

## LDST 250: Critical Thinking and the Methods of Inquiry

**Professor:** Dr. Sam Director

**Email:** sdirecto@richmond.edu

**Office Hours:** Mondays and Wednesdays 1:30-3:30pm or by appointment. [Link to scheduling.](#)

**Office Location:** Jepson Hall 119D (in the Ethics Suite)

**Class time:** *section 01:* 10:30-11:45am, *section 02:* 12:00-1:15pm

**Class Location:** Jepson Hall (room 103A)

**Course Description:** Here is the description from the course catalog: 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.

The goal of our class is to study inquiry and critical thinking. We will examine the ways in which we can inquire about the truth using the methods of critical thinking. This requires us to ask what truth is, what knowledge is, and how our methods of getting at these goods can succeed and go wrong.

In **Unit 1**, we will focus on key questions in epistemology. Epistemology is the branch of philosophy that studies knowledge. The goal of any inquiry is to gain knowledge about a subject. Traditionally, knowledge involves beliefs that are true and justified. To understand all of this, we will need to define what truth is and what justification is. Our basic goal in this unit is to examine what knowledge is and how we can acquire it. In this unit, we will also discuss the nature of good reasoning and the habits of the mind that foster it. Specifically, we will examine several important intellectual virtues. Virtues are robust character traits, and intellectual virtues are the character traits of the mind. We should endeavor to be virtuous in our intellectual lives, largely because this will make us more likely to acquire knowledge. What does it mean to have an intellectually virtuous character? How can we develop intellectual virtues?

In **Unit 2**, our class will shift to become more formal in its inquiry, as we will examine formal logic and how it can aid us in the pursuit of being critical thinkers. The gold standard of arguments is a sound argument (deductively valid and with all true premises). But, deductive reasoning is not the only kind of reasoning. We will also examine inductive and abductive arguments. Our goal in this unit will be to examine the methods of formal logic and to use logic to map arguments we encounter in English. The tools from this unit will be used throughout the rest of the course.

In **Unit 3**, we will examine obstacles to our pursuit of knowledge. We live in a world of noise and bias, all of which can cause us to systematically fail to acquire knowledge. Our goal in this unit is to examine many of these obstacles to effective critical thinking with the hope that in understanding them, we may avoid them. We will examine cognitive biases, echo chambers, affective polarization, social pressure, group think, and more.

In **Unit 4**, we will shift our discussion from inquiry itself to the societal background conditions that are necessary for effective inquiry in the first place. Critical thinking cannot thrive in a context in which free thought is not allowed or encouraged. In this unit, we will examine what institutional arrangements are best suited to promote a flourishing culture of free inquiry. Freedom of speech and academic freedom seem to be extremely important for us to gain knowledge, but some people question this and think that critical thinking is not served most by these ideals. Are those critics correct? In this unit, we will also address ethical questions about whether there are certain controversial topics that are not the appropriate subject for critical thinking. In other words, are some questions beyond the pale such that we should not even consider them?

- **Unit 1: Epistemology**
  - Key Questions:
    - What is truth?
    - Is truth relative or subjective?
    - What is the nature of epistemic justification?
    - What kinds of evidence should our beliefs be based on?
    - Do we always need evidence to support our beliefs?
    - What kinds of evidence can undermine or defeat our justification for our beliefs?
    - Does epistemic justification require reflective access to our evidence?
    - What are intellectual virtues and their corresponding vices?
- **Unit 2: Logic**
  - Key Questions:
    - What is the difference between inductive, abductive, and deductive reasoning?
    - What is the nature of deductive validity?
    - What are the rules of deductive reasoning that are useful in our lives?
    - How do we identify errors in deductive reasoning?
    - How do we translate natural language (how humans actually speak) into formal language (logic)?
- **Unit 3: Obstacles to effective reasoning**
  - Key Questions:
    - In what ways are humans biased, and can we overcome our biases?
    - Are social media echo chambers a threat to our ability to know?
    - Are Americans polarized and partisan about politics in a way that clouds our judgment?
    - Does the pressure to believe something from society lead us closer or farther from the truth?
    - Are we victims of group think?
    - How should we respond to deep disagreements about matters of fact and value?
    - As novices in many areas, how do we decide which experts to trust?
- **Unit 4: The political preconditions of effective inquiry**
  - Key Questions:
    - What kinds of rules around free thought and speech are ideal for a culture of knowledge?

- What are the limits of freedom of speech?
- Is freedom of speech under attack today?
- Are there ethical limits to what we should critically think about?

### **Learning Outcomes:**

By the end of this class, my goal is that you will have made significant progress toward achieving the following 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.

