

Critical Thinking and Methods of Inquiry

Location and Contact Information

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Class Time: Tuesday & Thursday

- Section 04: 12:00 to 1:15 pm
- Section 05: 1:30pm to 2:45 pm

Classroom: Jepson 120

Office Hours: [I post a sign-up sheet for my office hours online](#). Please sign up for office hours there.

Course Description

Here is the official description for this course:

Examination of knowledge and argumentation as they pertain to leadership. Analysis of scientific methodology and logic, language and interpretation, and their influence on the study and practice of leadership.

This specific version of the course focuses on the following goals and themes.

Written Communication & Argumentation. The primary aim of this course is to improve your writing abilities, particularly your ability to communicate and defend arguments in your written work.

Evidence. Along with other Jepson courses, this class seeks to promote your ability to understand and evaluate evidence, especially when this evidence is conflicting. Some questions we'll explore are: What counts as good evidence? Why are some sources of evidence better than others? How should we come to a reasoned judgment on some controversy when the evidence is ambiguous?

Leadership & Knowledge. This course also aims to help you to understand the relationship between knowledge and leadership. In particular, we'll examine how the production of knowledge influences the decisions of leaders in politics, science, and other areas of life. How do political considerations, bias, and self-interest affect how leaders draw on evidence in making their decisions? How should leaders incorporate arguments and evidence into their decision-making?

The Ethics of Critical Thinking. Certain values are important to critical thinking, such as the value of open inquiry and a commitment to follow the evidence wherever it leads. In this course, we'll explore the values that support rational inquiry and consider potential threats to those values. We'll also consider whether the value of critical thinking should always trump other concerns.

Written Communication

This class fulfills the Written Communication general education requirement. The learning outcomes for the Written Communication requirement are as follows:

- Students will produce written work that reflects disciplinary conventions and attention to audience and situation.
- Students will produce written work with a clear perspective and, where appropriate, forward claims supported by evidence, and cite sources responsibly.
- 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.
- Students will compose written work with clarity, cohesion, concision, and minimal error.

A major focus of this class is written communication. Throughout the class, you will write several short papers. These papers will be argumentative in nature. In your papers, you'll either aim to systematically defend an argument and respond to objections, or you'll describe different arguments in a debate and consider the advantages or disadvantages of each side. After you submit your papers, I'll then provide you with feedback on your writing and you'll have the chance to revise your work in light of my feedback.

Almost all writing and revising in this course will be done in-class. I'll designate certain class sessions as "writing" or "revising" days, and the entirety of these sessions will be devoted to in-class writing. These sessions will generally be held in a computer lab in the basement of Jepson Hall.

Historical Simulations

This course will achieve its learning outcomes through the use of historical simulations. For each simulation, we'll first learn about important ideas and debates related to the learning objectives of this class. Next, you'll apply what you've learned by playing the roles of important actors during pivotal events in history.

Why learn critical thinking through historical simulations? First, these simulations will deepen your understanding of the major ideas and questions that we will explore throughout this class. You'll need to debate concepts related to scientific evidence, the production of knowledge, the value of open inquiry, and then apply them to concrete historical situations. Second, the simulations develop your abilities to successfully engage in argumentative writing, oral communication, negotiation, and teamwork. You won't just learn *about* leadership in this class. You will also *practice* leadership.

Finally, these games are often a lot of fun. Some students are nervous about the idea of participating in historical roleplaying games because they've never done anything like this. But the majority of students find participating in these simulations to be an enjoyable experience.

I've selected historical simulations that promote the learning goals of this course, particularly the goals of understanding evidence, the relationship between leadership and critical thinking, and the ethics of critical thinking. Most of the simulations focus on the question of what to believe and how to act in the face of conflicting evidence.

We'll participate in the following historical simulations:

Meta Oversight Board: Content Moderation vs. Political Speech on Social Media.

- This game immerses students in the challenges of balancing digital free speech with public safety and human rights. Players take on roles as members of Meta's Oversight Board or one of five factions advocating different values around platforms' role in society. Using real-world cases of banned social media posts, students debate how political and cultural contexts complicate a single understanding of content moderation online.
- Why are we playing this game? This simulation touches on the theme of the ethics of critical thinking (for example, when to allow completely free speech or not when free speech violates community norms) and, since it is a short one-session game, it will serve as an introduction to Reacting games at beginning of the semester.

