

CARLETON UNIVERSITY

PHIL 2003A: Critical Thinking

Course Syllabus Fall Term 2015

Professor
Ken Ferguson

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Office Hours:
TBD

Class Time

Wed/Friday:
2:35 – 3:55

Location:
Check Website

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Critical thinking may be defined, roughly, as the systematic evaluation of beliefs (claims, theories, decisions) by rational standards. No skill is more important to success, whether in university, in one's chosen profession, or simply in making reasonable, well informed decisions in the course of everyday life, than the ability to think critically and logically. It is therefore appropriate that one of your courses should be devoted to improving your critical thinking skills. This is the course.

Unfortunately, there is no mechanical set of rules that can be applied to produce good critical thinking. (If there were, you probably wouldn't need this course.) There are, however, a number of informal methods, techniques and procedures which are very helpful in this task. Extended practice in the use of these techniques will enable you to recognize when an argument is being presented, identify precisely what the premises and conclusion of the argument are, spot any fallacies it happens to commit, and provide an overall evaluation of the argument. As a result of working with these techniques, you should be able to greatly improve your reasoning and critical thinking skills.

REQUIRED TEXT

A course pack, with the title *Philosophy 2003: Critical Thinking*, has been prepared by the Instructor. This course pack can be purchased at **Haven Books**, located at 43 Seneca Street, (613) 730-9888. Additional readings will be online.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

There will be two in-class exams, each worth 30% of the overall grade, and a final exam worth 40% of the grade. The in-class tests are *tentatively* scheduled for Oct. 2, and Nov. 4. The final will be held during the exam period. More details will be provided later about the content of these exams, but, in general, the questions on them will be similar to those assigned in class as homework.

HOMEWORK

Practice doing exercises is essential to success in this course. Homework exercises will therefore be assigned for (almost) every class. Although they will not be graded, students are strongly urged to do them on their own before they are done in class.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Attendance will not be taken, as it is not feasible in a class of this size. However, regular attendance in class is very important and students are fully responsible for material they miss due to absence.

OUTLINE OF TOPICS

(Note: A more detailed list of Topics and Readings is posted on CuLearn.)

I. Barriers to Critical Thinking

II. Analyzing and Reconstructing Arguments

- a) Claims, reasons, arguments
- b) Premises and conclusions
- c) Logical indicators
- d) Recognizing arguments
- e) The logical structure of arguments
- f) Dependent versus independent support
- g) Structure diagrams

III. Evaluating Sources of Belief

- a) Background belief
- b) Testimony
- c) Personal experience and observation
- d) Cognitive biases
- e) Illicit Rhetorical devices

IV. Informal Fallacies/Rhetorical Devices

- a) What are informal fallacies?
- b) Fallacies of irrelevant premises
- c) Fallacies of ambiguity
- d) Fallacies of unacceptable premises

V. Deductive Reasoning

- a) Concept of validity
- b) Distinction between deductive and inductive arguments
- c) Inference rules and deductions

VI. Critical Thinking and the Media

- a) Influences over the media
- b) Objectivity and bias in the media

VII. Explanation and Conspiracy Theories

- a) Inference to the best explanation
- b) Criteria for evaluating explanations
- c) What are conspiracy theories?
- d) What's wrong with conspiracy theories?

VIII. Scientific Reasoning and Pseudoscience

- a) Scientific methods of inquiry
- b) Theory testing and evaluation
- c) Science and pseudoscience
- d) Fallacies of evidence

IX. Inductive Reasoning

- a) Sampling and statistics
- b) Arguments from analogy
- c) Mill's methods and causal fallacies

X. Moral and Legal Reasoning

Department of Philosophy and Carleton University Policies (2015-16)

Assignments:

Unless specifically told otherwise by their instructors, students:

- must not use a plastic or cardboard cover or paper clips
- must staple the paper (there is a stapler on the essay box)
- must include the following:
 - student name
 - student number
 - course number and section
 - instructor's name
- No assignments will be accepted after the last day for handing in term work – see dates in next column.
- Assignments handed in through the essay box (just inside the glass doors, Paterson Hall, Floor 3A) must be dropped into the box by **4:15** on a regular business day in order to be date-stamped with that day's date. Assignments handed in after 4:15 or on a non-business day will be stamped as having been handed in on the next business day.
- Students are required to keep copies of their assignments. If your paper is lost at any point, you will be considered not to have submitted it if you cannot produce a copy immediately on request.

