PHIL 11009-002: Critical Thinking
Fall 2016, TH 3:45-5:00

Instructor: Matthew Veneklase
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Office hours: TH 12:00-2:00, 6:45-7:15pm

Generic, catalogue description: The place of argument in reasoning and the place of reasoning in thinking are explored through a concentration on argument – its structure, expression, function, and limits. Prerequisite: None. This course may be used to satisfy the Kent Core.

Description specific to this section: Throughout life we are presented with what theorists refer to as “arguments.” An argument, in this sense, is not a dispute, but a claim accompanied by reasons. In other words, whenever you are presented with both a claim and reasons why you should believe that claim, then you have been presented with an argument. Although we frequently encounter such arguments, it can be difficult to assess them correctly, or even to know where to begin. This course, by introducing methods for recognizing, analyzing, and evaluating arguments, aims to show you how to begin and where to go from there.

Statement of course learning outcomes and expectations: Abilities which should be gained from this course include: ability to distinguish arguments from non-arguments; to identify different types of arguments; to understand, recognize, and indentify common logical fallacies; to analyze and diagram arguments; to evaluate arguments for correctly determining how much credence each deserves. Improvements in related abilities, such as reading comprehension and writing composition, may be expected as well.

This course may be used to satisfy a Kent Core requirement. The Kent Core as a whole is intended to broaden intellectual perspectives, foster ethical and humanitarian values, and prepare students for responsible citizenship and productive careers.

Required books.

Statement on enrollment/official registration. The official registration deadlines for this course can be found by doing a Detailed Class Search from the Schedule of Classes found at: https://keys.kent.edu:44220/ePROD/bwlkfcs.P_AdvUnsecureCrseSearch?term_in=201680. (You should also be able to do this through Flashline.) University policy requires all students to be officially registered in each class they are attending. Students who are not officially registered for a course by published deadlines should not be attending classes and will not receive credit or a grade for the course. Each student must confirm enrollment by checking his/her class schedule (using Student Tools in FlashLine) prior to the deadline indicated. Registration errors must be corrected prior to the deadline.

For additional information about this course, including a provisional schedule of readings, assignments, et cetera, see the “Provisional Schedule” (this is a separate document).

The final exam for this course is scheduled for Tuesday, December 13, from 7:45-10:00am.

The course withdrawal deadline can be found in the same way that the official registration deadlines can be found (see the above “statement on enrollment/official registration).

Please note that this syllabus is subject to revision at the instructor’s discretion.
Your grade for this course will be determined according to the following percentages.

- Syllabus Quiz 05%
- Chapter Quizzes 60%
- Participation 10%
- Final exam 25%

No computers etc. in the classroom: Computers and computer-like devices, including tablets, readers, and smartphones, should not be in use or appear to be in use during classes. This means you’ll want to plan to use paper notebooks or looseleaf paper for notes, and you’ll want to acquire the paper version of the textbook (don’t get an ebook version). I’m sorry if this creates an inconvenience for anyone, but permitting computers, ebooks, phones etc. always seem to cause problems (mainly disruptions, distractions, and sometimes page numbers that don’t match).

Attendance Policy: Unless there is some appropriately serious and unavoidable circumstance, e.g. a medical emergency, students are expected to attend every class period. You are responsible for all material covered in the lecture, or covered in any assigned or distributed handouts or readings, regardless of whether or not you attended the class period in question. (This means that if you miss a class, you should attempt to get the notes, assignments, explanations, etc., from another student, and you might also want to visit me during my next office hours.)

If you miss an in-class or Blackboard chapter quiz:\(^2\) the first time, the quiz will be “dropped” from your final grade. The second time, you may take a make-up quiz, provided that your absence is a documented, excused absence, and that you notify me promptly. The make-up quiz may be different and/or more difficult than the “normal” quiz. If you miss a quiz due to an unexcused absence, notify me promptly and you might still be able to take a make-up quiz, although some points (perhaps, for example, a full letter grade) will need to be deducted. At the end of the semester, I will increase the quiz-average score for everyone who has not missed any quizzes, by introducing a small, progressive “curve.” For take-home quizzes, the following policy regarding “assignments” applies.

If you are absent on the day an assignment is due: If the absence is a documented, excused absence, you may turn in the assignment the following day of class without penalty. If the absence is not a documented excused absence, then if you email me a completed version of the assignment, and if I receive it (i.e. if it makes it to my email “inbox”) before the time when our class begins that day, then you may also turn in the assignment the following day of class with no penalty. Otherwise, I will accept late assignments if they are turned in within a week of when they were due, and some amount of points will be deducted as a “penalty.” For example, the grade might be reduced by a full letter grade for each day (of class) that it is late.

Statement concerning cheating and plagiarism: University policy 3-01.8 deals with the problem of academic dishonesty, cheating, and plagiarism. None of these will be tolerated in this class. The sanctions provided in this policy will be used to deal with any violations. If you have any questions, please read the policy at http://www.kent.edu/policyreg/administrative-policy-regarding-student-cheating-and-plagiarism and/or ask.

Statement regarding students with disabilities: University policy 3-01.3 requires that students with disabilities be provided reasonable accommodations to ensure their equal access to course content. If you have a documented disability and require accommodations, please contact the instructor at the beginning of the semester to make arrangements for necessary classroom adjustments. Please note, you must first verify your eligibility for these through Student Accessibility Services (contact 330-672-3391 or visit www.kent.edu/sasfor more information on registration procedures).

Respect and courtesy are expected of everyone, in relation to everyone. This includes, by the way, keeping cell phones and other devices silent and put away during classes. Failure to conduct oneself respectfully may result in points being deducted from a student’s grade, and in severe or repeated cases may result in other consequences.

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\(^2\) Note that this applies only to the chapter quizzes. It does not apply to the “Syllabus Quiz.”