The Ethics of Influence
LDST 357-01

Spring 2020

Course Syllabus

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Office Hours: Open door and by 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 take an extended look at the morality of public policy efforts to influence behavior with “nudges.” Cass Sunstein’s The Ethics of Influence 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 each participant bears an equal burden in explaining, critiquing, and developing the ideas conveyed in the readings. To facilitate this kind of engagement, I will regularly call on people with the expectation that you have completed the readings. **Class Contribution** constitutes a significant part of your final grade.

Each student is also required to write at least one **Short Paper**. Short papers are 800-1000 words and 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 by 9:00 a.m. on the day of class. I strongly recommend that you write more than one short paper. Your **Final Paper** must be based on one of 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. You may choose *once* to write on a reading from the class just previous.

Please note that **we begin and end on time** and that students are expected to be in class for the entire class period—except during the break. You may use computers in class, but you must first send me an email pledging that you will restrict your usage to the course-related activities of note taking and accessing course readings. Smartphones and similar devices must be turned off and placed out of view during class.

**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.

**REQUIRED TEXTS**


**REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING**
Your final grade will be determined as follows:

1. Class Contribution — 20%
2. Readings Test 1 — 10%
3. Short Paper — 15%
4. Presentation and Draft — 15%
5. Readings Test 2 — 15%

**A WORD ON DEADLINES AND SCHEDULED EXAMS**
The instructor takes 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.**

Grading legend:

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SCHEDULE (Subject to Change as the Course Progresses)

* Short Paper opportunity

W Jan 15  Carnegie, Parts One and Two

W Jan 22  Carnegie, Parts Three and Four
Rae Langton, “Duty and Desolation” (JSTOR)*

W Jan 29  Cialdini, Introduction-Chapter 4

W Feb 5   Cialdini, Chapter 5-Epilogue
Baron, “Manipulativeness” (JSTOR)*

W Feb 12  Noggle, “Manipulative Actions” (JSTOR)*
Barnhill, “What is Manipulation” (Coons and Weber)*

W Feb 19  **Reading Test 1**
Coons and Weber, “Introduction” (Coons and Weber)

W Feb 26  Gorin, “Towards a Theory of Interpersonal Manipulation (Coons and Weber)*
Manne, “Non-Machiavellian Manipulation (Coons and Weber)*

W Mar 4   Baron, “The Mens Rea and Moral Status of Manipulation (Coons and Weber)*
Speaker: Major Christian Quinn

Spring Break

W Mar 18  Blumenthal-Barby, “A Framework” (Coons and Weber)*
Cave, “Unsavory Seduction and Manipulation (Coons and Weber)*

W Mar 25  Wood, “Coercion, Manipulation, and Exploitation” (Coons and Weber)*
Cholbi, “Implications of Ego Depletion” (Coons and Weber)*

W Apr 1   **Presentations (Group A)**

W Apr 8   **Presentations (Group B)**

W Apr 15  Sunstein, Chapters 1-5

W Apr 22  **Reading Test 2**
Sunstein, Chapter 6-Recapitulation

F May 1   **Final Paper Due (7:00-10:00 pm)**
Awarding of Credit
To be successful in this course, a student should expect to devote 10-14 hours each week, including class time and time spent on course-related activities.
[registrar.richmond.edu/services/policies/academic-credit.html](registrar.richmond.edu/services/policies/academic-credit.html)

Disability Accommodations
Students with a Disability Accommodation Notice should contact their instructors as early in the semester as possible to discuss arrangements for completing course assignments and exams.
[disability.richmond.edu/](disability.richmond.edu/)

Honor System
The Jepson School supports the provisions of the Honor System. The shortened version of the honor pledge is: “I pledge that I have neither received nor given unauthorized assistance during the completion of this work.”
[studentdevelopment.richmond.edu/student-handbook/honor/the-honor-code.html](studentdevelopment.richmond.edu/student-handbook/honor/the-honor-code.html)

Religious Observance
Students should notify their instructors within the first two weeks of classes if they will need accommodations for religious observance.
[registrar.richmond.edu/planning/religiousobs.html](registrar.richmond.edu/planning/religiousobs.html)

*updated 8/10/2016*