

Ethics

In spite of the First Amendment right to our freedom of speech, there are restrictions on what might be said in public. Some words are actionable such as shouting “Fire” in any crowded room. There are laws protecting us from libel (written defamation) and slander (spoken defamation). As speakers, we have an obligation to urge actions that are legal and in the better interests of our audience members. To urge harm or to outline illegal action may be protected by the First

⁴ Rosenthal, R., and Jacobson, L. (1968). *Pygmalion in the classroom: Teacher expectation and pupils' intellectual development*. New York: Rinehart and Winston.

Amendment, but may not be ethical. As a practical matter, the audience may not be willing to listen if the speaker seems to be sharing information about a topic that few would agree with.

In the speech classroom, students are required to do research and integrate the ideas of others into the presentation. Ethical speaking acknowledges those ideas through attribution, telling us where the information came from. As a part of the speech, the names of authors or the titles of publications are shared with the audience so that it is clear which ideas and which conclusions belong to the speaker and which belong to publications and authors who were consulted in the research process. If the speaker does not acknowledge the ideas and/or words of another, it is theft. Plain and simple. Theft of intellectual property is difficult to prove in a court of law, but a student who uses the words of another, even if the student does so unintentionally, is simply not complying with university policy and copyright law. Here at UAM, we have a specific policy against using the work of others, an action we call “plagiarism”. This is a very serious issue, but it is easy to avoid with careful and thorough attribution of sources.