

Critical Thinking and Methods of Inquiry
LDSP 250 sec. 01, Spring, 2008
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Class: Jepson Hall room 107
Monday/Wednesday 11:30-12:45
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Purpose

The purpose of this course is to develop thinking skills. We live in a society that mass-produces information. Not all of it is true or well grounded in fact. The key challenge in an information age is to know how to judge the quality of the information, opinions, and arguments that we are exposed to on a daily basis. This includes the ideas, arguments and assertions that we see, hear or read in the news, in coursework, on the job and in all human relations. Critical thinking is a fundamental leadership competency. Leaders are often presented with information from a variety of sources and about areas where they have no expertise. They must know how to make good judgments about people, information, and arguments. Leaders also have to know how to present persuasive arguments. Some people become leaders because of their personality, desire, or “people skills.” Others become leaders because of their ideas and ability to create a vision, plan for the future, and anticipate and solve problems. Critical thinking is the foundational skill for of the Jepson School curriculum. It is not an end in itself, but a first step towards creative thinking and problem solving. The ability to think critically and solve problems is not only important for leadership, but for a life-long learning.

Course Objectives

In this course students will learn how to:

- . critically read, listen, and write
- . separate bad information from good information
- . analyze arguments and construct cogent arguments
- . anticipate and solve problems in complex systems
- . reflect on their own world view and the nature of truth and inference
- . develop intellectual and personal discipline

Course Description

The components of this course are critical writing, informal logic, epistemology, and systems theory. The content of the course is largely philosophic, but most of the application exercises will be centered on topics related to leadership. Students will analyze ideas in texts and lectures, learn how to critique and construct arguments, and analyze problems in complex systems. They will also examine the ways that powerful groups and people can influence notions of truth.

Requirements, Grading, and Participation

This syllabus should be regarded as a contract. Due dates for papers and exam dates are set, so please mark them down on your calendar. **Late papers will not be accepted, even if they are the result of computer problems.** Emailed papers **are not** accepted except with permission of the instructor.

30%	2 Exams
(10%)	Paper 1
(10%)	Paper 2
(10%)	Paper 3
(20%)	Systems Analysis
(5%)	Systems Presentation
(15%)	Class Participation.

You will be graded on the quality of your participation. Exemplary participation consists of coming to the class having done the readings, exercises or other assignments, offered specific and insightful comments on the readings, asked good questions, and contributed to the class's learning. It also includes integrity in the way you do your assignments. Participation includes the way that you work on group assignments and class exercises. Students should be respectful of others in the class. This includes showing up on time, not getting up during class (except in the case of an urgent problem). All electronic devices must be turned off at the beginning of class. Attendance is mandatory.

Required Texts

Howard Kahane & Nancy Cavender, *Logic and Contemporary Rhetoric*, 10th edition, (Wadsworth Publishing, 2006).

Naguib Mahfouz, *Akhenaten: Dweller in Truth*, translated by Tagried Abu-Hassabo, (Anchor Books, 1998).

Other readings will be assigned in class and placed on blackboard (BB)

Course Outline

I. Thinking About Reason and Truth

Jan. 14	Introduction: Left brain /right brain exercise
Jan. 16	The Nature of Truth Read: Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, "The Hairy Ball – Teeth Optional: The Truth You Feel," <i>Truth: A History and a Guide for the Perplexed</i> , (St. Martin's Press, 1997), 9-34. (BB)
Jan. 21-23	Good and Bad Reasoning Read: Kahane/Cavender Chapter 1
Jan. 28	Inductive and Deductive Reasoning Read: Kahane/Cavender Chapter 2

Jan. 30 How Truth Changes in Science
Read Thomas Kuhn, "The Priority of Paradigms" (BB)
Video: *The Day the Universe Changed: Science Revises the Heavens*

Feb. 1 Friday, Paper 1 due by 5:00

II. Fallacious Thinking

Feb. 4 & 6 Fallacious Reasoning
Read: Kahane/Cavender, Chapter 3

Feb. 11 & 13 Fallacious Reasoning
Read: Kahane/Cavender, Chapter 4

Feb. 18 & 20 Fallacious Reasoning
Read: Kahane/Cavender, Chapter 5

Feb. 22 Friday, Paper 2 due by 5:00

Feb. 25 Review for Exam

Feb. 27 Exam

Mar. 3 Psychological Impediments to Cogent Reasoning
Read: Kahane/Cavender Chapter 6

Mar. 5 Students will attend the Donchian Forum on the Ethical Challenges of
Read: Leadership in the Jepson Alumni Center

Mar. 10 & 12 Spring Break

Mar. 17 No Class (to compensate for Mar. 30 class)

III. Systems Thinking

Mar. 19 The Nature of Systems
Read: Dietrich Dörner, *The Logic of Failure* (Perseus, 1996), Chapters 1-2
(BB)
*Deadline for groups and paper topics to be approved

Mar. 24 Setting Goals and Creating Models
Read: Dörner, Chapters 3-4 (BB)

Mar. 26 (Speaker To Be Announced)

Mar. 30 Sunday 3-5:40 Students will play the systems simulation called The Beer game. Note: This game does not involve drinking beer, although snacks will be served during the session.

