COURSE SYLLABUS: REASONING AND CRITICAL THINKING

Philosophy 102

Required

iClicker device.


YOUR HOST: Brad Lord-Leutwyler

CONTACT INFORMATION:
E-Mail address: physhead999@yahoo.com
I ALSO USE YAHOO CHAT. USE IT TO CHAT/video conference with me. Office hours on line are easy and flexible, so get 21st century!

COURSE WEB PAGE: http://FACULTY.UNLV.EDU/BLORD
ALL COURSE MATERIAL WILL BE AVAILABLE AT THIS WEB SITE.

OFFICE HOURS: by appointment: If you make a sincere effort, so shall I.

PREFACE

Greetings, and WELCOME! NO MATTER WHAT YOU DO IN LIFE, be it as a biologist, CEO of Ford, Hotel Executive, police officer, lawyer, politician, film maker...anything, someone is always trying to persuade you, and they are often times doing so in a very poor manner. Often times they are trying to trick you into believing something which sounds good, but upon critical analysis turns out to be complete twaddle. You will learn how to spot such arguments and how to avoid making them.

SECOND: If you EVER see or hear ANY WORD in this course which you do not COMPLETELY UNDERSTAND THE MEANING OF, LOOK IT UP. You are responsible for your life, and ignorance is never an excuse.

THIRD, I want to let you know that this course is meant to be fun and entertaining as well as educational. THE PROBLEM I TEND TO ENCOUNTER IS THIS: students often mistake my easy-going style to mean that they can either slack off on the workload or that I will readily accept excuses for poor performance or an absence of any. It is foolhardy to confuse amiability with nonchalance.

Finally, I want to make certain that my educational philosophy is unambiguous. I proceed upon the reasonable assumption that you all are or ought to be mature, responsible adults who are here to learn. This perspective leads me to expect that each one of you shall
perform in a manner consistent with that assumption. If you do not believe that this expectation is either applicable to you or reasonable, you may wish to reconsider taking this course.

**Course Objectives:** There are two primary objectives in this class, and your grade is entirely dependent upon you mastering them and demonstrating said mastery via examination: (1) The development of the skills necessary to identify and evaluate arguments and (2) The development of skill in creating cogent arguments. Students will develop and improve interpretive and evaluative skills that will assist them in becoming more competent and independent thinkers in their academic, personal, and professional lives, and in their life-long learning. Nested within these two main objectives are several specific skills:

- identifying the basic structural elements of an argument (premises, conclusions, assumptions),
- re-organizing the arguments of others into a form which makes them more logically understandable,
- identification of the strength or weakness of the evidence used to support an argument,
- identify unstated premises in arguments (ASSUMPTIONS),
- understanding that there are several types of definitions of critical terms within an argument: what they are and how they work,
- identification of standard argument forms,
- understanding how parts of an argument work together to form an intellectually satisfying conclusion, and ultimately,
- building your own well reasoned, well-supported argument.

**Course Description:** This course covers various aspects of language, logic, and reasoning in order to help students correctly evaluate claims, arguments, and explanations from a variety of contexts and disciplines.

The process of critical thinking is of central importance to this course. Critical thinking is a mental process involving reasoning, problem solving, conceiving or discovering ideas, remembering, and imagining. It can be defined as analyzing on the basis of a standard, using purposeful mental activity. The standards for critical thinking are clarity, accuracy, precision, relevance, completeness and logical structure.

While there can be many definitions of critical thinking, most agree that it is a purposeful form of mental activity, involving learning and a conscious awareness of the thinking process itself. It is guided by the standards which help us aim toward truth. We develop critical thinking by following a reasoned, orderly process:

1. The process begins by acquiring knowledge about the subject.
2. It requires the use of language with precision and clarity.
3. It requires exercising the rules of deductive and inductive reasoning based upon the practice of keen observation.
4. It requires analysis based upon evidence and requires the writer or speaker to support his or her assertions with reasoning and evidence.
5. It involves the synthesis of information and accurate, effective evaluation of data.
6. To develop critical thinking, we need knowledge, word precision, and a set of rules to apply the reasoning process.
7. We need practice in observing, analyzing, reasoning, conceptualizing, synthesizing, and evaluating.

**Grading: EXAMS, EXAMS, EXAMS.** We will have some sort of test every-other week or so. All exams are open-note and open book. If you take notes on a computer, you will need to print them out for the test: you may not use the computer for exams. If you use ANY electronic (phone, text, radio…ANY) device during an examination of ANY kind, including quizzes, tests or any other form of assessment, you will be given zero credit for the exam, test, quiz etc. Each exam will be comprehensive and worth an increasing number of points. This way, if you do less than well early in the semester (when the tests are worth less) but pull it together in the end (when the tests are worth more) you can easily pull a respectably passing mark.

This class will be graded on a curve for each section with the highest student forming the “A” end of the curve, and 65% being the bottom of the “C-“ zone.

**Grade Questions:**
Grades will be posted when they are ready. Due to privacy concerns, I will not email your grades to you, nor will I discuss them with you by telephone. DO NOT, UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCE, CONTACT ME FOR YOUR GRADES. If they are not on the web, that means that they are not available. If you did an assignment and there is not a grade for it posted, you may contact me to make sure that I received the assignment.

