

CARLETON UNIVERSITY

PHIL 2003A: Critical Thinking

Course Syllabus Fall Term 2011

Professor
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Office Hours:
Tue/Thu 10-11

Class Time

Tues/Thurs:
8:35 – 9:55

Location:
301 Azrieli
Theatre

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 appropriate, therefore, 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

The Power of Critical Thinking, 2nd Canadian edition, by Lewis Vaughn and Chris MacDonald (Oxford University Press). This text is available in the University Bookstore.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

There will be two in-class tests, 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. 4, and Nov. 1. The final will be held during the exam period. More details will be provided later about the content of these tests and exams, but, in general, the questions and problems on them will be similar to those assigned 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

Although attendance will not be taken, as it is not feasible in a class of this size, it should be noted that regular attendance is still important to success in this course and that students are fully responsible for any material they miss due to absence.

OUTLINE OF TOPICS

Note: This outline closely follows the chapter by chapter presentation in Vaughn's text.

I. The Basics

- a) Claims, reasons, arguments
- b) Premises and conclusions
- c) Logical indicators
- d) Recognizing arguments

II. Obstacles to Clear, Rigorous Thinking

- a) Personal – bias, wishful thinking ...
- b) Philosophical – relativism, skepticism ...

III. Reconstructing Arguments

- a) The logical structure of arguments
- b) Dependent/versus independent support
- c) Limitations of structure diagrams

IV. Reasons for Belief and Doubt

- a) Personal Experience
- b) Evaluating evidence
- c) Influence of media
- d) Propaganda

V. Informal Fallacies

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

VI. Deductive Methods

- a) Propositional logic - logical connectives, valid argument forms, and deductions
- b) Categorical logic – terms, quantifiers, Venn Diagrams

VII. Inductive Reasoning

- a) Sampling and statistics
- b) Arguments from analogy
- c) Causal reasoning

VIII. Evaluating Explanations

- a) Inference to the best explanation
- b) Criteria for evaluating explanations

IX. Scientific Reasoning

- a) Scientific methods of inquiry
- b) Theory testing and evaluation
- c) Distinguishing science from pseudo science

X. Moral Reasoning

- a) Moral statements, arguments and theories
- b) Methods for evaluating moral beliefs

XI. Essays for Critical Evaluation

Department of Philosophy and Carleton University Policies

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 in the lower right corner of the cover sheet:
 - student name
 - student number
 - course number and section
 - instructor's name
- The Philosophy Department does not accept assignments by FAX. You may send them by courier, if necessary.
- 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://www4.carleton.ca/calendars//ugrad/current/regulations/acadregsuniv14.html#14.3>)

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 me 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/accommodation/>

Religious obligation: write to me 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/accommodation/>

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 could 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, 613-520-6608, every term to ensure that I receive your Letter of Accommodation, no later than two weeks before the first assignment is due or the first in-class test/midterm requiring accommodations. If you only require accommodations for your formally scheduled exam(s) in this course, please submit your request for accommodations to PMC by the deadlines published on the PMC website: <http://www2.carleton.ca/pmc/new-and-current-students/dates-and-deadlines/>

Important Dates:

Sept. 8	Classes start (after Orientation events).
Sept. 21	Last day for registration and course changes in Fall term and two-term courses.
Sept. 30	Last day for entire fee adjustment when withdrawing from fall term or two-term courses.
Oct. 7	University Day – no classes.
Oct. 10	Thanksgiving Day – university closed.
Nov. 21	Last day for tests or examinations in courses below 4000 level before the Final Examination period.
Dec. 5	Last day of classes, Fall term. Last day for handing in term assignments, subject to any earlier course deadline.
Dec. 5	Last day to withdraw from Fall term courses (academic purposes only).
Dec. 8-21	Final examinations for Fall courses, mid-terms for Fall/Winter courses.
Jan. 4	Winter term classes begin.
Jan. 17	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. 20	Family Day – university closed
Feb. 20-24	Winter Break, classes suspended.
Mar. 22	Last day for tests or examinations in courses below 4000 level before the Final Examination period.
Apr. 5	Last day of Fall/Winter and Winter term classes. Last day for handing in term assignments, subject to any earlier course deadline.
Apr. 5	Last day to withdraw from Fall/Winter and Winter term courses (academic purposes only).
Apr. 6	Good Friday – university closed.
Apr. 11-24	Final Examinations.

Addresses:

Department of Philosophy:	3A46 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
Paul Menton Centre:	500 University Centre www.carleton.ca/pmc 520-6608
Writing Tutorial Service:	4 th Floor, Library www.carleton.ca/wts 520-6632
MacOdrum Library	http://www.library.carleton.ca/ 520-2735