

**The Ethics of Influence**  
**LDST 357-01**

**Spring 2023**

**Course Syllabus**

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

COURSE DESCRIPTION

All leaders exercise influence to get people to do things. Using influence tactics differs, in some respects, from coercing followers and from outright lying to them, which—by assumption—are not morally permissible. But the influence tactics are not without problems of their own. For example, some forms of manipulation constitute neither coercion nor deception. One question we will address is what makes a behavior manipulative. A second question is whether influence is problematic even when it does not involve manipulation. This course is thus an ethical examination of the ways in which leaders influence followers. Our main goal is to discover the moral limits on the influence tactics that leaders use.

To achieve this goal, we must first get a handle on what leaders do and on what works. We will begin with classic, popular texts detailing the influence tactics leaders actually use—and use effectively. Our first step, then, will be to identify the behaviors that warrant ethical investigation. Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People* and Cialdini's *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion* will set the stage for this examination.

Next, we will assess the morality of the influence tactics. Our tools for assessment will be traditional moral theory and contemporary philosophical literature on manipulation. The moral theory most obviously opposed to manipulation is Kant's deontological ethics. Kantian ethics prohibits manipulation because it treats followers as mere "means" to an end, not as ends in themselves (*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*). As we shall see, however, it is not easy to specify what manipulation is and how, exactly, it differs from what we might think are morally acceptable forms of influence. Coons and Weber's edited collection, *Manipulation: Theory and Practice*, will take us a long way in the right direction.

All of my courses are designed for rigorous discussion of the issues, which means that students bear an equal burden in explaining, critiquing, and developing the ideas conveyed in the readings. To facilitate this kind of engagement, I use assigned seating. In addition to regularly calling on people so they can **Demonstrate Class Preparation**, I use in-class exercises to see

who has carefully completed the reading. At the beginning of each class, you should be prepared to answer the following questions **and point to passages in the text to support your answers**:

1. What is the author's main conclusion? (Example of evidence: the author's thesis statement.) How did the author defend this conclusion?
2. Given the central questions of the course, what is the author's most important, provocative, or controversial claim? (Example: "Unlike other authors in the course, she argues that manipulation need not be intentional." Evidence: the passage where she makes this claim.)
3. What part of the author's argument is most susceptible to critique? Can the argument be saved?

Each student is required to write at least one **Short Paper**. Short papers are 800-1000 words, and they engage critically with readings identified as "short paper opportunities." Because these papers are supposed to convey **your** understanding and analysis of the readings, **outside sources are prohibited**. I will often use student papers to structure class and ask that they be read aloud, so they are due to me via email the day before class—with a grace period until 9 a.m. on Wednesday. I *strongly* recommend that you write more than one short paper. Your **Solution Paper** must be based on work from one or more short papers. Also, each additional short paper that you write (up to four total short papers) adds one point to the grade of your strongest short paper. You may choose *once* to write on a reading from the class just previous. Assuming you haven't already taken advantage of this option, you can use it to get credit for a paper submitted after 9 a.m. on Wednesday. **Otherwise, please do not put me in a position reject late papers.**

There will be two **Readings Tests**. These tests serve several functions. They give you extra incentive to read carefully and to retain what you've read. They also give me a sense of your understanding of the course basics. Careful reading, retention, and understanding are necessary for achieving the main goals of the course: engaging with the material at a sophisticated level in class discussions—including in response to presentations of other students—and in your final papers. *The tests are therefore means to an end, not ends in themselves.*

**Attendance** affects your **Demonstrated Class Preparation** grade, your **Short Paper** grade (in-person attendance for the entire class is required for your paper to count), and—in all likelihood—your **Readings Tests** grades. Please email me if you are 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. We will take a break! 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

- The student should be able to catalog the influence tactics leaders use and to explain why they are successful.
- The student should be familiar with the main philosophical arguments against the influence tactics and, especially, manipulation.
- The student should be able to engage critically and constructively with these arguments.
- The student should understand the special place of influence, including potential justifications, in the exercise of leadership in professional life.

