Instructor Information

Dr. David Matheson  
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Description & Objective

We are constantly asked to believe things, both in the everyday setting and in more esoteric contexts. Sometimes what we are asked to believe strikes us as supported by good reasons, sometimes by bad reasons, and sometimes by no clear reason at all. The objective of this course is to introduce you to some basic tools for the formation of reasonable belief, by making explicit the standards that govern your intuitive competency in recognizing good and bad reasons for belief, and thereby to sharpen your skills for independent, critical thought. Specific topics to be explored include the nature of (rational) arguments, the clarification of meaning, assessing arguments, fallacies of reasoning, logic and deduction, varieties of inductive thought, techniques of irrational persuasion, and moral reasoning.

Text & Readings

All required readings will be drawn from the following text, which is available at the Carleton University Bookstore:

(Abbreviated “HLD” below.)

Evaluation

Your final grade for the course will be determined by your performance on five in-class tests (July 14, July 21, July 28, Aug 4, and Aug 11) with the following percentage-of-final-grade weights: Test 1=10%, Test 2=15%, Test 3=20%, Test 4=25%, Test 5=30%. There is no final examination for the course.

Because this is a very lecture-centric course and your instructor’s lecture slides are not normally distributed outside of the classroom, note that class attendance is essential.

Calendar

| Week 1 (July 6&7) | Why reasonable belief matters  
Reasonable belief & arguments  
Clarity & meaning  
Definitions | HLD, Ch. 1  
HLD, Ch. 2 |
|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Week 2 (July 13&14) | Vagueness & ambiguity  
Analyticity  
Necessary vs. sufficient conditions  
Reconstructing arguments & tree diagrams  
Test 1, July 14 | HLD, Ch. 3  
HLD, Ch. 4 |
| Week 3 (July 20&21) | Assessing premise truth  
- Belief sources  
- Falsification & verification  
Assessing logical strength I  
- The relevance criterion  
- Fallacies of relevance  
Test 2, July 21 | HLD, Ch. 5  
HLD, Ch. 6  
HLD, Ch. 7 |
| Week 4 (July 27&28) | Assessing logical strength II  
- The adequacy criterion  
- Fallacies of adequacy  
Formal logic  
- Logical form & deductive validity  
- Some valid forms  
- Some invalid forms  
Test 3, July 28 | HLD, Ch. 8  
HLD, Ch. 9 |
| Week 5 (Aug 3&4) | Inductive reasoning  
- For types of inductive argument  
- Inference to the best explanation: the fundamental type?  
Test 4, Aug 4 | HLD, Ch. 10 |
| Week 6 (Aug 10&11) | Irrational persuasion  
- Fallacious reasoning vs. irrational persuasion  
- Techniques of irrational persuasion  
Thinking critically about morality  
- Moral beliefs & susceptibility to moral reasoning  
- Strategies for reasoning about moral beliefs  
Test 5, Aug 11 | HLD, Ch. 12  
HLD, Ch. 14 |

Relevant Department of Philosophy and Carleton University Policies

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://www.carleton.ca/calendars/ugrad/current/regulations/acadregsuniv14.html#14.3)

Academic Accommodation

For students with disabilities: Students with disabilities requiring academic accommodations in this course must register with the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) for a formal evaluation of disability-related needs. Documented disabilities include but are not limited to mobility/physical impairments, specific Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/psychological disabilities, sensory disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and chronic medical conditions. Registered PMC students are required to contact the PMC every term to have a Letter of Accommodation sent to the Instructor by their Coordinator. In addition, students are expected to confirm their need for accommodation with the Instructor no later than two weeks before the first assignment is due or the first in-class test/midterm. If you require accommodations only for formally scheduled exam(s) in this course, you must request accommodations by the last official day to withdraw from classes in each term.

For religious observance: Students requesting academic accommodation on the basis of religious observance should make a formal, written request to their instructors for alternate dates and/or means of satisfying academic requirements. Such requests should be made during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist, but no later than two
weeks before the compulsory academic event. Accommodation is to be worked out directly and on an individual basis between the student and the instructor involved. Instructors will make accommodations in a way that avoids academic disadvantage to the student. Students or instructors who have questions or want to confirm accommodation eligibility of a religious event or practice may refer to the Equity Services website: http://www2.carleton.ca/equity/accommodation/holy-days/ for a list of holy days and Carleton’s Academic Accommodation policies.

For pregnancy: Pregnant students requiring academic accommodations are encouraged to contact an Equity Advisor in Equity Services to complete a letter of accommodation. The student must then make an appointment to discuss her needs with the instructor at least two weeks prior to the first academic event in which it is anticipated the accommodation will be required.

Important Dates

May 16  Last day for registration and course changes for early summer courses.
May 20  Last day for registration and course changes for full summer courses.
May 23  Statutory holiday, University closed.
May 31  Last day for a fee adjustment when withdrawing from early summer courses (financial withdrawal).
June 10 Last day to withdraw from full summer courses (financial withdrawal).
June 10  Last day to submit to the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities, formal Examination Accommodation Forms for June examinations.
June 20  Last day of classes for early summer courses. 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.
June 21 Last day for academic withdrawal from early summer courses.
June 24-9 Early summer final examinations will be held.
June 30 Final deadline for summer term fee payment.
July 1  Statutory holiday, University closed.
July 4  Late summer courses begin and full summer courses resume.
July 11 Last day for registration and course changes for late summer courses.
July 22 Last day for withdrawal from late summer courses with full fee adjustment.
July 29 Last day to submit to the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities, formal Examination Accommodation Forms for August examinations.
Aug. 1 Civic holiday, University closed.
Aug. 15 Last day of 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.
Aug. 16 Last day for academic withdrawal from late summer and full summer courses.
Aug. 18-3 Final examinations will be held.
Sept. 30 Last day for receipt of applications for review of final grades in summer term courses.
Sept. 30-Oct. 1 Summer term deferred final examinations will be held.

Addresses

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