

Critical Thinking, Communication, and Public Policy

PPL 212, Section 2

Fall 2021

T/R 8:00–9:15 am

Lott 113

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Office Hours: T/TH 9:30–10:30 & 2:30–3:30
or by appt. (Zoom optional)

1. COURSE OVERVIEW*

1.1 Description:

We all spend a significant amount of time thinking about issues and policies that are important to us. Few of us, however, spend time thinking about *how to think* about those things. If we do not think critically and rationally about policy issues, we may not be creating or supporting the best policies for ourselves or for society, nor can we effectively argue for those policies. Yet the best arguments will fail if they are not communicated well. And in a society that seems increasingly polarized and uncivil, even the best arguments can go unappreciated. So, in addition to helping students improve their skills in thinking critically, this course is designed to help students improve their skills in reading, writing, and communicating civilly through written work, individual presentations, and debates.

Students will learn the nature of arguments, the nature of deductive and inductive reasoning, common reasoning errors and how to avoid them, and some keys of good communication and public speaking. Students will also learn to apply their critical thinking skills in analyzing, criticizing, and strengthening arguments pertaining to contemporary issues in public policy.

1.2 Course Objectives and Student Learning Outcomes:

This course is designed to:

- Improve students' abilities in reading, identifying, and evaluating public policy issues and the arguments on which they rely
- Introduce students to various kinds of evidence for claims and improve students' abilities to assess and employ evidence well to establish their conclusions
- Improve students' abilities to assess media messages, especially as they pertain to politics and public policy
- Develop or improve students' skills in effective communication, including expository and persuasive writing skills and giving persuasive oral presentations for multiple purposes
- Help students understand how to civilly provide constructive criticism

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Identify arguments and classify argument types
- Evaluate claims and support their evaluation with evidence or a counterexample
- Analyze and evaluate arguments to determine whether they are strong, valid, sound, or cogent
- Infer and critique implicit premises and assumptions in arguments
- Create, develop, and defend their own arguments for novel claims regarding public policy
- Charitably interpret and critique the claims and arguments of others
- Identify heuristics and reasoning errors and explain when and why they are problematic
- Communicate more effectively and confidently
- Synthesize the skills above to create persuasive presentations and engage in civil debates

*Except for changes that substantially affect implementation of grading, this syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advanced notice. Students should read the entire syllabus carefully. It aims to cover every question students might have about course policies, procedures, and requirements.

2. REQUIRED TEXTS

- Walter Sinnott-Armstrong. 2018. *Think Again: How to Reason and Argue*. New York: Oxford UP. (ISBN: 978-0190627126). [\$12.95 new on Amazon]
- Daniel Kahneman. 2011. *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. (ISBN: 978-0374275631). [\$10 new on Amazon]
- Additional readings will be posted to the Course Library section of Blackboard.

3. COURSE FORMAT AND COVID-19

This course will be taught in person. In light of the continuing COVID-19 pandemic, however, students must observe university protocols regarding COVID-19. Current university protocols can be found at <https://coronavirus.olemiss.edu/>. Students should follow these protocols carefully to protect themselves and respect their fellow students and the instructor.

Currently, masks are required in the classroom and all university buildings for both vaccinated and unvaccinated students. Masks must be CDC-approved: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/types-of-masks.html>. **Please note that single-layer bandanas and neck gaiters do not meet CDC standards. Masks must cover both your nose and your mouth and must be worn at all times in the classroom.** Do not remove your mask or pull your mask down to talk, for instance. If you do not have a mask, you can get one from the PPL main office. Anyone who refuses to wear a mask in class will be asked to leave and will be subject to consequences as outline in the University policy: <https://conflictresolution.olemiss.edu/covidupdates/>.

Do not come to class if you feel sick or have a fever. If you are quarantined, sick, or have been otherwise approved, you can attend class remotely via the Zoom link available on Blackboard. However, students should, whenever possible, get my prior approval to attend remotely. They should also keep their camera on during class and remain engaged.

