

Phil 209 Introduction To Formal Logic • Cathal Woods  
Spring 2006  
Syllabus

*Contact Information*

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*Office Hours*

My office hours are Monday and Thursday at 1400 and by appointment and pretty much whenever I'm in my office. My office is Blocker 229.

You can use my office hours in numerous ways: (1) to get help on stuff from lectures and readings, (2) to talk about previous assignments, (3) to pick up handouts (if any), and (4) to chat about stuff related to the class but not explicitly addressed in lectures or readings.

*Texts*

1. Course Packet. If you want an additional text, use: *Understanding Arguments: An Introduction To Informal Logic*, 6th edition, 2001, Wadsworth Group, by Robert J. Fogelin and Walter Sinnott-Armstrong.

2. *How We Know What Isn't So*, Thomas Gilovich, Free Press 1991

3. *How To Lie With Statistics*, Darrell Huff, Norton 1993. **N.B.:** Optional Text

*Course Goals*

In short, the goal for this class is to learn how to distinguish between good and bad reasoning. From your perspective, reasoning will come in three kinds as you go through life: inferences you will make, arguments you will give to others, and arguments others will give to you. So if you do well in this class (i.e., if you achieve the class goal), you will be much better able to make good inferences, give good arguments to others, and recognize, correctly reconstruct, and correctly evaluate arguments others give to you.

*The Class*

General Information

All participants (students, teacher, friends and family, roadies and groupies, etc.) are expected to be on time. (Pet Peeve: Please do not pack up your books and bags before the end of class. I find this annoying.) Feel free to bring food and drink. You are welcome to bring family and visiting friends to class.

Class Format

Each class will consist of lectures and small group work. Typically, a class session will go like this: I will lecture on a chunk of material, you will then grapple with that chunk of material in small groups by working on exercises.

Some of you might be skeptical of the pedagogical value of small group activities, just as I was as an undergraduate. So here's the rationale...

According to researchers, there are two big drawbacks to the lecture-only method. First, in lectures students tend to take in material passively, as opposed to

actively engaging it by looking for connections, looking for consequences, and thinking about how it applies to new scenarios. Given this, students tend to forget material from lectures rather quickly, and tend to struggle with higher-level activities like seeing connections and drawing consequences. Second, in lectures students tend to have trouble paying attention: generally speaking, a student's attention increases from the beginning of a lecture to about ten minutes into it, and then decreases thereafter; generally speaking, a student has trouble paying attention starting at around 20 minutes into a lecture; on average, a student attends to what is said in a lecture only about 40% of the time.

Researchers also say that sprinkling lectures with small group activities handles both problems (though in this class, we'll just have one of each). Small group activities make for a change of pace and, thus, make it easier for students to focus on the class (thus handling the attention problem). Just as important (if not more important), they make students actively grapple with material (thus handling the processing problem).

Note: I encourage and expect lots of questions and comments in lectures. In terms of questions for example, you should get in the habit of asking questions like "Would you explain X again?", "So are you saying that . . .?", "A few minutes ago you said X. You just said Y. But aren't X and Y incompatible?", "I'm not questioning that X is true. But could you explain why it's true?", "If X, then does that entail that Y?", and "So does that mean that all Xs are Ys?".

You should raise your hand to make a comment or ask a question. Also ...

- (1) If you get to class late, then find a seat in the back, and get the new handout (if there is one) at the end of class.
- (2) If you can't stay for the whole class, try to tell me about it beforehand and sit close to the door.
- (3) In small group activities, don't interrupt other students.

### *Grades*

Group Work	20
Homework	25
Mid-Term	25
Final	30

(1) The first requirement is group work, and it counts for 20% of your grade for the class.

For each exercise set, I will randomly assign you to small groups. To get the full 20%, you need to get at least 85% of the possible points for the exercise sets. Suppose, for example, that there are 20 exercise sets. Each set is graded as satisfactory (1), partly satisfactory (0.5), or not satisfactory (0). Given this, you would need at least 17 of the 20 possible points in order to get a 100% for group work--since 85% of 20 is 17. If you were to have only 15.5 points, you would end up with an 85% for group work: for each half point under 17, you would lose 5%.

Note: given the rationale above for the small group activities, and given the 15% 'free', under no circumstances will I adjust your grade for an absence for which you have a good excuse (even for something like being kidnapped by the KGB).

(2) The second requirement is homework, and it counts for 25% of your grade for the class.

The first five homework assignments are along the lines of the in-class exercise sets. The sixth and seventh assignments are to look at, and find, real life examples of the kinds of arguments we will be looking at in class.

The first six assignments will be distributed a week in advance, and a late assignment will be accepted only if it is turned in at or before the beginning of the class after which it is due, only if it comes with a good excuse, and only if the excuse is documented. No exceptions. More details about the last assignment, which is due on the last day of class, will be given at the appropriate time.

(3) The third component is a mid-term, and it counts for 25% of your grade for the class.

You will be responsible for both the stuff covered in class (including handouts) and the stuff covered in assigned readings (if there is any difference).

(4) The fourth, and final, requirement is a final, which counts for 30% of your grade for the class.

The final is cumulative. It is on **Saturday, May 6, 1130-1400**

#### (5) Grading Scale

A: 100-93.33

A-: 93.33-90

B+: 90-86.67

B: 86.67-83.33

B-: 83.33-80

C+: 80-76.67

C: 76.67-73.33

C-: 73.33-70

D+: 70-66.67

D: 66.67-63.33

D-: 63.33-60

E: 60-0

#### *Disability*

VWC recognizes, and is sensitive to, students with special needs. In order to use accommodations, students must first register with the college's disability services coordinator, Fayne Pearson, at 455-3246, and provide the college with appropriate, professional documentation. If you need accommodations in this course because of a documented disability, or if you have emergency medical information to share, please make an appointment to see me during my office hours.