

Introduction to Philosophical Problems

Philosophy 156.501, CRN 44051

Spring 2016

Information

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| Instructor: | Zachary T. Shank | Office hours: | T 8-9 p.m. and by appointment |
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| Daytime Phone: | 224-3603 | Course access: | http://learn.unm.edu |

Course Description

Good citizenship requires the tools of reasoning necessary for everyday decision making and problem solving, and this course will provide such skills. We will learn to recognize, analyze, and construct arguments, the fundamental units of reasoning. We also will learn to recognize informal fallacies and use a variety of argumentative structures. Most important, we will learn to think better than we do now, which is its own reward.

Textbook

Weston, Anthony. *A Rulebook for Arguments*, 4rd ed. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc, 2009.

Supplemental essays and handouts will be available in the course shell. Students are responsible for all content made available in the course.

Finally, as one of the values of the liberal arts is to teach us how to learn, students should feel at liberty to research logical concepts from the modules on their own and to find additional useful resources. If ever in doubt about the credibility of a source, please ask the instructor.

Learning outcomes

At the end of the course, students will be able to do the following:

1. Identify and describe the basic features of arguments, distinguishing arguments from nonarguments, and premises from conclusions.
2. Identify basic argument structures and types.
3. Contrast the two primary means of support: Deductive and inductive reasoning.
4. Describe and explain common errors in reasoning, known as fallacies or biases.
5. Identify arguments in context, including distinguishing premises from conclusions and identifying secondary support structures.
6. Apply critical vocabulary and concepts to an argument in context to determine whether it is plausible.
7. Construct a properly formed argument or series of arguments to support their own belief.

Policies

Regular participation is expected; students should plan to access the course at least three times per week and complete various activities to maintain attendance. Mere logging is insufficient to count as attendance in the course.

Grading Policies

- ◆ Letter grades are assigned according to the following scale:

| | | | | |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|
| 100-98= A+ | 89.99-88= B+ | 79.99-78= C+ | 69.99-68= D+ | Below 60= F |
| 97.99-93= A | 87.99-83= B | 77.99-73= C | 67.99-63= D | |
| 92.99-90= A- | 82.99-80= B- | 72.99-70= C- | 62.99-60= D- | |

- ◆ Your grade is based on your performance on a variety of assignments and course tasks:

| | Allotted | My points |
|---------------------------|----------|-----------|
| Success portrait: | 10 | _____ |
| Quizzes (10 x10): | 100 | _____ |
| Discussion (14 x 10) | 140 | _____ |
| Weekly questions (10x10): | 100 | _____ |
| Exam 1 | 20 | _____ |
| Exam 2 | 20 | _____ |
| Exam 3 | 10 | _____ |
| Exam 4 | 20 | _____ |
| Paper 1 | 10 | _____ |
| Paper 2 | 10 | _____ |
| Paper 3 | 10 | _____ |
| Total: | 450 | _____ |

Students will have the opportunity to earn additional points for discussion and the weekly question categories. See the course FAQ for more on this.

Students who earn passing scores on exams 1,2, and 4, as well as the three papers will pass the class, regardless of their total number of points earned. If life happens to you or you have to make a choice between regular work and major assignments, complete the major assignments.

- ◆ The major assignments may be submitted late with varying penalties; see course FAQ for more information.
- ◆ **See the academic calendar for dates regarding enrollment policies, grading options, and drop options, particularly dates and information concerning refunds and dropping courses.**

