

**Logic & Critical Thinking**  
Fall 2007  
THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

INSTRUCTOR: Christian Cotton  
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OFFICE: 22 Peabody Hall (Basement)  
HOURS: T, 1-3pm & by appt.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This is a course in logic, the science or study of good reasoning, and critical thinking, the practice of applying good reasoning skills in our academic & everyday lives. Often, those unacquainted with logic suppose it to be a kind of “mental gymnastics” based on “word games” or “semantics”, used by the few to make their positions seem better and their opponents’ to seem worse, or just to confuse others about the issue at hand, making them look foolish and their position absurd.

In reality, however, the fundamental principles of logic and the skill of critical thinking are indispensable for educated, fair, and productive communication between individuals and groups who hold differing opinions. The principles of logic and the skill of critical thinking serve as the only common, neutral ground on which genuine discussion and deliberation are possible – without it, we are left only with differing opinions and unjustified beliefs.

If we think that our beliefs are justified, then we must be able to say *on what grounds* they are justified. After all, we should believe only those things for which we have good reasons to believe, and any attempt to provide such reasons requires the principles of logic and the skills of critical thinking. The aim of this course is to introduce students to those principles of logic and to instruct students in developing the skills of critical thinking.

To accomplish these goals, students must be willing to open their minds *as well as* their mouths. Fundamental to learning the principles of logic and cultivating critical thinking skills is to *express* one’s ideas and opinions, supported by good reasons for holding or believing them. Such expression can come in written or spoken form. Students must engage in both forms in this course.

**COURSE TEXT:**

*Open Minds and Everyday Reasoning*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Zachary Seech. Wadsworth, 2005.  
Selected Readings (reserve and/or handout)

**COURSE POLICIES:**

**Honesty** in every thing you do: by accepting admission to **UGA**, you make a commitment to understand, support, and abide by the Academic Honesty Policy without compromise or exception. This class will be conducted in strict observance of this policy. You should avail yourself of the pamphlet “A Culture of Honesty” available at [http://www.uga.edu/ovpi/honesty/culture\\_honesty.htm](http://www.uga.edu/ovpi/honesty/culture_honesty.htm).

**Respect** for both instructor and other students: turn off your cell phones; no private conversations; no coming in to class late – these are distracting and disruptive for everyone.

**Charity** when reading the material we encounter: in other words, give each author the benefit of the doubt when grappling with his position; don't make hasty judgments.

**Effort** in engaging the material: much of the reading will seem difficult, strange, and even frustrating; make an effort to understand what is being said; make comments in your text.

**Conviction** in defending positions: in other words, do not retreat into the feeling or attitude that says, "Well, that's just **my** opinion"; stand up for what you think, and defend it with good reasons.

**Acceptance** of one's errors: when one's position is found untenable, do not withdraw into the thought or sentiment that says, "Well, that's just **your** opinion"; reconsider your view in light of comments.

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

<b>Attendance</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Participation</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Chapter Exercises</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Quizzes</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Presentations</b>	<b>20%</b>

**Attendance.** Be **on time!** (See *Course Policies*, "Respect"). Late arrivals may be turned away. Roll will be taken daily, and your attendance grade is the *percentage* of class meetings you attend. Absences are excused **at the instructor's discretion**. Excessive absences will result in administrative withdrawal with a grade of "WF." Each student is responsible for any material missed due to absence.

**Participation.** Read **all** assignments by the class meeting for which they are assigned and **bring your book or reading assignment to class** – those who do not may be asked to leave class. Contribute to classroom discussion and avail yourselves of course-appropriate involvement outside of class (e.g., office hours and/or e-mail). Much of our class time will be spent involved in directed discussion. Participation is required in order to succeed in this class. Relevant here are *Course Policies*, "Charity", "Conviction", and "Acceptance."

**Chapter Exercises.** Complete **all** assignments by the class meeting for which they are assigned and **bring them to class**. What is required of you is **effort** (See *Course Policies*, "Effort") – those who do not complete the assignments will **not** receive credit for that day's work. Form study groups if it helps you learn; but pull your weight. Create a "homework folder" to store all your assignments in; work will be checked on occasion by handing in folder.

