PHIL 107: Logic & Reasoning

Syllabus
Prof. Ashley McDowell

Winter 2008
MWF 2:40 – 3:55, UL 307

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Office Hours: MWF 1:15-2:15, Tues 2:00-3:00
and by appointment

Text: Lewis Vaughn, The Power of Critical Thinking (2nd ed.)

Note on Moodle: this course website will include useful information – go to https://moodle.kzoo.edu/ and find our course, and get yourself logged on.

Note on e-mail: I will be sending mail to the class alias, which only knows your K email address. Make sure your K email is forwarded to whatever email account you use regularly, if it’s something else.

Description:
This course is a study of ways to think critically, argue effectively, judge carefully, and approach arguments logically. These are different aspects of the general subject of reasoning well. Since learning about reasoning well can’t really be done as a spectator sport, you will be getting lots of practice. We’ll be approaching these topics in the abstract, to get a feel for the basic ideas, and we’ll be applying them in many different ways.

It is probably not an overstatement to say that those who conscientiously absorb the lessons of this course will forever write better papers, construct better arguments, and, in general, become better thinkers.

The main question you should have in mind as we move through this course is the one that ties it all together:

How does one reason well?

Course Goals:
I want you to learn about critical thinking, reasoning, and logic. This will involve learning a lot of terms and concepts, becoming familiar with particular reasoning strategies and applications, and mastering specific techniques such as logical operations.

More importantly, though, I want you to make progress on your own abilities to reason well. You’ll learn about pitfalls and fallacies in reasoning, but not just because it’s fun (although I think it is) – the point is to become more apt to recognize them in others and avoid them in yourself. You’ll learn how critical reasoning and logic apply to subjects and communications all around us, and how it can help you clarify what’s being said and decide for yourself with a firm foundation. To achieve these ends, I will fight hard to keep you from letting yourself approach this class as a voyeur – you will be expected to change as a result of studying this material.

Class Format:
We’ll spend the majority of our time in class going over problems and exercises. We’ll go over homework and practice exercises that you were assigned, as well as new ones. We may do this as a whole class, in pairs, or in groups. I don’t expect to have to re-present the textbook material very often, since I chose the text because I think it is quite clear.

For this reason, it is crucial that you read the textbook material ahead of time. Reading ahead is necessary also because we’ll be doing exercises in class that presuppose your having done the reading.

Assignment responsibilities:
Moodle: Many exercises will be done directly onto the Moodle site. These are to be done by midnight the night before class, so that I have a chance to look them over and analyze your answers before class. You probably will want to print your work, or write your answers in your text or notebook, so that you have a record of your answers when we go over them in class.

Non-Moodle: Assignments that are to be turned in outside of the Moodle site must be turned in as hard (paper)
copies – no emailed assignments will be accepted except by special permission. It is your responsibility to retain copies of all assignments you turn in, in a reliable format.

Late assignments: An assignment (either on Moodle or not) that is between one hour and 24 hours late will receive a ½ grade reduction. An assignment that is between one day and two weeks late will receive a full grade reduction. Assignments will not be accepted more than two weeks late.

A note on changing grades: if you feel you have been assigned a grade unfairly or inaccurately, you should by all means talk to me about it. My only requirement is that you prepare an argument (a set of reasons and facts) before you do so.

Course Requirements and Grading Scheme

Online tests: 30% (Tests 1 & 2, 5% each; Tests 3 & 4, 10% each)
In approximately weeks 3, 5, 7, and during exam week, you’ll be taking out-of-class, timed exams on the Moodle site. Test 1 will be on Chapters 1-3, 2 on Chapters 4-5, 3 on Chapters 6-8, and 4 on Chapters 9-11. I’ll have more information on the nature of these tests as we get closer to them.

Homework: 40%
You’ll be doing homework for most class meetings, as you would for a math class, for instance. The homework exercises will nearly all come from the textbook, and many will be done on the Moodle site. Homework exercises due online will be due by midnight the night before, as indicated above. Again, you may want to record your answers somehow.

