Course Content
This course aims to teach students about the art of persuasion and the skills employed by the orator; this will be achieved both through the examination of the mechanics of rhetoric and by studying examples of celebrated speeches throughout history.

The course begins by examining the Classical schools of rhetoric, particularly in Athens around the time of Plato and Aristotle. Focusing on Plato’s critique of the Sophists and Aristotle’s detailed analysis of rhetoric, the tone and arrangement of speeches from this time provides a good foundation for the other parts of the course. Students will also spend a good deal of time studying the key elements of persuasive language and rhetorical ornamentation. Moving into the modern era, the course then examines philosophical reasoning, argumentation and its impact upon renowned political speeches from the time of Cranmer’s execution in Oxford through into the 21st Century. With an examination of the contributions made by philosophers like Hume, Mill and Nietzsche, students will get to appreciate the links between philosophy, politics and communication.

In the present day where political institutions have become so closely connected to media organisations, studying the ancient art of persuasion has become more important than ever.

At the end of the course students will deliver a short, small group presentation using some of the skills they have learned.

Weekly Outline
1. The nature of rhetoric and the three species of Classical speech
2. The five parts of Classical speech and Gorgias’ ‘Encomium of Helen’
3. Plato vs. the Sophists: spin doctors in the ancient world
4. Cicero: master of rhetoric
5. Philosophical reasoning and rhetoric
6. Political rhetoric from Reformation to revolution
7. Reason, polemic and war
8. Rhetoric in a post-factual world