IV. Arguments Behind Products, People, and Ideas

- Mar. 31 Thinking About Selling People and Products
Read: Kahane/Cavender, Chapter 10
- Apr. 2 Thinking About the News
Read: Kahane/Cavender, Chapter 11
- Apr. 7 Truth, Belief, and the Leader/Follower Relationship
Read: Akhenaten (the whole text)
- Apr. 9 Exam**
- Apr. 14 No class (To compensate for Mar. 30 class)
- Apr. 15 Tuesday, Systems papers due by 5:00**
- Apr. 16 Systems paper presentations
- Apr. 21 Systems Paper Presentations continued
- Apr. 23 System Paper Presentations continued
- Apr. 25 Friday, Paper 3 due by 5:00**

V. Assignments

Paper 1: Editorial Analysis

In this paper you will find two editorials or short articles that take different positions on a candidate in the presidential primaries (i.e. one arguing in favor of a candidate and one arguing against him or her). Look at these articles from the perspective of an undecided voter. Write a 1000-word (double-spaced) essay that critically examines the arguments in each essay. Examine the premises and conclusions of the argument carefully and decide which of the arguments is most convincing to you. **You must include the two editorials when you hand in your paper.**

Failure to follow these instructions will result in a lower grade. **Papers are due on February 1 by 5:00.** Late papers will not be accepted.

Paper 2: The Anti-Hitler Speech

This paper requires you to analyze the problems with an argument and then construct a convincing argument in the form a leader giving a speech. Read the “Nation and Race,” a chapter from Adolf Hitler’s Mein Kampf. It is on pp. 218-219 of Kahane.

Imagine that it is 1939 and you are the mayor of a small town in Germany. You are appalled by the ideas in Mein Kampf because they are immoral and scientifically questionable. The book has become a best seller in your town: You have called a meeting to explain to the town’s people why Hitler’s argument concerning the master race is fallacious. Write a 1000-word (double-spaced) speech that discusses the major premises of Hitler’s essay and the logical problems with the arguments in the essay.

Unlike the way things often are in real life, the success of your presentation to the community rests on your ability to logically dissect Hitler’s argument. In other words, pretend that the force of reason will prevail. Also, do your best to make the speech interesting and understandable to a broad audience. Use common sense to test out what Hitler says about races and species. Think about simple examples that support what you say or contradict Hitler. Do his claims make sense, given an ordinary person’s observation of the world? **Do not use any information about genetics that did not exist prior to 1939. You do not need to use outside references.**

It is useful to use the margin or summary method to isolate the key premises that need to be examined. When you refer to specific passages in Hitler’s essay, put the page numbers in parentheses at the end of the sentence. Your paper should be typed and double-spaced. The pages should be numbered at the bottom. Failure to follow these instructions will result in a lower grade. **Papers are due on February 22 by 5:00.** Late papers will not be accepted.

· By 1939 Mein Kampf was translated into 11 languages and had sold over 5 million copies.

Systems Analysis

This project will be done in pairs. You may either pick your partner or be assigned a partner. The project includes a paper and a class presentation of the paper.

1. Find your topic and have it approved either via email, in class, or by meeting with the instructor. The most difficult and important part of doing this assignment is finding a topic. You should have your paper topic approved by the instructor no later than **March 19**. In this paper, you will have to find a case where, as Dörner says, “things went wrong.” This may be the case of a misguided public policy, an accident, a decision made to improve something that actually made it worse or created another problem, or a well intended but disastrous leadership decision. You may not use a decision from history. It has to be an event in the news that has occurred between Jan. 2006-present.

2. After you have an approved topic, you will do research on it. Then, using the concepts from the articles by Dörner you will discuss the following:

I. Description

- What were the details of the problem that was being addressed?
- Who were the people involved in making the decision?
- What was the decision making process?
- What was the climate of the organization, group, individual, etc. like when the decision was being made?

II. Analysis of the Failure

- What made the decision or policy fail? What were its unintended consequences?
- In retrospect, what was wrong with the planning and decision process?
- What was wrong with the way that the way people framed or modeled the problem?
- What was wrong with the way that the way people framed or modeled the solution?
- What, if anything, was wrong with the decision makers’ state of mind?
- What if anything was wrong with the information they used? What issues or variables did they fail to take into consideration?

III. Discussion of How the Failure Might have been Prevented

- Use the material from the readings to put together a plan that would have prevented or anticipated the failure. (This part can also be integrated into your discussion in II.)

3. Papers should be about 4000 words long. You must use at least 8 references. The paper should be double-spaced, the pages numbered, and you should include endnotes. If you use a reference that is not cited in the footnotes, include a bibliography. You may use any standard citation format. The library web site has information on how to cite paper and electronic references. Half of your grade will be based on your research of the case and half on your analysis of the case. Failure to follow any of these instructions will result in a lower grade. **Papers are due on April 15 by 5:00.** Late papers will not be accepted.

Systems Analysis Presentation

Each pair will make a 20-minute presentation of their systems analysis to the class. This presentation is worth 5% of your grade. Presentations will be rigorously graded using the following criteria in order of importance:

1. Did the presenters critically analyze the case and the information that they collected?
2. Were they resourceful in their research and choice of case?
3. Did the presentation reflect insights from the course in the analysis of the case?
4. Did the presenters explain the case clearly?
5. Were the presenters well organized?
6. Was the presentation creative and/or engaging to the audience?
7. How well were the presenters able to cover their research in the allotted time frame?
8. Assess the way that the presenters spoke and carried themselves during the presentation.

Paper 3

This assignment will be handed out in class and posted on Blackboard after the mid-term.