The homework grade will be the average of all your homework grades. Some assignments may count double, if they involve more or more difficult work than most – I will let you know ahead of time.

Writing modules: 20% (5% each)
There are 5 writing modules in your textbook, in chapters 1-5. The first four amount to paper assignments, and you will complete those paper assignments. These papers will be a few pages long each. I’ll give you more details as we go along.

Participation and demonstrated preparedness: 10%
Participation is expected. We’ll be going over problems, discussing issues and concepts, engaging in group activities, and doing other things that work best the more people contribute.

I will keep general track of your contributions in class. Keep in mind that contributions can take various forms, including asking for clarification, participation in group work, giving helpful examples, and contributing answers to homework problems. Be aware also that more does not necessarily mean better: those who excessively dominate discussions, speak disrespectfully, or otherwise use their voices in a negative way may be penalized for doing so. If you are in doubt, or if you are interested in advice about how to participate more effectively or more easily, ask me.

Demonstrated preparedness includes evidence of your having read the assignments carefully, thought about and tried to answer any study questions or tasks I’ve given, prepared questions or comments in advance of class, and kept up with homework.

Again, if you want to know how you’re doing on this, or want to talk about how to do this well, get in touch with me.

Academic integrity and the Honor System
“It is always important to think of the intellectual world as a community of mutual dependence, mutual helpfulness, mutual protectiveness, and common delight. We take ideas from others and we give them to others. We are indebted to others, and others are indebted to us. In sharing and acknowledging the community, we define ourselves more certainly as individuals. The ability to describe our sources is also an ability to define our own originality and our own selves. All communities depend on generosity, trust, definition, and the proper use of sources is part of the mortar that holds the community of the mind together.”

- Richard Marius, Expository Writing Program, Harvard University

In this class, as in all classes at Kalamazoo College, we will be operating under the Honor System. It is important that you familiarize yourself with that system. You should also familiarize yourself with proper procedures for collaborating, doing research, and citing sources. Should you have any questions about citations, plagiarism, or honor system issues, please visit or contact me.

Any assignment you turn in that I find to violate academic integrity, either through dishonesty, plagiarism, lack of
appropriate citations, or unauthorized collaboration, will receive a grade of 0. Any further instance of a violation of academic integrity will be punished by a failing grade in the class as a minimum sanction. [1]

Special needs
If you have any special needs that I can accommodate, please let me know as soon as possible.

Office hours
My office hours are posted above. They will be conducted on a first-come, first-served basis, and by appointment, with appointments taking precedence. You should feel absolutely free to come to them and discuss the course, the material, the assignments, or philosophy.

I request that each of you take a few minutes to visit me sometime in the first week or two of classes. It will be an opportunity for us to chat one-on-one for the first time, and to get to know each other a bit more.
**Schedule of Readings**

This schedule is tentative. Any changes will be announced in class and by email. The reading assignments listed for each day must be completed before that class. Readings must be brought physically to class.

**WEEK ONE**
W read and do “So You Think You’re Logical?” (handout); read Ch. 1
F Ch. 1 continued

**WEEK TWO**
M Ch. 2
W Ch. 2
F Ch. 3

**WEEK THREE**
M Ch. 3
W Ch. 3
F no class – Online Test 1

**WEEK FOUR**
M Ch. 4
W Ch. 4
F Ch. 4

**WEEK FIVE**
M Ch. 5
W Ch. 5
F Ch. 5
by class on Monday: Online Test 2

**WEEK SIX**
M Ch. 6
W Ch. 6
F Ch. 7

**WEEK SEVEN**
M Ch. 7
W Ch. 8
F Ch. 8
by class on Monday: Online Test 3

**WEEK EIGHT**
M Ch. 9
W floating DOGL slot
F Ch. 9

**WEEK NINE**
M No class – Memorial Day
W Ch. 10
F TBA

**WEEK TEN**
M Ch. 10
W Ch. 11
F Ch. 11

[I] I owe some of the phrasing in this statement to Vaughn Maatman