**Course Structure:** This class will involve a mix of lecture and discussion. On a typical day in class, you will have done a pre-assigned reading on a topic, and I will begin with a summary of that reading and the crucial issues involved in it. At various points in my lecture, we will pause for discussion and questions. The goal is for lecture to take up about 40% of each class with discussion being the remaining 60% of the class. This will change for Unit 2, as formal logic does not usually lend itself to prolonged discussion.

**Course Materials:** All of our assigned readings will be excerpts from books or journal articles. Each reading will be posted to Blackboard. You do not need to buy any books for this class. I post all of the slides from class on Blackboard as well. They will be available after that day in class.

### **Grading:**

I grade on the following scale:

- 100-99 (A+)
- 98.9- 94 (A)
- 93.9 - 90 (A-)
- 89.9 - 87 (B+)
- 86.9 - 83 (B)
- 82.9 - 80 (B-)
- 79.9 - 77 (C+)
- Etc.

Your grade will be determined by the following categories:

- Quizzes/Homework (20%)
- Term Paper Annotated Bibliography (10%)
- Term Paper First Attempt (20%)
- Term Paper Revised Version (30%)

- Final Exam (20%)

I realize that there are extenuating circumstances each semester for many people. If you find yourself in an extreme situation that affects your ability to perform well in this class, please talk to me about it. I cannot guarantee that I will be able to accommodate you, but I may be able to.

### **Assignments:**

*Quizzes/Homework:* on most days in class, we will either have a short reading quiz or a homework assignment. These will be short quizzes that ask questions intended to see if you have done the reading. Alternatively, if we have a homework assignment, the goal will be to demonstrate that you have done the reading. I will drop your lowest two quiz/homework grades at the end of the semester. The goal of these quizzes/homework assignments is to give you an incentive to do every reading.

*Final Exam:* we will have a final exam that will cover units 1, 3, and 4.

The main assignment for our class will be a term paper, which will be completed in a variety of steps, each of which will be graded. This paper will be 10-12 pages long and will defend a stance on a philosophical issue of your choosing. The goal of this assignment is to develop a sustained argument for a conclusion, using the tools of critical thinking we have learned in class. The goal of your term paper is to give your best shot at writing an academic journal article. You will pick one topic of your choosing and defend a thesis about it, using research articles from our class or from external research. This is not just a literature review; instead, you will defend a substantive thesis of your choosing. In the process of writing your term paper, you will have to situate your argument in the existing literature. This will require reading peer-reviewed journal articles on your topic and incorporating them into your argument, as well as responding to the arguments made in these papers. In order to write a strong paper, you must engage frequently with counter-arguments and views from other published work, as well as offering your own responses to these counter arguments.

The portions of this paper are the following:

*Topic Approval:* you may choose any topic you like for your paper, but it must be approved by me. I will only approve a topic if you can find two smart people who disagree with your view on the issue. You must meet with me in office hours to discuss your paper topic.

*Annotated Bibliography:* for your term paper, you will submit an annotated bibliography about your research topic. The goal is to read and summarize ten academic papers on your topic.

*Term Paper First Attempt:* you will start by writing your best attempt at this paper. This is not a rough draft or an outline. This is your best first attempt.

*Term Paper Final Version:* after you turn in your first attempt, you will receive comments from me. You will then submit a revised version of your paper.

### **Class Policies:**

- *Attendance:*
  - Attendance in class is mandatory.
  - Of course, if you have some incredibly extenuating circumstance that requires you to miss class, please let me know. For example, if you are on a university athletics team that travels frequently, have a severe illness, etc., we can figure out a solution.
  - If you miss a quiz on the day of your absence, it is your responsibility to come to my office hours and take an alternate quiz.
- *Participation:*
  - Our goal is to get closer to the truth. We do this is by discussing the issues with each other. So, it's very important that we all actively participate in the discussion.
  - Participation most often looks like asking questions and bringing up points of discussion. But, I recognize that this is not the only way to participate in class. Active listening, note taking, talking with me about the material in office hours, etc. all count as participation.
- *Discussion Etiquette:*
  - We will be discussing important and often controversial issues. Given this, we should try to be charitable to our fellow classmates and not jump to harsh conclusions about their views. If a fellow classmate says something that strikes you as false, *or even offensive*, try to interpret his or her claim in the best possible light. The same goes for the authors that we will be reading.
  - However, even though we should be charitable to our classmates and authors, we should still voice disagreement with each other. In a college classroom, it is not rude to disagree with someone; to disagree with someone's reasoning is to acknowledge that person as a peer who is worthy of being debated. Disagreeing with someone does not mean that you are dismissing their views. Rather, it means that you are engaging with their views. This policy extends to me. I heavily encourage you to disagree with me.
  - More generally, my policy is to make the classroom a place of open expression and dialogue. I care a lot about *why* you believe what you believe (much more so than I care about *what* anyone believes). This course is a chance to explore ideas and to see where you think the truth leads. If you leave the course with all of the same beliefs that you entered with, that is completely fine with me, so long as you critically examined your reasons for your beliefs. I have no agenda, and there is no particular view advocated by the course. Of course, I do have many strongly held views and am happy to share those, but my goal is not that you adopt my beliefs, and you certainly are not graded based on adherence to those beliefs. If the goal of this class is to allow free exploration of ideas in the pursuit of truth, none of us can constrain the speech or thought of others. It is difficult to test an idea if we don't discuss and analyze it. For this reason, I affirm a strong policy in favor of free expression in the classroom. This, of course, entails a strong policy in favor of debate, criticism, and examination of each other's beliefs and arguments. The goal is that iron can sharpen iron in the discussion. As college students, it is extremely unlikely that you have made up your minds about most issues of social importance, and the classroom cannot be a place of intellectual exploration if you fear social sanctions from your peers for expressing your views. Again, this still means that we can, and should, vigorously disagree and debate views that our peers endorse.
  - See also: [UR's statement on freedom of speech and expression](#).
- *Technology:*

