

Critical Thinking and Methods of Inquiry
LDST 250, Section 1

Fall 2022

Course Syllabus

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Meeting Requests: Please contact me via email to set up an appointment.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

One characteristic feature of humans is our **liability to hold mistaken beliefs**. Unfortunately for us, it often turns out that we just have things wrong—sometimes badly wrong. We can think that we know things when in fact we do not. This problem is particularly acute for leaders. Leaders often face problems to which answers are not obvious. Accordingly, we might say that they can find themselves at the “epistemic margins” of social, political, and professional life. For example, they are frequently innovators and, so, must rely upon knowledge bases that are even more limited than are the knowledge bases upon which we rely in our everyday dealings in the world. This feature of leadership is important: leaders must sometimes take greater chances and face greater risks than do most individuals—both self-regarding and other-regarding chances and risks. In many ways, then, this is a course in **self-leadership**. How can we be expected to lead others in the right direction, we might ask, if we are misleading ourselves?

First, humans face a myriad of familiar **defects of reasoning**. In this course, we will begin with a **humanities-based approach** to how our reasoning goes awry. Most of the major defects of reasoning identified by philosophers can be put under the headings of “questionable premises” or “invalidity.” We sometimes reason from unfounded beliefs, and our beliefs often fail to support the conclusions that we want to draw from them. The goal in the first part of the course is to learn to notice and, ultimately, avoid these defects in our own reasoning.

Recognition of these problems, especially those at the level of argumentative premises, should lead us to consider whether, and how, we know things more generally. Is there such a thing as **objective truth**, or is all “truth” **relative**? Is knowledge even possible—that is, should we settle for **skepticism**? What are the strengths and weakness of standard ways of knowing—for example, **rationalism** and **empiricism**? What is the role of the **internal** and **external** perspective with respect to claims of knowledge? Can we trust the **testimony** of others? Does the truth of knowledge claims depend on **context**? What is the place of **intuition** in epistemology? In the second part of the course, we will consider these basic epistemological questions.

In the third part of the course, we will consider a **social scientific** argument for the claim that reasoning and knowledge—indeed, thinking—are under attack. Moreover, advocates of this

claim suggest that some false beliefs originate where we would least expect it: the university. Here, our goal will be not only to learn what social scientists, especially in the discipline of psychology, have to say about the challenges to critical thinking—indeed, wisdom—but also to apply what we have learned in the course to critically engage with their arguments and supporting cases.

As both a leader and a student of leadership, you will be presented with information from a variety of sources and in areas in which you have little to no expertise. You therefore need skills for making **your own judgments** about arguments and about the information on which these arguments rest. Because leadership turns on influencing others—on always being ready to justify oneself by means of an appeal to **rational persuasion**—you will also need to be able to give **cogent arguments** for your beliefs. You must be able to make a convincing argument that you are right and that others should accept (and, thus, act on) the beliefs that you have. In addition, if the social scientists are correct, you will need a sophisticated understanding of how people (including yourself) are actually inclined to think—often to the detriment of finding the truth. These leadership competencies fit with what you will need to be successful as a student of leadership: the ability to move among different **disciplines** and **methodologies** in the humanities and social sciences that come to bear on a multidisciplinary education.

This course aims to provide the necessary means for developing these fundamental leadership competencies. In the end, its success will depend in large part on your willingness to engage yourself fully in readings, assignments, discussions, and class exercises. To facilitate this kind of engagement, I use assigned seating. I also regularly call on people and give **Periodic Quizzes**, which will (usually) be unannounced. **Attendance** affects your **Periodic Quizzes** grade (if there is a quiz when you are absent), and—in all likelihood—your **Tests** grades. You should email me in advance if you will be unable to attend class. **Do not attend class if you are symptomatic or ill.**

Please note that **we begin and end on time** and that students are expected to remain in class for the entire class period. You may use computers and tablets in class, but permissible usage is restricted to the course-related activities of note taking and accessing course readings. **Recording class sessions or meetings is strictly prohibited.** Unnecessary devices must be silenced and placed out of view during class. All students should minimize distractions and respect the rules of standard classroom etiquette.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- Students should learn to identify formal and informal fallacies in the reasoning of others and how to avoid these fallacies in their own thought and in written and verbal communication.
- Students should have a sophisticated view of the nature and limits of claims to knowledge.
- Students should become aware of the challenges to critical thinking and arrive at considered conclusions about their implications for our understanding of leadership.
- Student should be able to apply their critical thinking skills in the study and exercise of leadership.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Jennifer Nagel, *Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt, *The Coddling of the American Mind* (New York: Penguin, 2018).

REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

Your final grade will be determined as follows:

1. Periodic Quizzes—25%
2. Test 1—25%
3. Test 2—25%
4. Application Paper—25%

Grading legend:

A+	97-100
A	93-96
A-	90-92
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F	50-59

HOW TO DO WELL IN THIS COURSE

Pretty much failsafe in my experience!

1. Attend all classes.
2. Complete all practices problems and readings in advance of class meetings.
3. Be an informed participant in discussions by drawing directly on the texts.
4. Ask questions in class and/or schedule a meeting with me when you do not understand the material.
5. Learn from mistakes you and others make in class, on quizzes, and on tests.