If students test positive for COVID-19 at any health care facility, they must contact the Student Health Center at 662.915.7274. Students with COVID-19 should seek medical attention and let the instructor know they will be missing class. Students who are exposed to someone with COVID-19 should contact the Student Health Center to **get tested 3-5 days following exposure**. Those who are not fully vaccinated should follow quarantine protocols found at <https://coronavirus.olemiss.edu/students/>.

4. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

4.1 Participation: Students are expected to participate in class. To receive full participation, students should offer a substantial contribution in 16 out of 26 class meetings. A substantial contribution can be: (1) A critical or reflective question (not a basic, surface-level question that is easily answered in a few words (though these are welcome too—but not for credit)), (2) A reflective or insightful response to another's question, (3) A reflective or insightful response to my question, etc. Students can earn partial participation credit through discussion with me in email or office hours.

If it is apparent that students are not completing the readings, I will give pop quizzes. Passing the quiz will not raise your participation grade. Failing the quiz will result in a 5% reduction of the participation grade, and it is possible to earn a negative grade for your participation grade.

4.2 Assignments: Students will be given 4 assignments throughout the course to help them practice applying some of the most crucial concepts from class. Students should think of these assignments as low-stakes practice for the exams. *If you receive a low grade on an assignment, please schedule an appointment to discuss the material as soon as possible to ensure you are prepared for the exam.*

4.3 Essays: Students are required to write two short essays for the course, to be turned in at the same time. One essay will offer an argument for some position on an issue in public policy. The second essay will be an argument for an incompatible position on that same issue. Each essay should be 600-700 words. Further details about the essays, including instructions and a grading rubric, are available on Blackboard.

4.4 Persuasive Presentation: Each student will make one short persuasive presentation, which will be a prepared speech crafted from one of the student's essays. Each prepared presentation should last at least 4 minutes, but no more than 5. Presentations will be made following a randomly generated schedule. More details on these presentations will be provided in class, but instructions and a grading rubric are available on Blackboard.

4.5 Debate: The course will culminate in student debates. As a class, we will generate a variety of issues for debate. While students will know the topic of their debate, they will not know which side they must debate until just before the debate, so they should be prepared for either side. More details on debates will be provided in class, but instructions and a grading rubric are available on Blackboard.

3.6 Exams: There will be two exams to test student understanding of crucial course material. The midterm will cover material from the first half of the course, and the final exam will be cumulative. Further details about the exams will be given in class.

5. GRADING POLICIES

5.1 Grade Distribution: The course requirements contribute to your final grade as follows:

Participation:	8%	Debate:	15%
Assignments:	12% (3% each)	Midterm:	15%
Essays:	15% (7.5% each)	Final:	20%
Presentation:	15%		

5.2 Final Grading Scale:

A	93-100	B+	87-89	C+	77-79	D+	67-69
A-	90-92	B	83-86	C	73-76	D	60-66
		B-	80-82	C-	70-72	F	0-59

5.3 Late or Missed Work: In general, work handed in late without a legitimate excuse will be penalized 1 point (out of 10) for each day late, including weekends. Late work will be accepted up to four days after the due date. *After four days, work will not be accepted and will receive an automatic 0.* Presentations and debates may not be made up unless there is an emergency or illness which renders a student unable to attend class on the day they are scheduled to present. Exams may not be made up unless the absence is excused. **If you need special accommodations regarding the day and time of the exam, please see me as early as possible.** If a student is unable to meet a deadline, they should contact the instructor **before** the deadline. **Excuses for lateness given after the fact will almost never be honored.**

6. UNIVERSITY POLICIES

6.1 Academic Misconduct and Plagiarism: Students are expected to uphold the University of Mississippi's standards for academic honesty. For a description of various kinds of academic misconduct and the disciplinary ramifications involved, refer to the University of Mississippi's standards of academic misconduct. A PDF is available on Blackboard, and information can also be found on the University of

Mississippi website at: <http://catalog.olemiss.edu/academics/regulations/conduct>. In addition, students can refer to the university's *M Book* for answers to any questions about academic honesty. **I take academic dishonesty very seriously. If students have questions about what plagiarism is or how to avoid it, they should see me as soon as possible for clarification and watch the following video:** http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/general_library/instruction/resources/plagiarism_ac_honest/plagiarism_academic_honesty.html. Students can also learn more, and take certification quizzes, at the following link: <https://plagiarism.iu.edu/tutorials/>. **Ignorance of what plagiarism is will not excuse students from penalties** for violations of the Student Academic Conduct and Discipline Policy, which can be severe and may result in expulsion.

