

CRITICAL THINKING & METHODS OF INQUIRY LDST 250-01: SPRING 2026

MON./WEDS. 10.30AM-11.45PM JEPSON HALL 120

This statement acknowledges the traditional, ancestral, unceded territory of the Pamunkey nation on which we will be learning and working throughout our time at the University of Richmond. It is important to acknowledge this land because of a legacy of silence and exploitation of indigenous peoples on the part of the United States and US Institutions, and it is our responsibility to help mitigate that history here and around the world where indigenous peoples are oppressed.

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Sign up for a meeting/chat with Dr. Bezio at <https://calendar.app.google/c4wkpTJrfW814sMa9>

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

The goal of this course is to help students develop critical thinking skills and provide an introduction to methods of research inquiry. In a society inundated with information from modern media – television, radio, movies, news, and the internet – it is crucial that we as responsible citizens be able to distinguish the good information from the bad, the truth from falsehood. Leaders are frequently required to make judgments about topics and in situations they know little about – critical thinking skills help them to assess what information they have in order to make good judgments about people, information, and ideas. It is also important for us – whether we are leaders, followers, or both – to be able to view the information and opinions with which we are presented from multiple standpoints, and to be able to assess and judge what we see and hear in context and with regard to our own ethics and mores. As members of a university, national, and global community, it is our responsibility to question not only what appears in the media, but the ideals and ideologies we already hold; as critical thinkers, it is important for us to bring these critical skills to bear not only in our examination of leadership and on the leaders we have chosen to follow, but also in our efforts to maintain life-long learning.

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COURSE OBJECTIVES

In this course, students will learn the following skills:

- How to critically read, listen, and observe
- How to evaluate information and locate bias
- How to analyze arguments and systems
- How to anticipate problems and counterarguments
- How to construct an analytical and well-researched argument in writing and in speech
- How to reflect on their own views and biases

This course fulfills one of your required Written Communication general education requirements (Ethics will fulfill the other one), and, as such, must meet the following **Written Communication Learning Outcomes**:

1. Students will produce written work that reflects disciplinary conventions and attention to audience and situation.
2. Students will produce written work with a clear perspective and, where appropriate, forward claims supported by evidence, and cite sources responsibly.
3. Students will produce written work undergoing an iterative process, where content evolves (creation, drafting, and revision) and improves based on feedback from the faculty member.
4. Students will compose written work with clarity, cohesion, concision, and minimal error.

REQUIRED MATERIALS & TEXTS

- *A Libertarian Walked into a Bear* by Matthew Hongoltz-Hetling (hard copy required, available at the bookstore)
- At least TWO binder-type things (3-ring is standard, but if you like the funny binding sets from Staples or Office Depot or wherever, knock yourself out).
- Paper to go in the binder (loose leaf would be standard if you have a 3-ring binder, but I don't care if it has lines on it or not).
- Hand-writing implements (pens, pencils, whatever so long as it's dark enough to read and isn't a giant marker or invisible ink).

In addition, you will be given access to a variety of articles and chapters on BlackBoard. You will need to print these, as you will be required to annotate them as part of your assignments. I recommend hole-punching them and putting them into a binder to keep them all in the same place.

Content Warning: Some of the materials for this course may discuss potentially traumatic events: abuse, violence, sexual assault, racism, homophobia, and sexism. Some works may be historically dated and contain offensive materials, while others use difficult content to make specific arguments. If you are concerned about course materials, please feel free to contact Dr. Bezio via email or Slack (or make an appointment).

