

**MGT 6544**  
**CONTROVERSIES AND DEBATES IN**  
**BUSINESS, MANAGEMENT, AND SOCIETY**

Rev. 15-Aug-15

(Course approved for Law School, Divinity School, and Master's of Public Policy credit)

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## OVERVIEW

This course will be a forum for analysis and debate on current, controversial issues related to business, management, economics, and society. Course objectives involve a unique blend of skill and substance.

- With respect to **skill**, the goal is to create meaningful improvement in students' ability to develop, articulate, and dissect persuasive arguments on complex issues, and to distinguish high quality policy arguments from inferior ones.
- With respect to **substance**, the goal is to expand students' in-depth knowledge of key issues of the day on topics related to business, economics, management practice, fiscal affairs, and public policy.

## SOURCES FOR READINGS

Readings are drawn from this text available at the Vanderbilt Bookstore:

- T. Edward Damer, *Attacking Faulty Reasoning* (7<sup>th</sup> Edition). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2013. (6<sup>th</sup> edition is also acceptable.)

and:

- Online readings are accessible through a course web page found here: <http://www2.owen.vanderbilt.edu/bruce.barry/mgt6544/>

Most readings for this course will be online. Links to assigned readings for weeks 1 and 2 are up on the web page. Readings for weeks 3 through 7 will be added once we settle on the topics that will be the focus of our discussions and debates.

**Readings are not accessible through Blackboard** (used only to submit deliverables).

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS/GRADES

### • **Class Participation** (30% of course grade)

The essence of this course is what we do in class, so naturally I put significant weight in grading on in-class participation. Simply showing up is not enough. (And not showing up is less than not enough.) It is essential that you come to class prepared to participate in issue discussions and raise questions of others in the class. The quality of your class participation is more important than quantity, although some of the latter is necessary to gauge the former. Good contributions to class discussion are perceptive, relevant, and focused — they respond to the current flow of the discussion, and enhance it.

### • **Your Role as “Primary” Arguer** (52% of course grade – 26% on each of **two occasions**)\*

We will discuss and debate 8-12 issues (depending on the number of students ultimately enrolled). On **two** occasions, you will be designed as a “primary” arguer – assigned to be especially prepared on the subject of the argument. Each time you are a “primary” **two things happen** – one written and one oral:

- [1] Your **written** deliverable is a brief that articulates and sources your analysis of the debate topic.
- [2] Your **oral** deliverable is your in-class performance during the discussion as a “primary” arguer, assessed by other students in the class and the professor.

You will occupy this "Primary" role twice, but **the two occasions are not the same** -- preparation and written deliverable are different. See page 3 of the syllabus, where all is explained (with additional information on both written and oral deliverables on page 4).

#### **Evaluation:**

- See page 8 of syllabus for form used to evaluate oral performance by primary arguers.
- See pages 9-10 of syllabus for the scoring rubrics used to evaluate the two written briefs.

#### **Weighting:**

- Performance as primary each time comprises 26% of grade (13% written + 13% oral).
- To pass the course, each oral and written deliverable must be minimally passing quality.

*\*The structure and frequency of the primary arguer role is subject to revision during the first week of the course once the size of class enrollment is known.*

### • **Take-Home Final: Argument Dissection** (18% of course grade)

During the last week of the mod, you will receive written passages representing two sides of a policy dispute (along the lines of the sorts of messages we analyze and discuss in class during the first couple of weeks of the course). Your task will be to write a critique (<1000 words) of the argument quality and integrity found in these pieces of advocacy. The task is open-book and open-source. Due: **Monday, October 5** at 11:59 pm. Submit your final writeup with the same formatting specifics and online submission procedure (Blackboard) used in your issue briefs. More details forthcoming as we approach the end of the mod.

## THE TWO "PRIMARY" OCCASIONS

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### PRIMARY OCCASION #1

The first time you are in the "Primary" role, you will be arguing (both in writing and orally in class) for a particular assigned side of an assigned topic. There will be two students assigned to each side. You will know the details of your assigned day, topic, and side by August 24.

#### Written Deliverable #1 – Argument Brief

Your written deliverable is a brief that articulates and sources your analysis of your side of the debate topic. These are intended to be thorough in conveying the various elements of your argument and point of view, but concise in form. *Brief is due before class on the day of the argument.*

#### Oral Deliverable #1 – In-Class Argument

Each of the four assigned "primary" arguers for the topic will have one minute to make opening remarks summarizing their positions and previewing their arguments. The professor will moderate a discussion in which the two assigned sides (the two "primary" arguers on each side) exchange views and respond to questions from others in the class. The total time for the conversation is roughly 35-40 minutes.