<https://registrar.unm.edu/Deadline%20Dates/spring-2016.html>

- Last day to change grade mode on LoboWeb: Jan. 29
- Last day to withdraw without a “W” and with 100 percent refund: Feb. 5
- Last day to drop without the dean’s permission on LoboWeb: April 15
- ◆ **Online course:** Please review the following information very carefully – your grade could depend on it.
 1. As noted above, students are expected to log on frequently and complete a variety of tasks each week on multiple deadlines. *You will not be successful in this course if you log in only once per week or put off all work until the weekend.* Do not wait until the last minute. It’s best to budget the same amount of time as spent in class to perform the online activities and to plan on additional time for reading the textbook and other assigned materials. For this class, that would mean 1.5 hours twice per week for the time we’d be in class, plus up to 4-6 hours for reading and note-taking etc. Students who want to earn a high score in this class should plan to find up to 7-9 hours per week, ***scattered throughout the week***, to complete course tasks. Students who plan to complete all work for this course on the weekends likely will not do as well as they would otherwise.
 2. This course requires basic computer applications that will support audio files, streamed video clips, PowerPoint slides, PDF files, and low- to medium-intensity Web pages. Some of this material will be covered on quizzes or other assignments, so students are responsible for accessing all course content provided by the instructor.
 3. I will provide most assignments and course files for printing as PDF documents to work across all platforms and devices. Some assignments may be in Word doc format so that students can complete them on the instruction sheet. *If you ever have trouble viewing an assignment, contact me immediately.*
 4. All assignments are to be submitted by the deadline according to the Blackboard clock. See course FAQ for more information. That’s the official clock of the course and the determinant of whether a

- given assignment is late. If you are participating in the course from another time zone whether because of travel or you live somewhere other than New Mexico, the governing Mountain time zone (we'll start in standard time and end in daylight time) is the appropriate clock to watch.
5. I can open almost any electronic file format. The safest, however, are Microsoft Word documents (extension .doc or .docx); Mac Pages document (.pages); or rich-text format (extension .rtf). Do not submit work in WordPerfect (.wpd) or Microsoft Works (.wps) formats. If I cannot open your document because of an inappropriate format, I will contact you to send it to me in an appropriate format via e-mail, and you will lose half a letter grade from your score (usually about 5 points). If you are unsure how to change formats or your default format, stop by a campus computer lab for assistance.
 6. *Plan carefully.* **This course requires significant participation.** If you are involved in the discussions and thinking about these issues, this should be a breeze. If you're putting off reading until the last minute, you will find it difficult to stay engaged with the material and therefore earn all of the points each week.

Classroom policies

- ◆ **Attendance:** Students enrolled for credit or audit are expected to attend this course, by which I mean complete at least some weekly course tasks. As noted above, mere logging in is not sufficient to establish attendance. If I need to report your attendance at any point of the term, I will use completed work as my guide, per federal guidelines and practice.
- ◆ **Dropping:** I try to reach out to students who are falling off the radar, and prefer we work out a strategy for you to be successful rather than dropping you for nonattendance. Any student who has not completed at least one course task over a period of two weeks may be dropped for nonattendance. Note that if you get behind, you can still pass the class by doing well on the major assignments. That may be better than dropping the course.
- ◆ **Weekly tasks:** Completing these tasks by stated deadlines is analogous to attending class. You either did it or you didn't. Most tasks cannot be submitted late or made up, just like activities that happen in a class you miss cannot be made up. In general, your grade can withstand missing some of these, but don't make it a habit.
- ◆ **Students who have not completed at least two course tasks or assignments by Friday evening, Jan. 29, will be dropped Saturday, Jan. 30, or before the deadline to drop without a "W" on Feb. 5. This decision shall be final.**

Student/Instructor Expectations

You may reasonably expect me to:

- be available, except in the case of an emergency, during my scheduled office hours online. We can make appointments to communicate synchronously either in person, the telephone, or via some kind of video chat tool if necessary, though face-to-face appointments will likely be rare unless you live in Albuquerque.
- return phone calls and e-mails that need response within 48 hours during the school week; it's unlikely that I will check e-mail or be online most Saturdays, so do not expect correspondence on that day. Also, while I do some grading and class prep on Sundays, I may not always return emails that day.
- return graded exams and papers within a week to 10 days after you have submitted an assignment.
- provide reasonable, thoughtful, and at times provocative feedback; criticism will be constructive for the purposes of improvement and shouldn't be interpreted as mean-spirited.
- ask you "why" or other questions for the purpose of digging deeper; again, this shouldn't be interpreted as mean-spirited.
- create meaningful, challenging, and positive learning activities and experiences to deepen your understanding of the material.
- treat you with the same respect and consideration that I would want to receive from you.

