

SYLLABUS

INSTRUCTOR: Dr. Mason Cash **E-MAIL:** Mason.Cash@ucf.edu
PHONE: 407-823-6857 **OFFICE:** PSY 246
OFFICE: By email, webcourses conference, or skype. I will hold on-line Confer-
HOURS: ences at a particular time (to be arranged) each week. Conferences will be recorded. Recordings will be available until 14 days afterwards.

Note: Dr. Cash will be travelling in New Zealand for the first few weeks of the course. The time difference and sporadic internet connection may delay responses.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This is a course in intellectual self-defense. Through active participation in this course, you will improve your understanding of how arguments and other persuasive techniques are used in our society in attempts to manipulate you into thinking or behaving in particular ways. You will gain a better understanding of how such techniques are employed, and be better able to identify them and defend against them.

The course looks at critical thinking for a diverse society. This means looking at arguments from many different perspectives. Your perspective is important. But you will also have the opportunity to examine and evaluate the frame of reference you bring to situations, and will have the opportunity to critically engage with other students, who have differing perspectives.

We begin by examining the structure of arguments and techniques for illuminating the relationships between the parts of an argument. We also closely examine different types of poor reasoning, learning how to identify it, and thus to “see through” attempts to use it.

We also examine the role of our worldviews and background beliefs in assessing and constructing arguments, and look at common human psychological factors that impede cogent reasoning.

In the latter part of the course, we apply what we have learned about critical thinking by studying the techniques that advertisers, political campaigns, and public relations campaigns employ to attempt to manipulate citizens’ attitudes and behavior towards products, brands, candidates for election, and issues. Having an understanding of these techniques you will be better able to think for yourselves rather than fall victim to such manipulation.

IMPORTANT CAUTION

This on-line course requires personal discipline and organization. The schedule of weeks and modules is designed to keep you on track. You will complete two modules each week on average (though some modules are longer and take a full week).

You **NEED** to use the textbook. The modules are designed to supplement the textbook. They direct you to read particular pages, and to complete practice exercises in the textbook. The textbook’s explanations and practice exercises will help you prepare for the graded quizzes, exercises and assignments.

There are many ungraded practice exercises to complete. You should complete them and compare your answers to the model answers to assess whether you have under-

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stood and mastered the relevant skill. While these are not graded, I assure you that your effort in practicing on them –actually doing the practice before looking at the answers—is very closely correlated with success on the graded assignments and the final examination, and so with success in the course.

The assignments are structured so that the due date is the last possible time you should complete them. I strongly urge you to complete the assignments well before the listed due date. If you leave them all until the due date they will be crowded together at the end of the course, and you will be very busy at that time.

REQUIRED TEXT

Wanda Teays, *Second Thoughts: Critical Thinking for a Diverse Society*, (McGraw Hill, 2009)
IMPORTANT : Make sure you get the Fourth Edition, 2009.

COURSE SCHEDULE

| Week | Text | Module | Topic | Assignments |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|--------|--|--|
| Week 1 June 26- July 2 | Ch 1 | 0 1 | Course Intro- duction. Out of the Fog: The Pathway to Critical Think- ing | Discussion 1 Journal 1 Quiz 1 |
| | Ch 2 | 2 | Nuts and Bolts: the Basics of Argument | Journal 2 Quiz 2 |
| Week 2 July 3-9 | Ch 5, Ch 10 | 3 | Deductive and Inductive Rea- soning | Journal 3 Quiz 3 Discussion 3 |
| Week 3 July 10- 16 | Ch 4 | 4 | Argument Structure | Discussion 4 Journal 4 Assignment 1 |
| | Ch 7 | 5 | Fallacies, Falla- cies | Journal 5 Quiz 5 Assignment 2 |
| Week 4 July 17- 23 | Ch 6 | 6 | The Persuasive Power of Analogies | Discussion 6 Quiz 6 |
| | Ch 3 | 7 | Analysis: The Heart of Criti- cal Thinking | Discussion 7 Journal 7 Assignment 3 |
| Week 5 July 24- 30 | Ch 11 | 8 | The Power of Language | Discussion 8 & 8b Quiz 8 Assignment 4 |
| | Ch 12 | 9 | Desire and Illu- sion: Analyzing Advertising | Quiz 9 Assignment 5 Final Exam |

