

**The Ethics of Influence**  
**LDST 357-01**

**Spring 2022**

**Course Syllabus**

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Meeting requests: Please contact me via email to set up an appointment.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

All leaders exercise influence to get people to do things. Using influence tactics differs, in some respects, from coercing followers and from outright lying to them, which—by assumption—are not morally permissible. But these tactics are not without problems of their own. For example, some forms of manipulation constitute neither coercion nor deception. One question we will address is what makes a behavior manipulative. A second question is whether influence is problematic even when it does not involve manipulation. This course is thus an ethical examination of the ways in which leaders influence followers. Our main goal is to discover the moral limits on the influence tactics that leaders use.

To achieve this goal, we must first get a handle on what leaders do and on what works. We will begin with classic, popular texts detailing the influence tactics leaders actually use—and use effectively. Our first step, then, will be to identify the behaviors under investigation. Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People* and Cialdini's *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion* will set the stage for our moral examination.

Next, we will assess the morality of the influence tactics. Our tools for assessment will be traditional moral theory and contemporary philosophical literature on manipulation. The moral theory most obviously opposed to manipulation is Kant's deontological ethics. Kantian ethics prohibits manipulation because it treats followers as mere "means" to an end, not as ends in themselves (*Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*). As we shall see, however, it is not easy to specify what manipulation is and how, exactly, it differs from what we might think are morally acceptable forms of influence. Coons and Weber's edited collection, *Manipulation: Theory and Practice*, will take us a long way in the right direction.

The course will end just as practically as it started. We will use Stacey Vanek Smith's *Machiavelli for Women* to take an extended look at influence in professional life. Her discussion of workplace influence tactics provides a leadership context for us to think about much of what we will have learned in the course.

All of my courses are designed for rigorous discussion of the issues, which means that students bear an equal burden in explaining, critiquing, and developing the ideas conveyed in the readings. To facilitate this kind of engagement, I use assigned seating. I also ask questions to see who has carefully completed the reading and regularly call on people so that they can

**Demonstrate Class Preparation.** At the beginning of each class, you should be prepared to summarize the readings. You should also be ready to answer the following questions about any particular reading:

1. What did you find most interesting about the reading?
2. Given the central questions of the course, what is the author's most important, provocative, or controversial claim?
3. What part of the author's argument is most susceptible to critique?

Each student is required to write at least one **Short Paper**. Short papers are 800-1000 words, and they engage critically with readings identified as "short paper opportunities." I will sometimes use these papers to structure class and ask that they be read aloud, so they are due to me via email by 9 a.m. on Wednesday. I *strongly* recommend that you write more than one short paper. Your **Final Paper** must be based on work from your short papers. Also, each additional short paper that you write (up to four total short papers) adds one point to the grade of your strongest short paper. Failing to write a short paper on your assigned day costs you two short paper opportunities. You may choose *once* to write on a reading from the class just previous. Assuming you haven't already taken advantage of this option, you can use it to get credit for a paper submitted after 9 a.m. on Wednesday. Otherwise, please do not put me in a position reject late papers.

There will be two **Reading Tests**. These tests serve several functions. They give you extra incentive to do the reading, read carefully, and retain what you've read. They also give me a sense of your understanding of the course basics. Careful reading, retention, and understanding are necessary for achieving the main goals of the course: engaging with the material at a sophisticated level in class discussions—including of presentations of other students—and in your final papers. *The tests are therefore means to an end, not ends in themselves.*

**Attendance** affects your **Demonstrated Class Preparation** grade, your **Short Paper** grade (in-person attendance for the entire class is required for your paper to count), and—in all likelihood—your **Reading Tests** grades. Please email me if you are unable to attend class. **Do not attend class if you are symptomatic or ill.**

Please note that **we begin and end on time** and that students are expected to remain in class for the entire class period. We will take a break! You may use computers and tablets in class, but permissible usage is restricted to the course-related activities of note taking and accessing course readings. **Recording class sessions or meetings is strictly prohibited.** Unnecessary devices must be silenced and placed out of view during class. All students should minimize distractions and respect the rules of standard classroom etiquette.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

- The student should be able to catalog the influence tactics leaders use and to explain why they are successful.
- The student should be familiar with the main philosophical arguments against the influence tactics and, especially, manipulation.
- The student should be able to engage critically and constructively with these arguments.
- The student should understand the special place of influence, including potential justifications, in the exercise of leadership in professional life.