Cholera, 1854: Contagionism, Miasma Theory and Sanitation.

- This simulation takes place on the evening of September 7, 1854 at Vestry Hall in Soho, Greater London. You are a member of a special emergency response committee of the local Board of Governors and Directors of the Poor of St. James Parish, who have convened to respond to the deadly outbreak of Cholera that has claimed the lives of more than 500 parish residents over the

preceding eight days. Historically, the outcome of this meeting was the decision to remove the pump handle from a contaminated neighborhood pump on Broad Street.

- Why are we playing this game? This game will introduce the class to key issues relating to how we should weigh and understand conflicting sources of evidence. This game also raises the question of whether politics and our preferred policy outcomes can be completely separated from the pursuit of truth.

The Cigarette Century: Tobacco and Lung Cancer, 1964-1965.

- How do we know if X causes Y? This game explores this question in the context of the congressional debates surrounding tobacco and lung cancer after the publication of the 1964 Surgeon General's Report. Players take on the role of senators, bureaucrats, scientists, media representative, and tobacco executives as they seek to interpret the existing body of evidence to inform regulatory policy decisions.
- Why are we playing this game? This game covers a range of topics including experimental design, statistical literacy, disinformation, and the relationship between scientific evidence, public policy, and leadership.

Charles Darwin, the Copley Medal, and the Rise of Naturalism, 1862-1864.

- This game thrusts students into the intellectual ferment of Victorian England just after publication of *On The Origin of Species*. Since its appearance in 1859, Darwin's long-awaited treatise in "genetic biology" had received reviews both favorable and damning. Thomas Huxley and Samuel Wilberforce's arguments for and against the theory sparked a vigorous, complex debate that touched on a host of issues and set the stage for the Royal Society's consideration of whether or not they ought to award Darwin the Copley Medal, their most prestigious prize. While the action takes place in meetings of the Royal Society, Great Britain's most important scientific body, a parallel and influential public argument smoldered over the nature of science and its relationship to modern life in an industrial society. A significant component of the Darwin game is the tension between natural and teleological views of the world. But the scientific debate also percolated through a host of related issues: the meaning and purposes of inductive and hypothetical-speculation in science; the professionalization of science; the implications of Darwinism for social reform, racial theories, and women's rights; and the evolving concept of causation in sciences and its implications for public policy.
- Why are we playing this game? This is the last simulation that we'll play and it will synthesize most of the themes of the course: the ethics of critical

thinking, the nature and production of scientific evidence, how to evaluate conflicting evidence, and the relationship between critical thinking and leadership.

Supporting Your Learning

I care about your success in this class and I'm willing to help you in any way possible. If you'd like to meet with me, you can sign up for my office hours [here](#) (note that I update my office hours for the coming week on Saturday or early Sunday).

If you'd like to leave me an anonymous comment with any questions or concerns, please see [this form](#).

Course Requirements

There is a total of 1000 possible points in this class. The points will be distributed as follows:

Description

Class Participation **(200 points)**

Click on the above link to see a rubric for each assignment!

For each historical simulation, there are two components: a more academic setup and the actual simulation. For the setup, you're expected to listen attentively to other students, participate in class discussions, and complete in-class activities and assignments. For the simulations, I would like you to enthusiastically participate in the game and try hard to achieve your objectives and remain faithful to your character's biography.

Speeches **(50 points)**

As part of the games, you'll sometimes need to deliver speeches from the perspectives of your characters. The goal of the speeches is to introduce your character to the class, present your perspective, and persuade other plays of the merits of your cause. This exercise will also help you to practice and hone your public speaking skills. Out of the speeches that you give, I'll select the best two speeches and count them toward your grade on this assignment.

Annotations
(150 points)

We will use an online social program for the readings called [Persuall](#). Persuall is a collaborative annotation tool that helps students to do the readings in a more effective and thorough way. I will typically assign readings through Persuall and you'll annotate them before class begins. To do this, you'll write comments on the readings and respond to other students' comments.

Written Assignments
(600 points)

For each historical simulation, you will need to complete writing assignments. You'll learn more about the details of your assignments after I assign you a character. But you can expect to write four papers during the course of the semester. Each of these papers will require you to interpret and engage with primary texts from the perspectives of your roles and develop arguments for a conclusion. Furthermore, you'll often have the opportunity to revise your written work in light of my feedback.