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### PRIMARY OCCASION #2

The second time you are in the "Primary" role, you will be assigned your topic but you will NOT be assigned a side. You will know the details of your assigned day and topic, by August 24.

#### Written Deliverable #2 – Issue Brief

Your written deliverable is a brief that synthesizes and summarizes the arguments of BOTH sides of the debate topic. These are intended to be thorough yet concise in outlining the arguments on each side. *Brief is due before class on the day of the argument.*

#### Oral Deliverable #1 – In-Class Argument

The four assigned "primary" arguers for the topic will each learn by random draw at the start of the conversation which side they will be arguing. Each will have one minute to make opening remarks; with a moderated discussion to follow. The total time for the conversation is roughly 25-30 minutes.

*Yes, you read that right.* For Primary Occasion #2 you will come to class prepared to argue an issue and having written a brief that distills arguments on both sides. However, **you will not know until just before the conversation begins which side you have to argue!**

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## **ABOUT THE WRITTEN BRIEFS (BOTH OCCASIONS)**

These written briefs are, as the name implies, brief! This means that there is a premium on expression that is direct, clear, and concise. There is no need and no value to investing excess effort into conjuring up a flowery introduction, which consumes valuable and precious space, so just dive right in. But please don't mistake my call for concision and directness as a license to compromise on analytical depth and quality. I may be inviting you to get right to the point, but I still expect the point once gotten to to be fabulous.

Here are the details you'll need regarding format and logistics for the two required briefs:

- **Length:** Briefs should be ~ 800 words (give or take)
- **Format:** Double space, margins  $\geq 1$ ", font size  $\geq 11$  pt.
- **Submit:** Via upload to Blackboard.
- **Due:** Before start of class on day of the argument (with stiff late penalties)

## **ABOUT THE IN-CLASS ARGUMENTS (BOTH OCCASIONS)**

Because of the size of the class and the limitations of time, the debates we convene on these issues will often be shorter in duration than we might wish, or than the complexity of the topic might require. There are two measures I take to try to help us optimize the time we do have.

[1] Many of the topics we discuss are large in both scope and implications. For some, I will suggest to the class (and especially to the assigned "primary" arguers) ways that we may construe the topic more narrowly, or focus our attention on a part of it.

[2] My approach to moderating each debate/conversation will be an active one, steering us (firmly but gently) in directions that I think will best capitalize on engagement between the two sides of the subject.

**As a "primary" arguer**, your role is to come to class not just with knowledge of the topic and armed with a few arguments, but with a developed sense of which arguments matter most, how they are most cogently expressed, and what humans on the other side of the issue might say in reply. For the second occasion – the one in which you won't know the side you are advocating until class – you have to be ready with a good sense of arguments on both sides (which you should know anyway).

**Students in the class who are not "primary" arguers** in a given conversation are not merely passive observers; you are invited to participate. At times as moderator I will welcome input from the class. I ask that this input take the form primarily of either questions directed at the "primary" arguers or specific challenges to the quality of arguments being aired.

**And an important note for everyone:** The success of the in-class enterprise requires that students advance arguments – convincingly! – for positions that they may not believe or prefer personally. It is vital that we keep this in mind, and avoid casting personal aspersions on classmates for their espoused positions. This is an essential course element and aspect of becoming better users and consumers of arguments. Don't let concerns about self-image stop you from arguing energetically. We know you may be playing a role ... for the sake of argument!

## CRITERIA FOR HIGH QUALITY WRITTEN WORK

I look for the following when I read your briefs:

- Analysis that is **thesis-driven**, which is to say the argumentative point you are making should be clear to the reader. Arguments should be supported using relevant readings and/or outside materials. (More on source citation below.)
- Your analysis should be **specific**, with the rationale behind positions taken or refuted clear. Don't presume that the reader shares your assumptions. Be careful of assuming that the reader even grasps your assumptions – do they need to be explicitly stated?
- Incorporate the **implications** of your analysis. Go beyond the obvious to consider relevant tradeoffs. What are the limits of your arguments? What are likely objections and opposing views, and how would you overcome them?
- Value the quality and creativity of your own **ideas**. Although we are trafficking in widely discussed issues, that doesn't mean it isn't possible to craft novel arguments or package arguments in novel ways.
- Pay attention to **style**. Briefs should be thoughtfully organized with the flow of argument easy to discern. Errors of spelling, grammar, or syntax are unacceptable. Submit a clean, clear, readable, properly sourced, and mechanically polished paper.

The scoring rubrics I will use for evaluating your briefs are shown on pages 9 and 10 of this syllabus.

