Critical Thinking and Methods of Inquiry
LDST 250, Section 1

Fall 2023

Course Syllabus

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

COURSE DESCRIPTION
One characteristic feature of humans is our **liability to hold mistaken beliefs**. Unfortunately for us, it often turns out that we just have things wrong—sometimes badly wrong. We can think that we know things when in fact we do not. This problem is particularly acute for leaders. Leaders often face problems to which answers are not obvious. Accordingly, we might say that they can find themselves at the "epistemic margins" of social, political, and professional life. For example, they are frequently innovators and, so, must rely upon knowledge bases that are even more limited than are the knowledge bases upon which we rely in our everyday dealings in the world. This feature of leadership is important: leaders must sometimes take greater chances and face greater risks than do most individuals—both self-regarding and other-regarding chances and risks. In many ways, then, this is a course in **self-leadership**. How can we be expected to lead others in the right direction, we might ask, if we are misleading ourselves?

Humans face a myriad of familiar **defects of reasoning**. In this course, we will begin with a **humanities-based approach** to how our reasoning goes awry. Most of the major defects of reasoning identified by philosophers can be put under the headings of "questionable premises" or "invalidity." We sometimes reason from unfounded beliefs, and our beliefs often fail to support the conclusions that we want to draw from them. The goal in the first part of the course is to learn to notice and, ultimately, avoid these defects in our own reasoning.

Some of these problems, especially those at the level of argumentative premises, raise questions about whether, and how, we know things more generally. Is there such a thing as **objective truth**, or is all "truth" **relative**? Is knowledge even possible—that is, should we settle for **skepticism**? What conditions do we have to meet for a claim to knowledge? What is the role of the **internal** and **external** perspective with respect to claims of knowledge? In the first part of the course, we will take about one day per week to consider these basic epistemological questions.

In the second part of the course, we will consider a **social scientific** argument for the claim that reasoning and knowledge—indeed, thinking—are under attack. Advocates of this claim suggest that some false beliefs originate where we would least expect it: the university. Here, our goal

will be not only to learn what social scientists, especially in the discipline of psychology, have to say about the challenges to critical thinking—indeed, wisdom—but also to apply what we have learned in the course to critically engage with their arguments and supporting cases.

As both a leader and a student of leadership, you will be presented with information from a variety of sources and in areas in which you have little to no expertise. You therefore need skills for making **your own judgments** about arguments and about the information on which these arguments rest. Because leadership turns on influencing others—on always being ready to justify oneself by means of an appeal to **rational persuasion**—you will also need to be able to give **cogent arguments** for your beliefs. You must be able to make a convincing argument that you are right and that others should accept (and, thus, act on) the beliefs that you have. In addition, if the social scientists are correct, you will need a sophisticated understanding of how people (including yourself) are actually inclined to think—often to the detriment of finding the truth. These leadership competencies fit with what you will need to be successful as a student of leadership: the ability to move among different **disciplines** and **methodologies** in the humanities and social sciences that come to bear on a multidisciplinary education.

This course aims to provide the necessary means for developing these fundamental leadership competencies. In the end, its success will depend in large part on your willingness to engage yourself fully in readings, assignments, discussions, and class exercises. To facilitate this kind of engagement, I use assigned seating. I also regularly call on people and give **Periodic Quizzes**, which will (usually) be unannounced. **Attendance** affects your **Periodic Quizzes** grade (if there is a quiz when you are absent), and—in all likelihood—your **Tests** grades. You should email me in advance if you will be unable to attend class.

Please note that **we begin and end on time** and that students are expected to remain in class for the entire class period. If you are late to class, you may be asked to wait outside until we are finished with the quiz.

ELECTRONIC DEVICES
Computers, tablets, and phones are not permitted in class. **Recording class sessions or meetings is also prohibited.** All devices must be silenced and placed out of view during class. Students should minimize any other distractions and respect the rules of standard classroom etiquette.

THE HONOR CODE AND USE OF AI
As a student at the University of Richmond, you are bound by the Honor Code. The Honor Code prohibits the use of any unauthorized assistance. For this course, the use of text-generating artificial intelligence tools (such as, but not limited to, ChatGPT) will be considered unauthorized assistance. I will work with Honor Council to investigate and address any potential violations. This includes the use of generative AI for any stage of the work from conception to completion.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- Students should learn to identify formal and informal fallacies in the reasoning of others and how to avoid these fallacies in their own thought and in written and verbal communication.

- Students should have a sophisticated view of the nature and limits of claims to knowledge.

- Students should become aware of the challenges to critical thinking and arrive at considered conclusions about their implications for our understanding of leadership.

- Student should be able to apply their critical thinking skills in the study and exercise of leadership.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Jennifer Nagel, *Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt, *The Coddling of the American Mind* (New York: Penguin, 2018).

REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

Your final grade will be determined as follows:

1. Periodic Quizzes—25%

2. Test 1—25%

3. Test 2—25%

4. Application Paper—25%

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

<u>HOW TO DO WELL IN THIS COURSE</u>

Pretty much failsafe in my experience!

1. Attend all classes.

2. Complete all practices problems and readings in advance of class meetings.

3. Be an informed participant in discussions by drawing directly on the texts.

4. Ask questions in class and schedule a meeting with me when you do not understand the material.

5. Learn from mistakes you and others make in class, on quizzes, and on tests.

<u>DEADLINES AND SCHEDULED EXAMS</u>
I take deadlines and scheduled exams very seriously. In fairness to your classmates, emergencies should be brought to my attention as soon as possible before the deadline or scheduled exam. **I do not accept late work, but I will accept and grade incomplete work.** I do not give "extra credit."

<u>SCHEDULE</u> (subject to change as the course progresses)

W Aug 30   **Introduction to Arguments and Epistemology**
Goldstein, "Our Moment of Truth" (on Blackboard)

F Sept 1   **Formal Logic**

W Sept 6   **Formal Logic**

F Sept 8   **Epistemology**: Nagel, Chapter 1

W Sept 13   **Informal Logic**

F Sept 15   **Epistemology**: Nagel, Chapter 2

W Sept 20   **Informal Logic**

F Sept 22   **Epistemology**: Nagel, Chapter 4

W Sept 27   **Informal Logic**

F Sept 29   **Epistemology**: Nagel, Chapter 5

W Oct 4   CATCH-UP DAY

F Oct 6	**Informal Logic**
W Oct 11	**Argumentative Analysis**
F Oct 13	NO CLASS
W Oct 18	**Informal Logic**
F Oct 20	REVIEW
W Oct 25	**Test 1**
F Oct 27	TEST DEBRIEF
W Nov 1	**Argumentative Analysis**
F Nov 3	Lukianoff and Haidt, Introduction & Part I
W Nov 8	**Argumentative Analysis**
R Nov 9	**Angel Parham Lecture, 5 p.m.**
F Nov 10	Lukianoff and Haidt, Part I & Part II
W Nov 15	**Argumentative Analysis**
F Nov 17	Lukianoff and Haidt, Part III
	THANKSGIVING WEEK
W Nov 29	Lukianoff and Haidt, Part III
F Dec 1	**Test 2**
W Dec 6	PAPER WORKSHOP
F Dec 9	**Course Wrap-up**
M Dec 15	**Application Paper emailed to me in MS Word by 12:00 p.m.**