- Laptops, cellphones, etc. will not be allowed in class. There is lots of evidence that we (and the people around us) learn better when technology is absent and when we have to write things by hand.
- If you have a disability accommodation that allows you to use technology in class, I am happy to accommodate this.
- If you receive an urgent phone call, please feel free to step out of class to take it.
- Recording of class will not be allowed, largely to aid in the goal of creating a space of free expression in the classroom.
- *Office Hours:*
  - The scheduling link to my office hours is listed above. If you would like to talk about material from or adjacent to class, clarify a point from class, get help with an assignment, talk about your grade, etc., feel free to make an appointment with me. I also genuinely want to get to know you as my students. You are always welcome to come say hello while I'm in my office.
- *Late Work:*
  - My policy is that for every day that your assignment is late, you will lose a full letter grade on it.
- *Plagiarism:*
  - As student at the University of Richmond, you are bound by the Honor Code. The Honor Code prohibits the use of any unauthorized assistance. For this course, the use of text-generating artificial intelligence tools (such as, but not limited to, ChatGPT) will be considered unauthorized assistance. I will work with Honor Council to investigate and address any potential violations. ***This includes the use of generative AI for any stage of the work from conception to completion.***

**Course Schedule:**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Assigned Reading</b>	<b>Assignment Due</b>
1/13	Introduction to the class and discussion of syllabus.	None.	
<b>Unit 1: Epistemology</b>			
1/15	Truth	Michael Lynch. <i>True to Life: Why Truth Matters.</i> 9-20, 31-35.  Michael Hannon and Elise Woodard. <i>Political Epistemology.</i> 18-29.	
1/20 (no class in observation of MLK Day)			

1/22	Skepticism	Barry Stroud. "The Problem of the External World."  G.E. Moore. "Proof of an External World."	
1/27	Types of Evidence and Sources of Knowledge	Robert Audi. "The Sources of Knowledge."  Selections from Michael Huemer. <i>Ethical Intuitionism</i> .  Ernest Sosa. "Experimental philosophy and philosophical intuition."	
1/29	Justification	Ted Poston. "Internalism and Externalism in Epistemology."	
2/3	Justification	Ted Poston. "Internalism and Externalism in Epistemology."	
2/5	Intellectual Virtues	Nathan King. <i>The Excellent Mind</i> . Chapters 2 and 6.	
2/10	Intellectual Virtues	Nathan King. <i>The Excellent Mind</i> . Chapters 9 and 10.	Term paper topic due.
<b>Unit 2: Logic</b>			
2/12	Logic (What is an argument? How do we identify premises and conclusions? What is the difference between deductive, inductive, and abductive arguments?)	Thomas Metcalf. "Arguments."  Selections from Ernest Lepore. <i>Meaning and Argument</i> .	

		<p>Selections from “Abduction.” <i>The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy</i>.</p> <p>Selections from Dona Warren. <i>Critical Thinking</i>.</p>	
2/17	Logic (propositional logic, symbolizing, and logical connectives)	<p>Thomas Metcalf. “Formal Logic.”</p> <p>Selections from Ernest Lepore. <i>Meaning and Argument</i>.</p>	
2/19	Logic (practice translating arguments into deductively valid forms)	<p>Common Argument Forms Handout.</p> <p>Selections from Dona Warren. <i>Critical Thinking</i>.</p>	
2/24	Logic (practice translating arguments into deductively valid forms)	No reading.	Term paper annotated bibliography due.
2/26	Logic (informal argument mapping)	Selections from Dona Warren. <i>Critical Thinking</i> .	
3/3	Logic (argument mapping practice on a real paper)	Peter Singer. “Famine, Affluence, and Morality.”	
3/5	Logic (argument mapping practice on a real paper)	St. Anselm. “The Ontological Argument.”	
<b>Spring Break (3/8-16)</b>			
<b>Unit 3: Obstacles to effective inquiry</b>			