COURSE EVALUATION:

| Course Components | Percentage of Final Grade |
|---|---------------------------|
| Assignment Exercises | 40% |
| Journal Exercises | 10% (best 5 of 6) |
| Group Discussion participation | 10% |
| Module On-line Quizzes | 20% (best 8 of 9) |
| Bonus points for passing (80% or better) 90% of the Module Quizzes. | 5% |
| Final Exam | 15% |

EXERCISES AND ASSIGNMENTS

This course aims to develop particular analytical and expressive skills. Just like martial arts skills, these skills require *practice* to develop. The textbook's practice exercises, on-line discussion exercises, journal entries, quizzes and course assignments are your chance to practice them in a context where you can get feedback on your skills.

Below is a tentative overview of the assignments I plan to have for this course. This may change as the course progresses and I evaluate the pace and workload of the course. More details will be available in the course modules.

1. Modules 2- 4: Argument Form (10 points)

Analyze and represent in standardized form a brief argumentative passage. Identify and clarify the premises, sub-conclusions and conclusions. Give interpretive reasons for any alterations and/or additions you make to the original text. Identify and explicitly state implied premises and conclusions. Diagram the structure of the argument . Important: **Defend your interpretation of the structure** . (2-3 pages; 10 points)

2. Module 8: Fallacious Arguments (2.5 points each; 5 points total)

Find two different fallacious arguments in a newspaper, book, blog post, forum post, or magazine. For each argument, explain the fallacy you think it commits, and **justify your charge of fallacy**. A standardization of the argument, and a diagram should be given. Include copies of (and links to) the original items, and give a citation to the original source.(1-2 pages each; 5 points each, 10 points total).

3. Module 4-7: Evaluating Arguments (15 points)

Evaluate one of two arguments supplied. Give the standardized version of the argument and a diagram of its structure. Briefly justify this as a good representation of the argument. (Note, this first part is a repeat of Assignment 2).

For *each inference* in the argument, give an assessment (involving the truth or falsity of premises, logical fallacies committed, use of language, etc.). Explain whether the argument as a whole is, or is not convincing. (2-3 pages.)

4. Module 8: Misleading Language (2.5 points each; 5 points total)

Collect and present two different examples of language used to mislead readers of books or magazines or TV viewers. In each case, explain the nature of the deception, and the way the language is employed to create the deception. Include the originals with the relevant passages highlighted. (1 page each --not including examples)

5 Module 9: Advertisement (5 points)

Analyze an advertisement. Identify the purpose of the advertisement (what is it trying to get the reader/viewer to do). Identify the following, and show how they contribute to this purpose:

1. the type of advertisement it is;
2. fallacies it commits;
3. rhetoric (uses of language) it employs;
4. the perceived needs, fears, desires, etc. it appeals to (whether they are reasonable fears, needs, desires);
5. the kind of audience it is aimed at and how this shaped (1) – (4).

It may be useful --especially for (4) and (5)-- to contrast this ad with a different ad for the same product in a different venue (e.g. ads for the same product in *Cosmopolitan* and *Maxim*). (2 pages not including the advertisement itself)

QUIZZES

To ensure you keep up with the readings, there will be small quizzes associated with each module (most are T/F and multiple choice questions related to the assigned readings). If you earn a passing score (better than 80%) in 8/9 of the quizzes, you qualify for a bonus 5%. These are designed to ensure that you have studied the assigned material and attempted the module's exercises.

Quizzes must be completed by the times specified. You can take them up to twice, but you must take all attempts before posted due date. No quizzes may be taken late.

JOURNAL ASSIGNMENTS

Short reflections on assigned questions. Two points each. Usually about 200 words or so. Your best 5 of 6 count towards the final grade. Graded for thoughtfully answering the question asked.

WEBCOURSES DISCUSSIONS

You have been randomly assigned to a discussion group, in which you will participate in discussions on WebCourses with other students. Only members of the group will have access to your postings.

These groups will discuss assigned questions for each module. The purpose of these discussions is to explore the questions in the context of assigned readings and lectures.

