Poli 110: Critical Reasoning and Consumption

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Class Meetings:	Mon., Wed. & Fri. 3:00-3:50	**Office Hours:**	Thurs 1:00 - 1:50

Course Description

All students will engage with the media and encounter reports throughout their lives. There will be reports of scientific breakthroughs, human rights abuses, malevolent conspiracies, and large-scale social action. Some of this evidence will be reliable—some of it will not. While reports are sometimes diligent and careful, others range from poorly conceived to deliberately misleading. As critical consumers, it is our responsibility to distinguish between the two: to carefully and rigorously evaluate the evidence we encounter. How we evaluate these reports may well impact important decisions in our lives: how we vote, whether to dedicate time and money to various pursuits, and even what medication we opt to take.

The aim of this course it to provide the tools needed for this evaluation—to be able to distinguish 'fake news' from real. Each week, we will discuss attributes of reasoned arguments and apply them to political, legal and social examples. We will highlight not only the ways in which arguments are flawed, but also the way to construct ones that succeed.

Students who take this course will be better equipped to evaluate evidence they encounter as they continue at UCSD (and beyond). In addition, they will be practiced at communicating with others: at describing when and where these flaws occur both in discussion and in written work.

Learning Outcomes

Students who complete this course are expected to be able to do the following:

- To analyze evidence contained within news (and other media) reports.
- To understand the persuasive strength arguments (both good and bad) have in society.
- To recognize flawed reasoning in oneself, as well as in others.
- To clearly and persuasively write an argument that calls attention to these flaws.
- To engage in respectful and productive debates with peers about the quality of evidence.

Overview

This course is structured in such a way that we cover a particular aspect of argumentation each week. In the first, introductory week, we discuss reasoning as a dialogue—focusing on the phenomenon of implication, before discussing how conversational norms are violated in presidential debates. In the second week, we discuss questions that occur in a dialogue, especially the way in which questions can presuppose an answer. In the third week, we turn to the role of emotion in discussions. Although emotion is often seen as something which hinders rational debate, it can also serve as evidence. We then discuss science and scientific journalism—focusing both on issues with scientific practice and the gap between what science shows and what is reported.

Roughly halfway through the course, we turn to discussions of biases and fallacies in argumentation. We discuss confirmation and availability bias (and the relation between the two) as well as the role fallacies play in politics. After discussing how arguments go wrong, we discuss how they go right: what argumentative validity consists of.

The course finishes with shades of grey. We discuss the phenomenon of vagueness, as well as its uses in legal interpretation. We discuss appeals to authority—a necessary, but epistemically risky phenomenon as we navigate the world. Lastly, we discuss ad hominem argumentation and hypocrisy in politics.

Expectations and Evaluations

Students are expected to complete readings and attend the seminar. Because this is a discussion-based class, participation is weighted highly. In addition to contributing to discussions, students will be expected to find real-world examples of the phenomena we discuss and present them to the class.

Students will write three papers for this class. As with the presentations, each paper will involve applying the course material to contemporary cases. Each paper will be 5-8 pages (double spaced). The first paper will be distributed on January 25$^{\text{th}}$ and will be due on February 1$^{\text{st}}$. The second paper will be distributed on February 17$^{\text{th}}$ and will be due on February 24$^{\text{th}}$. The final paper will be in lieu of a final exam.

The breakdown of grades for this course is as follows:

20% First Paper
20% Second Paper
30% Third Paper
30% Participation

Academic Integrity

You are expected to conduct yourself with honor and integrity throughout this course. UCSD's policy on academic honesty is the following:

"Integrity of scholarship, otherwise referred to as academic integrity, is essential for an academic community, including UC San Diego. Academic integrity is built on a foundation of honest, responsible, fair and trustworthy scholarly activity. Without it, the degrees we confer, the research we conduct, and our reputation all diminish in value.

Thus, the University expects that both faculty and students will adhere to its standards of academic integrity. The UC San Diego Policy on Integrity of Scholarship (herein the "Policy") states the general rules associated with student integrity of scholarship. The Procedures for Resolving Alleged Violations of the Policy (herein the "Procedures") are found at https://senate.ucsd.edu/media/389895/procedures-for-resolving-alleged-ai-violations.pdf and authorized by the San Diego Division of the Academic Senate's Educational Policy Committee."

Academic honesty involves adequately citing the sources you rely upon, not stealing other students' exams or papers, not cheating on exams, and not plagiarizing any work. Anyone who is found to be dishonest will automatically fail the class and be reported to the UCSD Academic Integrity Office. If you are unsure whether something constitutes academic dishonesty, contact me BEFORE submitting your work.

Reading Schedule

	Introduction	
01/04	None	
01/06	Argument as a Reasoned Dialogue	Walton
01/08	Uncooperativeness in Political Discourse: Violating Gricean Maxims in Presidential Debates	Buddharat et al.
	Circular Argumentation	
01/11	Questions and Answers in Dialogue	Walton
01/13	Question Begging and Analytic Content	Elgin
01/15	No Class	
	Emotions in Argumentation	
01/18	No Class	
01/20	Appeals to Emotion	Walton
01/22	The Problem of Propaganda	Stanley

	Science and Scientific Journalism	
01/25	When Ice Cream Sales Rise, so do Homicides. Coincidence, or Will Your Next Cone Murder You?	Peters
01/27	Bastoy: The Norwegian Prison that Works	James
01/29	FIRST PRESENTATIONS	
	Confirmation and Availability Bias	
02/01	A Machine for Jumping to Conclusions	Kahneman
02/03	Availability, Emotion, and Risk	Kahneman
02/05	SECOND PRESENTATIONS	
	Errors and Fallacies	
02/08	Inductive Errors, Biases, and Fallacies	Walton
02/10	How Trump Buried the National Debate in Logical Fallacies	Neuron
02/12	THIRD PRESENTATIONS	
	Valid Arguments	
02/15	No Class	
02/17	Valid Arguments	Walton
02/19	Novel Argumentation and Attitude Change: The Case of Polarization Following Group Discussion	Vinokur
	Arguments in Natural Language	
02/22	Natural Language Argumentation	Walton
02/24	Vagueness in Law and Language	Waldron
02/26	No Class	
	Appeals to Authority	
03/01	Appeals to Authority	Walton
03/03	Expert Intuition—When Can We Trust It?	Kahneman
03/05	FOURTH PRESENTATIONS	
	Ad Hominem and Hypocrisy	
03/08	Personal Attacks in Argumentation	Walton
03/10	Ad Hominem Argumentation in Politics	Borovali
03/12	FIFTH PRESENTATIONS	