3/17	Cognitive Biases	Selections from Daniel Kahneman. <i>Thinking Fast and Slow</i> .	
3/19	Rational Irrationality	Michael Huemer. "Why Are People Irrational About Politics?"	
3/24	Affective Polarization	Shanto Iyengar, Yphtach Lelkes, Matthew Levendusky, Neil Malhotra, and Sean Westwood. "The Origins and Consequences of Affective Polarization in the United States."	
3/26	Partisanship	Chris Freiman. <i>Why It's Okay to Ignore Politics</i> . Chapter 2.  Hrishikesh Joshi. "What are the chances you're right about everything? An epistemic challenge for modern partisanship."	Term paper first attempt due
3/31	Group Think/Social Pressure on Beliefs	Selections from Glenn Loury. "Self-Censorship in Public Discourse: A Theory of 'Political Correctness' and Related Phenomena."  Daniel Williams. "Socially adaptive belief."	
4/2	Echo Chambers	C. Thi Nguyen. "Echo chambers and epistemic bubbles."	

4/7	Deep Disagreement	Richard Feldman. “Reasonable Religious Disagreements.”	
4/9	Being a Novice in a Complex World	Elizabeth Anderson. “Democracy, Public Policy, and Lay Assessments of Scientific Testimony.”	
<b>Unit 4: The political preconditions of effective inquiry</b>			
4/14	Freedom of Speech	Selections from John Stuart Mill. <i>On Liberty</i> .  Selections from Nadine Strossen. <i>Hate: Why We Should Resist with Free Speech and Not Censorship</i> .	
4/16	Limits to Freedom of Speech?	Selections from Nadine Strossen. <i>Hate: Why We Should Resist with Free Speech and Not Censorship</i> .	
4/21	Freedom of Speech on Campus	Selections from FIRE’s <i>Guide to Free Speech on Campus</i> .	
4/23	Academic Freedom	Brian Leiter. “Why Academic Freedom?”	Term paper revised version due.
Final Exam			

27 days

**UR’s Final Exam Schedule:**

<https://registrar.richmond.edu/common/PDF/67%20Exam%20Schedule/Spring-25-Exam-Schedule.pdf>

## **Syllabus Statements**

### **AI and the Honor Code**

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 by AI, or is otherwise not the original work of the student for the specific assignment (without explicit permission).

### **Disability Services**

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 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](http://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](http://disability.richmond.edu). Disability Services can be reached at [disability@richmond.edu](mailto:disability@richmond.edu) or 804-662-5001.

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/](http://disability.richmond.edu/)

### **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](http://registrar.richmond.edu/services/policies/academic-credit.html)

### **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."

<https://studentdevelopment.richmond.edu/student-handbook/honor/index.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](https://registrar.richmond.edu/planning/religiousobs.html)

**Academic Skills Center** ([asc.richmond.edu](https://asc.richmond.edu)): Assists students in assessing their academic strengths and weaknesses; honing their academic skills through teaching effective test preparation, critical reading and thinking, information conceptualization, concentration, and related techniques; working on specific subject areas (e.g., calculus, chemistry, accounting, etc.); and encouraging campus and community involvement. Tutors will be available virtually. The on-call peer-tutors available for these appointments are listed in the Box file: [On-Call Online Tutors](#) (<https://richmond.box.com/s/dpe37chr2zodr3o1amtj8omjk72v2ktb>). **Email Roger Mancastropa** ([rmancast@richmond.edu](mailto:rmancast@richmond.edu)) **and Hope Walton** ([hw Walton@richmond.edu](mailto:hw Walton@richmond.edu)) **for appointments in academic and life skills to request a Zoom conference.**

**Boatwright Library Research Librarians:** ([library.richmond.edu/help/ask/](https://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 library instruction, tutorials, research guides, and individual help. All research support will be provided online or by appointment and students can contact a librarian for help via email ([library@richmond.edu](mailto:library@richmond.edu)), text (804-277-9ASK), chat, or Zoom (by appointment).

**Career Services:** ([careerservices.richmond.edu](https://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](https://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 Syllabus Statement

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 experiencing a barrier to access due to a disability and/or temporary condition are encouraged to apply for accommodations by visiting: [disability.richmond.edu](https://disability.richmond.edu). Disability Services can be reached at [disability@richmond.edu](mailto:disability@richmond.edu) or 804-662-5001.

Once accommodations have been approved, students must 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](http://sl.richmond.edu/be). and 2) Request a meeting with each professor to create an accommodation implementation plan. 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. Disability Services is available to assist, as needed.

**Speech Center** ([speech.richmond.edu](http://speech.richmond.edu) or 289-6409): 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](http://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.