

COMM 2400 Position Paper

Due: Dec 2/9/11
(on the day we discuss the selected controversy)

Taking a Position Regarding a Language Controversy

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to analyze **one** of three language controversies concerning issues of “hate speech,” “sexual harassment” and/or “affirmative action.” Reflecting on the ways in which our everyday talk works to shape identity, you are asked to consider the arguments and debates surrounding issues of naming and language use. The paper then asks you to relate your chosen controversy to various concepts from the text and lecture, working to broaden your understanding of these terms.

Step 1: Select a Controversy

Pick **one** of the following three language controversies to analyze for the paper.

A) Over the past several years, several instances of harassment and ethnic intimidation have occurred on CU campus and in Boulder generally. These have included incidents of derogatory graffiti as well as threatening emails. While these crimes are already sanctioned by law, as harassment and defacement of property, some residents have proposed a "hate crimes ordinance" which would increase the penalties associated with these crimes if they can be proven to be racially motivated acts. Do you agree or disagree with this proposed legislation? Why or why not?

Required readings:

Wikipedia article on “hate speech”

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hate_speech

Walker, Samuel (1994). *Hate speech: The history of an American controversy*. University of Nebraska Press. [Chapters 1, 7 and 8]

B) Over the past several decades increased attention has been drawn to the ways in which various institutions attempt to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace. At the same time workplaces are central places where people find and develop romantic relationships. Many large institution have policies designed to avoid sexual harassment and to control romantic relationships among employees. Assess the policies CU has in place regarding romantic relationships (“i.e. amorous”) and sexual harassment. Assess the reasonableness (or not) of this pair of policies. Do they adequately deal with the dangers of sexual harassment and allow people to pursue love/romance relationships in way that should be allowed?

Required readings:

CU polices on sexual harassment and amorous relationships

<https://www.cu.edu/policies/Personnel/amorel.html>

<https://www.cu.edu/policies/Personnel/sexharass.html>

Additional discussions of issues

<http://management.about.com/cs/people/a/OfficeRomance.htm>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sexual_harassment

C) The use of affirmative action in admissions and hiring policies has been a subject of controversies in the United States since the early 1960s. Affirmative action is an umbrella term for policies and programs designed to provide members of historically disadvantaged social groups, primarily racial and ethnic minorities and women, with increased access to education and employment. In two widely publicized lawsuits against the University of Michigan's admissions policies, the U.S. Supreme Court decided to uphold the need for affirmative action in order to foster diversity in U.S. higher education. Do you agree or disagree with the Supreme Court's decision? Why or why not?

Required readings:

Wikipedia article on "Affirmative action in the United States"

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Affirmative_action_in_the_US

Kellough, J. Edward (2007). *Understanding affirmative action: Politics, discrimination, and the search for justice*. Georgetown University Press.

[Chapters 1 and 4]

Step 2: Analyze the debate and state your position

After choosing a controversy you need to begin your analysis. This should include **your** specific stance on the chosen controversy as well as acknowledgement of the concerns and issues on the other side. Make sure to give specific reasons for your opinion. The texts as well as the Wikipedia readings point to many possible arguments that you might draw upon. Some examples include, but are not limited to, issues of free expression/ infringement of rights, obstruction to/facilitation of public debate, standards of acceptability/unacceptability, liberty / equality, equal opportunity / qualifications, Reasons do not need to be found in the text or articles, but they should answer the question of *Why* you take a specific position.

Step 3: Application of concepts

Once you have chosen your controversy, analyzed it, and stated your position, you will need to choose **three** of the following concepts to apply to the specific issue. Drawing from the textbook, lecture and the readings, offer a brief definition of each of the chosen concepts and a description of how the concept could/does relate to the specific language controversy you are analyzing.

Altercasting **Sapir-Whorf hypothesis**
Interactional meaning **Interpersonal ideologies**
Stance/stance indicators **Face threat**

Step 4: Classroom discussion

On the day the controversy you wrote on is discussed, you are expected to participate in a fishbowl discussion of the issue in front of the class. You will be asked to represent the position you will have taken in your position paper. Then the controversy will be opened to all students.

Paper Requirements: Papers should be **3-4 pages in length, typed (12 point font), double-spaced, with a 1-inch margin**. The writing should be clear and error free. Make sure to proofread all work before handing it in. Students are expected to complete their own work. Students are expected to make a **duplicate copy of their paper** that they can produce should a problem arise. Papers are **expected on time**. Late papers will be accepted but will be penalized 2 points for each class day that they are late. (i.e., 2, 4, 6, etc.) Papers should not be sent by file attachment (5-point penalty in addition to any late penalties).

Assessment: (possible 60 points). In writing the paper, make sure to address the following – these will be specific points looked for in assessing the grade:

- Choose “one” controversy and take a position on it
- Offer specific reasons for your stance on the issue
- Acknowledge the other side’s concerns and issues in the debate
- Choose “three” course concepts
- Define the course concepts correctly
- Relate each concept to the specific language controversy you have chosen

Each paper will be evaluated on the detail, reasonableness, and insight of the analysis (the primary criteria) and the quality of the paper’s writing (a secondary criterion). Points will be awarded as follows:

D or F (Below 42): Paper does not address key parts of the assignment.

C: (42-47): The paper addresses the assignment and makes some good points but there is confusion about course concepts, the analysis is not sufficiently detailed, and/or opinions are asserted rather than developed through argument. Organization is partial; writing errors occur with some frequency.

B (48-53): A good paper, one that satisfies the main thrust of the assignment. Analysis makes interesting points and is reasonably organized. Course concepts are understood and applied appropriately. There may be a few writing errors but there are not many.

A (54-60): An excellent paper, one that is largely error-free in writing; analysis is interesting, insightful and organized. The analysis brings an emotional vividness to what is being written about.

For more information on grading criteria, lateness and plagiarism, as well as *Hints on Paper Writing* see the Interaction Project packet on WebCT.