

Critical Thinking and Methods of Inquiry
LDSP 250 sec. 03, Spring, 2009
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Class: Jepson Hall room 102
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
- understand causal connections in systems
- develop intellectual and personal discipline

Course Description

The components of this course are critical writing, informal logic, and epistemology. 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. If you are late for class on the day that a paper is due, you will lose ½ grade on your assignment.** Emailed papers are not accepted except with permission of the instructor.

- (40%) Exam I Mar. 4, 20% & Exam II Apr. 15, 20%
- (5%) Paper 1 Truth Paper due on Jan. 21
- (10%) Paper 2 Editorial Paper due on Feb. 11
- (20%) Systems Analysis due on Apr. 3 by 5:00 PM
- (10%) Paper 3 Capstone Paper due on Apr. 22
- (15%) Class Participation

You will be graded on the quality of your participation. Exemplary participation consists of coming to the class having read the readings, exercises, or other assignments; offering specific and insightful comments on the readings; asking good questions; and contributing to the class's learning. It also includes integrity in the way you do your assignments and 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 physical 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 Thinking and Truth

- Jan. 14 Introduction: Left brain /right brain exercise
- Jan. 21 Truth and Knowledge
Read: Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, "The Hairy Ball – Teeth Optional: The Truth that you Feel," from *Truth: A History and Guide for the Perplexed*, Thomas Dunne Books, 1999. (BB)
Paper 1 due at the beginning of class.
- Jan. 28 Good and Bad Reasoning
Read: Kahane/Cavender Chapter 1
- Feb. 4 Inductive and Deductive Reasoning
Read: Kahane/Cavender Chapter 2

II. Fallacious Thinking

- Feb. 11 Fallacious Reasoning
Read: Kahane/Cavender, Chapter 3
Paper 2 due at the beginning of class.
- Feb. 18 Fallacious Reasoning
Read: Kahane/Cavender, Chapter 4
- Feb. 25 Fallacious Reasoning
Read: Kahane/Cavender, Chapter 5
- Mar. 4 **Exam I**
- Mar. 11 Spring Break

III. Systems Thinking

- Mar. 18 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. 25 Setting Goals and Creating Models
Read: Dörner, Chapters 3-4 (BB)
- Apr. 1 Psychological Impediments to Cogent Reasoning
Read: Kahane/Cavender Chapter 6
Kalle Lasn, *Culture Jam: How to Reverse America's Suicidal Consumer Binge – And Why We Must* (Harper Paperbacks, 2000), pp. 3-41. (BB)
- April 3 Systems Papers due by 5PM.**
- Apr. 8 Systems Paper Discussion
- Apr. 15 **Exam II**
- Apr. 22 Truth, Belief, and the Leader/Follower Relationship
Read: Akhenaten (the whole text)
Paper 3 due at the beginning of class.

Assignments

Paper 1: Truth

Write a 500-word argument (about 2 pages double-spaced) about how you know that something is true. **Papers are due at the beginning of class on January 21. Late papers will not be accepted.**

Paper 2: Editorial Analysis

Write a 1000-word (about 4 pages double-spaced) essay that critically examines the argument in an editorial on an issue related to leadership. Find an editorial from a major newspaper or magazine. Make sure that it is a fairly long editorial. Isolate the major premises of the author's argument. Assess the quality of the premises. Is there suppressed evidence? Are the premises true? Do the premises logically lead to the editorial's conclusion? How does the author use language to persuade or mislead the reader? **You must include the editorial with your paper.** Failure to follow these instructions will result in a lower grade. **Papers are due at the beginning of class on February 11. Late papers will not be accepted.**

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 16**. 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. 2007-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 should be 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 in the instructor's mailbox or office on or before April 3 by 5:00. Late papers will not be accepted.**

Paper 3 Capstone Paper

The goal of this paper is to apply what you have learned about critical thinking to a novel. Write a 1000 word (about 4 pages double-spaced pages) analysis of what you think is the truth about Akhenaten, based only on what is presented in the novel. This will include discussion of which characters you think tell the truth and which ones seem to lie. You will need to give reasons and examples to support your opinion and the whole paper should present a cogent argument. In your essay, you must use concepts from Kahane's book, Armesto's essay, and (where appropriate) other course materials in your analysis and argument. **Papers are due at the beginning of class on April 22. Late papers will not be accepted.**