

LAS 241: Inquiry and Truth
MW 1-2:15pm, Science Building 44
Fall 2015

Professor: Jennifer Kling, PhD

Office Hours: MW 11:30am-1pm, TuTh 10am-12pm; available by appointment (Sacred Heart Hall 312E)

Email: jkling@sienaheights.edu

Phone (emergencies only!): 919-260-2719

Course Description:

Critical thinking and inquiry is, first and foremost, a *practical* endeavor. It allows us to evaluate reasons and arguments—both our own and other people's—so that we can decide whether or not to accept those reasons and arguments and incorporate their conclusions into our daily lives. We accept and reject conclusions all of the time: “I don't need to buy that shirt.” “I should vote for that politician.” “Being a philosophy major, while intellectually fulfilling, is financially risky.” “Sea World is an evil company.” “I believe in God.” “The world just doesn't work that way.” These conclusions are the result of explicit and implicit inquiry, reasoning and argumentation; so whether we should accept them depends on how good those inquiries, reasons and arguments are.

This is where critical thinking comes in—critical thinking is a catch-all term for the process of analyzing and assessing a particular piece of inquiry, reasoning, or argumentation in order to determine its worth. Is the argument true? Is it a strong or weak argument? Does it depend on unsupported assumptions, or is there evidence in its favor? What counts as evidence? Is the argument valid, or does it contain a logical fallacy? Are there good reasons to accept the argument's claims and conclusion(s)? What makes something a good reason? What is it to be a reasonable person? Why do reasons matter at all?

In this course, we will attempt to tackle some of these big questions by focusing on different aspects of what it means to reason well. We will be reading both historical and contemporary texts, with an eye to understanding what others have thought about the nature of inquiry, reason, argumentation, and truth. However, our efforts will not be merely an academic exercise where we will only study what others have thought. Instead, in this course you will be joining in an active and ongoing effort to better understand how to think critically, inquire responsibly, and reason well. You will have to struggle with big concepts that you may not have engaged before, and you will have to work hard to succeed. In other words, in this course you are going to learn how to seek and express truth, which is both difficult and rewarding.

Course Requirements:

Participation (10%): You will need to both do the readings and come to class in order to be successful in this course. If you don't do the readings, you'll be lost in class; if you don't come to class, you'll be lost in the readings and the assignments. While **excessive** participation is not required, some willingness to engage with both me and your fellow classmates is necessary— without this willingness on your part, we won't be able to have the sort of productive class discussions that will enable you to successfully engage in critical thinking and inquiry. So, while a lack of participation won't harm your grade very much, participation can significantly *help* your grade.

I appreciate that speaking to a classroom full of your peers can be difficult; so, there are a number of other ways to participate in class. You may speak in class, you may engage in small group work, you may visit my office hours, you may send me emails with questions, comments, and concerns, you may join the online discussion threads, you may post relevant outside documents/videos/blogs, etc. to the course eCollege site, you may tweet and/or journal about issues raised in class, etc. If you're unsure of whether some action counts as participation, please see me, and we'll discuss it.

Blog Posts (2% each): You are required to submit **fifteen** blog posts throughout the semester. You may submit up to two per week, and you may not submit any after the final week of class. Blog posts should be roughly 250-400 words, and should *thoughtfully engage* with the topics under discussion in class. You have broad leeway in your blog posts. For example, you may comment on a part of the readings you found confusing, ask a question about an author's argument or conclusion, present a problem with an author's position, discuss the relationship between two or more readings, connect the readings with an item in the news media or popular culture, or provide a considered response to questions raised by the readings or in class. You may submit a text blog post, a video post, or a podcast (videos and podcasts should be roughly 1.5-2 minutes). If you wish to submit a blog post in some other form, please see me, and we'll discuss it.

Papers (10% each): There are **five** required papers for this course. Each paper should be 2 pages long, and should *critically engage* with some issue brought up in the course readings and class discussions. I will provide a list of topics two weeks in advance of each paper's due date. If you wish to write on a topic not on the list, please come see me to discuss your proposed topic. If you wish to submit a paper in some other form, please see me, and we'll discuss it.

