

## **PHI 169 – CRITICAL REASONING – SPRING 2016**

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### **ASSIGNMENT #4 – DUE MAY 2**

This assignment (due May 2) is preparatory work for the project presentation (last two weeks; schedule TBA) and the final paper (due May 23). The expected length of this assignment is 2-3 pages. This assignment should address the items below, (a) through (f).

- (a) List the members of your group (5-2 people). If you prefer to work alone, say why. In forming a group, keep in mind that:
  - You will hand in one copy of this assignment (due May 2) and receive a grade as a group. You will also give a presentation (next two weeks; schedule TBA) as well as write a final paper (due May 23) with your group members. If you work alone, you will do those things alone and receive an individual grade.
  - For groups of 2-3 people, the length of the final paper will be 13-16 pages, and for groups of 4-5 people, 20-25 pages. If working alone is your preference, your final paper will be 7-12 pages in length.
- (b) Select a topic that interests you. You may write on any topic that is controversial.<sup>1</sup>
- (c) Narrow down the topic in (b) by identifying specific questions you want to address. Be precise. Define each key term, distinguish different types of questions and show how some questions relate to others. Keep in mind that:
  - During the course we distinguished between questions that define the subject matter (definitional questions), questions about “facts” (descriptive questions), questions about causes (etiological questions), and questions about what should be done at the political, legal or personal level (normative questions).
  - Questions about the causes must rely on “facts” in qualitative or quantitative form, while normative questions rest on value judgments.
- (d) Collect data, statistics or stories and anecdotes that will help you address the questions you identified in (c), especially descriptive and etiological questions. Discuss why your

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<sup>1</sup>The following topics are merely indicative: racial profiling and the NYPD stop-and-frisk policy; racial discrimination; gender inequality; the death penalty; economic inequalities; immigration reform; taxation; poverty; public debt; health care; capitalism; democracy; pluralism; religion in society; terrorism; same-sex marriage; college education; art and culture in society; science *versus* religion.

data, statistics, stories and anecdotes are relevant for (c). These will form the factual basis of your work. Always properly cite your sources.

- (e) Collect articles that will help you address the questions you identified in (c). Read the articles, write up a brief summary of each—i.e. identify the main argument, its premises and conclusion—and explain why they are relevant for (c).
- (f) In light of (a) through (e), formulate the goal of the paper. You can aim to
  - defend a specific thesis (e.g. the richest 1% pay enough taxes today), or
  - compare and contrast conflicting arguments (e.g. compare and contrast arguments for and against the death penalty), or
  - find an explanation for a puzzling phenomenon (e.g. find an explanation for why college tuitions have gone up so dramatically in recent years).

*Research a topic you are passionate about. Set high standards for your work. Be a rigorous and creative researcher. I expect to say “wow!” when I read your work.*

**Grading criteria – see “grading scheme” on the next page:**

- ability to identify and understand relevant data and statistics;
- ability to distinguish different questions, e.g. descriptive, etiological, normative;
- ability to identify resources that are relevant for the research project;
- ability to summarize arguments clearly and concisely; and
- ability to cite properly your sources;
- overall clarity and precision.

**Grading scheme**

<i>criteria</i>	<i>unsatisfactory</i>	<i>satisfactory</i>	<i>good</i>	<i>very good</i>
DATA AND STATISTICS				
DIFFERENT QUESTIONS				
RESOURCES, ARTICLES				
ARGUMENT SUMMARIES				
PROPER CITATIONS				
CLARITY				
PRECISION				