REQUIRED TECHNOLOGY

- Respondus Lockdown Browser (will be activated for assignments and exams through Blackboard)
- Word, Google Docs, and/or LibreOffice (DO NOT USE PAGES) for writing papers—you will need to be able to turn in and share the “history” of your paper-writing.
- (RECOMMENDED but not required: Zotero citation software, both browser plugin and desktop app, also recommended to include the plugin for Google Docs and/or Word)

- (OPTIONAL but not required: Slack, as a way of communicating with Dr. Bezio or your other classmates through an app on your phone or in a browser if you hate email:
https://join.slack.com/t/criticalthinkingbezio/shared_invite/zt-3mr9re2bl-fgniLfcCXEWj3F5WjetlAw)

ACCESSIBILITY

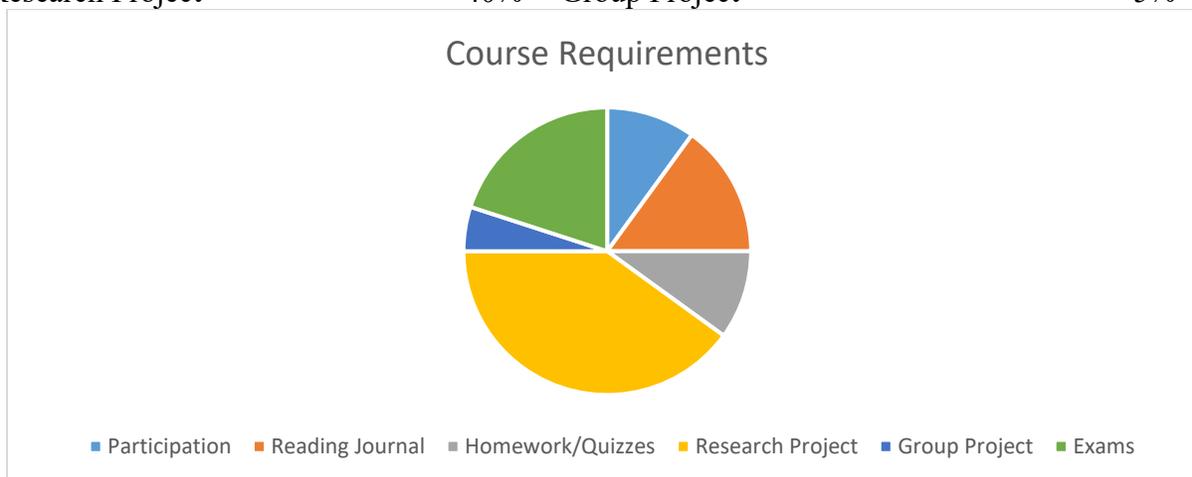
Students who need to use screen readers can request Word versions of all assignments (and the syllabus/course schedule) from Dr. Bezio. Students who need transcripts for audio files (podcasts) can request transcripts from Dr. Bezio. Students who record lectures *may not* distribute them or post them (per UR policy). Any students who have exam or assignment accommodations should send their DANs to Dr. Bezio as soon as possible.

All our exams will be administered via BlackBoard using Respondus. Students needing extra time must get their DAN in to Dr. Bezio, and that time will be built into the exam for those students. Students in need of a distraction-free environment who do not have access to one at “home” should contact Disability Services.

Students who are concerned that they may *need* accommodations (either temporary or long-term) are encouraged to contact Student Disability Services (contact information at the end of the syllabus packet, on page 7 and page 9).

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Participation	10%	Reading Journal	15%
Exams	20%	Homework Assignments & Quizzes	10%
Research Project	40%	Group Project	5%



Class Participation (10%)

All students are expected to contribute to class discussions. Frequent absences will impact a student’s ability to participate in discussion, but absences will not specifically count against a student’s grade. If students are uncomfortable participating out loud during class discussions for any reason, they have the following additional options:

- sending a 200+ word email response to the day’s discussion to Dr. Bezio before the following class in exchange for participation credit (via email or Slack private message).
- engaging in discussion of the course materials (or topics related to course materials) with other students on Slack.

Participation is straightforward—an “instance” of participation, whether on Slack, via email, or in class, should move the conversation about the class materials or topics forward, whether in the form of comments or questions. Each “instance” earns a point. (Longer written responses, such as the 200+ word email, may earn more than one point.) On average, each class day is worth 3-4 points.

