REASON AND ARGUMENT
FALL 2012

INSTRUCTOR: Alison Peterman
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OFFICE HOURS: Friday 12:00-2:00 pm
Lattimore 521

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Thursday 1:00-3:00 pm
Lattimore 534

TIME AND LOCATION: MWF Hutchison Hall 140
TEXT: Reason and Argument by Richard Feldman

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 independent 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 dont 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.

ORGANIZATION

The class is organized into units based on Feldman’s chapters. But I will sometimes introduce material in a chapter in a different order than it appears in Feldman and will add and remove material as needed. There may be new material introduced in class. In particular, Chapter 3 of Feldman’s book will be significantly extended with a more detailed introduction to formal methods of evaluating validity than he provides. I will provide some reading material on Blackboard for this in addition to covering it in 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 turn off your cell phones when you arrive; if you are texting 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).

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 (30%)**:

There will be two tests, each worth 15%, during the course of the semester. Although the emphasis in Test 2 will be on material covered in Part 2, it may involve skills and concepts learned in Part 1 of the course.

**Final exam (20%)**:

There will be one final exam, which is worth 20% of your grade. It will cover everything that we learned in the semester.

**Homework (25%)**:

Your homework will be worth a total of 25% of your grade. 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. There will be 4 homeworks and their scores will be averaged.
Presidential debates (10%):
We are lucky to be in a presidential election year! 10% of your grade will revolve around assignments related to the three debates. You will be required to watch all three. I will give more details as the time approaches.

Homework 4 - Moral reasoning (10%):
After we learn about moral reasoning, you’ll be asked to read and analyze several moral arguments.

Argument alertness (5%):
While the main goal of this course is to give you the skills to analyze and build arguments, those skills aren’t of much use if you aren’t alert to situations in which you should be using them. I’d like you to leave the class more likely to engage with the arguments that you find every day. So once, at any point in the semester after Test 1 and before the last day of class, you should hand in a two-page, double-spaced paper discussing and analyzing an argument that you found persuasive (ideally one that changed your own mind) or one that you thought was bad, and explain why. The argument can be from anywhere: tell me about an argument that your friend made, or that you made to a friend; an editorial in the New York Times or the Washington Post or the school newspaper; a debate on television; an academic journal article or book, or almost anything else. If you choose to analyze a bad argument, it should be from a reputable source - it’s too easy to find bad arguments on the internet! I will discuss this more when we are done with Part 1. I would be really happy if you did not do this on the last day - the idea is to encourage you to be looking for arguments during the whole time that you are in taking this class, and beyond.

Course Schedule

Part 1: The basics
Week 1
August 31: Introduction

Week 2: Introduction
September 5: Basics of arguments and critical thinking
* Read 1.I-1.II

September 7: Impediments to good reasoning
* Read 1.III-1.V

Week 3: Propositions, truth and belief
September 10: Propositions
  * Read 2.I-2.II

September 12: Truth
  * Read 2.III-2.IV

September 14: Belief
  * Homework 1 posted

Week 4: Well-formed arguments and evaluating validity

  September 17: Standard form and two kinds of well-formed arguments
  * Read 3.I, 3.II.A1, 3.II.B1 (Not the rest of 3.II.A and B!)

  September 19: Propositional logic
  * Blackboard reading

  September 21: Propositional logic
  * Homework 1 due

Week 5: Evaluating validity, cont. and cogency

  September 24: Propositional logic

  September 26: Categorial logic
  * Blackboard reading

  September 28: Categorical logic; valid argument forms
  * Blackboard reading
  * Homework 2 posted

Week 6: Sound arguments and strong arguments

  October 1: Induction and cogency

  October 3: Induction and cogency
  * Watch Debate 1 tonight!

  October 5: Sound and strong arguments
  * Read all of Chapter 4

Week 7: Review and test

  October 10: Sound and strong arguments
  * Deadline for blog comments on Debate 1
  * Homework 2 due

  October 12: Review for Test 1
PART 2: ARGUMENT ANALYSIS

Week 8: Argument reconstruction

October 15: Identifying premises and conclusions
* Read 5.I-5.III
* Watch Debate 2 tomorrow night (October 16)!

October 17: Adding implicit premises
* Read 5.V-V.II

October 19: Fine-tuning a reconstruction
* Read 6.I-6.II

Week 9: Argument reconstruction

October 22: Test 1 (Covers everything through October 12)
* Watch Debate 3 tonight!

October 24: Fine-tuning
* Read 6.III-6.IV

October 26: Fine-tuning

Week 10: Evaluating arguments

October 29: Evaluating arguments
* Read 7.I-7.II

October 31: Evaluating arguments
* Read 7.III-7.IV

November 2: Testimony
* Read Chapter 8

Week 11: Evaluating arguments

November 5
* Don’t forget to vote tomorrow - you are qualified!!!!

November 7: Argument analysis

November 9: Argument analysis
* Homework 3 posted
Week 12: Argument analysis
   November 12: Argument analysis
   November 14: Argument analysis
   November 16: Argument analysis

PART 3: APPLICATIONS

Week 13: Applications
   November 19: Statistical arguments
      * Homework 3 due
      * Read 9.I-9.II
   November 21: Statistical arguments
      * Read 9.III-9.IV

Week 14: Applications
   November 26: Causal arguments
      * Read 10.I-10.III
   November 28: Causal arguments
      * Read Read 10.IV-10.VI
   November 30: Test 2

Week 15: Applications
   December 3: Moral arguments
      * Read 11.I-11.II
   December 5: Moral arguments
      * Read 11.III-11.IV
   December 7: Alison out of town - NO CLASS

Week 16: Review
   December 10: Review
   December 12: Review
      * Homework 4 due

Final exam (covers everything): Thursday, December 20, 7:15 pm