Deferrals for Term Work:

If you miss a final examination and/or fail to submit a final assignment by the due date because of circumstances beyond your control, you may apply for a deferral of examination/assignment. For deferred examinations, you must apply within 5 working days after the scheduled date of your exam. To apply for deferral of a final assignment, you must apply within 5 working days of the last scheduled day of classes. Visit the Registrar's Office for more information.

Plagiarism:

It is the responsibility of each student to understand the meaning of 'plagiarism' as defined in the Undergraduate or Graduate Calendars, and to avoid both committing plagiarism and aiding or abetting plagiarism by other students. (Undergraduate Calendar Academic Regulations, section 14.3, or <http://calendar.carleton.ca/undergrad/regulations/academicregulationsoftheuniversity/acadregsuniv14/>)

Academic Accommodation:

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request the processes are as follows:

Pregnancy obligation: write to your professor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details visit the Equity Services website: <http://www2.carleton.ca/equity/>

Religious obligation: write to your professor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details visit the Equity Services website: <http://www2.carleton.ca/equity/>

Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: The **Paul Menton Centre** for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send your **Letter of Accommodation** at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (*if applicable*). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with your professor to ensure

accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the PMC website for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally-scheduled exam (*if applicable*) at <http://www2.carleton.ca/pmc/new-and-current-students/dates-and-deadlines/>

You can visit the Equity Services website to view the policies and to obtain more detailed information on academic accommodation at <http://www2.carleton.ca/equity/>

Important Dates:

Sept. 2	Classes start.
Sept. 4	Classes follow a Monday schedule.
Sept. 7	Labour Day - University closed.
Sept. 18	Last day for registration and course changes in Fall and Fall/Winter courses.
Sept. 30	Last day for entire fee adjustment when withdrawing from Fall term or two-term courses.
Oct. 12	Thanksgiving Day – University closed.
Oct. 26-30	Fall Break – no classes.
Nov. 24	Last day for tests or examinations in courses below 4000-level before the Final Examination period.
Dec. 7	Last day of classes, Fall term. Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for Fall term courses.
Dec. 7	Last day to withdraw from Fall term courses (academic purposes only).
Dec. 8	No classes or examinations take place. Review classes may be held, but no new material may be introduced.
Dec. 9-21	Final examinations for Fall courses, mid-terms for Fall/Winter courses. Exams are normally held all seven days of the week.
Dec. 21	Take-home exams are due.
Jan. 6	Winter term classes begin.
Jan. 19	Last day for registration and course changes in Winter term classes.
Jan. 31	Last day for entire fee adjustment when withdrawing from winter courses or winter portion of two-term courses.
Feb. 15-19	Winter Break, no classes.
Mar. 24	Last day for tests or examinations in courses below 4000-level before the Final Examination period.
Mar. 25	Good Friday – University closed.
Apr. 8	Last day of Fall/Winter and Winter term classes. Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for term work for Fall/Winter and Winter term courses.
Apr. 8	Last day to withdraw from Fall/Winter and Winter term courses (academic purposes only).
Apr. 9-10	No classes or examinations take place. Review classes may be held, but no new material may be introduced.
Apr. 11-23	Final Examinations. Exams are normally held all seven days of the week.
Apr. 23	Take-home exams are due.

Addresses:

Department of Philosophy:	3A35 Paterson Hall www.carleton.ca/philosophy 520-2110
Registrar's Office:	300 Tory www.carleton.ca/registrar 520-3500
Student Academic Success Centre:	302 Tory www.carleton.ca/sasc 520-7850
Writing Tutorial Service:	4 th Floor, Library http://www1.carleton.ca/sasc/writing-tutorial-service/ 520-6632
MacOdrum Library	http://www.library.carleton.ca/ 520-2735