Homework Assignments & Quizzes (10%)

There will be periodic short assignments to accompany the daily readings which ask students to fill out “quizzes” online or to diagram arguments as preparation for class discussion. These are mostly loaded in the front half of the semester. When we transition to content-based readings, the “Reading Journal” section (below) becomes more relevant.

Reading Journals (15%)

Reading Journals (one of the binders) are tied to the specific assignments for the day *when the readings are on content rather than argument structure*. For most readings, students must do *at least SIX* annotations and write *ONE* paragraph, although they are welcome to do more. Additional—*above and beyond the required number of comments*—count as 1 “participation” point each.) Assignments that require more annotations will indicate this on the course schedule.

- Providing commentary (2 points for every thoughtful comment) in the margins when there is an assigned reading.
- Writing (by hand) a 200+ word response in the journal on something relevant to the day’s materials (for up to 4 points).

Each student will have a folder to put the pages of their journal and/or their printed readings for the day so the Dr. Bezio can check them and give points. They will be returned as soon as possible and should then be added to your Reading Journal Binder.

Note: when we get to *A Libertarian Walked Into a Bear*, Dr. Bezio will collect the BOOKS on Mondays and return them on Wednesdays for those who want to annotate them. You can put your name on your book by hand or with a post-it so that the right person gets the points. If you want to keep your book clean (so that you can resell it or because you like clean books), you will need to copy down quotation starts and ends, as well as page numbers, to write your annotations in your Reading Journal.

Research Project (40%)

There will be a long research project in this course which will contain several short papers, and will culminate in one longer paper OR creative project. The Research Project includes a Research Binder in which students will keep annotated articles, research-project-related assignments, marked-up drafts, etc. All papers and assignments are expected to be the students’ original work and follow the guidelines of the Honor Code *and should not involve the use of AI without explicit citation of use* and ***cannot use AI to write the text of the paper or come up with the foundational argument***. Papers should contain correct, formal language and a complete works consulted bibliography (of works that actually exist). Papers should be turned in on BlackBoard (papers must be received by the due date and time *and open properly* to be considered acceptable). Papers will need to be turned in with copies of the “process” documents (save Google Doc history and include a link to the Doc; a screenshot of the Properties of a Word or LibreOffice document). Students should also put hard copies of their papers in their Research Binders for future annotation. Papers will be graded using the Microsoft Word Reviewing tool and uploaded along with the grading

rubrics to BlackBoard's GradeCenter. **Papers must be turned in as .docx files in order to receive comprehensive comments and be gradable by Dr. Bezio.**

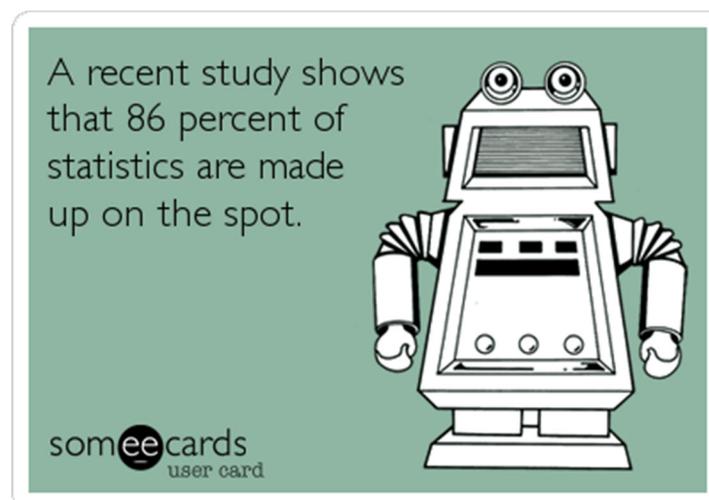
Group Project (5%)