**Quizzes.** Master basic elements of logic and critical thinking as demonstrated in timed, written quizzes given at the beginning of class. For at least the first half of the semester, there will be quizzes given **each** week. From the quizzes, only the highest 5 will be counted. Quizzes will typically reflect material encountered in the chapter exercises, though some innovative problem solving may be included. Quizzes will last **15 minutes**.

**Presentations.** Deliver your own thoughts (in the form of arguments) by preparing a short paper which you will present to the class as a whole. In the second half of the semester, each student will be required to present to the class their thoughts on some of the topics we will cover. Students will be chosen during class the day of – this means students should come prepared to present for **each** class. The presentations will be on the issue discussed for that day (or week). Presentations will last **up to 15 minutes**, including discussion by the class. A rubric for assessing your grade will be handed out.

**NOTE: YOUR COURSE AVERAGE IS BASED ON AN EVENLY SPREAD SET OF FIVE ELEMENTS; NONE OF THESE SHOULD BE NEGLECTED IN FAVOUR OF THE OTHERS.**

**GRADING CRITERIA:**

A+	100	B+	88	C+	78	D+	68
A	96	B	85	C	75	D	65
A-	93	B-	82	C-	72	D-	62
A-/B+	90	B-/C+	80	C-/D+	70	F	<60

**MAKE-UPS & LATE ASSIGNMENTS:** Make-ups will be administered, and late assignments accepted, strictly at the discretion of the instructor.

**INDEX CARDS:** Print neatly the information requested below on the index cards handed out with this syllabus. It is important that you answer honestly and be as specific as you can in a few words. The reason for this is that, in a class on critical thinking, it is fundamental for both teacher and student to know where the student believes he or she stands on central elements of belief, such as religion and politics. These are, after all, the *two* things one never discusses in *polite* company! This may explain why there is so much misunderstanding between those of differing religious and political persuasions. And this is a central problem we will address in this course.

<b>NAME: LAST, FIRST</b>
<b>EMAIL: ONE YOU CHECK OFTEN</b>
<b>YEAR:</b>
<b>MAJOR:</b>
<b>POLITICAL AFFILIATION: BE SPECIFIC &amp; HONEST</b>
<b>RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION: BE SPECIFIC &amp; HONEST</b>
<b>MOST PRESSING ISSUE FACING THE WORLD: BE SPECIFIC &amp; HONEST</b>
<b>REASON FOR TAKING THIS COURSE: BE SPECIFIC &amp; HONEST</b>

**SCHEDULE:** The following schedule is a best-approximation for the semester. We may fall behind at times, so check your email daily for possible changes and/or revisions.

- 8-16 introductions – index cards – assign political compass: <http://www.politicalcompass.org/>
- 8-21 Ch. 1 & 2  
 political compass due – at the end of page 6, click “Now let’s see where you stand”; read the analysis; then click on “Show graph on separate page for printing”; print graph.

8-23 Ch. 3

8-28 Ch. 4

8-30 Ch. 5

9-4 Ch. 6

9-6 Ch. 7

9-11 Ch. 8

9-13 Ch. 8

9-18 Ch. 9

9-20 Ch. 9

9-25 Ch.10

9-27 Ch.11

10-2 Buffer Week

10-4 Buffer Week

Second half TBA. In this portion, we will explore various topics in critical thinking, e.g., morality, free will, personal identity, specific political and ethical issues (e.g., abortion, physician-assisted suicide, social justice), etc. Some of these are more abstract, others are much more practical.

**IF THERE ARE ANY TOPICS YOU WOULD LIKE TO SUGGEST, PLEASE FEEL FREE TO DO SO. IF THERE IS ENOUGH INTEREST BY STUDENTS, WE CAN INCLUDE THESE IN THE SCHEDULE.**

**TOPICS MIGHT INCLUDE “CREATIONISM VS EVOLUTION”, “INTELLIGENT DESIGN”, “SCIENCE & ETHICS”, “ECONOMICS & ETHICS”, “FUTURE GENERATIONS”, “TERRORISM”, “ENERGY POLICY” – REALLY, THE POSSIBILITIES ARE IMMENSE.**