## USING AND CITING SOURCES

In written briefs, cite sources (both those I may have provided and those consulted on your own) using a generally accepted form of citation and reference. My preference is for footnotes or endnotes using the *Chicago Manual of Style*. Here's a handy guide to *CMoS*:

[http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html).

(Law students and other humans are free to use *The Bluebook* or *AWLD Citation* methods if they like.)

## THE HONOR CODE

Students are bound by the honor code for all work completed in this course. Specifically: the work you turn should be entirely your own completed without the assistance of others. You may not consult materials produced by students who have taken this course in the past. Use appropriate citations (in an accepted and consistent format for citation and reference) to identify contributions to arguments and analyses that draw on the work of others. It is your responsibility to understand what plagiarism is, and what it means to properly cite the work of others. One good source of information on that is the *Vanderbilt Student Handbook* ([http://www.vanderbilt.edu/student\\_handbook/the-honor-system](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/student_handbook/the-honor-system)). Although that document is describing the undergraduate honor system, the discussion of plagiarism is applicable to all students.

## CLASS SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS — FIRST TWO WEEKS

### WEEK 1

Tues., Aug. 18 **Course Introduction**

BOOK: · Damer, *Attacking Faulty Reasoning*, Chapter 1

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Thurs., Aug. 20 **Dissecting Arguments**

BOOK: · Damer, *Attacking Faulty Reasoning*, Chapter 2  
ONLINE: · Issue readings (linked at [course website](#))

*The Issue:* Legalize cannabis?

► **Completed topic survey** is due on **Fri., Aug 21 at 3:00 pm.**

### WEEK 2

Tues, Aug. 25 **Psychology of Influence**

BOOK: · Damer, *Attacking Faulty Reasoning*, Chapter 3  
ONLINE: · [How Facts Backfire](#)  
ONLINE: · Issue readings (linked at [course website](#))

*The Issue:* Enact a carbon tax?

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Thurs., Aug. 27 **Inverting Arguments**

BOOK: · Damer, *Attacking Faulty Reasoning*, Chapter 4  
ONLINE: · [How Not to be Misled by Data](#)  
ONLINE: · Issue readings (linked at [course website](#))

*The Issue:* Bar firms from tax inversion?

Our agenda beyond week 2 – the specific issues engaged – will be determined with student input.

You will be asked during week 1 for input regarding those issues in the form of a class survey. The schedule of days, topic, and primary-arguer assignments will be revealed by the start of week 2.

**See next page for a preliminary list of issues →**

## **AN INCOMPLETE LIST OF POSSIBLE ISSUE TOPICS**

### **Economics**

- Should progressive federal income taxes be replaced with a flat income or consumption tax?
- Is the current level of deficit spending harmful to America's economic future?
- Should the government do more to rein in the size of financial institutions and the level of risk they incur?
- Should the U.S. minimum wage be significantly raised?
- Is Europe better off with the Euro than without it?
- Is it ethical, and should it be legal, to allow financial incentives for organ "donation"?
- Is the level of economic inequality in the U.S. excessive?

### **Energy/Environment**

- Are government subsidies encouraging development of alternative fuels good policy?
- Should the government mandate greater automobile fuel efficiency?
- Should U.S. firms adhere to U.S. environmental standards in their operations overseas?
- Is "cap-and-trade" a good approach to pollution reduction?

### **Health/Lifestyle**

- Is an enforceable mandate that individuals obtain health insurance good public policy?
- Should companies promoting dubiously healthful lifestyle choices (e.g. fast food chains) be held liable for the growing American obesity problem?
- Should cities/states follow California's and New York City's lead and ban trans fats in restaurants?
- Should employers be required to cover contraceptives in employee health plans?
- Would the U.S. be better off with a single-payer health insurance system?
- Is organic/free range/local food more ethically and environmentally responsible than factory farm raised food?

### **Employment**

- Is the compensation of CEOs and other top executives excessive?
- Should U.S. firms adhere to U.S. labor standards in their operations overseas?
- Should a private employer be able to fire someone for their political beliefs and off-work activities?
- Is the doctrine of employment-at-will a good thing?
- Do rights to collective bargaining undermine economic prosperity?
- Should federal law forbid employment discrimination based on sexual orientation?
- Is drug testing of employment applicants and employees a good idea?
- Should U.S. laws about vacation and sick leave look more like Europe's?

### **Media/Technology**

- Are the FCC's rules addressing so-called net neutrality reasonable and appropriate?
- Should there be greater regulation of manipulative advertising?
- Should there be a right to be forgotten on the internet?
- Should the government intervene more assertively to regulate media consolidation?

