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9/10/12

BUS 714 - Fall 2012

Week 3 Argument Analysis

In a recent piece entitled "State of the Republicans" published in the editorial section of the *New York Times*, opinion columnists David Brooks and Gail Collins wage both a forensic and deliberative argument about the upcoming Republican primary debates. Their discussion centers around a consideration of politicians engaged in the ongoing race for the Republican presidential nomination, but the primary topic of their chat is the upcoming debate between Newt Gingrich and Mitt Romney in Florida on January 23rd. The writers are trying to make predictions on the outcome of the election (making this a deliberative argument) based the recent debates as well as past elections (making this a forensic argument).

Instead of arguing right and wrong, this conversation between Brooks and Collins is more about their understanding of the situation and their opinions on the candidates. As *Everything's an Argument* (Lunsford and Ruszkiewicz, 2011) explains, "debates about what has happened in the past are called forensic arguments" (p. 16) and the purpose of forensic argument is to "sharpen knowledge" and is usually "exploratory and open-ended" (p. 17). For example, Brooks argues that although Obama was weaker in the presidential debates back in 2008 he still won the election. He uses a logical appeal to emphasize that being the best in debates does not guarantee winning the election. The example relies on past actions that influence decisions in analyses of cause and effect – a decidedly forensic argument. The use of a forensic argument can let audiences learn about a candidate through a historical context. Thus, current perspectives of these two candidates are enriched.

But the debate also succeeds in its attempts to consider what will or should happen in the future, making this also a deliberative set of arguments. Again per Lunsford and Ruszkiewicz, A deliberative argument is typically demonstrated by drawing on sustained testimony about a given topic. For instance, according to Brooks, the notion that "Gringrich has the best chance to defeat Barack Obama [is based on]

his presumed ability to win debates" in general (p. 4). The argument makes a reasoned guess that the Republicans will win the election based on extant evidence and examples. Thus, the debate successfully directs the argument to all voters in the nation – again marking it as a deliberative argument.

The columnists are successful in presenting their arguments in both deliberative and forensic terms, relying as they do on both historical precedent but also current theory, research and opinion.