

PHI169

CRITICAL REASONING

M&W 9:30-10:45 in C-349

or

M&W 11:00-12:15 in C-349

instructor Marcello Di Bello*e-mail* marcello.dibello@lehman.cuny.edu*office hrs* M&W 2:00-3:00 in C-365***course description¹***

you will develop skills for the analysis of complex questions through reading, writing and debating

part 1 - arguments and data - we will examine various ways in which people can deceive, e.g. by

misrepresenting the data and drawing unjustified conclusions from them

part 2 - getting the facts right - by examining controversial questions of our time, we will (try to) distinguish “facts” from “fictions”

part 3 - beyond facts -

once the facts are agreed upon, we still need to answer non-factual questions, e.g. what should we do?

part 4 - presentations -

students will present their ideas for the final paper

materials

you will read newspaper articles and excerpts from scholarly essays as well as watch video clips

slides, handouts and homework assignments will allow you to concentrate on key aspects of the course materials

website

all course materials are available on the course website

<https://phi169.wordpress.com>



who is the victim and who is the criminal?

¹ From the Bulletin: “Introduction to the concepts and method of thinking, reading and writing analytically and evaluatively.”

requirements & grades

- ♦ complete four assignments, each counting for **15%** of the grade
- ♦ conduct independent research on a topic of your choice, present your findings to the class (**10%** of the grade) and write a final paper (**20%** of the grade)
- ♦ attend class, participate, and take two surprise exams, counting for **10%** of the grade

four assignments

- #1. reasoning exercises
due Feb 8
- #2. causation v. correlation
due Mar 7
- #3. checking facts
due Mar 28
- #4. reasoning beyond facts
due May 2

presentation & paper

the presentation and final paper, 15-20 pages, will be written with 4-5 fellow students on a topic of your choice, due May 23

the final paper is an opportunity for you to apply the skills of careful analysis and reasoning which you'll be learning in this course

attendance & surprise exams

you are expected to attend class, do the reading and participate

there will be two surprise exams

PART 1 - ARGUMENTS AND DATA

week 1: Mon Feb 1 & Feb 3

We will see how data, charts and images can be misleading

reading

Quartz, *The Most Misleading Charts of 2015*

week 2: Mon Feb 8 & Wed Feb 10

We will discuss the nature of an argument and its articulation in *premises* and *conclusion*

assignment #1
due Feb 8

reading

Euclid, *Elements*, Book I, Propositions 1–5

week 3: Wed Feb 17 — No class Mon Feb 15

We will discuss what *necessary* and *sufficient* conditions are and their significance within arguments

watching

WIFI Philosophy, *Necessary and Sufficient Conditions*

week 4: Mon Feb 22 & Wed Feb 24

Same topic as last week.

week 5: Mon Feb 29 & Wed Mar 2

We will discuss the difference between *causation* and *correlation*

watching

Khan Academy, *Correlation and Causality*

PART 2 - GETTING THE FACTS RIGHT

week 6: Mon Mar 7 & Wed Mar 9

Is female genital mutilation a peculiarity of Islamic countries?

assignment #2
due Mar 7

watching

Reza Aslan Slams Bill Maher

Sarah Heider Responds to Reza Aslan

objectives

you will learn how to be critical of the claims made in newspaper articles, the TV, political speeches

you will develop intellectual honesty, i.e. the courage to admit that, sometimes, your claims aren't well supported by arguments

you will develop analytical writing skills, as well as skills for oral presentations and public debates

course etiquette

just in case you forgot

- ✦ do the reading and come to class ready to engage with me and your fellow students
- ✦ disagree with me and your fellow students, but always be gracious and polite
- ✦ don't be shy and don't think what's in your mind is stupid or not worth sharing
- ✦ when you're in class, don't get distracted by the virtual world – i.e. your phone, facebook, instagram, etc.

no plagiarism!

you may not copy the work of others without proper acknowledgement, and if you do so, *you will fail the class*

week 7: Mon Mar 14 & Wed Mar 16

Are the majority of Muslims moderate or radical?

reading

Pew Research Center, *The World's Muslims*

week 8: Mon Mar 21 — No class Wed Mar 23

What are the living conditions in the Palestinian territories?

watching

Queen Ranja at Yale University

PART 3 - BEYOND FACTS

assignment #3
due Mar 28

week 9: Mon Mar 28 & Wed Mar 30

There is a disparity between the incarceration rates of blacks and whites, which raises the question, what is the *cause* of this disparity?

reading/watching

Mac Donald, *Is the Criminal Justice System Racist?*

Alexander, *Roots of Today's Mass Incarceration*

week 10: Mon Apr 4 & Wed Apr 6

Same topic as last week

week 11: Mon Apr 11 & Wed Apr 13

If there is social and economic disparity between blacks and whites, what *should* we do about that?

reading/watching

Coates, *The Case for Reparations*

week 12: Mon Apr 18 & Wed Apr 20

Same topic as last week

week 13: Mon Apr 25 & Wed Apr 27 — Spring break

disability accommodation

students who have a disability which may necessitate an academic accommodation or the use of auxiliary aids and services in a class should contact the *Office of Student Disability Services* located in Shuster, room 238, phone number 718-960-8441

tutoring services

the *Academic Center for Excellence (ACE)* is the tutoring centers on campus

the ACE provides appointment based and drop-in tutoring in the humanities, social sciences, and writing, as well as general writing and academic skills workshops

to obtain information about the ACE, please visit their website at www.lehman.edu/issp or call the ACE at 718-960-8175

PART 4 - PRESENTATIONS

week 14: *Mon May 2 & Wed May 4*

Workshop in preparation for presentations and final paper

week 15: *Mon May 9 & Wed May 11*

Student presentations

week 16: *Mon May 16 & Wed May 18*

Student presentations

assignment #4
due May 2

FINAL PAPER
due May 23