research outlines, presentations, and websites.*

- Find and utilize relevant and reliable library and community-based research.  
  *Assessed via research outlines, presentations, and websites.*

- Ethically engage in research, interactions with community members, and in presentations (oral, written, and websites). See project guidelines.  
  *Assessed via research outlines, speeches, websites, and student project assessments.*

- Understand how to effectively engage opportunities for positive social change.  
  *Assessed via student project assessments and final reflections.*

- Reflect on strengths and weaknesses and articulate a plan for continued skill and knowledge development.  
  *Assessed via exercises and final written and in class reflections.*
**Public Advocacy Project—Semester-long Civic Engagement Project** (exemplary project 1—Public Advocacy Project)

Public Discourse centers around a sequenced semester-long Public Advocacy Project. In the project, students actively and meaningfully engage a community problem. In completing the project, each student identifies a problem in the community in which they are a part, thoroughly researches that problem, determines the best plan for addressing the problem, and presents the plan to agents of change in their community. With the support of a dedicated textbook, sequenced assignments, focused exercises, and a supportive learning community, students develop the research, audience analysis, and skills necessary to ethically advocate in their communities,

**Course Assessment**

Public Discourse is assessed through a variety of means. Assignments, particularly the action assessment and final reflection, are used to assess student learning, civic engagement, and community impact. The AAC&U Civic Engagement VALUE Rubric is used to assess civic learning and engagement. Various pre- and post-measures have been used, including leadership, self-efficacy, communication apprehension, and civic learning. A 2015 alumni survey focused on course and civic learning outcomes. Despite the intensive workload for first-year course, nearly all students and alumni recommend the course as a relevant and useful academic and civic learning experience.

**Additional Documentation**

- Syllabus
- Course Calendar
- Project List
- Student Stories
- Public Discourse Press

**Research and Assessment**

2. **Media & Democracy COM 245**
Course level: 200-level, undergraduate  
Course size: 20-25  
Course format: Discussion-based; 4 hours (2 hours 2x per week). small group project work.

**Course Summary:**
The current political climate has heightened attention toward the role of information in society. From news sources to social media, media offer the most prevalent and immediate opportunities for citizens to access information to make political decisions on local and national issues. This class explores ways media ownership concentration and contested truth influence content and access to information. In the final project, students develop media literacy curricula for children to help them navigate the changing nature of information in society.

The content of *Media & Democracy* promotes civic learning and democratic engagement through examining the role of information in a democracy and developing resources for children. Content is divided into four modules.

1. The role of information in a democracy covers basic tenets and historical developments of different types of democracy, democratic theory, and ways information formats shape content, quality, and rigor.

2. Evaluating information teaches students how to critically analyze information they encounter. Topics for this module include evaluating information for relevancy and reliability using different information criteria, media effects theories like framing, priming, and agenda setting, and case studies using the Checkology virtual classroom (run by The News Literacy Project) and stories like RadioLab’s study of reality and media manipulation.

3. Capitalism’s role in democracy includes media regulation, media conglomeration, the impact of new information technologies on democracy, and alternative news sites and the economic value of information.


**Course Goals**
Students in Media and Democracy:
- thoughtfully analyze enduring and contemporary questions about the role of information in a democracy from multiple perspectives, independently develop original and creative solutions to complex problems related to information and democracy, and support their reasoning while considering other possibilities.
- demonstrate the ability to understand and communicate effectively across a variety of modes, including written, oral, visual, creative, and quantitative.
- synthesize and apply their broad and specialized knowledge, skills, and ways of knowing about the role of information in democracy in varied contexts.
- critically contemplate the conflicting value choices of the ethically complex world in which we live, articulate their own values, and reflect on how these values shape their ethical decisions.
- thoughtfully consider different beliefs, customs, practices, and social behaviors as they develop strategies for respectful and constructive engagement with others in order to come to a broad sense of being in the world, especially as it relates to the role of information in a democracy.
Civic Course Assignments

- **Visual Representation of Concepts**
  o Students synthesize information from the first module of the course to create a visual representation of the role of information in a democracy. They choose a perspective and write for a specific audience to produce the visual manifestation. For example, as content creator for a prominent social media site, a student would act as if their boss has given them the task of creating an infographic that explains the role of information in a democracy.

