Phil 201: Critical Thinking

Instructor: Dr. Audrey Yap (ayap@uvic.ca)
Office: CLE B307. Phone: 250.721.7510
Office Hours: Thursdays 10:00-12:00, and by appointment
Class Information: TWF 10:30-11:20 in ECS 116
Course Website: Through CourseSpaces: http://coursespaces.uvic.ca
Recommended textbook: Lewis Vaughn and Chris MacDonald The Power of Critical Thinking, Oxford University Press (any edition)

Course Description: Everywhere we look, we find arguments trying to persuade us of the truth of one claim or another. We are told that a scientific study proves one thing, and then later that a different scientific study proves the exact opposite. Conflicting claims are made on television, the internet, in advertisements, in newspapers, and in everyday interaction with other people. How do we evaluate them?

Informal logic is the study of everyday reasoning, and of what makes arguments good or bad ones. If we tell ourselves we only want to be persuaded by good arguments, then we ought to have some criteria and some tools for analysing what distinguishes a good argument from a bad one. The goal of this course is to learn some of these skills, and how to apply them to real life arguments.

Communication: Office hours are held on a drop-in basis. You do not need to make an appointment to see me during those times, although the amount of time I can spend talking to any one person during office hours can depend on how many people are waiting. If you do want to schedule an appointment outside my office hours, try emailing me with a few suggestions for times that would work for you. I’m also happy to try and answer short questions either before or after class, time permitting.

In general, email is my preferred method of communication, especially for any official requests. If you ask me a question over email, you can expect a reply within about 1 working day. If you don’t hear back from me after that time frame, feel free to try again in case your message went astray. When you do address me (over email or otherwise), please do so as either Professor (Prof.) Yap, or Dr. Yap. Please don’t use any of Mrs/Miss/Ms/Mr, for a variety of reasons.

Course Logistics: I do not take attendance, and basic notes are posted on the course website on a regular basis. This means that if you do have to miss class, you will be able to get an idea of what you have missed through the online resources. However, classes will give you the opportunity to get more detailed explanations of the concepts and to participate in discussions, which are extremely helpful in learning the material. I do expect you to come to class, but there is no need to tell me if you need to miss class unless it is likely to be a regular occurrence or there is a test scheduled for that day.
There will be 12 homework assignments, roughly one per week. Homework must be turned in by 5pm on the due date, unless otherwise specified, and will be done online through CourseSpaces. Late assignments will not be accepted, since solutions will be released immediately after the assignments are closed. However, only the best 10 assignments will count towards your final grade, so if you have to miss one, it will not affect your mark. You are encouraged to discuss the homework assignments with others, but your answers must be written independently. Plagiarised work on homework or exams will not be given credit. For more information on plagiarism, see the University Calendar. Homework will be worth 20% of the final grade. There will also be four non-cumulative tests, held in class, each worth 15%, and a cumulative final to be written during the exam period (20%). Exam rewrites will only be scheduled in cases of documented illness or other extenuating circumstances. Such documentation must be received within a week of the exam date. Exceptions to these rules will only be made in the case of documented illness or other extenuating circumstances which interfere with the timely completion of assigned work.

**Numerical and Letter Grades:** Grades will be given as percentile marks. The percentile mark for the course will be converted to a letter grade in the following manner:

\[
A+ = 90 - 100, \quad A = 85 - 89, \quad A- = 80 - 84, \quad B+ = 77 - 79, \quad B = 73 - 76, \quad B- = 70 - 72, \quad C+ = 65 - 69, \quad C = 60 - 64, \quad D = 50 - 59, \quad F = 0 - 49.
\]

The A range means exceptional, outstanding and excellent performance. A grade in the B range means a very good, good and solid performance. A grade in the C+ or C range means satisfactory, or minimally satisfactory, performance. A grade of D or D- indicates merely passable or marginal performance. An F indicates unsatisfactory performance.

**Course Evaluations:** I value your feedback on this course. Towards the end of term you will have the opportunity to complete a confidential course experience survey (CES) regarding your learning experience. The survey is vital to providing feedback to me regarding the course and my teaching, as well as to help the department improve the overall program for students in the future. When it is time for you to complete the survey, you will receive an email inviting you to do so. If you do not receive an email invitation, you can go directly to [http://ces.uvic.ca](http://ces.uvic.ca). You will need to use your UVic NetLink ID to access the survey, which can be done on your laptop, tablet or mobile device. I will remind you nearer the time, but please be thinking about this important activity, especially the following three questions, during the course.

1. What strengths did your instructor demonstrate that helped you learn in this course?
2. Please provide specific suggestions as to how the instructor could have helped you learn more effectively.
3. Please provide specific suggestions as to how this course could be improved.
Schedule:

- **Week One: Sept 9, 11**
  
  Topic: Introduction to Critical Thinking
  
  Reading: Chap 1

- **Week Two: Sept 15, 16, 18**
  
  Topic: Argument Basics, Missing Premises
  
  Reading: Chap 3
  
  HW 1 due Sept 18

- **Week Three: Sept 22, 23, 25**
  
  Topic: Argument Patterns, Diagramming Arguments
  
  Reading: Chap 3
  
  HW 2 due Sept 25

- **Week Four: Sept 29, 30, Oct 2**
  
  Topic: Experts, Experience, and Advertising
  
  Reading: Chap 4
  
  HW 3 due Sept 30
  
  Test One (Argument Basics) Oct 2

- **Week Five: Oct 6, 7, 9**
  
  Topic: Fallacies
  
  Reading: Chap 5
  
  HW 4 due Oct 9

- **Week Six: Oct 13, 14, 16**
  
  Topic: Fallacies
  
  Reading: Chap 5
  
  HW 5 due Oct 16

- **Week Seven: Oct 20, 21, 23**
  
  Topic: Propositional Logic
  
  Reading: Chap 6
  
  HW 6 due Oct 21
  
  Test Two (Common Argument Mistakes) Oct 23

- **Week Eight: Oct 27, 28, 30**
  
  Topic: Propositional and Categorical Logic
  
  Reading: Chap 6, Chap 7
  
  HW 7 due Oct 30
• Week Nine: Nov 3, 4, 6
  Topic: Categorical Logic
  Reading: Chap 7
  HW 8 due Nov 6

• Week Ten: Nov 13
  Topic: Inductive Arguments
  Reading: Chap 8
  HW 9 due Nov 13
  Test Three (Propositional and Categorical Logic) Nov 13

• Week Eleven: Nov 17, 18, 20
  Topic: Inductive Arguments
  Reading: Chap 8
  HW10 due Nov 20

• Week Twelve: Nov 24, 25, 27
  Topic: Causal Arguments
  Reading: Chap 8
  HW 11 due Nov 27

• Week Thirteen: Dec 1, 2, 4
  Topic: Evaluating Arguments
  HW 12 due Dec 2
  Test Four (Causal and Scientific Arguments) Dec 4

Note: This syllabus is provisional, and should only be used to give a rough guide to the course schedule. Dates may be changed if necessary.