Papers are due by the start of the class period on the due date. For every 24-hour period that a paper is late, I will take 5 points off. That said, I am aware that life happens; if you feel you need an extension, please ask me as soon as possible. The earlier you ask, the more likely I am to give you an extension. Failure to turn in any one of the papers will result in failing the course.

Final (10%): There is a required final exam for this course. The exam will consist of a series of short answers as well as one longer essay. Please bring a bluebook for the final. Failure to take the final exam will result in failing the course.

Grading Scale:

A: An 'A' denotes exceptional skill and ability. An 'A' student demonstrates an excellent grasp of the material (i.e., the student understands the material enough to explain it succinctly and well), and also displays the ability to engage with both the broad issues and finer points under discussion.

B: A 'B' denotes solid-to-impressive skill and ability. A 'B' student demonstrates a good grasp of the material (i.e., the student understands the material well enough to explain it with few mistakes), and also displays the ability to engage with most, if not all, of the issues and points under discussion.

C: A 'C' denotes adequate skill and ability. A 'C' student demonstrates a fair grasp of the material (i.e., the student understands the big picture, but makes some serious errors in presentation), and also displays the ability to engage with at least some of the issues under discussion.

D: A 'D' denotes inadequate skill and ability. A 'D' student has serious problems with grasping the material, and fails to engage with any of the issues under discussion.

F: An 'F' denotes catastrophic problems in fulfilling the requirements of the course. An 'F' student neither grasps the material nor engages with it at any level.

While hard work is correlated with success, it is not sufficient for success. To get a good grade in this course, you need to not only understand and engage with the material, but also communicate your understanding and engagement to me via your participation, blog posts, papers, and exam. If you sense that you are heading towards a grade you do not want, please come see me as soon as possible (if you wait until the end of the semester, it will be too late).

Assignments:

All readings, videos, podcasts, etc can be found on this course's eCollege site.

Date	Topic	Assignment
8/31	Introduction to the Course	
9/2	Inquiry and Reasoning: What's the Goal?	<i>Read:</i> Plato, excerpt from <i>The Republic</i>
9/7 Labor Day	No Class: Labor Day	
9/9	Inquiry and Reasoning: What's the Goal?	<i>Listen:</i> "Simon Blackburn on Plato's Cave" Philosophy Bites Podcast http://philosophybites.com/2007/06/simon_blackburn.html
9/14	Truth: What is it?	<i>Read:</i> Richard Feldman, excerpt from Chapter 2 of <i>Epistemology</i>
9/16	Truth: What is it?	<i>Read:</i> William James, excerpts from <i>Pragmatism</i>
9/21	Truth: What is it?	<i>Watch:</i> "Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: The danger of a single story" TED Talk http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en
9/23 Paper #1 Due	The Nature of Explanations	<i>Paper #1 Due on eCollege</i> <i>Read:</i> Peter Lipton, excerpt from "What Good Is An Explanation?"
9/28	The Nature of Explanations	<i>Read:</i> Michael Oakeshott, "The voice of poetry in the conversation of mankind"
9/30	Methods of Reasoning: Mythological Explanations	<i>Watch:</i> "Lakota Origin Story by Elder Duane Hollow Horn Bear" Youtube video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MhbXk63wMTI
10/5	Methods of Reasoning: Mythological Explanations	<i>Read:</i> Genesis 1 and 2
10/7	Methods of Reasoning: Mythological Explanations	<i>Read:</i> Joseph Campbell, "The Impact of Science on Myth"
10/12 Paper #2 Due	Methods of Reasoning: Inductive and Deductive Logic	<i>Paper #2 Due on eCollege</i> <i>Watch:</i> <i>12 Angry Men</i> (1957) available on Youtube
10/14	Methods of Reasoning: Inductive and Deductive Logic	<i>Read:</i> Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, "Arguments To and From Generalizations," and <i>Watch:</i> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rWS4ZeksUuA&feature=youtu.be&list=PL0BJTIrmOncx9Dxms8JsBxMIbZLFQj3zr and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pTjXLGzH8i8&feature=youtu.be&list=PL0BJTIrmOnczq5CDX7V8wD4lphgdiiOWm
10/19	Methods of Reasoning:	<i>Read:</i> Aquinas, excerpts from <i>Summa</i>

