James Schurrer
Curriculum Design

**Statement of Purpose**

In today’s society rhetoric is everywhere. What was once reserved for speeches, newspapers and productions has an inescapable, ubiquitous presence. As today’s students mature into young adults, they will be bombarded with thousands of messages that, on a daily basis, urge them to participate in a variety of activities and beliefs. In an election year, the common refrain is “make informed decisions.” Thus, in order to be able to process their environment, students must be able to analyze an argument and evaluate its effectiveness.

While not every message attempts to change a student’s beliefs or values, one can hardly watch TV for thirty minutes without hearing an entreaty for a particular political figure. Roskelly (2006) claims that the very *“ordinariness* of rhetoric is the single most important reason that teachers must teach it.” As high school students prepare for graduation and matriculation into post-secondary education, argument analysis is a vital tool that must be developed. To borrow from Thomas Jefferson, we must teach our students to become well-informed citizens. It is crucial for our students to evaluate sources and speakers and come to educated conclusions in regards to argument effectiveness.

And yet, while the new Common Core Standards for English/Language Arts for 11-12th graders insist that students must be able to “apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning,” there is evidence that contends that American society is replete with citizens who are either misinformed or do not care to evaluate the *sources* they encounter. Max Schudson (2000) laments that America has become a country where many are willfully ignorant.

The unit designed within this project is designed as an introductory unit for 11th grade students in an Advanced Placement Language and Composition course and will span six weeks. Because rhetorical analysis stems from Aristotle, the content is organized in a traditional fashion. While the concepts may be traditional, many of the examples and exercises will be current to appeal to the students and their unique experiences. As this is an Advanced Placement course, the curriculum is prescribed by The College Board and is vital for success on the AP examination. Passage of the AP exam results in college credit for many students.

As outlined briefly above, this unit is one that deals primarily with critical thinking. Students will be challenged to develop their analytical skills and expand their knowledge. Throughout the unit, the students will be required to look at a variety of sources and apply the terms that they have used to analyze the effectiveness of the source’s argument. Starting and ending with Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have A Dream” speech, the unit will provide the students with countless opportunities to practice their new skills, through both written and visual examples of rhetoric. Although not every student will go on to become an English major, I believe the strength of this unit lies in its universality; students will learn a new way to process the information they see every day. Whether in TV commercials or news reports, everything is an argument.

**References**

Davies, M (2011). Concept-mapping, mind-mapping and argument mapping: what are the differences and do they matter? *Journal of Higher Education, 62*: 279-301.

National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers (2010). Common core state standards English and Language Arts. Retrieved from
<http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI_ELA%20Standards.pdf>

Roskelly, H (2006). What do students need to know about rhetoric? In *Special Focus in English Language andComposition: Rhetoric*. Retrieved from: <http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/apc/members/repository/ap06_englang_roskelly_50098.pdf>

Shudson, M (2000). America’s ignorant voters. *Wilson Quarterly 24*(2): 1-4.