In turn, I expect you to:

- ask questions when you have them. These can be about concepts in the text, the week's topic, or philosophy in general. Many students find something that is confusing and think that re-reading the same material will make it clearer, but that rarely happens. I'm here to help (as are your peers), but you'll need to let us know when it's needed.
- log on frequently and regularly to discuss these topics, having thoughtfully considered the assigned material.
- treat this class with the same level of importance as any other course.

- treat your classmates and instructor with the respect and consideration that you would want to receive from them.
- submit assignments on time and having followed directions.

E-mail: Most messages to students come in the form of broadcast announcements that appear in Learn and your UNM email. Other private correspondence can take place either in Learn or via the UNM email. I will not conduct correspondence about your performance in the course unless it is initiated from a UNM e-mail account or within the course shell.

Learning statement: I seek excellence from my students and have high standards for their performance. I will provide various forms of support during the term (lecture notes, audio or video files related to course content, office hours, etc.) that engage different kinds of student learning and empower students to construct their knowledge and to demonstrate their mastery of the material. I encourage my students to think of me as an aide rather than as an obstacle to be overcome. Prior to a student earning an A in this or any other class, there is no such thing as an A student. If a high grade is part of your goal for this course, I expect that it will be foremost in your mind and that you will take the kind of time and care needed to accomplish this goal. The earlier we correspond if things aren't going well for you, the more time we have to help you earn a grade you find desirable.

This course requires regular reading and some practice. If you just do the reading, you won't do well. Also, while course activities should help illuminate the text, these cannot substitute for sitting in a quiet place and wrestling with the material on your own. **This is not an easy course and every point counts.** Students who wish to earn an A should consider the material carefully, take notes about the text and online activities, ask questions either via the discussion board, the chat room, the course e-mail tool, or during office hours, and take their time with assignments. Informal study or discussion groups also could be valuable. If this class met face-to-face, we would spend 3 hours in class together, and you would need to spend an additional 4-6 hours per week (depending on your reading speed) reading the textbook and doing practice. Students should plan at least that amount of time each week, although those hours can be spread across that week in the way most convenient to you and consistent with meeting weekly deadlines.

Warning: I am not a certified member of any tech support team, so if you are having trouble with your computer or Internet connection, you should have a backup plan in place in order to ensure I receive your assignments on time. Faulty connections, computer crashes and disk errors are not acceptable excuses for late work – unless the problem is with the university's Blackboard server.

Academic honesty: I expect that all work you submit for a grade in this class is your own and that any outside sources you might use will be cited appropriately. Collaboration is useful for getting started and finding the path, but letting someone else do your thinking goes beyond that. Assignments and exams, unless otherwise specified, are to be the work of the individual student.

Plagiarism is not only illegal but also morally wrong. From the legal perspective, it is the theft of intellectual property of another individual and often a violation of copyright laws. Morally, it is a lie both to yourself and to the instructor. Further, using the work of another and pretending it is your own robs you of the very opportunity you are here to pursue: your education. Finally, philosophy's task is to force us to wrestle with our own ideas, so any attempt to short-circuit this process is a gross disregard for the foundation of this discipline. Any student caught plagiarizing or other form of cheating in this course faces an immediate penalty of a zero for the assignment and is subject to further sanctions per relevant university policies.

In short, submit your own work. If you need help citing a source or any other aspect of an assignment, please discuss it with me. If you are tempted to cheat, please make an appointment with me instead. It's just not necessary.