Extra Credit

You can earn extra credit in this class by achieving the victory objectives of your characters in the simulations.

Laptops and Other Devices

Please do not use your laptop, ipad, or phone during class unless I direct you to do so. I ask this because a growing body of research finds that the use of laptops and cell phones in class diminish student learning. So, if you use a laptop or other device without authorization during class, I'll ask you to put it away. Please review the class participation rubric for more information on my policies regarding laptops.

The Readings

All 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.

Week 1: Introduction

Tuesday, January 13th:

- Introduction
- Reading: Julia Galef, "Two Types of Thinking"

Thursday, January 15th: The Oversight Board

- Content Moderation vs. Political Speech on Social Media

Week 2: Arguments and Writing

Tuesday, January 20th:

- Read: "Critical Thinking: The Very Basics" on Persuall. *From now on, every reading will be a Persuall assignment unless noted otherwise on the syllabus and the Persuall assignments are always due at noon*

Thursday, January 22nd:

- Read: "How to Write an Argumentative Paper"
- Reminder: Persuall assignment is due at noon
- Workshop on writing and public speaking

Week 3: Cholera, 1854

Tuesday, January 27th:

- *Cholera 1854*, pp. 1-34 & excerpts from primary sources
- You should also review your character-specific readings

Thursday, January 29th:

- Writing Assignment 1
- Meet in computer lab G06, in the basement of Jepson Hall

Week 4: Cholera, 1854

Tuesday, February 3rd:

- First session of Cholera
- Watch: "Tips on Public Speaking for Reacting" on Persuall

Thursday, February 5th:

- Second session of Cholera

Week 5: Cholera, 1854

Tuesday, February 10th:

- Debriefing on Cholera, 1854
- All indeterminate players need to give a brief speech explaining their judgments
- Read: Julia Galef, "Lean Into Confusion."

Thursday, February 12th:

- Revisions to Writing Assignment 1

- Meet in computer lab G06

Week 6: Cigarette Century

Tuesday, February 17th:

- *Cigarette Century*, pp. 1-42, 59-79

Thursday, February 19th:

- Writing Assignment 2
- Meet in computer lab G06

Week 7: Cigarette Century

Tuesday, February 24th:

- Game Session 1

Thursday, February 26th:

- Game Session 2

Week 8: Debriefing and Revisions

Tuesday, March 3rd: Debriefing

- All indeterminate players need to give a brief speech explaining their judgments
- Read: Julia Galef, "Hold Your Identity Lightly"

Thursday, March 5th:

- Revisions to Writing Assignment 2
- Meet in computer lab G06

Week 9: Spring Break

- No class!

Week 10: Darwin

Tuesday, March 17th:

- *Charles Darwin, the Copley Medal, and the Rise of Naturalism*, pp. 12-27, 53-77.
- I also recommend that you read pages 28-52 for background on the game.
- Role survey.

Thursday, March 19th:

- *Charles Darwin, the Copley Medal, and the Rise of Naturalism*, pp. 79-151.

Week 11: Darwin

Tuesday, March 24th:

- *Charles Darwin, the Copley Medal, and the Rise of Naturalism*, pp. 160-216.

Thursday, March 26th:

- Writing Assignment 3
- Meet in computer lab G06

Week 12: Darwin

Tuesday, March 31:

- Writing Assignment 3
- Meet in computer lab G06

Thursday, April 2nd:

- Game Session 1

Week 13: Darwin

Tuesday, April 7th:

- Game Session 2

Thursday, April 9th:

- Game Session 3

Week 14: Darwin

Tuesday, April 14th:

- Revisions to Writing Assignment 3
- Meet in computer lab G06

Thursday, April 16th:

- Game Session 4

Week 15: Darwin

Tuesday, April 21st:

- Game Session 5

Thursday, April 23rd:

- Game Session 6

Final Session

During the final session, we will finish the Darwin game and you'll complete your fourth and final writing assignment.

- First half of the session: finish the Darwin game & make the final decision on the Copley Medal. All indeterminate must make brief speeches explaining their decisions.
- Second half of the session: final writing assignment.

If you are in the 12:00-1:15pm section, then your final exam is scheduled for Tuesday, April 28th from 2-5pm.

If you are in the 1:30-2:45pm section, then your final exam is scheduled for Sunday, May 2nd from 2-5pm.