PHILOSOPHY 4  
Critical Thinking

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Description

In this course we will study the basic skills of good reasoning and the proper method of identifying, interpreting, and evaluating arguments. Even more important will be our ability to evaluate attempts at argument—attempts one typically sees in the political and news media of our times. Our goal, in short, will be the ability to distinguish between argument and mere exhortation. Topics will include: argument structure and identification, validity and strength of arguments, Aristotle's formal and material fallacies of reasoning, the use and abuse of language in reasoning, and principles of fair play in argumentation. We will also explore the sociological implications of critical thinking as a cultural value for modern democracies.

Requirements

Our work will primarily be lecture and discussion, so both careful attention to the readings and class participation will be crucial for a lively course. Please bring your text to class.

During each class meeting, we will group-critique one short opinion-editorial piece from a major newspaper or news magazine. These will be available for download from the Downloads section of the course webpage every Monday for use in that week’s class. In addition, each student must bring to each class an opinion-editorial clipping of his or her own choosing, and be prepared to offer an individual critique of this clipping when called upon. Individual critiques will count as part of the student's quiz grade percentage (see below).

There will be two examinations—one take-home mid-term paper and one in-class final—as well as several unannounced short answer quizzes on the readings. All written work must comply with Philosophy Department guidelines, which can be found here: http://www.csus.edu/phil/req/writing.htm. The departmental grading policy for written work can be found here: http://www.csus.edu/phil/req/grading.htm.

Course Text


This is available at the university bookstore. Weekly op-ed articles and other readings will be made available for viewing or download on the course web page here: http://www.csus.edu/indiv/e/eppersonm
Grading

Class participation: 15% (2 unexcused absences results in 0%)
Quizzes: 25%
Mid-term exam: 25%
Final exam: 35%

Lecture Schedule – Summary View

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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
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<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>09/01</td>
<td>Introduction; Argument vs. Rhetoric</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>09/08</td>
<td>Reason, Rhetoric, and Argument Analysis</td>
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<td>Week 3</td>
<td>09/15</td>
<td>Truth and Rationality</td>
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<td>Week 4</td>
<td>09/22</td>
<td>Well-Formed Arguments</td>
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<td>Week 5</td>
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<td>Strong Arguments</td>
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<td>Week 6</td>
<td>10/06</td>
<td>Reconstructing Arguments</td>
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<td>Week 7</td>
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<td>Details of Argument Reconstruction</td>
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<td>Week 8</td>
<td>10/20</td>
<td>Evaluating Arguments</td>
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<td>MIDTERM DISTRIBUTED</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 9</td>
<td>11/27</td>
<td>Arguments and Testimony</td>
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<td>MIDTERM COLLECTED</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 10</td>
<td>11/03</td>
<td>Statistical Arguments and Predictions</td>
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<td>Week 11</td>
<td>11/10</td>
<td>Tuesday: No Class - Veterans Day; Thursday: Causal Arguments</td>
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<td>Week 12</td>
<td>11/17</td>
<td>Causal Arguments (cont'd); Moral Arguments</td>
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<td>Week 13</td>
<td>11/24</td>
<td>Thanksgiving Week - No Class</td>
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<td>Week 14</td>
<td>12/01</td>
<td>Review and Wrap-up</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 15</td>
<td>12/08</td>
<td>Dead Week - No Class</td>
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Lecture Schedule – Detailed View

Week 1 9/01 General introduction and background: The importance of distinguishing between argument and exhortation. Political and sociological Implications of critical thinking as a cultural value for modern democracies.

Week 2 9/08 Chapter 1: Arguments, reason, and rhetoric. Argument analysis. Impediments to good reasoning

Week 3 9/15 Chapter 2: Language; truth and the principle of correspondence to fact; rational vs. irrational belief
Week 4  9/22  Chapter 3: Argument analysis; well-formed arguments; validity, cogency, and the truth-value of premises

Week 5  9/29  Chapter 4: Deductive strength; inductive strength

Week 6  10/06  Chapter 5: Argument reconstruction and the principle of charity; distinguishing arguments from non-arguments; identifying premises and conclusions; general and specific premises; adding implicit premises; cheap validity

Week 7  10/13  Chapter 6: Improper wording; missing premises; including unnecessary premises

Week 8  10/20  Chapter 7: Basic rules of argument evaluation; evaluating specific types of premises; argument analysis and problems of meaning

MIDTERM EXAM DISTRIBUTED

Week 9  10/27  Chapter 8: The role of testimony; testimonial arguments; premises and testimony

MIDTERM EXAM COLLECTED

Week 10  11/03  Chapter 9: Past to future arguments; simple statistical statements; the standard pattern for survey arguments; correlations

Week 11  11/10  Tuesday: No Class - Veteran's Day;
Thursday: Chapter 10: Causal statements; the meaning of general causal statements; knowledge of general causal statements; analyzing causal arguments; common errors in causal reasoning

Week 12  11/17  Chapter 10 (cont'd);
Chapter 11: Moral propositions; morality, rationality, and truth; analyzing moral arguments; common problems in moral reasoning

Week 13  11/24  No Class - Thanksgiving Week

Week 14  12/01  Review and Wrap-up

Week 15  12/08  Dead Week - No Class
Additional Information

Satisfies General Education Area A3: Critical Thinking

General Learning Objectives:
The knowledge and skills to be studied in this course include:
- Logical analysis and the identification and construction of arguments.
- Understanding logical relations, in particular the relations between premises and conclusions.
- Recognizing the more common forms of formal and informal fallacies.
- Evaluating the relevance, validity, and strength of arguments.
- Understanding the logical structure of deductive and inductive arguments.
- Awareness of the abuses of language, including connotation, ambiguity, and definition.
- Recognizing arguments in a variety of contexts, including other disciplines as well as in public affairs.
- Improve ‘information competence’: the ability to find out what one needs to know in order to have a responsible position on an issue.
- Acquiring an immunity to propaganda.
- Developing not only the capacity but the disposition to use good reasoning in a variety of contexts.
- Developing a sense of fairness and respect for opposing positions.

At the end of the course the student should have the ability to:
- Locate the argument in a passage.
- Detect errors of reasoning and explain how the reasoning is in error.
- Engage in cogent and respectful discussion.
- Analyze specific arguments for consistency and credibility.
- Apply good reasoning to issues in professional and personal contexts.
- Evaluate evidence and make appropriate inferences from that evidence.
- Determine what evidence is necessary and know how to find that evidence, if possible.
- Evaluate evidence for relevance and determine the degree of support it provides.
- Construct and defend arguments in support of or in opposition to particular propositions.