Critical Thinking and Methods of Inquiry

Dr. Javier Hidalgo
Office: 234 Jepson Hall
Email: jhidalgo@richmond.edu or hidalgoj@gmail.com

Class Time and Rooms:
- Section 2: 10:30-11:45am Tuesdays and Thursdays, Jepson G28.
- Section 3: 12pm-1:15pm Tuesdays and Thursdays, Jepson G22.

Office Hours: I post a sign-up sheet for my office hours on blackboard. Please sign up for office hours there.

Course Description:

This course will focus on argument analysis and evaluation. We learn how to analyze the structure of arguments. But analyzing arguments is hard. Like other skills, you need to practice analyzing and evaluating arguments in order to become proficient. This course will give you a great deal of practice.

The cornerstone of this course is argument mapping. Argument maps are visual representations of reasoning. They show the underlying logical structure of arguments. Argument maps represent arguments visually to help people better understand them.

Why learn argument mapping? Argument mapping helps people to improve their critical thinking skills. According to the available research, courses that focus intensively on argument mapping are about two to three times more effective at instilling critical thinking skills than traditional courses. This is the reason that we will focus on argument mapping throughout this course. You will likely find that the skills you learn in this class will help you to become a better writer and thinker in other courses as well.

One other aspect of this course that is worth noting: throughout the course we will focus on debates about controversial contemporary issues, like sanctuary cities, animal experimentation, euthanasia, effective altruism, and other contentious topics. I’ve selected debates that include moral arguments and that involve complex empirical questions. The debates in this class won’t focus on any one subject matter. Instead, we will read debates about a disparate set of topics.

Why focus on debates? The point of this course is argument analysis. Debates are an excellent resource for understanding arguments. People often learn best how to analyze arguments by evaluating the arguments for and against a position. But keep in mind that, in this class, understanding debates is only a means to an end: learning to clarify and evaluate arguments more generally.

Here’s a brief outline of the course. We will begin with a basic introduction to argument analysis and mapping. We will then consider different kinds of arguments, such as deductive and inductive arguments, and the standards by which we should assess them. After mastering basic techniques of argument mapping and evaluation, we will then begin mapping arguments in editorials and short papers. The arguments that we study will grow in complexity as the course goes on. Near the end of the course, we will map out and evaluate difficult philosophical
arguments in academic articles.

Policies:
1. Please do not use your laptops during class for anything except class work.
2. I can only offer make up exams in cases of extreme duress like documented medical emergencies and/or religious observance.
3. If you have a documented disability and would like some form of academic accommodation, please contact me as soon as possible to discuss whether such accommodation can be provided.

Course Requirements:

1. Problem Sets (45 percent)
   a. You will need to complete a problem set almost every week. These problem sets will deal with the material in class or the readings that we discussed the previous week.
   b. All of the problem sets are on blackboard.
   c. I encourage you to collaborate in creating argument maps in class. However, you cannot just copy maps from another student. It’s important that you actively contribute to creating argument maps so that you learn how to do it.
   d. Late policy:
      i. Turn your maps in 24 hours after deadline: One third of a grade off.
      ii. Turn them in 24-48 hours after deadline: two thirds of a grade off.
      iii. After that: you can still complete the problem set at any time for half credit.
   e. If you receive less than 50 percent on a problem set, you can complete it again for half credit.

2. Midterm (10 percent)
   a. The midterm will consist in questions about the material that we covered in class from week 1 to week 6. The midterm is scheduled for the following time:
      i. February 27th during your normal class time.

3. Final (20 percent)
   a. The final is cumulative: it will test you on the material since the beginning of the term.
   b. The final exam is scheduled during the following time:
      i. Section 2 (10:30-11:45am): Tuesday, May 1st from 2-5pm.
      ii. Section 3 (12pm-1:15pm): Monday, April 30th from 2-5pm.

4. Paper (15 percent)
   a. You will need to write a paper that is about 1000-1400 words long. I will give you a suggested prompt for the paper several weeks before it is due.
   b. If you turn in your paper late, I will drop it by 1/3 of a grade. I will then continue to drop your grade by 1/3 for every two days that pass.
c. If you want an extension, you must request one from me at least 24 hours before the paper is due.
d. Computer problems are not a valid excuse for late papers (for this reason, I strongly recommend that you use google drive or drop box to save your work as you write).
e. I won’t give you feedback on drafts over email. If you want any additional comments, please schedule a meeting with me. A warning: if you send me your paper right before it is due, it might be hard to schedule a meeting.
f. I will give you a chance to revise your papers. If your paper substantially improves, it will receive a 1/3 to 2/3 grade increase. To revise your papers, you must turn in a letter that details the changes that you have made to your paper in response to my comments.

5. Class Participation (10 percent)
   a. Class attendance and participation are mandatory. You must do the readings and come to class prepared to discuss these readings.
   b. Students will be penalized by half of a percentage point from their final grade for each unexcused absence after one absence. In other words, your participation grade will take a half percentage point hit each time that you are absent after your first absence from the class.
   c. You will practice argument mapping in most class sessions. There will be little lecturing. Instead, you will actively work in a group with one or two other students generating proposed argument maps, while I circulate among the groups giving feedback and answering questions.
   d. You must bring a laptop to class. If you don’t have a laptop, you will need to borrow one. Please let me know if you need help borrowing a laptop from the university. However, you can only use your laptops in class for argument mapping. I will ask you to close your laptops when we are not practicing.
   e. In many cases I will distribute the readings to you at the beginning of class and you should be able to read them in only a few minutes. While the readings are brief, they can be difficult to interpret and it takes a long time to correctly map out a complex argument.