Americans with Disabilities Act: Participants desiring a reasonable accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act must contact the Equal Access Services office immediately to discuss their needs. Failure to notify that office in a timely manner may hinder the college's ability to assist participants successfully complete the course.

Title IX: In an effort to meet obligations under Title IX, UNM faculty, Teaching Assistants, and Graduate Assistants are considered responsible employees. This designation requires that any report made to a faculty

member, TA, or GA regarding sexual misconduct or gender discrimination must be reported to the Office of Equal Opportunity and the Title IX Coordinator. For more information on the campus policy regarding sexual misconduct, see: <https://policy.unm.edu/university-policies/2000/2740.html>

Further, as a Safe Zone-certified faculty member, I take issues of equality seriously, and I expect that students will treat one another respectfully and as equals. If I see language that is derogatory in nature against another person or group, I'll have a conversation about it with the author. I may ask students to revise their language to be more neutral and consistent with constructive academic discourse.

Critical thinking and challenging ideas: I generally try to find examples of work for us to consider that are relatively benign, but many of the most important issues in the world that require our closest attention and deepest consideration are controversial in nature. Some topics will push buttons, and that's OK and to be expected. When working with these topics, however, keep in mind norms of constructive academic discourse: challenge ideas, not people; avoid character attacks (ad hominem fallacy); be open to learning more about new topics or positions; give people the benefit of the doubt and ask for clarification. For more on this, see Weston, chapter 1, rule 5.

Catastrophic circumstance: In the event that systemwide outages occur that prevent the timely submission of the final paper, students will be awarded grades based on points earned to date, scaled to the available points possible.

Assignments/Readings for Phil 156, SHANK

Below is a general calendar for the course (subject to revision); detailed weekly calendars will be available online in the unit modules.

Each week of new material begins Monday. Weekly work (quizzes and discussion) is due on Sundays, although discussion may bridge into the week following a given topic. Major assignments are due on the Wednesday after the topic that was covered. More information about assignments and due dates will appear in the weekly learning modules and as announcements from time to time.

I reserve the right to make changes to the calendar if necessary. Such changes will be sent as announcements, and a revised syllabus will be posted in the course shell.

| Week / Date | Topic | Primary Reading | Major Assignments |
|--------------|---|---------------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Jan. 19 | Course overview What is logic or critical thinking? | Course documents | Success portrait |
| 2. Jan. 25 | What is an argument? What are the two main kinds of arguments? | Weston: Ch. 1 Course notes | |
| 3. Feb. 1 | Arguments by example / Generalizations | Weston: Ch. 2 | 2/3: Exam 1 |
| 4. Feb. 8 | Arguments by analogy Arguments from authority / Sources | Weston: Ch. 3 Weston: Ch. 4 | |
| 5. Feb. 15 | Arguments about causes | Weston: Ch. 5 | |
| 6. Feb. 22 | Deductive arguments | Weston: Ch. 6 | 2/24: Exam 2 |
| 7. Feb. 29 | Deductive arguments | Course notes | |
| 8. Mar. 7 | Normative arguments | Course notes | 3/9: Exam 3 |
| 9. Mar. 14 | --- Spring break --- | | |
| 10. Mar. 21 | Fallacies | Weston: Appendix I | |
| 11. Mar. 28 | Schematization Essay 1: The Wrongfulness of Euthanasia | Course notes Williams essay | 3/30: Exam 4 |
| 12. April 4 | Essay 1: The Wrongfulness of Euthanasia | Williams essay | |
| 13. April 11 | Plausibility analysis Essay 2: Climate change dialogue | Course notes Climate change essays | 4/13: Paper 1 |
| 14. April 18 | Essay 2: Climate change dialogue | Climate change essays | |
| 15. April 25 | Argument construction | Weston: Ch. 7 and 8 | 4/27: Paper 2 |
| 16. May 2 | Argument construction | | |
| Finals week | Final assignment | | 5/11: Paper 3 |