### REQUIRED TEXTS—NOT INCLUDING BLACKBOARD READINGS AND FILMS

Dale Carnegie, *How to Win Friends & Influence People: The Only Book You Need to Lead You to Success* (New York: Gallery Books, 1998).

Robert B. Cialdini, *Influence, New and Expanded: The Psychology of Persuasion* (New York: Harper Business, 2021).

Christian Coons and Michael Weber, *Manipulation: Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Terry L. Price, *Leadership and the Ethics of Influence* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

### REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

Your final grade will be determined as follows:

1. Demonstrated Class Preparation—20%
2. Readings Test 1—10%
3. Short Paper—15%
4. Presentation and Draft—15%
5. Readings Test 2—15%
6. Long Paper—25%

### A WORD ON DEADLINES AND SCHEDULED EXAMS

I take class time, deadlines, and scheduled tests very seriously. In fairness to your classmates, any emergencies that arise should be brought to my attention as soon as possible. Please note that computer problems *never* constitute an acceptable excuse. **I do not accept late work, but I will**

**accept and grade incomplete work. (However, short papers must meet the word limit to get a passing grade.)**

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. Worry less about note-taking than staying engaged in the discussion. I will provide necessary notes.
2. Complete all readings in advance of class meetings. When reading, identify passages to which you can easily refer when answering the three sets of questions above.
3. Use the week to prepare for our one-day-per week class. Do the after-class readings, and spread your work out over shorter, focused blocks. Do not save this course for Tuesday night!
4. Write the maximum number of short papers (4).
5. Be an informed participant in discussions by drawing directly on the texts.
6. Write a final paper that builds on your best short paper and responds to my comments and—if applicable—the comments of your classmates.

SCHEDULE (subject to change as the course progresses)

\* **Short Paper opportunity**

- W Jan 11     *Before class:*  
Carnegie, Parts One and Two  
*After class:*  
Price, Introduction & Chapter 1 (16-24)
- W Jan 18     *Before class:*  
Carnegie, Parts Three and Four  
Rae Langton, “Duty and Desolation” (Blackboard)\*  
*After class:*  
Price, Chapter 1 (24-33)
- W Jan 25     *Before class:*  
Cialdini, Introduction-Chapter 4  
Watch *Othello*  
*After class:*  
Price, Chapter 2 (38-53)
- W Feb 1      *Before class:*  
Cialdini, Chapter 5-Chapter 7  
Baron, “Manipulativeness” (Blackboard)\*  
*After class:*  
Price, Chapter 2 (53-63) & Chapter 2 (33-37)
- W Feb 8      *Before class:*  
Noggle, “Manipulative Actions” (Blackboard)\*  
Barnhill, “What is Manipulation” (Coons and Weber)\*  
*After class:*  
Price, Chapter 5 (43-52)
- W Feb 15     **Readings Test 1**  
*Before or after class:*  
Machiavelli, selections from *The Prince* (Blackboard)  
Hollander, selections from *Leaders, Groups, and Influence* (Blackboard)
- W Feb 22     *Before class:*  
Gorin, “Towards a Theory of Interpersonal Manipulation (Coons and Weber)\*  
*After class:*  
Price, Chapter 3 (64-81)
- W Mar 1      *Before class:*  
Manne, “Non-Machiavellian Manipulation (Coons and Weber)\*

**Spring Break**

- W Mar 15     *Before Class:*  
Baron, “The *Mens Rea* and Moral Status of Manipulation (Coons and Weber)\*
- W Mar 22     *Before class:*  
Blumenthal-Barby, “A Framework for Assessing...” (Coons and Weber)\*  
*After class:*  
Price, Chapter 6 (152-163)
- W Mar 29     *Before class:*  
Cave, “Unsavory Seduction and Manipulation (Coons and Weber)\*
- W Apr 5        **Readings Test 2**
- W Apr 12      **Presentations (Group A)**
- W Apr 19      **Presentations (Group B)**
- F Apr 28      **Final Paper Due (7:00-10:00 pm)—due via email (Wednesday, April 26, strongly preferred)**