

Phil 100: Topics in Philosophy

MW 2:50-4:10

Instructor: Young

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Hours: 4:30-5:30 MW

Description:

This course is designed to help you become a more critical thinker. We will focus on issues like abortion, gun control, affirmative action, and the existence of God, evaluating arguments exclusively in terms of their logical strength. For the first step in becoming a truly critical thinker is being able to tell that an argument is good or bad because of its logical strength, not because of your feelings about its conclusion.

Procedures:

After working on the fundamentals of critical thinking (definitions, implied premises, and so on), we will learn techniques of analysis appropriate to arguments of a variety of logical types. You will have at least three resources at your disposal: 1) the explanations and exercises in the text, 2) W.W. Norton's "Logic Tutor" website, and last but certainly not least 3) your instructor's experience and ability to help make sense of all this. Class lecture and discussion will be our primary means of bringing these resources to bear in helping you learn our material.

Purpose:

By the end of this course, you should be able to: 1) Identify the nature of a variety of arguments, 2) Use the techniques we learn in class to identify their strengths and weaknesses, and 3) Construct stronger arguments of your own based on what you have learned.

Course Requirements:

There will be quizzes on each chapter of the text discussed in class. Collectively, these will be 25% of your overall score. There will be no make-ups for missed quizzes, but with a documented reason, I will accept an "argument evaluation" as described later in this package.

There will also be an essay midterm and final, based on the articles we discuss in class. These will each be 25% of your overall score. You may substitute papers for these tests, and papers will be the makeup assignment for any missed test.

Your attendance score will be a mathematical percentage: the number of times you are present when I take attendance. Documented reasons will be accepted as excused absences. This will be 25% of your overall score as well.

Required texts:

The Art of Reasoning, by David Kelley (Third Edition, W. W. Norton).

Readings for Logical Analysis by Hicks & Kelley (Second Edition, W. W. Norton)

Syllabus

September	5	General Introduction.
	10-19	Definitions (Kelley, Chapter 3).
	24	Readings: Abortion (Brody, Warren).
	26	Basic Argument Analysis (Kelley, Chapter 5).
October	1-8	Basic Argument Analysis, continued.
	10	Readings: Affirmative Action (Martin, Newton).
	15	Midterm Exam.
	17-29	Inductive Generalizations (Kelley, Chapter 15).
	31	Readings: Crime and Gun Control (Rubenstein, Kates, Sloan).
November	5-14	Argument by Analogy (Kelley, Chapter 16).
	19	Readings: Capital Punishment (Mencken), God's Existence (Daniel), Freedom of Speech (Dershowitz).
	21	Scheduled as a Friday (No Class).
	22-3	Thanksgiving Holiday.
	26-28	Fallacies (Kelley, Chapter 6).
December	3-5	Fallacies, Continued.
	10	Readings: Government Conspiracy (The Liberty Network)
	12	Review.
	18	Final Exam, 2:00-5:00.

NOTES

- 1. All chapter references on this syllabus are from The Art of Reasoning.*
- 2. Every chapter quiz will be immediately after we finish discussing that chapter.*
- 3. All "readings" on this syllabus are from Readings for Logical Analysis.*
- 4. This syllabus is only provisional. The speed at which we move through this material, as well as the dates of the quizzes, will vary depending on the pace of class discussion. I may also make changes in the reading selections. It will be your responsibility to be aware of any and all changes I announce in class.*

Policies

Since I am giving these policy statements to you in writing, 1) I will presume that you understand them unless you tell me otherwise, and 2) ignorance will under absolutely no circumstances be an acceptable excuse.

I: Academic Dishonesty

If I find you have cheated in this class, you will be failed for the course and I will report you to the office of academic affairs for further disciplinary action. Absolutely no excuses will be accepted.

II: Attendance

I will take attendance on a random basis. Your attendance grade will be the percentage of times I take attendance when you are present. Documented absences will be excused. If you are late for class, it will be your responsibility to check with me afterwards on receiving half credit.

III: Quizzes & Exams

No one will be permitted to begin a quiz or an exam after the first person has finished and left the room. There will be no make up quizzes, but the argument evaluations explained elsewhere may substitute for quiz scores. Argument evaluations will be considered late unless accompanied by a documented reason for missing the quiz.

IV: Course Completion

Incomplete grades will be only be assigned to students who arrange for them with me in advance. Otherwise, course requirements remaining unfulfilled at the scheduled finish time for the final exam will be assigned scores of zero. All late work is subject to grade penalties. Be aware that incomplete grades automatically convert to failing grades a certain period of time after the semester ends.

V: Final Grade Computation

The quantified aspect of your final grade will be the mathematical mean of all course requirements. The point value of letter grades on your written work is as follows:

A	95	B-	80	D+	68
A-	90	C+	78	D	65
B+	88	C	75	D-	60
B	85	C-	70	F	50

The scale for final grade averages is as follows:

90+	A	80+	B	70+	C
88+	B+	78+	C+	60+	D

I reserve the right to depart from the mathematical average in determining a final letter grade, based on my judgements regarding intangibles. I may adjust your grade upwards based on effort, commitment to class discussion, interest in the subject, or other similar factors. I may also adjust downwards based on the lack of such indicators.

Argument Evaluations

You may substitute a written evaluation of an argument drawn from a source outside our textbook for any missed essay quiz. It may come from newspapers, journals, web sites, or any other written source (including textbooks for other courses). A copy of the text of the argument must be turned in with the evaluation.

The purpose of this assignment is to allow you to make up for any quizzes you may miss by showing that you are able to apply the analytical techniques you have learned in class to sources in the world outside of our classroom. Your task, therefore, will be to find arguments of the types we study in class, and write up your evaluation of their strengths and/or weaknesses.

Because there are so many different types from which you may choose, there is little I can say about what any particular analysis must specifically include. In fact, the material from the first four chapters are not specifically about arguments. But in any evaluation, I will look for 1) whether you have correctly identified the course concepts in question, 2) whether your evaluation makes appropriate use of the analytical tools relevant to that concept, and 3) whether you do a reasonable job of identifying the strengths and weaknesses (where relevant) of the specific argument you evaluate.

There may, of course, be additional issues or criteria specific to particular types and cases which I cannot specify in advance. However, part of the point of this exercise is to see whether you have learned what would be an appropriate analysis of each of the ideas dealt with in our course work. If you have in fact learned what we studied in class, you should have a pretty clear idea of what is necessary.

Sometimes just finding material which correspond to the concepts we discuss in class can be a real task in itself. So I suggest that you begin looking for examples of our course concepts as soon as we begin each chapter, so that if you need to substitute this assignment for a quiz, you will be prepared to do so. In particular, since you are already studying from your texts for other classes, using them can provide a time saving (as well as knowledge integrating) opportunity.