DEADLINES AND SCHEDULED EXAMS

I take deadlines and scheduled exams very seriously. In fairness to your classmates, emergencies should be brought to my attention as soon as possible before the deadline or scheduled exam. **I do not accept late work, but I will accept and grade incomplete work.**

SCHEDULE (Subject to Change as the Course Progresses)

W Aug 24	Introduction to Arguments and Epistemology Goldstein, “Our Moment of Truth” (on Blackboard)
F Aug 26	Formal Logic
W Aug 31	Formal Logic
F Sept 2	Epistemology: Nagel, Chapter 1
W Sept 7	Informal Logic
F Sept 9	Epistemology: Nagel, Chapter 2
W Sept 14	Informal Logic
F Sept 16	Epistemology: Nagel, Chapter 4
W Sept 21	Informal Logic
F Sept 22	Epistemology: Nagel, Chapter 5
W Sept 28	CATCH-UP DAY

F Sept 30 **Epistemology:** Nagel, Chapter 6

W Oct 5 **Informal Logic**

F Oct 7 **Epistemology:** Nagel, Chapter 7

W Oct 12 **Informal Logic**

F Oct 14 NO CLASS

W Oct 19 REVIEW

F Oct 21 **Test 1**

W Oct 26 TEST DEBRIEF

F Oct 28 **Epistemology:** Nagel, Chapter 8

W Nov 2 Lukianoff and Haidt, Introduction & Part I

F Nov 4 Kahneman, Chapter 7 & Chapter 13 (on Blackboard)

W Nov 9 Lukianoff and Haidt, Part I & Part II

F Nov 11 Lukianoff and Haidt, Part III

W Nov 16 Lukianoff and Haidt, Part III

F Nov 18 **Test 2**

W Nov 30 Lukianoff and Haidt, Part IV

F Dec 2 **Course Wrap-up**

M Dec 5 **Application Paper emailed to me in MS Word by 12:00 p.m.**

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/>

SYLLABUS INSERT REGARDING ACADEMIC AND PERSONAL SUPPORT SERVICES

Hope N. Walton, Director Academic Skills

Below is a boxed statement that describes the services available from a myriad of resources. We recommend that you consider including this boxed statement in your course syllabus, on Blackboard, or perhaps on a separate handout. Of course, other support services that relate specifically to your course can also be added.

Staff members from the resources below are available for consultations about concerns related to students as well as issues related to services.

If you experience difficulties in this course, do not hesitate to consult with me. There are also other resources that can support you in your efforts to meet course requirements.

Academic Skills Center (asc.richmond.edu): Academic coaches assist students in assessing and developing their academic and life-skills (e.g., critical reading and thinking, information conceptualization, concentration, test preparation, time management, stress management, etc.). Peer tutors offer assistance in specific subject areas (e.g., calculus, chemistry, accounting, etc.) and will be available for appointments in-person and virtually. Peer tutors are listed on the ASC website. **Email** [Roger Mancastroppa \(rmancast@richmond.edu\)](mailto:rmancast@richmond.edu) and [Hope Walton \(hwalton@richmond.edu\)](mailto:hwalton@richmond.edu) for coaching appointments in academic and life skills.

Boatwright Library Research Librarians: (library.richmond.edu/help/ask/ or 289-8876): Research librarians help students with all steps of their research, from identifying or narrowing a topic, to locating, accessing, evaluating, and citing information resources. Librarians support students in their classes across the curriculum and provide individual appointments, class library instruction, tutorials, and [research guides \(libguides.richmond.edu\)](http://libguides.richmond.edu). Students can [contact an individual librarian \(library.richmond.edu/help/liaison-librarians.html\)](http://library.richmond.edu/help/liaison-librarians.html) or ASK a librarian for help via email (library@richmond.edu), text (804-277-9ASK), or [chat \(library.richmond.edu/chat.html\)](http://library.richmond.edu/chat.html).

Career Services: (careerservices.richmond.edu or 289-8547): Can assist you in exploring your interests and abilities, choosing a major or course of study, connecting with internships and jobs, and investigating graduate and professional school options. We encourage you to schedule an appointment with a career advisor early in your time at UR.

Counseling and Psychological Services (caps.richmond.edu or 289-8119): Assists currently enrolled, full-time, degree-seeking students in improving their mental health and well-being, and in handling challenges that may impede their growth and development. Services include brief consultations, short-term counseling and psychotherapy, skills-building classes, crisis intervention, psychiatric consultation, and related services.

Disability Services (disability.richmond.edu) The Office of Disability Services works to ensure that qualified students with a disability (whether incoming or current) are provided with reasonable accommodations that enable students to participate fully in activities, programs, services and benefits provided to all students. Please let your professors know as soon as possible if you have an accommodation that requires academic coordination and planning.

Speech Center (speech.richmond.edu or 287-6409): Assists with preparation and practice in the pursuit of excellence in public expression. Recording, playback, coaching and critique sessions offered by teams of student consultants trained to assist in developing ideas, arranging key points for more effective organization, improving style and delivery, and handling multimedia aids for individual and group presentations. Remote practice sessions can be arranged; we look forward to meeting your public speaking needs.

Writing Center (writing.richmond.edu or 289-8263): Assists writers at all levels of experience, across all majors. Students can schedule appointments with trained writing consultants who offer friendly critiques of written work.