

PHIL 321: SOCIAL & POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY (FALL 2018)
GAIGE 202, TUESDAY/THURSDAY 2:00-3:20

Professor Amy Berg
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OFFICE: Gaige 225
OFFICE HOURS: Wednesdays 2:30-4:30 (or by appointment)

COURSE OVERVIEW

We live in a society that is full of disagreements about government and what it should do. You have probably argued about some of these questions before, whether in your dorm room, with relatives at Thanksgiving, or on Facebook or Twitter. The theme of this course, “Arguing about Politics: The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly,” is geared toward making you better at thinking carefully about your own political views and being able to argue for them well. This course is divided into three sections:

- **The good:** First, we will discuss how to argue *well*. In this section of the course, we will examine two topics: arguments about democracy itself and arguments about the place of multiculturalism in democracy.
- **The bad:** Next, we will evaluate *bad* arguments. Why is it bad to argue uncharitably? How can you recognize good and bad reasons for believing something? How does tone affect arguments?
- **The ugly:** Finally, we will discuss what happens when people or their government go beyond argument into outright lying or bullshit. We will end the course by evaluating one remedy—civil disobedience—for unjust government.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND POLICIES

You will need:

- The readings. We will be using three books and a number of other readings:
 - *Why We Argue (And How We Should): A Guide to Political Disagreement* (Scott Aikin and Robert Talisse, Routledge 2013, ISBN 978-0415859059)
 - *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life* (Sissela Bok, Knopf Doubleday 1999, ISBN 978-0375705281)
 - *On Bullshit* (Harry Frankfurt, Princeton 2005, 978-0691122946)
 - The rest of the readings you will need are collected in a course reader. The three books are available at the Bookstore and are widely available elsewhere; the course reader is only available at the Bookstore.

You will be responsible for bringing the reading for the day with you to class. Complete all assigned readings before coming to class.

- Access to Blackboard, where I will post the syllabus, assignments, and other information.

Assignments: There are eleven assignments due in this course:

- Eight short writing assignments. These assignments will require you to master a variety of skills you need in order to argue well: defining terms, summarizing others’ views, developing objections to those views, and so on. These assignments are due by the start of class every Tuesday, starting September 11 and ending October 30. Unless you are in extraordinary circumstances, **I will not accept short writing assignments that are turned in more than one week late.** You must turn in all eight assignments. Submit the weekly assignments, as **Word documents**, via Blackboard, where they will be checked using SafeAssign.
- A draft of the final paper is due at the start of class on November 13.
- Comments on a peer’s paper are due at the start of class on November 27.

- The final version is due by December 18.

All assignments will be graded anonymously; you should put your student ID number, *not* your name, on them. **You must turn in all assignments in order to pass this course.** Keep in mind that, in this course, **your writing is a public act.** I will occasionally use anonymized and (sometimes) edited versions of your work in class and in future courses in order to generate discussion, share viewpoints, ask questions, and so on.

Attendance and participation:

- Participation is part of your final grade in this course; to participate, you need to attend. You are allowed **two unexcused absences** over the course of the semester; if you must be absent more than that, please speak to me (and bring documentation from a doctor or dean). I will deduct one percent from your participation grade for each additional unexcused absence.
- But participation is more than just attendance! In order to receive full participation points, come ready to make active, serious, charitable contributions to class discussion. **I reserve the right to call on students at random if you are not participating actively.** If you are not comfortable participating in class, I will count active, serious, charitable visits to my office hours toward your participation grade. You will receive a midsemester evaluation of your participation. When I grade participation, here’s what I’m looking for:
 - A range: Attends all (or almost all) class sessions, does the reading, actively and positively participates in all group activities, asks questions or offers comments at least every other class session, comes to office hours at least a couple of times.
 - B range: Attends most class sessions, does the reading, participates in most group activities, asks questions or offers comments sporadically. Is never a distraction.
 - C range: Attends only occasionally, does not do the reading, does not participate very actively in class (or else is a distraction), never comes to office hours.
 - D or F range: Rarely if ever attends class, either does not participate or is an active distraction in class, never comes to office hours or communicates with me via email.

The grade breakdown is:

- **Weekly assignments:** 56% (7% per assignment, eight assignments total)
- **Final paper draft:** (ungraded, but failure to turn in a complete draft will result in a deduction to your final paper grade)
- **Comments on a peer’s draft:** (ungraded, but failure to give satisfactory comments will result in a deduction to your final paper grade)
- **Final paper:** 34%
- **Participation:** 10%

The grade scale is:

	A: 93-100%	A-: 90-92%
B+: 87-89%	B: 83-86%	B-: 80-82%
C+: 77-79%	C: 73-76%	C-: 70-72%
D+: 67-69%	D: 60-66%	
F: below 60%		

Lateness policy: Assignments must be turned in at the start of class on the day they are due. **There are no exceptions unless you make prior arrangements with me.** I will deduct three percent of your final grade if the paper is turned in the day it’s due any time after the start of class and three percent for each day after that that the paper is late (so, for example, a paper that would have gotten 100% if it were turned in on time on Tuesday would get 91% if turned in on Thursday).

