

REASON AND ARGUMENT

FALL 2016

INSTRUCTOR: Alison Peterman
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OFFICE HOURS: Mondays 10:30 am - 12:30 pm
Lattimore 520

TA:
Tuesdays 11:30-1:30
Lattimore 534

CLASS TIME AND LOCATION: MW 9:00-10:15 am, Hutchison Hall 473

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this class, you will learn how to think critically to figure out what you should believe. You learn to do this in almost all academic fields, but this class is meant to help you hone this ability by focusing on it independently of the contents of any specific subject matter.

Careful thinking comes in handy in more situations than you might guess. If you have a falling out with a loved one, you can better try to figure out where the real disagreement lies. If you are faced with challenges to your beliefs, you can figure out how to defend them or adjust them, or when to give them up. If you don't know an answer on an exam, but you know some other things, you can think about how they might entail an answer. You can decide who to vote for or where to donate money. You can prevent getting swindled. It will make you better at any academic pursuit. You can win at Risk. Being carefully thoughtful can help you feel more engaged with the world around you and with other people. My goal is for you to be, by the end of the course, better at thinking about practical, ethical, political, social, scientific, theoretical, technical and professional issues.

TEXTS

There is no required text for this class. I will post readings on Blackboard and you should read them before the class on which they are indicated. In your assignments, you will be responsible for the material in those readings, in the slides, and discussed in class.

I have put several critical reasoning textbooks on reserve in the library, including our own Richard Feldman's *Reason and Argument*, to which the organization of this class is much indebted. You may consult them if you find them useful on any topic; however, you will not be responsible for material that is in them but is not in the course.

This syllabus may evolve during the course of the semester, and readings may be added or removed. Please check before each class whether there is reading assigned for that class.

POLICIES

Please let me know right away if you need special accommodations because of a documented condition that interferes with your learning.

Please review the class schedule sometime in the next week and let me know if there are any issues.

Please email me at the beginning of the course letting me know your preferred gender pronoun: <https://www.gsafewi.org/wp-content/uploads/What-the-heck-is-a-PGP1.pdf>.

Please turn off your cell phones when you arrive; if you are using it I will ask you to leave. No computer funny business. I reserve the right to ban laptops if it becomes a problem (except for students with a documented need for one).

There is no text for this class, but there will be readings posted on Blackboard. When a reading is indicated under a class date, you are expected to have read before class on that day.

Student success at the University of Rochester includes more than just academic performance. Please feel comfortable speaking with me about challenges you are experiencing within and outside of the classroom so that I may submit a CARE report on your behalf. A CARE report is submitted when the level of concern for a student necessitates inclusive, multi-layered support from the campus community. The CARE network administrator shares information only with staff who need to know it in order to help you.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

Students and faculty at the University must agree to adhere to high standards of academic honesty in all of the work that we do. As freshmen, students read and sign an academic honesty policy statement to indicate that they understand the general principles upon which our work is based. The College Board on Academic Honesty website gives further information on our policies and procedures: www.rochester.edu/college/honesty.

ASSESSMENT

TESTS (60%):

There will be a test at the end of each of three parts of the course, each worth 20%. You will be responsible for the material from class and any readings, and the skills practiced in the homework.

HOMEWORK (30%):

Three homeworks, graded for both effort and accuracy, worth 10% each. You may work together but you should try all of the exercises yourself first so that you get practice. Mere copying is not OK and counts as academic dishonesty.

CHECK-INS (10%):

There will be ten scheduled “check-ins”, which are very small homeworks graded for effort. They are assigned on certain Wednesdays designated in the syllabus and due on the following Monday morning. You must bring the check-in to class yourself; they are designed to practice key concepts but also to ensure attendance. I will automatically drop one of them in the course of the semester, so there will be no makeups except under EXTENUATING circumstances.

There will also be unscheduled work done in groups in class, and I will sometimes ask you to turn them in with your names. This may make a difference if your grade is on the edge.

EXTRA CREDIT: DEBATES

There are three presidential (Sept. 26, Oct. 9 and 19) and one vice-presidential (Oct. 4) debates during our semester. If you watch three of the four and complete a short assignment for each one within one week, you will receive one point on your final grade (NB: this may make a difference to your final grade and it may not).

The assignment is to identify an argument given by one of the candidates, write a short informal summary of it, reconstruct it and evaluate it. All this should take about 500 words.

COURSE SCHEDULE

PART 1: PROPOSITIONS AND ARGUMENTS

Week 1: Introduction

August 31: Introduction to arguments

Week 2: Arguments and their parts

September 5: LABOR DAY, NO CLASS

September 7: Arguments

* Blackboard reading

Week 3: The parts of arguments: Propositions

September 12: Propositions

* Check-in 1 due

September 14: Truth and belief

* Blackboard reading

* Homework 1 posted

Week 4: The form of arguments

September 19: Standard form and two kinds of arguments

* Check-in 2 due

September 21: Evaluating validity: Propositional logic

* Blackboard reading

Week 5: Evaluating the form of arguments

September 26: Evaluating validity: Propositional logic

* Check-in 3 due

September 28: Evaluating validity: Categorical logic

* Blackboard reading

Week 6: Evaluating the form of arguments

October 3: Evaluating validity: Categorical logic

* Check-in 4 due

* Blackboard reading

October 5: Evaluating cogency

Week 7: Soundness and strength

October 10: Soundness and strength

- * Check-in 5 due
- * Blackboard reading
- * Homework 1 due

October 12: Review/Catch Up

Week 8

October 17: FALL BREAK, NO CLASS

October 19: Test 1

PART 2: ARGUMENT ANALYSIS

Week 9: Argument reconstruction

October 24: Identifying premises and conclusions

October 26: Identifying premises and conclusions

Week 10: Argument reconstruction

October 31: Implicit premises

- * Check-in 6 due
- * Homework 2 posted

November 2: Implicit premises

Week 11: Evaluating arguments

November 7: Evaluating arguments

- * Check-in 7 due

November 9: Argument analysis

Week 12: Review

November 14: Argument analysis

- * Check-in 8 due
- * Homework 2 due

November 16: Review

PART 3: APPLICATIONS

Week 13: Applications

November 21: Test 2

- * Homework 3 posted

November 23: NO PHYSICAL CLASS but you *will* be responsible for the material in an online lecture.

- * Blackboard reading

Week 14: Applications

November 28: Testimony; Statistical and correlation arguments

- * Check-in 9 due
- * Blackboard reading

November 30: Statistical and correlation arguments

- * Blackboard reading

Week 15: Applications and Review

December 5: Causal arguments

- * Check-in 10 due
- * Blackboard reading

December 7: Impediments to good reasoning: fallacies, cognitive biases and illusions, propaganda

- * Blackboard reading
- * Homework 3 due

Week 16: Test

December 12: Test 3