

Philosophy 105: Practical Reasoning  
Spring, 2017  
Gen Ed: R2  
Classroom: W245 South College  
Time: TTh 1:00-2:15 plus Friday discussion section  
Instructor: Phillip Bricker                      Teaching Assistant: Dallas Amico  
Office: E327 South College                      Office: E320 South College  
E-mail: [bricker@philos.umass.edu](mailto:bricker@philos.umass.edu)                      E-mail: [damico@umass.edu](mailto:damico@umass.edu)  
Course Website: [blogs.umass.edu/bricker/teaching/phil-105-practical-reasoning](http://blogs.umass.edu/bricker/teaching/phil-105-practical-reasoning)

### **Course Requirements:**

There will be a midterm exam and a final exam (during the scheduled final exam time period), each counting one-third of the grade. Quizzes, short assignments, and class participation will count for the remaining one-third of the grade.

There will be frequent homework assignments. These assignments will not be turned in, but doing them is essential to doing well on the quizzes and exams. They will be gone over in discussion section, and answer sheets will be made available.

Participating in class discussion, both for lectures and discussion sections, is an essential part of the course. Class attendance at lectures is mandatory in this sense: I sometimes present material in lectures that does not occur in any of the reading, and that you are required to know for the quizzes and exams.

### **Textbook/Readings:**

Our main text will be: *Critical Thinking: Consider the Verdict (6<sup>th</sup> ed.)*, by Bruce Waller. This book is available from the Amazon student book store. (The first two chapters are on the website to give you time to acquire the book.) Supplementary readings will be put on the website as the semester progresses.

### **Course Website:**

There is a website for the course that will have all assignments and readings. The address above goes directly to the course page; or it can be accessed from my personal website under "teaching".

### **Course Description:**

This is an introductory course in critical reasoning (aka practical reasoning, aka informal logic) geared towards a particular application: deliberating on a jury. I choose to focus on jury deliberation because: (1) It is important: when you sit on a jury, you have enormous power over complete strangers; only good critical reasoners have the ability to wield that power responsibly. (2) It is general: almost all aspects of critical reasoning may come into play during the course of evaluating

the testimony of witnesses and the arguments of trial lawyers. (3) It is fun: we consider real-life legal cases; you can watch your favorite crime or legal dramas and claim to be studying for the class.

Some of the topics we will cover would occur in any critical reasoning course: constructing and evaluating arguments; characterizing and learning to detect standard fallacies such as ad hominem arguments, fallacious appeals to authority, strawman arguments, irrelevant reason fallacies, and many more. There will be some discussion of statistical reasoning, that is, reasoning under uncertainty.

Some of the topics are more specific to the problem of deliberating on a jury, for example: evaluating eyewitness testimony, scientific testimony, or child testimony; and the concept of reasonable doubt. Moral questions will also be discussed: what should a juror do if a strict application of the law would lead to an unjust result?

### **Plagiarism.**

The UMass Amherst Academic Regulations defines plagiarism as follows: “Knowingly representing the words or ideas of another as one’s own work in any academic exercise.” All cases of plagiarism will be reported to the academic honesty office. The penalty for plagiarism ranges from a zero on the assignment or exam involved (in less severe cases) to an F for the course (in the most severe cases). All students are expected to be aware of the University policies on plagiarism and academic dishonesty.