

# Philosophy 1300: Introduction to Critical Thinking

Steve Hiltz     May Term 2017

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**Instructor:** Professor Hiltz received his B. A. *magna cum laude* from Princeton University and his Ph.D. from the University of Texas. He has been part of the faculty in the Philosophy Department at SMU since 1996, teaching a wide variety of courses. He is a two-time H.O.P.E. honoree and former President of the North Texas Philosophical Association.

**Description:** This course presents the fundamentals of argumentation and the rational assessment of claims. Topics will include the analysis and clarification of meaning, deductive and inductive reasoning, assessing the evidence for claims and the credibility of sources, detecting insidious persuasive techniques, and recognizing formal and informal fallacies.

**Student Aims and Orientation:** This is much more a skills-development course than an information course. Critical thinking involves careful analysis, discerning judgment and sound inferences. Your focus should be on enhancing your intellectual capacities in these areas by becoming practiced in the application of the concepts and distinctions presented in the text and discussed in class. To the extent your efforts are successful, you will **benefit** in several ways:

- You will become a more cogent reasoner, and a more objective and analytically astute judge.
- You will become more alert to nonsense and bogus rhetoric, and hence be very difficult to dupe.
- You will develop the kind of mind all employers value.
- You will satisfy Pillar I of the Philosophical and Religious Inquiry and Ethics (PRIE 1) University Curriculum requirement, as well as the Quantitative Reasoning Proficiency (QR)
- You will have built a foundation for achieving your life goals, inasmuch as all of your other course work and virtually any career path you embark upon after graduation will be significantly benefited by the enhancement of the skills focused on in this course.

## UC Student Learning Outcomes:

- PRIE 1:** Students will be able to describe, explain and/or employ some of the principles and theoretical methods of philosophy, religious studies, or ethics — in particular, as it relates to logic and critical thinking.
- QR:** Students will be able to apply symbolic systems of representation.
- Students will be able to formulate structured and logical arguments
- Students will be able to communicate and represent quantitative information or results numerically, symbolically, aurally, visually, verbally, or in writing.

**Required Text:** Lewis Vaughn, *The Power of Critical Thinking: Effective Reasoning About Ordinary and Extraordinary Claims*

**Grading:** There will be two equally weighted tests, each worth 45% of your grade. The remaining 10% of your grade will be determined by class participation. There will be frequent short homework assignment, and you will be given a diagnostic quiz every other day. Neither the homework nor the quizzes will receive a letter or numerical grade, but they will be assessed in a manner that will affect your class participation grade.

## Course Outline:

**Part I. The Basics** — Chapters 1 – 3, with supplementary material on Canvas)

Day 1: Definitions of basic terms

The nature and importance of critical thinking  
Identifying arguments and distinguishing them from explanations  
Psychological and philosophical obstacles to critical thinking

Day 2: Clarity and meaning, problematic vocabulary

Ambiguity: semantic, syntactic, grouping  
Vagueness

Day 3: The structure of arguments: premises and conclusions, indicator words

Deductive arguments: valid, invalid, sound

Inductive arguments: strong, weak, cogent

**Part II. Deductive and Inductive Reasoning** — selections from Chapters 6, 7 & 8, with  
supplementary material on Canvas

Day 4: Propositional Logic

Propositional Forms and their Truth Conditions

Valid Deductive Patterns and Corresponding Fallacies

Day 5: **Test 1**

Categorical Logic

Basic statement forms and the Square of Opposition

Syllogisms

Day 6: Testing for validity with Venn Diagrams

Statistical reasoning

Enumerative induction

**Part III. Claims and Persuasion** — Chapters 4 & 5, with supplementary material on  
Blackboard

Day 7: Assessing the premises of arguments, stand-alone claims

The initial plausibility of claims, background knowledge

Observation and personal experience

Assessing the credibility of sources: knowledge, objectivity, bias, reliability

Day 8: Probability and evidence, innumeracy

How our inquiries go awry: confirmation bias, availability bias

Day 9: News and Advertising

Non-logical persuasion: slanters and other rhetorical devices

Day 10: Informal fallacies: errors in reasoning

Fallacies of irrelevance

Fallacies with bogus premises

Day 11: **Test 2**

**Attendance:** Due to the highly compressed nature of May Term courses, missing even one day of class is equivalent to missing more than a full week's worth of material in a normal semester. Consequently **strict attendance is mandatory**. For each *unexcused* absence, you will receive a

10-point deduction from your next test. If you have more than two absences, excused or not, you will be dropped from the course.

### **Miscellaneous Notes:**

- Keeping afloat in philosophy requires reading the assigned material several times. You will be expected to have read the relevant pages at least once *before* they are discussed in class, and you will need to read them at least once afterwards.
- Philosophy thrives on questions, so please bring some with you to class. If the readings do not bring up any questions, objections, or associations in your mind, you are reading too passively. Moreover, it is important to learn to question your own assumptions, to direct the same critical attention to the ideological stance from which you approach the readings as you would towards unfamiliar or disturbing views.
- In philosophy there is no such thing as a dumb question or inappropriate concern. Don't be shy about dropping in at office hours. Such meetings are very casual, and usually end up being helpful to both of us.
- No cell phone use is allowed in class. Please keep your phone in your pocket or purse at all times. Laptop use is permitted, but only for note taking or class-related searches. Violation of either of these rules will result in your class participation grade being capped at 50.

**Disability Accommodations:** Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first be registered with Disability Accommodations & Success Strategies (DASS) to verify the disability and to establish eligibility for accommodations. Students may call 214-768-1470 or visit <http://www.smu.edu/alec/dass.asp> <<http://www.smu.edu/alec/dass.asp>> to begin the process. Once registered, students should then schedule an appointment with the professor to make appropriate arrangements.

**Religious Observance:** Religiously observant students wishing to be absent on holidays that require missing class should notify their professors in writing at the beginning of the semester, and should discuss with them, in advance, acceptable ways of making up any work missed because of the absence.

**Excused Absences for University Extracurricular Activities:** Students participating in an officially sanctioned, scheduled University extracurricular activity will be given the opportunity

to make up class assignments or other graded assignments missed as a result of their participation. It is the responsibility of the student to make arrangements with the instructor prior to any missed scheduled examination or other missed assignment for making up the work.