Reasoning Across Disciplines

IDST 3350

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Office: Stabler 405F

Office Hours: Wednesdays 12-2 via Zoom, or by appointment **Email:** mcabrera@ualr.edu

Course Description and Objectives

In this course we will examine established principles of logic, reasoning, and argumentation. Some of the particular topics that we will discuss include: i) how to identify, reconstruct, and evaluate arguments; ii) how to identify and avoid fallacies in reasoning; iii) how to apply formal methods to make more precise arguments expressed in ordinary language; iv) how to reason about cause and effect; and v) how to tell the difference between science and pseudoscience. In investigating these topics, we will often apply our general, theoretical knowledge to specific concrete cases. This course is primarily a skills-based course, with the main goal being to help you become a more precise, critical, and nuanced thinker. Students will study interdisciplinary processes and concerns that apply to the liberal arts, including reading and thinking critically, making effective arguments, exploring research techniques, and writing effectively.

Credit Hours Explanation

This is equivalent to three credit hours. For each academic credit hour, UALR expects that a typical undergraduate student will spend *two hours* outside of class preparing for and studying for the class.

Classroom Etiquette

In this course we may address some emotionally-charged issues about which you may already have strong convictions. Thus, it is asked that you be respectful when challenging the arguments of your peers or the instructor. Of course, reasoned disagreement is permitted and strongly encouraged. However, I request that you direct your criticism at the ideas and arguments at issue and not at particular people.

Academic Integrity

Students may not gain undue advantage over their classmates by deceptive or dishonest means. Throughout their education students should be impressed with the facts that cheating, duplicity, unauthorized reproduction of classroom materials, and plagiarism are morally degrading and that such practices seriously interfere with learning and intellectual development. It is a responsibility of instructors to make every effort to prevent dishonesty, protect honest students, and take appropriate action in instances of dishonesty. It is the responsibility of the student not only to abstain from cheating, but in addition, to avoid the appearance of cheating and to guard against making it possible for others to cheat. Courtesy and honesty require that any ideas or materials borrowed from another must be fully acknowledged. It is the obligation of each student to report all alleged violations of academic integrity to the instructor, as well as the responsibility of all instructors to report all alleged violations of academic integrity to the Office of the Dean of Students.

Students may not reproduce, in whole or in part, classroom lectures or study materials presented by a professor without specific approval in advance by the professor. Publication of any such material shall only be with the express consent of the professor.

The determination that a student's work was the result of dishonest action can be considered in the instructor's evaluation of that work and in the determination of the course grade. In addition, disciplinary action will be taken by the appropriate university official (representative from the Office of the Dean of Students) or by the Academic Integrity and Grievance Committee.

Students with Disabilities:

Your success in this class is important to me, and it is the policy and practice of the University of Arkansas at Little Rock to create inclusive learning environments consistent with federal and state law. If you have a documented disability (or need to have a disability documented), and need an accommodation, please contact me privately as soon as possible, so that we can discuss with the Disability Resource Center (DRC) how to meet your specific needs and the requirements of the course. The DRC offers resources and coordinates reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. Reasonable accommodations are established through an interactive process among you, your instructor(s), and the DRC. Thus, if you have a disability, please contact me and/or the DRC, at 501.569.3143 (V/TTY) or 501.683.7629 (VP). For more information, please visit the DRC website**.**

Inclement Weather Policy

1. During inclement weather, UA Little Rock will make a decision on whether or not to close based on all available information.
2. The chancellor will decide whether or not conditions warrant canceling classes and activities and closing the campus or whether classes and activities will be canceled but with specified campus offices open. Online or web-enhanced classes will continue as scheduled at the discretion of the faculty member.
3. The UA Little Rock website, UA Little Rock email, the university's main telephone number (501-916-3000), and the Rave campus alert notification system are the official means of communicating information concerning weather-related closings.
4. When necessary, the university will announce a separate decision about canceling night classes (those classes starting at 4:20 p.m. or later) by 2 p.m., if possible.
5. Ordinarily, sites remote from campus such as the Bowen Law School and the Arkansas Studies Institute will close or cancel classes and activities whenever the university does so. In some circumstances, however, a separate decision may be made whether or not a site remote from campus will be open or closed, and this decision will be announced through the university's official means of communicating weather-related closings.
6. Vice chancellors are responsible for seeing that necessary services are provided in their respective areas when the university is closed. Employees required to provide such services will be identified by their supervisors. Classified employees who must report to work when the university is closed due to inclement weather will be allowed compensation time of 1.5 hours for one hour worked. Persons who are not required to work when the university is closed will

be granted authorized absence. Employees who do not report to work when the campus is open will be charged annual/compensatory leave or leave without pay. The Payroll Department will prescribe payroll reporting and timekeeping.

7. The Policy Advisory Council of the University Assembly will recommend to the chancellor if and when missed undergraduate and graduate class days should be made up. In the event that the university is closed during a final examination day, the provost, in consultation with the Faculty Senate president, will reschedule any missed graduate or undergraduate final examinations with the exception of online exams which will continue as scheduled.
8. Weather and road conditions vary from place to place. Employees and students are expected to exercise good judgment regarding the safety of travel when road conditions are affected by the weather.

