

Philosophy 105 Practical Reasoning Syllabus

Summer II 2020 (Online)

Prerequisites: None | Credits: 4 | Gen Ed: R2 (Analytic Reasoning)

Instructor

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Room: Blackboard Learn
Office Hours: By Appointment
(Via Zoom)

Course Description

This course covers methods for understanding and evaluating reasoning, arguments and inferences, of the sort found in daily life, political speeches, news articles, academic writing and beyond. Questions covered include: What is the structure of an argument? What considerations are relevant for determining its strength and cogency? What sorts of appeals to quantitative and scientific data are appropriate, and what sorts aren't? What, if any, kinds of reasoning patterns can be identified as fallacious or abusive? How can we understand and overcome cognitive biases and how do they appear and operate in practical contexts like job hiring or elections? What are the different kinds of evidence and how should we properly weight evidence when deliberating? What constitute 'good' and 'bad' reasons for believing something? How can laypeople assess scientific and statistical claims? Ultimately, the course will teach you how to think and reason better. The skills and methods of critical thinking acquired during this course are applicable to a wide variety of contexts, both academic and beyond.

Course Goals and Learning Outcomes

In this course, we will explore the foundations of critical, rational thought with the aim of improving our critical thinking and reasoning skills. By the end of the course, you will be able to:

- Identify and evaluate statements, arguments, beliefs, and evidence
- Use critical thinking to address diverse problems
- Think more clearly about challenging moral, political and scientific issues
- Be clearer about your own beliefs and where they come from
- Create well-reasoned and well-formed arguments
- Recognize one's biases by viewing an issue from diverse perspectives
- Evaluate your own position or conclusions through critical reflective thinking
- Evaluate evidence and make appropriate inferences from that evidence
- Discover what one needs to know in order to have a responsible position on an issue
- Have a sense of fairness, respect, and open-mindedness to positions different from your own

Most importantly, you will be able to apply these skills to all aspects of your life.

Course Readings

There are no required textbooks for this course. Course readings will be from a variety of sources, including articles, discussion notes, and book chapters, as well as the lecture handouts. All reading materials will be made available on Blackboard in each associated learning module.

Grading

Letter grades (corresponding to a 4-point scale: A=4, A-=3.7, B+=3.3, etc.) will be assigned based on the following:

Unit 1 Quizzes	25%
Unit 2 Quizzes	25%
Unit 3 Quizzes	25%
Presentation	15%
Participation	10%

Assignments

Quizzes

There are six quizzes, cumulatively worth 75% of the final grade (12.5% each). There is a quiz each week, covering the topics discussed that week. Quizzes are a variety of True/False, Multiple Choice, Matching, and Short Answer questions. Students will be able to retake the non-Short Answer parts of the quizzes up to three times.

Presentation

Students are required to do one 'presentation' during the semester, in Unit 2. The presentation will consist of students choosing a recent news article that makes some kind of argument (topic is open) and to reconstruct that argument in the way learned in Unit 1 and then to identify the fallacy or fallacies that the author makes. Students will post a powerpoint or PDF, along with their chosen article, to Blackboard so that other students can engage with and discuss their assessment of the article. The presentation is worth 15% of the final grade and is due by the end of Week 4, Friday July 31 (this is a hard deadline; no presentations will be accepted after the end of Week 4). Detailed instructions are available on Blackboard.

Participation

While this class is online, students are still expected to participate inasmuch as online teaching allows. This mainly involves commenting on/discussing their peers' presentations in Week 4, but also involves posting questions or comments about the course content to the discussion forums of each learning module and engaging with other students' posts. Participation is worth up to 10% of the final grade.

Practice Exercises

While the grading for this class is mostly determined by the weekly quizzes, students will succeed at these quizzes if they do the practice exercises and questions associated with each learning module. The quizzes will be structured similarly to the practice exercises. Answers to the practice questions are available on the associated learning module, but students are encouraged to try the exercises *first*.

Class Expectations

Online Community

- This course is largely self-paced, but it also involves a participation component, in the form of forum discussions which can serve as a place to post comments or questions about the

week's material. Additionally, students will do a presentation in Unit 2 as a forum post and will curate and moderate a discussion related to their presentation.

