

LDST 250 Critical Thinking

T or R 11:15-12:30

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Office Hours: TR 5:15-6:30, W 4-5, and by appointment

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The aims of this course are practical ones: to prepare you for your academic future, as well as to contribute something to the way you think about and engage with the world around you. In other words, this is a skills-based, rather than a content-oriented, course: the vocabulary you develop, the habits of mind you cultivate can and should be portable. We will focus on problems of knowledge and interpretation, on the potential and pitfalls of language and argumentation; the course will be as much about reading and writing as it is about thinking. We will learn from social theorists and novelists, scholars and public intellectuals. Because it will help us to have a common framework for substantive discussion, we will supplement our critical thinking guide with readings on the wide-ranging theme of consumer culture. But since nobody said we can't have fun while in pursuit of these worthy ends, we'll try our best to do that, too.

Texts:

** selected essays on electronic reserve **

Brooks, *Bobos in Paradise*

Browne & Keeley, *Asking the Right Questions: A Guide to Critical Thinking*

Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*

Recommended:

Gibaldi, *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (6th edition)

Warburton, *Thinking From A to Z*

Williams & Colomb, *The Craft of Argument* (concise edition) or

Booth, Colomb, & Williams, *The Craft of Research* (2nd edition)

REQUIREMENTS:

1. *Class contribution* (15%): You are required to keep up with the reading assignments and participate in class discussion in an active and informed manner. You may occasionally be asked to help *lead* class discussion; you will always be expected to help *shape* it. This will not be a lecture course.

2. *Short Assignments* (28%): You will be responsible for completing a variety of short assignments aimed at cultivating your critical reading and writing skills. You may turn in one late assignment without penalty. See separate sheet for details.

3. *Paper* (32%): You will write a research paper of 6-8 pages at the end of the class. Guidelines and suggested topics will be provided as the deadline approaches.

4. *Quizzes* (25%): Instead of a cumulative final exam, there will be regular reading

quizzes, beginning in the third week of class. I will drop the lowest quiz grade before calculating your average.

RULES & REGS:

Failure to meet the short assignment deadlines will affect your grade. Written work must be handed in to my box in Jepson 126 before 5 p.m. on the due date. Extensions will be accepted *only if you speak to me before the paper is due*. If you submit a late paper without getting advanced (more than 24 hours) approval, your paper grade will be reduced by an **entire letter grade** (i.e., a paper grade of B-plus becomes a C-plus).

Since class participation is an essential part of this course, I will allow only two unexcused absences without penalty (an excused absence is one about which I have been notified beforehand—for example, a serious illness, athletic event, religious observance, or family emergency). More than two unexcused absences will result in the reduction of your final grade by **two-thirds of a letter grade for each missed class** (i.e., a final grade of a B-plus becomes a B-minus).

KEY DATES:

LAST DAY TO DROP/ADD: JANUARY 23

LAST DAY TO WITHDRAW: FEBRUARY 27

FINAL PAPER: TUESDAY, APRIL 28

Calendar: LDST 250

Week 1: Getting Started

reading: Edmundson, "On the Uses of a Liberal Education: I. As Lite Entertainment for Bored College Students" (**e-reserve**)

optional: Shorris, "On the Uses of a Liberal Education: II. As a Weapon in the Hands of the Restless Poor" (**)

assignment: none

Week 2: Backgrounds

reading: Browne & Keeley (B&K), chs. 1-3; McMillan & Cheney, "The Student as Consumer" and Williams & Colomb, "Argument & Rationality" (**)

optional: Press & Washburn, "The Kept University" (**)

assignment: none

Week 3: Backgrounds & Classic Texts

reading: B&K, ch. 4; Williams, from *Keywords* (xerox); Adorno & Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry" (**)

optional: Glickman, from *Consumer Society in American History* (**)

assignment: QUIZ 1

Week 4: Classic Texts, cont'd

reading: B&K, chs. 5- 6; Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, chs. 1-2

preview: Marx, "The Fetishism of the Commodity & Its Secret" (**)

assignment: SHORT ASSIGNMENT (SA) 1

Week 5: Classic Texts, cont'd

reading: B&K, ch. 7; Veblen, chs. 3-4, Marx, "The Fetishism of the Commodity..." (**)

review: B&K, chs. 4-6

assignment: QUIZ 2

Week 6: Contemporary Contexts

reading: B&K, ch. 8; Hine, "What's in a Package" (**)

optional: Kron, "The Semiotics of Home Decor" (**)

assignment: SA 2

Week 7: Contemporary Contexts, cont'd

reading: B&K, ch. 9; Marchand, "The Parable of the Democracy of Goods" (**)

optional: Solomon, "Masters of Desire" (**)

assignment: [logical fallacies review]

Week 8: The Educated Elite

reading: Brooks, *Bobos in Paradise*, Introduction and chs. 1-2

review: B&K, chs. 7-9

assignment: QUIZ 3

SPRING BREAK— NO CLASS 3/11 & 3/13

Week 9: The Educated Elite, cont'd

reading: B&K, ch. 10; Brooks (finish)

optional: none

assignment: none

Week 10: Shopping, Clothes, & Identity

reading: B&K, ch. 11; Veblen, ch. 7; Gladwell, "Listening to Khakis" and Davis, "Blue Jeans" (**)

optional: Halter, *Shopping for Identity*, chs. 2-3 (**)

assignment: SA 3

Week 11: Shopping & Identity, cont'd

reading: B&K, ch. 12; DuCille, "Toy Theory" and Prager, "Our Barbies, Ourselves" (**)

optional: Bernstein, "Goin' Gangsta, Choosin' Cholita" (**)

assignment: QUIZ 4

Week 12: The Politics of Shopping

reading: B&K, ch. 13; Clark, "Commodity Lesbianism" (**)

preview: Fiske, "Shopping for Pleasure" (**)

assignment: SA 4; PAPER PROPOSAL DUE BY FRIDAY

Week 13: The Rebel Consumer

reading: B&K, ch. 14 & "Final Word"; Fiske, "Shopping for Pleasure" and Frank, "Why Johnny Can't Dissent" (**)

optional: Frank, "Alternative to What?" and Klein, "Alt.Everything" (**)

assignment: QUIZ 5 (and research!)

Week 14: Here & Now

reading: Schor, "Towards a New Politics of Consumption" (**)

optional: Heath & Potter, from *The Rebel Sell* (**)

assignment: work on your paper!