

Political Science 105 – Introduction to Critical Thinking**OVERVIEW**

This course introduces students to the methods and practices of critical thinking. Critical thinking is the application of reason to the evaluation of claims; it is the practice of “thinking about thinking.”

As our world becomes more complex- when the paths to truth and understanding become more circuitous – how we develop and judge the construction of arguments becomes increasingly important. Our task is not to ascertain the origin or truthfulness of particular perspectives but, rather, to examine the construction of arguments and whether these construction are internally logical.

As we examine the construction of arguments from others, we learn about our own reasoning processes. We shine a light on the assumptions out of which our own thought processes are developed. In studying critical thinking we learn the skills of dispassionate analysis; we also learn much about ourselves and how we perceive the world.

In addition to the definition and examination of particular components of critical thinking, this course stresses practice and application. Many of the readings you will encounter engage controversial social and political topics. You should not let your pre-existent ideas and positions determine your response to these pieces; rather you should engage in a critical analysis of the components of the arguments and the methods used by the authors to obtain your assent. We exist today in a swirl of competing contentions and world views. Critical thinking can provide us with the tools to move through this thicket, and in so doing, develop our own place in the world.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, students will have learned to:

- recognize when their thoughts and opinions are truly their own, as opposed to those of their parents, relatives, or friends
- distinguish between a strong argument and a weak one
- evaluate the quality of an opinion, and be able to separate valid thoughts and ideas from those that are unfounded, unjustified, exaggerated, or grounded solely in emotion
- distinguish a fact from a value
- become aware of the value system and thought processes that are central to American culture and politics
- become aware of the ways in which the value system and thought processes of American popular culture and media in general influence their thinking
- learn to evaluate statistical claims and statistical methods
- realize that our own thinking can change if we work at becoming better and more careful thinkers
- recognize the power of our thinking and language in shaping our lives

Political Science 105 – Introduction to Critical Thinking**REQUIREMENTS**

- 1) Students are expected to attend all classes, to have read the assigned materials and to participate in class discussion. An excused absence requires written documentation. All medical documentation must be given to me (not merely shown to me) and must include the student's name as well as the name of a medical doctor or clinic with a verifiable phone number. Students who do not regularly attend class will receive an "F" for their class participation grade. Students who miss classes or assignments with a valid excuse should consult with me in order to make up their work in a timely fashion.

Students are allowed two unexcused absences without affecting their grade.

Lateness: Students who arrive more the five minutes late will be marked absent.

- 2) Written work will consist of two midterms, a paper and a final exam. The paper topic will be given to you in advance.

You are expected to be present for the midterms and the final exam. A student who cannot be present for an exam must consult with me in advance and provide documentation.

Late papers will not be accepted without a grade reduction unless a student consults with me in advance. Written documentation will be required.

The last chance to hand in a paper is with your final exam. If you hand in a viable paper, the lowest grade will be a D, even with deductions. If you do not hand in a paper, the grade is F.

Do not plagiarize. Plagiarism will be dealt with severely.

The procedures for withdrawal from this course will conform to university policies. Students requiring accommodation for university verified disabilities must notify me in advance.

CONTACT & OFFICE HOURS

- OFFICE: SPA 344
- HOURS:
- EMAIL: richard.goldin@csulb.edu

Political Science 105 – Introduction to Critical Thinking**GRADING**

- **Class participation and attendance: 10%**
Participation includes attendance. Excellent participation is when, in the instructor's judgment, the student contributes regularly in ways that demonstrate both an *understanding* of the reading materials *as well as* thoughtful *consideration* of and *reflection* on the issues and themes that are addressed in readings and in class discussion.
- **First Midterm: 20%**
- **Second Midterm: 20%**
- **Paper: 25%**
- **Final: 25%**

A grade of:

- **A:** designates mastery of the material and the ability to convey your knowledge effectively through both oral and written communication. An "A" rewards an excellent academic performance that has been consistent throughout the semester.
- **B:** designates a very good performance throughout the semester. Students who earn a B demonstrate a great deal of knowledge about the subject matter, and have strong written and communication skills.
- **C:** designates an adequate academic performance throughout the semester. It conveys the students' ability to synthesize a fair amount of accumulated knowledge, and implies that the student has adequate, but not strong, writing and speaking skills.
- **D:** designates a poor academic performance. Students who receive a D have not demonstrated much knowledge of the course material, cannot synthesize information asked on exams or papers, and generally give the impression of being unprepared for class.
- **F :** designates a failing performance.

COURSE MATERIALS**TEXT**

Browne and Keeley, *Asking the Right Questions with Readings*, 1st edition. Prentice Hall (ARQWR)

BEACHBOARD

- Additional readings may be posted on BeachBoard.

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ASSIGNMENTS

Students should be prepared to discuss materials on the date indicated

WEEK 1: 8/23	Introduction
8/25	<u>Asking the Right Questions</u> ARQWR – Chapter 1 <u>Critical Thinking as a Social Activity</u> ARQWR – Chapter 2
WEEK 2: 8/30, 9/1	<u>Issues, Conclusions,</u> ARQWR – Chapter 3,
WEEK 3: 9/8	<u>What are the Reasons?</u> ARQWR – Chapter 4
WEEK 4: 9/13, 9/15	<u>What Words or Phrases are Ambiguous?</u> ARQWR – Chapter 5
WEEK 5: 9/20, 9/22	<u>What are the Values and Descriptive Assumptions?</u> ARQWR – Chapter 6
WEEK 6: 9/27,	<u>Are There Any Fallacies in the Reasoning?</u> ARQWR – Chapter 7
9/29	MIDTERM 1
WEEK 7: 10/4, 10/6	<u>How Good is the Evidence?:</u> <u>Intuition, Personal Experience, Testimonials</u> <u>And Appeals to Authority</u> ARQWR – Chapter 8
WEEK 8: 10/11, 10/13	<u>How Good is the Evidence?:</u> <u>Personal Observation, Research Studies,</u> <u>Case Examples, and Analogies</u> ARQWR – Chapter 9

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WEEK 9: 10/18,	<u>Are There Rival Causes?</u> ARQWR – Chapter 10
10/20	MIDTERM 2
WEEK 10: 10/25, 10/27	<u>Are the Statistics Deceptive?</u> ARQWR – Chapter 11
WEEK 11: 11/1, 11/3	<u>What Significant Information is Omitted?</u> ARQWR – Chapter 12, Chapter 16
WEEK 12: 11/8, 11/10	<u>What Reasonable Conclusions are Possible?</u> ARQWR – Chapter 13, Chapter 15
WEEK 13: 11/15, 11/17	<u>Overcoming Obstacles to Critical Thinking</u> ARQWR – Chapter 14, Chapter 17
<u>*PAPER DUE 11/17</u>	
WEEK 14:	FALL BREAK
WEEKS 15, 16: 11/29-12/8	Review
WEEK 17:	FINAL EXAM