There will be a group GivingGames project in this course which consists of a group research paper and occasional check-ins. Students will be assigned to a group and tasked with researching the ethics and effectiveness of a chosen charity; over the course of the semester, students will research their charities, then write a group analysis of that charity with a recommendation for or against it. All papers and assignments are expected to be the students' original work and follow the guidelines of the Honor Code *and should not involve the use of AI without explicit citation of use* and **cannot use AI to write the text of the paper or come up with the foundational argument**. Papers will be circulated to the whole class for evaluation of the charities. **Papers must be turned in as .docx files in order to receive comprehensive comments and be gradable by Dr. Bezio.**

Exams (20%)

There will be two take-home midterms and an in-person final exam. The second midterm will be **optional**. Students who elect not to take the second exam will have their first score doubled. Students who do take the second exam will have both scores contribute to their grade. Exams will be a combination of short- and long-answer and essay questions. Midterm exams will be available on BlackBoard and will use Respondus Lockdown Browser. The final exam will take place on April 29th from 9am-12pm in JPSN 120 (per the Registrar's Exam Schedule). Exams are *open note, open book*, so be prepared to use your notebooks, notes, etc. in hard copy. Those needing accommodations should provide documentation to Dr. Bezio so that appropriate adjustments can be made. Students with accommodations may need to schedule exams in the Testing Center, and should do so ASAP.

Anyone who wishes to take any exam by hand in a Bluebook may request to do so. Dr. Bezio will help to arrange a time and place for the midterms. Students wishing to do this must tell Dr. Bezio at least one week in advance so that arrangements can be made and Bluebooks acquired.



GRADE SCALE

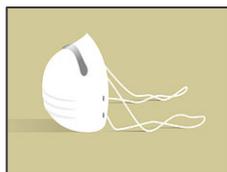
The points in this course are distributed to allow for a 5% scale between each letter grade (although students can expect letter grades to be awarded for similar quality work in other Jepson courses). The course as a whole is graded out of 2,000 points.

Grades will not be “rounded.” Students must reach the threshold for each grade in order to earn that grade (an A falls between 1900 and 1999.999, for instance). Some assignments will be graded with partial points. Grades for individual assignments can be determined by dividing by the total number of points for the assignment, with 5% between each grade (an A is 95% to 99.999%, an A- 90% to 94.999%, etc.).

A+	2000
A	1900
A-	1800
B+	1700
B	1600
B-	1500
C+	1400
C	1300
C-	1200
D+	1100
D	1000
D-	900

Grades (and comments when appropriate) will be made available to students on BlackBoard when the assignment has been graded for the whole class (both sections). Feedback (when appropriate) will be provided via pdf attachments for papers and in BlackBoard’s comment sections for smaller assignments, exams, and quizzes. Reading Journal and participation grades will be updated at the end of the semester on BlackBoard, but students may inquire with Dr. Bezio to find out where they stand at any point in the semester.

CLASSROOM POLICIES



Dr. Bezio has an autoimmune condition that increases her/their risk of severe illness—some of your classmates may be in the same situation—so please **wear a mask or do not come to class if you have symptoms of an illness**. Be sure to see student health and/or take a COVID test if you have an illness and abide by the University’s continued COVID policies.

Laptops

Laptops are permitted in class for the purpose of facilitating discussion and taking notes, including the use of Slack as appropriate, but remember that your exams will be in a Lockdown Browser, so you may wish to have your notes in hard copy instead. Students should *not* be using laptops to surf the internet or use social media during class. Please make sure all cell phones are silenced or turned off. Classes will not be recorded, although chats through Slack and on BlackBoard will remain available to students throughout the semester for repeated reference. Students are also welcome to meet with Dr. Bezio in person or on Zoom to go over any missed material with which they want assistance.