## REQUIRED TEXTS

Dale Carnegie, *How to Win Friends & Influence People: The Only Book You Need to Lead You to Success* (New York: Gallery Books, 1998).

Robert B. Cialdini, *Influence, New and Expanded: The Psychology of Persuasion* (New York: Harper Business, 2021).

Christian Coons and Michael Weber, *Manipulation: Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Terry L. Price, *Leadership and the Ethics of Influence* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

Stacey Vanek Smith, *Machiavelli for Women: Defend Your Worth, Grow Your Ambition, and Win the Workplace* (New York: Gallery Books, 2021).

## REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

Your final grade will be determined as follows:

1. Demonstrated Class Preparation—20%
2. Readings Test 1—10%
3. Short Paper—15%
4. Presentation and Draft—15%
5. Readings Test 2—15%
6. Long Paper—25%

## A WORD ON DEADLINES AND SCHEDULED EXAMS

I take class, deadlines, and scheduled exams very seriously. In fairness to your classmates, any emergencies that arise should be brought to my attention as soon as possible. Please note that computer problems *never* constitute an acceptable excuse. **I do not accept late work, but I will**

**accept and grade incomplete work. (However, short papers must meet the word limit to get a passing grade.)**

Grading legend:

A+	97-100
A	93-96
A-	90-92
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F	50-59

### HOW TO DO WELL IN THIS COURSE

Pretty much failsafe in my experience!

1. Attend all classes. Worry less about note-taking than staying engaged in the discussion. I will provide necessary notes.
2. Complete all readings in advance of class meetings.
3. Use the week to prepare for our one-day-per week class. Do the after-class readings, and spread your work out. Do not save this course for Tuesday night!
4. Write the maximum number of short papers (4).
5. Be an informed participant in discussions by drawing directly on the texts.
6. Write a final paper that builds on your best short paper and responds to my comments and—if applicable—the comments of your classmates.

SCHEDULE (Subject to Change as the Course Progresses)

\* **Short Paper opportunity**

- W Jan 12     *Before class:*  
Carnegie, Parts One and Two  
*After class:*  
Price, Chapter 1 (16-24)
- W Jan 19     *Before class:*  
Carnegie, Parts Three and Four  
Rae Langton, “Duty and Desolation” (JSTOR)\*  
*After class:*  
Price, Chapter 1 (24-33)
- W Jan 26     *Before class:*  
Cialdini, Introduction-Chapter 4  
*After class:*  
Price, Chapter 2 (38-53)
- W Feb 2      *Before class:*  
Cialdini, Chapter 5-Chapter 7  
Baron, “Manipulativeness” (JSTOR)\*  
*After class:*  
Price, Chapter 2 (53-63) & Chapter (33-37)
- W Feb 9      *Before class:*  
Noggle, “Manipulative Actions” (JSTOR)\*  
Barnhill, “What is Manipulation” (Coons and Weber)\*  
*After class:*  
Price, Chapter 5 (43-52)
- W Feb 16     **Reading Test 1**  
Price, Introduction
- W Feb 23     *Before class:*  
Gorin, “Towards a Theory of Interpersonal Manipulation (Coons and Weber)\*  
Manne, “Non-Machiavellian Manipulation (Coons and Weber)\*  
*After class:*  
Price, Chapter 3 (64-81)
- W Mar 2      *Before class:*  
Baron, “The *Mens Rea* and Moral Status of Manipulation (Coons and Weber)\*  
CATCH-UP DAY

**Spring Break**

- W Mar 16     *Before Class:*  
Blumenthal-Barby, “A Framework” (Coons and Weber)\*  
Cave, “Unsavory Seduction and Manipulation (Coons and Weber)\*  
*After class:*  
Price, Chapter 6 (152-163)
- W Mar 23     *Before class:*  
Machiavelli, *The Prince* (selections on Blackboard)  
Smith, Chapters 1-4
- W Mar 30     *Before class:*  
Smith, Chapters 5-11
- W Apr 6        **Reading Test 2**
- W Apr 13       **Presentations (Group A)**
- W Apr 20       **Presentations (Group B)**
- F Apr 29       **Final Paper Due (7:00-10:00 pm)**