Brief Guide to Effective Oral Presentations

Students are expected to give a final presentation in Soc 201. Students will work in groups of three to four. The presentation may focus on any area of society but it must be sociological in content; that is, the presentation must provide a "systematic analysis of social issue." Groups *are not* to present on their personal opinions. Rather, groups should focus on presenting *academic research* findings (brief summaries of peer-reviewed articles) specific to a particular area of society. The easiest way to start this process is to think of a question worth answering. For example, why are obesity rates in Colorado among the lowest in the nation? Related to this, why are obesity rates in Colorado rising at one of the fastest rates in the nation? Moreover, in general, what are the potential negative effects in both the short-run and the long-run for a nation in which nearly thirty percent of its inhabitants are obese? With these basic questions in mind it would be fairly easy to begin researching academic studies related to obesity rates in both Colorado and the nation as a whole. Once the group has a sufficient understanding of the issues, the next task would be to synthesize the information into a 15-20 minute presentation. Other issues that might be of interest include but are not limited to: education, school shootings, war, health care outcomes (infant mortality rates, heart attacks, stress, depression, etc.), migration, racism/discrimination, globalization, bullying, domestic abuse, homicide rates, sustainable development, etc. What follows are several steps to keep in mind. (Also, be sure to see the presentation grading rubric that is available on the course website.)

Step One: Be clear on the subject and purpose of your presentation

Outline your purpose or goal before you begin to prepare for the presentation. Know what you are going to study and develop a number of hypotheses regarding your expectations *prior* to beginning your research.

Step Two: Gather your material

Begin researching your subject. Focus your efforts on reviewing peer-reviewed research. (EBSCO host articles are a good place to start.) Gather together all the information that you are thinking of including in your presentation. Create a brief summary in Microsoft Word (or on a note card or legal pad) for each article or piece of information that you plan to include in your presentation. Make sure that you understand the research prior to presenting it!

Step Three: Analyze your audience

Are you speaking to someone in particular or a general group? What are the characteristics of that individual or group? What will they find interesting? Be sure to tailor your presentation to engage your audience. (I.e., break down very technical information in a manner that facilitates a general understanding.)

Step Four: Arrange and outline main ideas

Once you have gathered your material, it is time to organize it. You should have an introduction that previews what you hope to accomplish in your presentation and a brief conclusion that reviews what you have presented. Also, be sure to include at least two policy

recommendations that are based on your findings. Your presentation should be logically organized and easy to follow. Remember the primacy/recency principle: Place your most important or significant points at the beginning and ending of your speech. Listeners will remember them most. You should also begin and end your presentation with a memorable idea. Effective attention-getters and catchy endings will leave the audience with a favorable impression of your presentation. Humor, vital information, novel information, conflict, ideas with which the audience are familiar, activity or movement, suspense, startling statistics, and quotes or stories are all ways to gain attention. To maintain attention throughout the presentation, offer diversity and utility. In other words, be sure your audience sees the importance of your ideas from a variety of perspectives. Graphically enhancing your ideas through carefully crafted visual aides is another sure way to maintain the interest of your audience.

Step Five: **Develop and communicate confidence**

Be yourself—a public presentation is not the time to ACT like someone else. Look at your listeners, communicate with your body (i.e. use gestures) and your voice (vary your pitch, volume, rate and tone for emphasis). Above all, be prepared—rehearse your presentation. And remember—if you're not nervous, something is wrong with you! Channel your nervous energy into excitement. A presentation is a fantastic opportunity to show your audience your strengths and abilities, and it is an opportunity you should not approach haphazardly. Being organized, informed and prepared will allow you to make a favorable impression on the audience you encounter. Be sure to have an outline to follow while speaking. Finally, before you speak take a few deep breaths, relax and mentally tell yourself that you are about to seize an opportunity to accomplish the goal you established when you first started preparing for the presentation.

Checklist:

Be sure to review this list before presenting! Make sure that your presentation meets these basic requirements:

- A clear social issue.
- A series of initial hypotheses.
- Peer-reviewed research.
- Clear, concise outline of findings.
- Introduction, body and conclusion.
- At least two policy recommendations.