AI Policy

Students who use AI for brainstorming, research, etc. are allowed to do so with documentation of which AI, and what it was asked to do (prompt, etc.). Any use of AI to compose part or all of an assignment text is prohibited in this class (grammar *check* is permitted). Students should *not* rely on AI-generated summaries to “do the reading” for the class. No student is to turn in work that was paid-for, copied, excessively summarized without citation, created in collaboration (without permission), produced *or assisted in composition* by AI, or is otherwise not the original work of the student for any specific assignment (without explicit permission). The use of any of the above without explicit permission is a violation of the University Honor Code and will be treated as such.

Due Dates, Late Policies, & Honor Code

All written work is expected on time (barring significant contingencies or accommodations, which need to be discussed with Dr. Bezio). Late papers and assignments will be penalized up to a full grade step for each 24 hours they are late (A to A-). Technical problems (computer or email) are not an acceptable excuse for lateness: back up files on Google Drive, Box, Dropbox, and/or an external jump drive, and save often. **Students are responsible for knowing how to turn in files on Blackboard and must turn in all files as .doc or .docx files** (.pages, .pdf, and links to Google Docs are not acceptable formats for assignments).

All students will receive a 24 hour extension they can cash in on any assignment. For every 24 hours a student turns in a major paper *early*, they can earn an additional 24 hours for a later assignment. (Note: No papers can be accepted after May 3rd at the end of the semester to meet grading deadlines.)

All assignments are expected to be the student's original work. The Jepson School follows the provisions of the Honor System as outlined by the School of Arts and Sciences. This means that no student is to use, rely on or turn in work that was paid-for, copied, excessively summarized without citation, created in collaboration (without permission), produced or edited by AI, or is otherwise not the original work of the student for the specific assignment (without explicit permission). The use of any of the above without **explicit** permission is a violation of the University Honor Code and will be treated as such. (Software such as Grammarly or Word/Google's grammar check are acceptable—ChatGPT or similar software is not.)

Emergencies

If emergency circumstances inhibit a student from attending class or completing an assignment, the professor should be notified as soon as possible (preferably before class or the due date of the assignment). Extensions and make-ups are given at the discretion of the professor. Exams cannot be made up except under the most extenuating of circumstances. Students needing accommodations should speak to the professor.

Students are expected to make safe, healthy decisions on behalf of themselves and their classmates. Students are **strongly encouraged** to contact Dr. Bezio if they are experiencing symptoms of illness (COVID or otherwise) if they wish to discuss missed materials or have questions once they are recovered. Students experiencing symptoms of COVID or who have a positive test result **should not come to class** and should immediately contact their respective dean (Richmond or Westhampton) and student health.

COVID-19 POLICIES (OFFICIAL UR POLICY)

We are facing a challenging situation in which all of us are called on to make a good faith effort to be flexible and to make decisions in the best interest of the community, including staying home when sick. Students who are sick should stay home/in their dorm, will not be required to provide formal documentation from a health care provider, and will not be penalized for absences. However, students must:

- Notify instructors in advance of the absence if possible.
- Contact the Student Health Center if sick.
- Keep up with classwork if they are able to do so.
- Submit assignments digitally on time when possible.

- Work with their instructors to try to reschedule any missed assignments.
- Stay in close communication with their instructors.

This policy requires that faculty and instructors trust the word of their students when they say they are ill, and it requires that students report the reason for their absence truthfully. Falsely reporting a reason for an absence is an honor code violation.

Students shall not:

- Disclose, share, trade, or sell class recordings with/to any other person, organization, business, or institution; and/or
- Post/store these recordings in a location accessible by anyone other than the student, including but not limited to social media accounts.

Students must also comply with any instructions or directions from their faculty regarding the use of such recordings. Students are required to destroy any recordings that were made when they are no longer needed for the student's academic work. Failure to abide by this policy will be a violation of the Standards of Student Conduct; such issues will be sent to the appropriate University Conduct Officer.

FOR STUDENTS STRUGGLING TO COMPLETE WORK...