	Inductive and Deductive Logic	<i>Theologica and Watch</i> : “3 Minute Philosophy —St. Thomas Aquinas” Youtube video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CwToalGJIF4
10/21	Methods of Reasoning: Scientific Explanations	<i>Watch</i> : excerpts from <i>Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey</i> (TV Show)
10/26 Paper #3 Due	Methods of Reasoning: Scientific Explanations	Paper #3 Due on eCollege <i>Watch</i> : Michael Frayn, <i>Copenhagen</i> (1998), a play. (Watch the introduction.) Available on youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0qbd-yjd06c
10/28	Methods of Reasoning: Scientific Explanations	<i>Watch</i> : Michael Frayn, <i>Copenhagen</i> (1998), a play. (Watch the play.) Available on youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0qbd-yjd06c
11/2	Science and Faith	<i>Read</i> : Stephen Jay Gould, “Nonoverlapping Magisteria”
11/4	Science and Faith	<i>Listen</i> : “David Papineau on Scientific Realism” Philosophy Bites Podcast http://philosophybites.com/2009/01/david-papineau-on-scientific-realism.html
11/9 Paper #4 Due	Problems with Reasoning: Skepticism	Paper #4 Due on eCollege <i>Watch</i> : <i>Inception</i> (2009)
11/11	Problems with Reasoning: Skepticism	<i>Read</i> : David Hume, excerpts from <i>Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i>
11/16	Problems with Reasoning: Skepticism	<i>Read</i> : Keith DeRose, excerpts from “Responding to Skepticism”
11/18	Reasoning Well: Avoiding Agendas	<i>Read</i> : Two accounts of Sojourner Truth's speech, “Ain't I a Woman”
11/23 Paper #5 Due	Reasoning Well: Avoiding Assumptions and Biases	Paper #5 Due on eCollege <i>Read</i> : Joanna Kadi, “Stupidity “Deconstructed””
11/25 Thanksgiving Break	No Class: Thanksgiving Break	
11/30	Reasoning Well: Avoiding Fallacies	<i>Read</i> : “Informal Fallacies” (website) http://www.txstate.edu/philosophy/resources/fallacy-definitions.html
12/2	Reasoning Well: The Value of Paying Attention	<i>Read</i> : Samuel H. Scudder, “Take This Fish and Look at It”
12/7	Reasoning Well: The Value of Different Perspectives	<i>Read</i> : Patricia Hill Collins, excerpt from “Black Feminist Epistemology”
12/9	Review/Catch Up	

Finals Week 12/14-12/18	Final Exam	<i>In-Class Final Exam</i>
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Code of Student Conduct:

All students at Siena Heights University are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policy of this institution. For more information, please see the [Code of Student Conduct](#). Please obey the spirit as well as the law of SHU's Code of Student Conduct. If you think that something is in violation of the Code, it probably is, so check before doing it. Please remember that unintentional plagiarism is still plagiarism, and that **you must cite all of your sources** for papers!

****Please note:** every assignment turned in for this class must be your own original work, produced specifically *for this class*. You may not turn in an assignment written for a previous and/or different class. To do so would constitute (self) plagiarism, and will be treated as such.**

The Writing Center:

The Writing Center at Siena Heights University is a free resource available to all CAS students. Students are encouraged to visit the writing center for writing feedback at any stage in the writing process. For information regarding their tutors, hours, location, or to utilize their online links and resources, please visit writingcenter.sienaheights.edu. **PLEASE NOTE:** Beginning Fall 2015, the Writing Center will be located on the main floor of the library. For more information, please contact Karin Barbee at kbarbee@sienaheights.edu.

Diversity and Disability Statement:

Our institution values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. Our goal is to create learning environments that are usable, equitable, inclusive and welcoming. If there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion or accurate assessment or achievement, please notify the instructor as soon as possible. Students with disabilities are also welcome to contact the Office of Disabilities Resources (517) 264-7683 or Laura Lyall (coordinator) at llyall@sienaheights.edu to discuss a range of options to removing barriers in the course, including accommodations. This process is initiated and driven by the student. It is to your advantage to begin the process in a timely manner, since accommodations are not retroactive. Grades earned before verification of a disability by the ODR will not be changed.

Syllabus Changes:

I reserve the right to make changes to this syllabus as appropriate. The odds that I'll do so during the semester are small, but if I do, I will inform you as soon as possible.