All the readings are available on the blackboard page for this class. I may make some modifications to the syllabus as the semester progresses. I’ll announce any changes to the syllabus in class and you can always find the updated syllabus on blackboard. It’s your responsibility to make sure that you have the updated version of the syllabus.

**Week 1: Introduction to Argument Analysis**

**Tuesday, January 16th: Can Critical Thinking Be Taught?**
- Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa, “Are Undergraduates Actually Learning Anything?”
- Get started on Maralee Harrell, “Types of Arguments” (on blackboard).

**Thursday, January 18th: Introduction to Arguments**
• Harrell, “Types of Arguments.”
• Recommended: Snyder et al. “Basic Concepts of Logic.”

Friday, January 19th:
• Problem set 1 due at 5pm. You can find the problem set on blackboard in the content folder for week 1.

**Week 2: Argument Mapping**

Tuesday, January 23rd:
• Maralee Harrell, “Argument Analysis and Diagraming.”
• Familiarize yourself with Mindmup.

Thursday, January 25th:
• Harrell, “Argument Analysis and Diagraming.”

Friday, January 26th:
• Problem set 2 due at 5pm.

**Week 3: Mapping and Evaluating Arguments**

Tuesday, January 30th:
• Martin Davies, Ashley Barnett, and Tim van Gelder, “A Procedural Approach to Argument Mapping.”
• Simon Cullen, “Hints for Argument Mapping.”
• In-class exercises.

Thursday, February 1st:
• Recommended: read through the blackboard folder “Argument Patterns.”
• In-class exercises.

Friday, February 2nd:
• Problem set 3 due at 5pm.

**Week 4: Inductive and Causal Arguments**

Tuesday, February 6th: Inductive Arguments
• Readings on Inductive Reasoning, Sampling, and Base Rates.
• In-class exercises.

Thursday, February 8th: Causal Arguments
• Readings on Causal Arguments and Scientific Research.
• In-class exercises.

Friday, February 9th:
• Problem set 4 due at 5pm.

**Week 5: Causal Arguments and Fallacies**

Tuesday, February 13th:
• Review readings on Inductive Reasoning & Causal Arguments.
• In-class exercises.

Thursday, February 15th:
• Snyder et al., “Informal Fallacies.”
• Recommended: Tom Chatfield, “Cognitive Biases.”
• In-class exercises.

Friday, February 16th:
• Problem set 5 due at 5pm.

**Week 6: Review**

Tuesday, February 20th:
• Review for midterm.

Thursday, February 22nd:
• Class cancelled.

Friday, February 23rd:
• Problem set 6 due at 5pm.

**Week 7: Midterm and Mapping Arguments in Short Editorials**

Tuesday, February 27th:
• Midterm.

Thursday, March 1st:
• Debate about Free College.
• Random assignment day.

**Week 8: Mapping Arguments in Short Editorials**

Tuesday, March 6th:
• Debates About Sanctuary Cities.
• Argument map due in class.
• An argument map is now due for every session unless noted otherwise on the syllabus.

Thursday, March 8th:
• Debates About Co-Ed Greek Life.
Week 9: Break

- No class.

Week 10: More Short Editorials

Tuesday, March 20th:
- Debate About Sex Work.
- Reminder: an argument map is due in class.

Thursday, March 22nd:
- Debates about Due Process on College Campuses.

Week 11: Understanding Moral Arguments

Tuesday, March 27th:
- James Rachels, “What is Morality?”
- For this week, you should carefully read the assigned paper before each class session begins and I recommend that you bring a copy of the paper to class.

Thursday, March 29th:

Week 12: Debates About Effective Altruism

Tuesday, April 3rd:
- Debates about Effective Altruism.

Thursday, April 5th:
- Debates about Effective Altruism.

Week 13: Debates about Animal Experimentation

Monday, April 9th:
- Paper due at 5pm. Email it to me at hidalgoj@gmail.com.

Tuesday, April 10th:
- Tom Regan, “Empty Cages: Animal Rights and Vivisection.”
- For weeks 13 and 14, you should carefully read the assigned paper before each class session begins and bring a copy of the paper to class.
- No argument map due today.

Thursday, April 12th:
- Carl Cohen, “The Case for the Use of Animals in Biomedical Research.”
Week 14: Debates About Euthanasia

Tuesday, April 17th:
• James Rachels, “Active and Passive Euthanasia.”

Thursday, April 19th:
• Daniel Callahan, “The Case Against Euthanasia.”

Week 15: Comprehensive Review

Tuesday, April 24th:
• Review exercises & practice final.

Thursday, April 26th:
• Review exercises & practice final.
• No argument is due.

Final Exam:
• Section 2 (10:30-11:45am):
  o Tuesday, May 1st from 2-5pm.

• Section 3 (12pm-1:15pm):
  o Monday, April 30th from 2-5pm.