If you have trouble getting your assignments in on time, starting your assignments at a reasonable hour, or focusing while doing your work OR if you are currently experiencing an illness or injury (or the aftereffects of one), you may want to seek support from *both* the Academic Skills Center **and** Student Disability Services, and talk to Dr. Bezio.

There are a *lot* of people with invisible, undiagnosed, and underdiagnosed temporary and permanent disabilities in the United States, particularly students from lower income households, communities of color, and blue collar backgrounds. Disabilities, in this context, include neurodiversity that might cause a student's brain to work in a pattern that doesn't mesh well with "traditional" higher education models; a physical impairment (like migraines) that occasionally causes challenges completing assignments; a mental illness (like anxiety or depression); or another condition that isn't *explicitly* classified as a "learning disability" or a "visible disability." Disabilities might also include long COVID, a concussion, a broken arm, or a number of other conditions that are temporary, but require support for a few weeks or a few months.



If you think—based on the above descriptions—that you might qualify for support from Disability Services, please contact them ASAP, even if you've never felt you "needed" accommodations. The University of Richmond's office of Disability Services strives to ensure that students with disabilities and/or temporary conditions (i.e., concussions & injuries) are provided opportunity for full participation and equal access. Students who are approved for academic accommodations must complete the following steps in order to implement their accommodations in each class:

- 1) Submit their Disability Accommodation Notice (DAN) to each of their professors via the Disability Services Student Portal available at this link: sl.richmond.edu/be.

2) Request a meeting with each professor to create an accommodation implementation plan. Disability Services is available to assist, as needed.

It is important to complete these steps as soon as possible because accommodations are never retroactive, and professors are permitted a reasonable amount of time for implementation. Students who are experiencing a barrier to access due to a disability and/or temporary condition are encouraged to apply for accommodations by visiting disability.richmond.edu. Disability Services can be reached at disability@richmond.edu or 804-662-500.

Jepson School of Leadership Studies

Common Syllabus Insert

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

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/

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

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

Addressing Microaggressions on Campus

Microaggressions are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership.¹ Recent research has found that, when professors do not address microaggressions in class, microaggressions foster alienation of marginalized groups.² Furthermore, both students and faculty that are exposed to microaggressions more often are more likely to have depressive symptoms and negative affect (a negative view of the world).³ A comfortable and productive environment where meaningful learning happens can be collectively created through actions, words, or environmental cues that promote the inclusion and success of marginalized members, recognizing their embodied identity, validating their realities, resisting sexism, ableism, and racism.⁴

The University of Richmond is committed to building an inclusive community. To this end, the Student Center for Equity and Inclusion (SCEI) was created in 2021 and offers ongoing support and assistance for a diverse student body.⁵ With this in mind, as a community member at the University of Richmond, I pledge to address microaggressions in the classroom by holding myself, other students, and faculty accountable for what is said and being receptive to criticism when perpetuating these slights, snubs, or insults.

¹Sue, S., Zane, N., Nagayama Hall, G. C., & Berger, L. K. (2009). The Case for Cultural Competency in Psychotherapeutic Interventions. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 60(1), 525–548. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.60.110707.163651>

²Bergom, I., Wright, M.C., Brown, M.K. and Brooks, M. (2011), Promoting college student development through collaborative learning: A case study of *hevruta*. *About Campus*, 15: 19-25. <https://doi.org/10.1002/abc.20044>

³Nadal, K. L., Griffin, K. E., Wong, Y., Hamit, S., & Rasmus, M. (2014). The Impact of Racial Microaggressions on Mental Health: Counseling Implications for Clients of Color. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 92(1), 57–66. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.2014.00130.x>

⁴Rolón-Dow, R. (2019). Stories of Microaggressions and Microaffirmation: A Framework for Understanding Campus Racial Climate. *NCID Currents*, 1(1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/currents.17387731.0001.106>

⁵ <https://inclusion.richmond.edu/>