

PHL 3000-03: CRITICAL THINKING
SYLLABUS

FALL 2017

Meeting Time: MWF 2:30-3:25
Meeting Place: 210 Fawcett
Instructor: Dr. Irvine
Office: 383 Millett (enter through 370 Millett, the Philosophy Department office)
Office Phone: 775-2610 (If there is no answer, you can leave a message by calling 775-2274.)
E-mail: william.irvine@wright.edu
Office Hours: Walk-in hours: MWF 12:30-1:15 and 3:30-4:00. If you can't make either of these times, contact me to make alternative arrangements!
Course Website: <http://www.wright.edu/~william.irvine/> (I do not use Pilot!)

Course Description: This is a course on critical thinking. Students will investigate the psychology that lies behind human thought processes. They will be taught techniques of reasoning, involving both deductive and inductive logic. They will also explore the mistakes people commonly make when reasoning and learn the basic principles of scientific reasoning. Students will then go on to practice thinking critically in a number of areas, including ethics, politics, and religion.

Course Work: Students will take three midterm exams. The first exam will be worth 20% of a student's course grade; the next two will each be worth 25%. The remaining 30% of a student's course grade will be determined by verbal quizzes, with 15% going for verbal quizzes in the first half of the course and another 15% going for verbal quizzes in the second half. I will convert the resulting percent score into a letter grade, using the "standard" scale, with 90% or above being an A, 80% or above being a B, and so on. (This formula applies only to students who take all tests at the official times. Anyone who takes one or more makeup exams will be graded by a formula that might significantly "underweight" the makeup exam(s) in question.)

Missed Exams/Missed Class: If you are going to miss an **EXAM**, let me know, by e-mail or in person, before the exam. If you miss an exam and wait more than 24 hours (from the start of the exam) to get in touch with me, you will receive a 0% on the exam, even if it turns out that you had a good reason for missing it. Makeup exams are given only if a student had a legitimate reason for missing the exam. Makeup exams will generally be given within 24 hours after the missed exam, and they will usually be essay-type exams. If you are going to miss a **VERBAL QUIZ**, send me an email before class begins to make arrangements to make it up. If you fail to contact me ahead of class, you will not be allowed to make the quiz up.

Verbal Quizzes: Students will be called on in class (1) to answer questions about assigned readings and videos, (2) to discuss issues raised in lecture, and (3) to solve problems in the outline. If a student is absent when called upon, is present but does not respond when called upon, or responds but is unable to answer the question asked, a grade of 0 will be recorded for that quiz. If a student responds when called upon and correctly answers the question asked, a grade of ✓ will be recorded for that quiz. To determine a student's verbal quiz grade, I will add up a student's quiz scores. A student who got, for example, 6 ✓s after being called upon 10 times would receive a verbal quiz grade of 60% (the lowest possible D). If you cannot participate in class discussions because of physical or psychological disabilities, let me know on the first day of class so I can come up with another way for you to get credit for verbal quizzes. If you are unable to download assigned Verbal Quiz material, be sure to contact me before class starts, so I can help you get the material. Realize that if you refuse to participate or are always absent from class, your class participation score will be 0%, meaning that the highest grade you can possibly get in this course will be a 70% (the lowest possible C), and this grade will be possible only if you do perfect work in all your exams!

Expectations for Class Attendance: I do not take attendance. Nevertheless, students who routinely miss class will end up with low verbal quiz scores and probably low exam scores as well. They are therefore likely to fail the course.

Course Text: There is no textbook for this course. There is instead a "course outline," which will be sent—one section at a time and for free!—to students who are enrolled in the course. (It will be sent to your official Wright State e-mail account.) You should **print out a hard copy** so you can more easily take notes and follow class discussions.

Trigger Warning!!! This is a class in which I will routinely challenge your beliefs in many different areas. As a result, we could conceivably have extended, very open-minded discussions about rape, incest, torture, race, crime, religion, gender, and other "touchy topics." Such challenges, after all, have long been one of the core activities of philosophy. If you do not want your beliefs challenged, you will be profoundly unhappy taking this course and would therefore be well advised to take another course instead, or maybe to take this course from a different instructor.