You will be expected to:

- post your own considered thoughts on the week's question (your position and your reasons for holding that position)
- respond to the posting of at least one other group members (add examples, ask questions, raise reasons for disagreement, etc).
- reply thoughtfully to any responses to your postings.

Your collaboration grade for these discussions will be based on your contributions to the group's process and products.

FOR EACH MODULE:

- Each Module will guide you through reading the relevant sections of the textbook, trying practice exercises (then checking your answers), and applying these skills in journal postings, discussion exercises, and quizzes.

- Read on-line Modules (these will summarize and highlight aspects of the textbook that you should study closely, and practice exercises I recommend you complete).
- Closely study (this means more than just glancing over) the indicated areas of the textbook. Make notes. complete the practice exercises from the textbook that the module recommends. (Answers to the textbook's practice quizzes will be posted in the module).
- Participate in group discussion exercise indicated in the relevant module.
Generally you will be expected to contribute to at least one discussion for each module. You also should make follow-up postings as required (e.g. if people reply to your posting, raise objections, ask questions etc.). A "contribution" may require several postings.
- Complete required journal exercises.
These are assessed for completion and for a reasonable thoughtful attempt to answer the question.
- Complete the module quizzes on the indicated areas of the text.
These quizzes will test for the kind of basic comprehension of the central concepts that you would get from carefully reading the text, and completing the practice exercises, and the discussion and journal exercises.

COURSE POLICIES:

COMMUNICATION

I will have office hours each week, when I will be available for answering questions about recent modules and their contents and exercises. These will be held via the CONFERENCES tab in webcourses. For an overview of this conferences tool (uses BigBlueButton) see this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oh0bEk3YSwI>

For very brief questions send me a message using WebCourses.

Email is best for longer form communication. Mason.Cash@ucf.edu. Make sure you put PHI2108: at the beginning of your subject line, to avoid inadvertently being sent to my spam folder.

Before you send me a message or email:

Read this syllabus. Many answers to common questions are contained here.

I will be creating and maintaining a Frequently Asked Questions page on the main course page. Please check there first, to see if your question has already been asked and answered.

If you ask me a question that others might want to know the answer to, I may make an FAQ entry based on your question and my answer. All such entries will be made anonymous, though.

LATE PENALTIES

Each assignment is listed as being due at midnight on a particular day. However, Assignments posted before dawn (6:00 am or so) that night will be counted as on time. A deduction of 1/10 of the possible worth per day late, counted at dawn the following day.

For example, an assignment that would have earned 7/10 if it were on time, but is two days late, will be deducted 2 points and so earn 5/10.

EXTENSIONS

I will automatically grant each person a once only, one day, extension, on one assignment only, with no explanation necessary or expected. It will become due one day following the due date. This does not apply to Discussion or Journal Exercises or to Quizzes. **It only applies to assignments.**

The extension must be requested *before the assignment is due*. Requesting extensions by email is the best method. I repeat: **this can only be granted once**. Save it until you need it (most students don't need it at all).

Any further or longer extensions can be granted only in cases of documented exceptional medical or family emergencies.

As with any course policy, however, if you feel that your case deserves special consideration, please feel free to discuss it with me as early as possible.

GRADING & EVALUATION

Each assignment and participation assessment will earn a numerical score. These will total 100 points. This score is used to determine your letter grade.

I do not use a rigid set of cutoff points for grades, because these are rather arbitrary, and do not reflect the relative performances of people in the class. This would mean that people with very similar points get different grades. I do not think this is fair and so do not assign grades this way.

Instead, I try to make principled distinctions between groups of students. I make divisions between grades at places where there are natural divisions between groups of students, maximizing the difference in percentage between people at the cutoff points. My judgments are based on the natural clustering of grades, and the class mean and standard deviation.

If your grade is right at the borderline, I look for reasons to draw the line below you and include you in the group getting the higher grade. I do this by looking for higher scores than those below you in Final Exam scores (assuming that you finally began to grasp the course material by the end of the course), Participation on Web Discussions Journal Exercises and other indicators of effort.