Texts

The primary text for the course is *Understanding Arguments: An Introduction to Informal Logic 9th Edition* by Walter Sinnott-Armstrong and Robert J. Fogelin. All other course readings will be posted on Blackboard.

Grading for the Course

Your grade for this course will be determined by 1) exams, 2) homework assignments, 3) participation, and 4) a term paper. Grades will be posted on Blackboard. The precise weighting for graded assignments is as follows:

Midterm Exam	30%
Blackboard Posts	30% (15x 2% each)
Argument Analysis and Response	30%
Participation	10%

Midterm Exam will be open-book and will consist of some variety of multiple choice, short answer, or true/false questions, as well as some problem-solving challenges and a short essay question.

Blackboard Posts will be responses you write to each week's prompt. I will post the initial prompt in Blackboard at the beginning of each week. You will have until Wednesday of that week to write a post responding to the prompt, and until Friday of that week to respond to a minimum of two (2) of your classmates' posts. Your post should be at least 300 words long, and should be a substantive engagement with the prompt. Your responses to your classmates' posts should be at least 100 words long, and should be a substantive engagement with what they wrote (e.g., no responses that are simply verbose expressions of agreement).

Argument Analysis and Response should be 3-4 full pages double-spaced (12 pt. Times New Roman font with 1-inch margins). For this paper, you will be asked to use the skills you have learned to write a substantive paper about one of the moral arguments we discuss in weeks 12 and 13. After analyzing the

argument itself, you should write a response to the argument that consider an objection to it. Your paper should end with a suggestion on how the argument could be amended to account for this objection. Late papers, homework assignments, and discussion board posts will be penalized 4% points for each day they are late.

Participation will be based on quantity as well as *quality* of contribution. One post on the discussion boards per week of content (for a total of 15 posts) and two responses to others' posts (for a total of 30 responses) in order to receive full credit for participation.

Late Work:
The instructor reserves the right to grade late work on a case by case basis. However, as a general rule, late work will be accepted with a 5-point (that is, half a letter-grade) reduction per day that it is late. After 5 days, barring special circumstances, the work will no longer be accepted.

Grading Scale:
90–100: A, "exemplary, far beyond requirements/expectations"
80–89: B, "exceeds requirements/expectations"
70–79: C, "meets requirements/expectations"
60–69: D, "below minimum requirements/expectations"
0–59: F, "failing"

Rounding up of in-between grades is not guaranteed and is always at the instructor's discretion. The only factors that determine whether a grade is rounded up are exceptional attendance or participation.

COURSE OUTLINE

If we depart from the reading schedule, an announcement will be sent out on Blackboard.

Week #1, January 17th: Formulating and Evaluating Arguments I
Sinnott-Armstrong and Fogelin, Ch. 3
Sinnott-Armstrong and Fogelin, Ch. 4
Read Smithsonian Article

Week #2, January 23rd: Formulating and Evaluating Arguments II
Sinnott-Armstrong and Fogelin, Ch. 5

Week #3, January 30th: Formulating and Evaluating Arguments III
Sinnott-Armstrong and Fogelin, Ch. 5
Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?"

Week#4, September 12th: Fallacies I
Sinnott-Armstrong and Fogelin, Ch. 13
Sinnott-Armstrong and Fogelin, Ch. 15

Week #5, February 6th: Fallacies II
Sinnott-Armstrong and Fogelin, Ch. 16
Boudry et al. – "The Fake, the Flimsy, and the Fallacious: Demarcating Arguments in Real Life"

Week #6, February 13th: Inductive Arguments
Sinnott-Armstrong and Fogelin, Ch. 8
Sinnott-Armstrong and Fogelin, Ch. 9

Week #7, February 20th: Causal Reasoning
Sinnott-Armstrong and Fogelin, Ch. 10
Smith and Cordes, *The Phantom Pattern Problem: The Mirage of Big Data* (selections)
Wykstra, "What Really Helps the Poor?"

Week #8, February 27th: TBD
Midterm Exam due by Friday

Week #9, March 6th: Testimony
Nagel, "Testimony"
Fricker, "Trusting others in the sciences: a priori or empirical warrant?

Week #10, March 13th: Science vs. Pseudoscience
Reading #1 - Ellis and Silk, "Scientific method: Defend the integrity of physics"
Reading #2 - Popper, "Science: Conjectures and Refutations"
Kuhn, "Logic of Discovery or Psychology of Research?"

Week #11: March 20th:
Laudan, "Commentary: Science at the Bar—Causes for Concern";
Ruse, "Response to the Commentary: Pro Judice"

Week #12: March 27th: Moral Reasoning

Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"
Narveson, "Feeding the Hungry"

Week #13: April 3rd: Moral Reasoning

TBD

Week #14: April 10th: Moral Reasoning

TBD

Week #15: April 17th : Public Reason

Rawls, "Public Reason"

Week #16: April 24th:

Pryor, "How to Write a Philosophy Paper"