Please also keep in mind that the course materials (lecture slides, exams, instructions, rubrics, etc.) are my intellectual property and must not be shared with others, including students outside the class or uploaded to "tutoring" sites. Students who share such materials or who consult such materials from others will be guilty of academic misconduct and will be disciplined accordingly.

6.2 Disability Access and Inclusion: The University of Mississippi is committed to the creation of inclusive learning environments for all students. If there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your full inclusion and participation, or to accurate assessment of your achievement, please contact the course instructor as soon as possible. Barriers may include, but are not necessarily limited to, timed exams and in-class assignments, difficulty with the acquisition of lecture content, inaccessible web content, and the use of non-captioned or non-transcribed video and audio files. If you are approved through SDS, you must log in to your Rebel Access portal at <https://sds.olemiss.edu> to request approved accommodations. If you are NOT approved through SDS, you must contact Student Disability Services at 662-915-7128 so the office can: 1. determine your eligibility for accommodations, 2. disseminate to your instructors a Faculty Notification Letter, 3. facilitate the removal of barriers, and 4. ensure you have equal access to the same opportunities for success that are available to all students. *Students with diagnosed health concerns that may affect their compliance with COVID-19 health requirements should contact UM's Student Disability Services (SDS) Office (<https://sds.olemiss.edu>) to see if they are eligible for an SDS accommodation as soon as possible.*

7. CLASSROOM POLICIES

7.1 Attendance: Attendance verification during the first two weeks of class is required by the University of Mississippi. Students must attend class at least once during this two-week period to ensure that they are not dropped from the course and to avoid any adjustments to financial aid. For more information on this policy, see <http://olemiss.edu/gotoclass>.

I will take attendance at the beginning of every class meeting. Students are expected to attend all class meetings (unless the absence is excused). Students will not receive any points for attending class. Instead, they will lose points from their final grade if too many classes are missed without justification. **Students may miss two class meetings without penalty on days on which they are not required to give a presentation or take an exam. After the third unexcused absence, the student's final grade will be lowered by 2% for each absence.**

Students with a legitimate excuse (illness, internet problems, etc.) should notify me as soon as possible and, if they are able, should provide some documentation of the excuse. For instance, if you have tested positive for COVID-19, you may send a picture of your test result. *However, please do not seek documentation if it will put you or others at risk. If you or someone you live with has been exposed to COVID-19, do not come to class until you have tested negative.*

7.2 Punctuality and Attention: Please enter the classroom on time to minimize distractions. Once in the room, you are expected to fully participate in the discussion and to minimize distractions that are within

your control. This means no cell phones, outside chats, etc. Students are also expected to remain in class for the entire discussion. If students have a legitimate reason for being late or leaving early, they should notify me ahead of time. **Students who enter class more than 15 minutes late or leave class more than 15 minutes early without a valid excuse will be marked as absent. Students who habitually come to class late will also be marked as absent.**

7.3 Respect and Civility During Discussion: Students are expected to show their fellow classmates and me the utmost respect. **This means, at the very least, not jeering or interrupting or carrying on private conversations while another person is speaking.** If a student has a response to another student’s comment or question, they should offer it in a calm and respectful manner. We are here to share ideas and learn from each other, and these goals cannot be achieved in a hostile environment. Disrespect will not be tolerated.

8. COURSE SCHEDULE (subject to change)

Students are responsible for carefully completing each reading assignment or watching a lecture **before** coming to class. If we deviate from the schedule below, it is the student’s responsibility to stay informed of schedule changes, which will be announced in class and posted on Blackboard.