Dates to remember:

Midterm Exam Dates: Friday, September 22; Monday, October 30; and Friday, December 15, 2:45-4:45 (in the usual classroom)

No Class: Monday, Sept. 4 (Labor Day); Friday, November 10 (Veterans' Day); Wednesday & Friday, November 22&24 (Thanksgiving)

Last Lecture: Friday, December 8

Final Exam (= third midterm): Friday, December 15, 2:45-4:45 (in the usual classroom)

(turn over)

Instructor Policies

At the end of each quarter, there are students (e.g., graduating seniors, people on probation, people with scholarships, and people trying to get into certain programs) who come to me, tell me that they needed a certain grade in my course, and ask if there is anything they can do—now that the course has ended—to get it. Unfortunately, if the course has ended, I will not change a grade unless we can find evidence that your course work has been misgraded. It doesn't matter how badly you need the grade in question: I will invariably give you the grade you earned, not the grade you want or need.

This means that if you need a certain grade in my course, you must work for it. You will find that I am more than willing to help you learn course material: I would much rather spend time helping you than have to give you a bad grade. There is no such thing as coming in to office hours too often; you will tire of seeing me long before I tire of seeing you. But if you do poorly in this course and make no effort to seek help, you leave me with no choice but to give you a grade that neither of us will be pleased with. I don't give "pity grades" for the simple reason that I don't think you are pitiful.

Infrequently Asked Questions

- Q1.** I already took this course and failed it. Is it true that since I am retaking it, I am sure to pass?
A. Certainly not. In fact, I have had students do worse in the course the second time they took it than the first time. I had one student who failed one of my courses three times. (She refused to come in for help.)
- Q2.** I am a graduating senior (or a person on a scholarship or a student visa) and I need to pass your course so I can graduate (or keep my scholarship or my visa). Can I assume that you will understand my situation and therefore won't fail me?
A. I will give you the grade you earn, not the grade you need or want. And by the way, if you get an F in this course, it isn't me who has failed you, it is you who has failed you; I am just the one whose job it is to deliver the bad news. People who desperately need to pass this course should become regular visitors to office hours at the very first sign that they are doing poorly; if they don't do this, I can only conclude that despite what they say, it isn't particularly important to them to attain their goals.
- Q3.** I am taking your class but won't be able to attend very often because my life is very complicated. Will you overlook this and give me the grade I would have earned if my life hadn't been so complicated?
A. If your life is too complicated, it is unlikely that you will succeed in college. I will certainly be willing to help you outside of class, but having done that, I will give you whatever grade you earn, exactly like any other student.
- Q4.** If I am not doing well in your class, will you come up with extra-credit projects for me to do so I can get a passing grade?
A. No. Your grade will be determined by class exams and assignments, just like it is for everyone else. If you aren't doing well in class, you need to come in regularly for help. My view is that extra-credit projects are generally given so that students can pass a course without having mastered the course content. If you don't master the content of this course, you will not pass.
- Q5.** I won't get into Harvard Law School unless you give me an A. Will you raise my grade and thereby help me accomplish my goal?
A. Of course not. I will give you the grade you earned, not the grade you want.
- Q6.** I get As in all the other classes I take. Doesn't it follow that you should give me an A as well?
A. It doesn't follow. Maybe you are better in those classes than in this class.
- Q7.** Would you give a student a B even though doing so would ruin their perfect 4.0 GPA?
A. Yes, if they earned only a B, that is the grade I would give. My goal is to give you the grade you earned, not the grade that allows you to maintain or improve your GPA.
- Q8.** If I stop coming to class half-way through the quarter, will you give me an INC so I can finish the class (without signing up for it again) in the next quarter?
A. No. Some faculty members do this sort of thing, but I don't. I will only give an INC to a student who has finished everything but the final, and has been forced to miss the final by circumstances beyond his control. If it becomes clear to you that you can no longer come to class, you should drop the class.
- Q9.** If I attend every class, will it guarantee that I will pass your course?
A. It depends on what you do in class. If you take lots of notes and participate in class discussions and see me when there are things you don't understand, it is likely (but not guaranteed) that you will pass. If you don't take notes and don't participate, it is unlikely that you will pass even though you are "physically present" in the classroom.
- Q9.** If I come into office hours to get help, will it guarantee that I will pass your course?
A. It depends on what we do during office hours. If we talk about your pet cat, for example, it will probably have no effect at all on your course grade. If we discuss the course material, it will likely improve your chances of passing, but there are no guarantees.
- Q10.** If I failed your course in the past, will you sign me in for the next quarter so I can graduate on schedule?
A. It depends on what you did when you took my course in the past. If you, as a graduating senior who was doing poorly, didn't routinely come to office hours, I can only conclude that you are not a serious student. My classes are invariably filled to capacity. Therefore, to sign you in would be to deprive another, quite likely more serious student, of a seat in the class and thereby slow down his or her academic progress. It would be unfair for me to do this.
- Q11.** If I felt that I understood the material in your course, will you give me a passing grade?
A. No. You must demonstrate that you understood the material by passing exams.