- Students are expected to be kind, respectful, and courteous to one another and to me when engaging in online discussion, even when (and especially when) we disagree with one another or have different points of view on a topic.
- I will moderate the discussion forums and answer questions you have about the material. If students routinely violate classroom etiquette by being rude or insensitive they will forego their participation grade. We are all here to learn, and the best way to do that is together!

Communication

- The main way to contact me is by email, and I will aim to respond to all emails within 24 hours; I generally don't respond to emails after 5pm or on weekends. Should important news or information arise I will send out a class email and post an announcement on Blackboard. Feel free to contact me with any questions you have about the course or its content and also feel free to refer to me by my first name. If you need extra help and email is too clunky, we can set up a virtual meeting time to go over course material.
- When you're engaging with me or your peers either via email or in the class discussions/presentations please keep your language concise and proofread anything you write before sending/posting it. While this course is online, please avoid the use of internet slang and abbreviations or emojis/emoticons, as well as all caps and sarcasm – these can be easily misunderstood in online communication.

Logistics

- Because this course is asynchronous and largely self-paced, late work only really comes up with respect to the presentations. You are expected to post them by the due date and unless you have been granted an extension by me, they will not be accepted. Completion of all course requirements – quizzes, participation in forums – must be done by Sunday, August 16; final grades are due August 19. Note that presentations must be posted by Friday, July 31.
- You're required to do the readings for each learning module, and read over the associated lecture slides, which are necessary to complete the unit quizzes. The course schedule/structure will stay the same throughout the semester, unless extraordinary circumstances arise. Any changes will be made by email and announced on Blackboard.
- I likely can't assist you with technical difficulties. For technical assistance, the best thing to do is to contact the 24/7 UMass Help Desk at <http://uma.echelp.org>.

Academic Honesty

Academic honesty is expected. I will follow UMass official policies when handling cases of academic dishonesty. Consult UMass' website for information on their official academic honesty policies: <https://www.umass.edu/honesty/>.

Accessibility

I am committed to making this class accessible and welcoming for all students. Students with documented disabilities are encouraged to contact Disability Services at <http://www.umass.edu/disability> to register and request any accommodations you might need.

Provisional Course Schedule

Unit 1: Argument Analysis

Week 1:

- Course Introduction
- Statements
- Arguments, Premises, Conclusions
- Non-Argument Forms of Discourse
- Inductive and Deductive Arguments
- Evaluating Arguments

Readings:

- Hurley, Chapter 1 “Basic Concepts” (pp1-63)

Week 2:

- Argument Mapping
- Mapping Extended Arguments
- Argument Reconstruction

Readings:

- Hurley Chap. 1 “Basic Concepts” (pp. 64-69)
- Bowell-Kemp, Chapter 5 “The Practice of Argument Reconstruction” (pp. 134-162)

Unit 2: Fallacies and Biases

Week 3:

- Introduction to Fallacy Theory
- Different Kinds of Fallacies
- Why Study Fallacies?

Readings:

- Hurley, Ch. 3 “Informal Fallacies” (119-184)
- Hitchcock, “Do the Fallacies Have a Place in Critical Thinking?”
- Blair, “The Place of Teaching Informal Fallacies in Critical Thinking”

Week 4:

- Introduction to Cognitive Biases
- Different Kinds of Cognitive Biases
- Cognitive Biases in Play: Practical Contexts
- Presentations due Friday July 31

Readings:

- Lau, Chapter 20 “Cognitive Biases”
- Valian, pp 2-6 & Chapter 7 “Evaluating Women and Men”
- Steele, “Thin Ice: Stereotype Threat and Black College Students”

Unit 3: Science, Evidence, and Thinking Well

Week 5:

- Belief, Knowledge, Truth
- Different Kinds of Evidence
- ‘Good’ vs. ‘Bad’ Reasons
- Causal Reasoning
- Statistical Reasoning

Readings:

- Vaughn, Chapter 4 “Reasons for Belief and Doubt” (109-128 & 137-141)
- Hurley, Chapter 10 “Mill’s Methods” (529-540) & Chapter 12 “Statistical Reasoning” (pp. 571-587)

Week 6:

- Hypotheses: Formation and Understanding
- Scientific Reasoning
- Open-Mindedness and Creative Thinking

Readings:

- Vaughn, Chapter 10 (366-384) "Judging Scientific Theories"
- Baron, Chapter 9 "Actively Open-Minded Thinking"

****All course requirements must be completed by Sunday, August 16****