TA=Think Again; TF&S=Thinking, Fast and Slow; Other readings and videos posted on Blackboard

	Readings and Videos	Assignments
PRELIMINARIES		
<i>Polarization, Values, and the Need for Arguments</i>		
1 T 8.24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TA, Introduction 	Getting to Know You Survey (Bb) Syllabus Reading Quiz (Bb)
2 R 8.26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TA, Ch. 1 TA, Ch. 2 (to p. 30; rest is optional) 	
3 T 8.31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TA, Ch. 3 TA, Ch. 4 (pp. 55-63; rest is optional) 	
<i>Dual-Process Theory and the Need for Critical Thinking</i>		
4 R 9.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TF&S, Ch. 1 TF&S, Ch. 8 TF&S, Ch. 9 	Assignment 1 due
5 T 9.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TF&S, Ch. 12 TF&S, Ch. 13 TF&S, Ch. 34 	
ARGUMENT FUNDAMENTALS		
<i>Identifying Arguments</i>		
6 R 9.9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TA, Ch. 6 	

<i>Introduction to Argument Mapping: Basic Argument Structures</i>			
7	T 9.14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video lecture, "Evidence and Explanations" • Video lecture, "Independent Premises and Chain Arguments" 	
DEDUCTIVE ARGUMENTS			
<i>Mapping Advanced Argument Structures</i>			
8	R 9.16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video lecture, "Co-Premises and Reasoning" 	
9	T 9.21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TA, Ch. 8 (pp. 117-122) • Video lecture, "Validity and Valid Argument Structures" 	
<i>Implicit Premises</i>			
10	R 9.23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TA, Ch. 8 (pp. 122-126) • Video lecture, "Implicit Premises" 	
11	T 9.28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TA, Ch. 8 (pp. 126-141) 	
<i>Evaluating Premises</i>			
12	R 9.30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TA, Ch. 11 (pp. 200-204) • Sinnott-Armstrong and Fogelin, Excerpt from <i>Understanding Arguments</i> (pp. 333-335) • Video lecture, "Evaluating Arguments" 	Assignment 2 due
13	T 10.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TA, Ch. 7 • Diestler, Excerpts from <i>Becoming a Critical Thinker</i> (pp. 275-278, 280-285, 287, 291-303) 	
14	R 10.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No reading 	Midterm Exam
PRESENTING FUNDAMENTALS			
15	T 10.12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diestler, Excerpts from <i>Becoming a Critical Thinker</i> (pp. 444-463) 	
INDUCTIVE ARGUMENTS			
<i>Statistical Generalizations</i>			
16	R 10.14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TA, Ch. 9 (up to p. 160) • Video lecture, "Statistical Generalizations" 	Assignment 3 due
17	T 10.19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TF&S, Ch. 10 	
<i>Causal Reasoning</i>			
18	R 10.21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chabris and Simons, Excerpt from <i>The Invisible Gorilla</i>, Ch. 5 (pp. 154-176) • Sinnott-Armstrong and Fogelin, Excerpt from <i>Understanding Arguments</i> (pp. 234-237) • Video lecture, "Causal Reasoning" 	Essay due (by end of day)
19	T 10.26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salmon, Excerpt from <i>Introduction to Logic and Critical</i> 	

		<i>Thinking</i> (pp. 122-126)		
<i>Abduction</i>				
20	R	10.28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TF&S, Ch. 17 • TA, Ch. 9 (pp. 160-169) 	
<i>Analogies</i>				
21	T	11.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diestler, Excerpts from <i>Becoming a Critical Thinker</i> (pp. 201-203, 226-228) 	
PRESENTATIONS				
22	R	11.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TA, Ch. 10 (up to p. 183) 	Assignment 4 due
23	T	11.9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TA, Ch. 10 (pp. 183-199) 	
24	R	11.11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TA, Ch. 11 (pp. 204-216) 	
PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: DEBATES				
25	T	11.16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No reading 	
26	R	11.18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No reading 	
<i>NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING BREAK (11.22-11.26)</i>				
27	T	11.30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No reading 	
28	R	12.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review 	

FINAL EXAM: Tuesday, December 7 at 8:00 am