Very roughly, the following are the approximate bounds of the ranges at which I often award grades. Variations in the difficulty and number of assignments entail that final grades will not necessarily follow this precisely, but will be approximately in these ranges.

| | | | | |
|------|---------|---------|---------|------|
| F | D- D D+ | C- C C+ | B- B B+ | A- A |
| 0-59 | 60-69 | 70-79 | 80-89 | 90+ |

PLAGIARISM, AND HOW TO AVOID IT

Integrity — practicing and defending academic and personal honesty— is the first tenet of the UCF Creed. This is in part a reflection of the second tenet, *Scholarship*: "I will cherish and honor learning as a fundamental purpose of membership in the UCF community". Course assignments and tests are designed to have educational value; the process of preparing for and completing these exercises will help improve the skills and knowledge this course aims at developing.

Whenever you submit work for academic credit, therefore, we should be able to trust that it is the result of your own scholarly and creative efforts. In most cases it is appropriate to use others' work to support your academic work. In fact, the ability to use others' ideas, expressions, arguments, images, or data to support your work is an important aspect of academic research.

However, whenever you use another's work to support your own, you must give a full citation that credits the original source. Not giving credit to the original author creates the false impression that work you present for academic credit represents the results of your efforts to master the skills and knowledge that is the purpose of the academic exercise.

UCF's Golden rule defines plagiarism as the following: "whereby another's work is used or appropriated without any indication of the source, thereby attempting to convey the impression that such work is the student's own."

Thus you commit plagiarism whenever you use in your academic work any argument, image, expression or other element of another's work that is not common knowledge and is not clearly credited to its original author.

Common knowledge is difficult to define precisely. Consider as a rough guideline that you do not necessarily need citations for facts that anyone could reasonably be expected to know.

To cite a source, use parenthetical citations (Smith 2006, p. 7) or footnotes, and give full references at the end of your paper.

When citing web-based sources, *do not just give the URL*. Give the author's name, title of page, URL, date produced and the date you accessed it.

If in doubt about whether to provide a citation, err on the side of being helpful to your reader. If it is possible that a classmate who reads your paper finds a statement of yours to be interesting, surprising or otherwise useful, and the reader is interested in investigating further, give them a citation that directs them to your sources.

Assignment reuse also undermines the academic purpose of the exercise of working on course assignments. You plagiarize yourself if you submit for university credit a piece of work that is the same or substantially similar to work for which you have already gained or intend to gain university credit, at this or any other university. To avoid self plagiarism, you must have prior permission from the relevant instructor(s), and give full attribution to the source (i.e yourself).

One of the best ways to avoid suspicion of plagiarism is to **keep detailed records of the sources of your information as you collect them**.

You must clearly identify which parts of your work are derived from each source, using in-text citations, footnotes or endnotes. Ending with a list of "works consulted" is not sufficient. Ask your instructor about appropriate citation style. See UCF library's guides to citing sources: <http://library.ucf.edu/Reference/Guides/Citation.asp>.

Any expression you use that is identical to one in the original source must be presented using "quotation points," and the source should be clearly identified.

Any other aspect of another's work you use that is not a direct quotation should be a paraphrase or summary in your own words. Simply rearranging the wording of sentences or replacing words with synonyms (changing "occasionally" to "sometimes") does not qualify as an adequate paraphrase in your own words. See the following for

advice about acceptable paraphrasing

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_paraphr.html.

Furthermore, a significant portion of your work must be the result of your own scholarly efforts. A succession of quotations with a few of your own comments to string them together is unlikely to be considered acceptable scholarship.

Plagiarism is a serious academic offense. Typical penalties may be either loss of credit for the assignment or a failing grade in the course. Perpetrators may also be required to take an academic integrity seminar. Serious cases can lead to academic probation, suspension, expulsion from the University, or the revocation of a degree.

TURNITIN.COM

In addition to the many resources I use to detect plagiarism, I may also use Turnitin.com, a computer based service that checks for originality in submitted papers. Any assignment submitted by a student at UCF may be checked for originality to confirm that the student has not plagiarized from other sources (including other students in this course). Copies of student assignments checked by this process will be retained by Turnitin.com.

ACCESSIBILITY

Students with permanent or temporary disabilities who would like to discuss the possibility of accommodations are invited to register with Student Disability Services (407-823-2371).