**FURTHERMORE, YOU ARE NOT, UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCE, TO CONTACT ME TO TELL ME HOW BADLY YOU NEED A PARTICULAR GRADE IN THE COURSE IN ORDER TO KEEP A SCHOLARSHIP, STAY IN COLLEGE, MAKE A LOVED ONE HAPPY OR OTHERWISE. I WILL IGNORE YOU COMPLETELY.**

If you want to discuss or contest your grade on any item, I expect you to use your critical thinking skills to convince me that you deserve a better grade. If you fail to reason correctly, you may lose points. Keep in mind that if I re-examine your work and discover that I have mistakenly given you points that you did not deserve, I will deduct those points from your grade. However, if you describe the situation accurately and reason correctly, I will give you the grade you deserve, and I will add additional points for good reasoning.

**Standards:**

**ABSENCES:**
I may take attendance and your attendance may influence your final grade in some nominal manner. I do NOT care whether or not you show up, and I do not need notes or excuses as to why you were not here. It is your responsibility to obtain class notes and other information from your classmates. **DO NOT, UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCE CONTACT ME ASKING, “WHAT DID I MISS IN CLASS.” FOR CLASS NOTES OR FOR HANDOUTS: I WILL MERELY FROWN AT YOU.**
MISSED ASSIGNMENTS/EXAMS:
Your education is important. I take it very seriously, often times more so than many of my students. For all intents and purposes, you should treat this class as if it were a fantastic, high-paying job that you love and wish to keep, and be on good terms with the supervisor. You are not to miss this class for any reason that would not be deemed a serious justification by a mature objective outside observer. Vacations, trips, hangovers etc. are typically not considered to be acceptable justification. Thus, if you know in advance that you are going to be absent for good cause when an assignment is due or when an exam is going to be administered, it is your responsibility to inform me of such as far in advance as possible, one week at a minimum. Failure to do so will probably result in the assignment or exam being treated as an unexcused absence, thus earning a zero. Medical excuses for exams or missed assignments REQUIRE a physician's note. Deaths in the family require verification, such as a death certificate, but please, no photographs.

PREPARATION:
It is the responsibility of each student to come to class prepared for each class session. I WILL CALL ON STUDENTS AND I DO EXPECT THAT STUDENT TO BE PREPARED AND TO RESPOND. In order to retain the type of flexibility to teach critical thinking, I will inform you at each class session what you will be required to read and which exercises you will be required to have completed for the next class session. Missing a class is not a legitimate excuse for not being prepared for the next class. LACK OF PREPARATION MAY BE USED BY THE PROFESSOR TO DETERMINE WHETHER OR NOT STUDENTS “ON THE EDGE” BETWEEN GRADES GET THE HIGHER OR LOWER GRADE.

DUE DATES
All papers and homework must be submitted on their due date. The Professor reserves the right to either reduce the grade for any paper submitted after its due date or reject it completely. Occasionally due dates will be extended.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY
The University trusts each student to maintain high standards of honesty and ethical behavior. All assignments submitted in fulfillment of the course requirements must be the student’s own work. Academic dishonesty is normally defined by, though not necessarily limited to, the following categories:

I WILL VIGOROUSLY AND AGGRESSIVELY CHECK YOUR TERM PAPERS FOR PLAGIARISM. I WILL USE THE WORLD'S LEADING DATABASES TO COMPARE EACH PAPER TO KNOWN RESEARCH, PREVIOUSLY SUBMITTED PAPERS, AND COMMERCIALLY AVAILABLE PAPERS. NOT ONLY DO CHEATERS NOT PROSPER, THEY SUFFER DEARLY.
Cheating – defined as using inappropriate sources of information on a test or assignment.

Plagiarism – IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTION ABOUT WHAT PLAGIARISM IS, PLEASE VISIT THIS SITE AND CHECK IT OUT…VIGOROUSLY. I WILL BE HARD-CORE ABOUT THIS, SO GET A CLUE.

http://www.turnitin.com/research_site/e_home.html

It is defined as presenting as one’s own, the ideas, words, or products of another. Plagiarism occurs when a student copies material word-for-word from a book or electronic source without giving credit, paraphrases scholarly material without giving credit to the source, copies large blocks of material from another even though citation is given, or fails to appropriately and accurately cite sources of original ideas and opinions of others. Whether this is done intentionally or unintentionally, it is considered plagiarism. The academic dishonesty policy, as stated in the University Bulletin, applies to any assignment or exam submitted by a student, whether in person or by electronic means. It is considered a serious academic offense and will result in a failing grade for that assignment as well as referral to the University authorities for disciplinary action.

Detailed Description of Course Assignments:
DO NOT, UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCE, CONTACT ME TO ASK WHAT WILL BE ON ANY EXAM: IT IS ALL FAIR GAME!

Additional Information:
If you have a documented disability that requires assistance, you will need to go to the Disability Services (DS) for coordination in your academic accommodations. The DS is located within the Learning Enhancement Services office in the Reynolds Student Services Center, room 137. The DS telephone number is 702-895-0866 or TDD 895-0652. You may also visit their website at: http://www.unlv.edu/studentlife/les

Copyright Policies
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