### **Etc.**

- Should U.S. immigration policy create a path to citizenship for undocumented workers?
- Should the practice of affirmative action in hiring and university admissions be halted?
- Should it be more difficult for consumers to bring product liability claims against corporations?
- Do corporations have too much influence on electoral politics and public policy?
- Should college athletes be treated as employees (paid and allowed to unionize)?
- Are more restrictions on the manufacture and sale of firearms necessary and appropriate?

### MGT 6544 IN-CLASS "PRIMARY" EVALUATION FORM

Below is a sample of the form used to evaluate your in-class performance on each of the two occasions when you are a "primary" arguer.

For each topic/discussion, I will distribute this form to a handful of students in the class. As you can see, a student who fills out the form for a topic is evaluating all of the primary arguers, on both the YES and NO sides of the issue. Student ratings will be combined with the professors to determine your overall evaluation as a primary arguer on the topic.

Note that the evaluation does not measure whether the rater agrees with the point of view you are espousing in the discussion. It is an evaluation of your preparation, argument quality, eloquence, and persuasiveness.

#### MGT 6544 IN-CLASS EVALUATION

**Tues., Aug. 21:** Should the government mandate free valet parking for all employees?

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Rate the quality of each "primary" in today's class discussion:  
Was he/she prepared? articulate? energetic? effective? persuasive?

		<i>feckless</i>	<i>weak</i>	<i>subpar</i>	<i>acceptable</i>	<i>solid</i>	<i>impressive</i>	<i>exceptional</i>
<b>YES:</b>	Madison	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
	Wilson	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
<b>NO:</b>	McKinley	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
	Hoover	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

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**MGT 6544 ARGUMENT BRIEF RUBRIC**  
(Primary Occasion #1)

You will submit your brief on Blackboard. I will read it online, using Blackboard's inline paper grading facility to make comments that you will later be able to see. I will convey the score for your brief by tallying a version of this rubric in the space on Blackboard for instructor comments. The maximum score on this deliverable is 28. For paper formatting and sourcing, the baseline is 0 (for doing it right); you lose points for deficiencies.

<b>CONTENT:</b>	<i>light</i>	<i>okay</i>	<i>solid</i>	<i>terrific</i>
Argumentative position in the paper: Specific? Clear? Reasonable?	1	2	3	4
Supporting arguments: Sufficient in quantity/quality/depth?	1	2	3	4
Evidence to back up assertions and claims: Sufficient? Compelling? Used well?	1	2	3	4
Rebuttal: Opposing arguments anticipated and effectively countered?	1	2	3	4
Quality of research: Appropriate depth? Current and credible sources?	1	2	3	4
<b>STYLE:</b>	<i>light</i>	<i>okay</i>	<i>solid</i>	<i>terrific</i>
Structure of paper and its arguments: Clear, logical, effective?	1	2	3	4
Quality of expression: Articulate, well- written, free of mechanical errors?	1	2	3	4
<b>FORMAT/SOURCING:</b>	<i>yes</i>	<i>somewhat</i>	<i>deficient</i>	
Paper format: Clean, appropriate?	0	-0.5	-1	
Sources: Used and cited properly?	0	-0.5	-1	

**Maximum Score is 28.**

**MGT 6544 ISSUE BRIEF EVALUATION RUBRIC**  
(Primary Occasion #2)

You will submit your brief on Blackboard. I will read it online, using Blackboard's inline paper grading facility to make comments that you will later be able to see. I will convey the score for your brief by tallying a version of this rubric in the space on Blackboard for instructor comments. The maximum score on this deliverable is 28. For paper formatting and sourcing, the baseline is 0 (for doing it right); you lose points for deficiencies.

<b>CONTENT:</b>	<i>light</i>	<i>okay</i>	<i>solid</i>	<i>terrific</i>
Overall statement of the controversy: Clear? Appropriate? Reasonable?	1	2	3	4
Supporting arguments: Sufficient in quantity/quality/depth?	1	2	3	4
Evidence to accompany arguments: Sufficient? Appropriate? Compelling?	1	2	3	4
Balance: Both sides of the issue covered with equal effectiveness?	1	2	3	4
Quality of research: Appropriate depth? Current and credible sources?	1	2	3	4
<b>STYLE:</b>	<i>light</i>	<i>okay</i>	<i>solid</i>	<i>terrific</i>
Structure: Clear, logical, effective?	1	2	3	4
Quality of expression: Articulate, well- written, free of mechanical errors?	1	2	3	4
<b>FORMAT/SOURCING:</b>	<i>yes</i>	<i>somewhat</i>	<i>deficient</i>	
Paper format: Clean, appropriate?	0	-0.5	-1	
Sources: Used and cited properly?	0	-0.5	-1	

**Maximum Score is 28.**