

PHIL 1250: Reasoning & Rational Decision Making

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I. Class description

- Being a critical thinker involves the ability to support and criticize claims in a rational manner, i.e. by identifying reasons and providing arguments. This, in its turn, requires being well-informed and possessing reliable reasoning skills.
- The objective of this course is to help you develop and refine those skills, by: (a) providing you with a tool kit of concepts and reasoning methods; (b) giving you the opportunity to apply them over a wide range of situations (including advertising, media reports of scientific studies and academic essays) and (c) encouraging you to improve, through practice and feedback from the instructor, your ability to express arguments in written form.

II. Objectives of the course

- At the end of the semester, the students will:
 - appreciate the importance of basing claims, judgments and decisions on well-founded reasons.
 - become acquainted with the biases inherent to our cognitive capacities.
 - correctly identify, reconstruct and represent the structure of arguments and their components.
 - be familiar with different standards of reasoning (deductive and non-deductive) and their application to the detection of good and bad arguments.
 - be familiar with the main concepts of deductive logic (including the notion of valid argument form), as well as with its inference rules.
 - have a grasp of basic probabilistic thinking (and its common pitfalls).
 - recognize common fallacies in everyday reasoning.
 - have the capacity to develop lines of argument and to express them clearly, logically and persuasively in written form.

III. Texts

The primary text for the course is:

- Walter Sinnott-Armstrong and Robert Fogelin, *Understanding Arguments: An Introduction to Informal Logic* 9th Edition (Cengage Learning, 2014). You *must* have the *9th* edition of this book.
- In addition to the course text, additional readings will also be assigned where appropriate. These will be made available on Canvas.

IV. Mechanics of the course

- This course is organized by weeks. On a typical week, I will post, by Monday:
 - the week’s corresponding slides and lecture notes.
 - the homework assignments (if they haven’t been posted earlier), which will be due by the end of the following Monday.
 - at least one discussion question related to the class material.
- Announcements will be posted in Canvas on a regular basis. Please make certain to check them regularly, as they will contain important information about upcoming assignments or class concerns.

V. Grading and Requirements

a. Reading

- Those enrolled in the course for credit are required to **read all of the required materials closely**, preferably more than once, *before* each class meeting.
- Changes to the schedule will occasionally be made. In such event, a notification of the changes will be made on the *Announcement* page of the course website.

b. Exams (40%)

- There will be *four* exams, each of which is worth 10 % of the final grade, for a total of 40 %.
 - The exams will cover significant ideas, principles, and methods treated in the course i.e., those covered in the readings, homework, and *especially* in class lectures.
- For each of the exams, there will be an announced period of **5** days, during which the student must take the exam *once*, at the time and place of her/his convenience. Once logged in, the student will have a maximum of 50 minutes to complete the exam.

- The exams will be composed of different kinds of questions, including multiple choice and true-false items, short essay questions, and application problems.

c. Homework (45%)

- Homework assignments will be given weekly, and they will collectively constitute 45% of your final grade. Doing the homework promptly and carefully is necessary for learning the material.
- Your homework must be submitted through Canvas, on the due date specified in the class calendar.

d. Class Participation (15%)

- Class participation will account for 15% of the final grade.
- To get full participation credit, you must participate on at least 10 weeks out of 15 weeks of the course.