- **Evaluating Information**
  o For this assignment, students act as elected officials charged with educating community members of their towns/cities on elements important for critically evaluating information (e.g. making sure they can find credentials of the author). Students design an app that guides citizens through questions to ask when evaluating information.

- **Media/Democracy Paradox**
  o This assignment sets students up with the following scenario: “The year is 2025. A chance encounter with Robert McChesney on an international flight and some amazing follow-up conversations afterward landed you in a very important position with Free Press. As part of your job, you are invited to a dinner to help facilitate a conversation among three individuals and yourself. One attendee is an avid consumer of broadcast network news (choose one: ABC, NBC, CBS, or FOX). Another attendee is a person who works for the parent company of that broadcast network news corporation (The Walt Disney Company, NBC Universal, CBS Corporation, or 21st Century Fox, respectively). The third attendee is a person who works for the FCC. The topic of conversation is the media/democracy paradox.”

- **Learning Resources for K-12 children**
  o Students utilize Backward Design to create media education learning activities for children in grades K-5 or 6-12. The topic of the lessons are issues relevant to media and democracy for that age group. The lessons are focused on helping students become information literate individuals and are posted on a website for teachers to access.

**Course Assessment**

Assessment for *Media & Democracy* is twofold: direct and indirect measures of learning and assessing information literacy. Direct measures of learning are infused throughout the course through in-class exercises as well as through each assignment. Indirect measures are in the form of course evaluations and student surveys at mid-term and the final week of the course. Information literacy is assessed using two instruments: the Association of American Colleges and Universities Information Literacy VALUE Rubric, which measures, “The ability to know when there is a need for information, to be able to identify, locate, evaluate, and effectively and responsibly use and share that information for the problem at hand.” The second instrument is the Standardized Assessment of Information Literacy Skills (SAILS) from Kent University, which is based on the ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education and objectives for Information Literacy Instruction.

**Additional Documentation**

- Syllabus
- Example Media Literacy Lesson Plan
3. **Public Deliberation COM 270**  
*Course level:* 200-level, undergraduate  
*Course size:* 15-20 students  
*Course format:* Discussion-based; 4 hours (2x per week for 2 hours); small group work

**Course Summary**  
This course examines democratic deliberation theory and tests it in a local, civic context. Students first enact and critique deliberation theory and models by participating in class dialogues and deliberations. They further bring theory into practice by designing and facilitating a public deliberation in the community. Working with a community partner, they identify a pressing question or problem that requires public discussion. They research models for deliberation in order to develop a structure that will best fit the particular question and community context. Students participate in two community events that are scheduled outside of the regular class time (determined in collaboration with the community partner). They host, facilitate, and document the community deliberations and provide a report and recommendations to the community partner.

The course requires students to understand the principles and challenges of deliberation as well as to learn skills for designing, facilitating, and documenting public conversations. The project supports both student learning and the local community's civic objectives. The course was initially taught as Argumentation and Debate and uses argument and public forum debate as a foundation for learning how to frame and develop deliberative community conversations.

**Course Goals**  
Students in Public Deliberation:
- evaluate deliberation theory and models.
- design, facilitate, and synthesize public conversations.
- research community issues, including conducting interviews with citizens.
- collaborate in small teams to produce public documents.
- understand the role and value of deliberation in a democracy.

**Civic Course Assignments (hyperlink each to a pdf)**
- [Interview Report](#)
- [Interview Coding Report](#)
- [Deliberation Design Report](#)
- [Public Deliberation](#) (team contribution, event participation, final report contribution)
- [Deliberation Analysis Paper](#)

**Course Assessment**  
The course is assessed through student assignments, particularly the Deliberation Analysis Paper, in which students speak to the learning outcomes. Students also engage in a discussion-based final reflection on both individual and the work of the class in designing and completing the public deliberation.

**Additional Documentation**
- [Syllabus](#)
- [Example Student-Generated Final Report to Community](#)