On writing: Your success in this class depends on the ability to express yourself clearly. Here are some writing resources I recommend:

- **The Writing Center** (Craig-Lee 225; <http://www.ric.edu/writingcenter/>) will talk through ideas, work through a draft with you, and generally give advice at all stages of the writing process.
- **Style**, by Joseph M. Williams (University of Chicago Press, 1990) is an excellent guide to clear and forceful writing. It's widely and cheaply available at bookstores and through Amazon.

Other policies

- **Electronic devices (laptops, tablets, phones, etc.) are not allowed in class**, except by permission. I am happy to give permission if you need to use an electronic device in order to be successful in this course; please speak with me during the first two weeks of the course. If I give you permission to use technology, please minimize your distractions to other students (by sitting in the back or to the side of the classroom). If you need to use a RIC computer to print, view documents, or upload your assignments to Blackboard, there are computers available at Adams Library.
- **I use email** to send announcements about this course. It is your responsibility to check your RIC email (including your spam folder) every day. (Please note: I use Blackboard when I need to send announcements to the entire class. Replies to emails I send through Blackboard do not go to me, and I have no way to see them. **If you need to contact me over email, please make sure you're emailing my email address, aberg@ric.edu.**) Our emails to each other in this course are professional documents, and it is your responsibility (and mine) to write them professionally. For tips on how to write a professional email, check the email rubric posted to Blackboard. I will respond to your email no later than 5 pm on the next business day; in the rare case I do not, please feel free to follow up with me.
- **Academic honesty is critical to your success in this course.** RIC has policies regarding academic dishonesty such as cheating, plagiarism, and other behaviors. **Cheating** includes receiving unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment. **Plagiarism** involves the theft of "intellectual property." The college policy against plagiarism bans word-for-word plagiarism, patchwork plagiarism, unacknowledged paraphrasing, and unacknowledged facts. I also ban self-plagiarism (that is, you may not turn in work you have written for a previous class). **Other dishonest behaviors** include anything else that provides an unfair advantage over other students or that sabotages another student's efforts. I am happy to talk to you if you have any questions about academic integrity, or you can consult the Academic Standards section of the RIC Student Handbook (<http://www.ric.edu/studentlife/documents/RICStudentHandbook.pdf>). If I find that you have violated academic integrity standards, the minimal consequences will be a zero for the assignment, and you will not be allowed to redo it. Additional consequences may occur, including your failing the class and/or being brought before the Academic Integrity Board. I will also report you to the Vice President of Academic Affairs.
- Rhode Island College, and I, are committed to making reasonable efforts to assist individuals with documented disabilities. If you are seeking reasonable classroom accommodations under the ADA and/or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, you must register with RIC's Disability Services Center (Fogarty 137, 456-2776). To receive accommodations for this class, please obtain the proper Disability Services forms and meet with me during the first two weeks of the course to discuss how we can implement them.
- There are lots of resources at RIC to support you during your time here. OASIS (Adams Library, lower level; <http://www.ric.edu/oasis/>) is here to help you succeed academically. Learning For Life (Adams Library, level 1; <http://www.ric.edu/learningforlife/>) can connect

you to resources on- and off-campus to support you with non-academic needs you may have while you're at RIC. Project ExCEL (Roberts 303; <http://www.ric.edu/esl/>) has a variety of programs and classes for multilingual students. If you'd like information on how to access and use these resources, please don't hesitate to talk with me.

- You are welcome and encouraged to come to my office hours or make an appointment with me whenever you want to talk about the course material, your assignments, or any other philosophy-related concerns you have.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS [READINGS WITH *AROUND THEIR TITLES*** ARE IN THE COURSE READER]**

Tuesday, August 28: Course introduction

Reading: None

Thursday, August 30: Good arguments

Reading: Aikin & Talisse, Introduction

Tuesday, September 4: Good arguments

Reading: Aikin & Talisse, Ch. 1

Thursday, September 6: Good arguments

Reading: Aikin & Talisse, Ch. 2

Tuesday, September 11: Arguing about democracy

Reading: None

Thursday, September 13: Arguing about democracy

Reading: ***Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government****

Tuesday, September 18: Arguing about democracy

Reading: ***Lynskey, "I Thought I'd Put in a Protest Vote"*** AND *** Cumming-Bruce and Erlanger, "Swiss Ban Building of Minarets on Mosques"***

Thursday, September 20: Arguing about democracy

Reading: ***Dewey, "Creative Democracy—The Task before Us"***

Tuesday, September 25: Arguing about democracy

Reading: Aikin & Talisse, Ch. 3

Thursday, September 27: Arguing about democracy

Reading: No new reading (bring Aikin & Talisse to class)

Tuesday, October 2: What arguments count?

Reading: None

Thursday, October 4: What arguments count?

Reading: ***Okin, "Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?"***

Tuesday, October 9: What arguments count?

Reading: ***Al-Hibri, "Is Western Patriarchal Feminism Good for Third World/Minority Women?"*** AND ***Nussbaum, "A Plea for Difficulty"***

Thursday, October 11: Bad arguments

Reading: Aikin & Talisse, Ch. 4

Tuesday, October 16: SPECIAL EVENT – Journalism on the Front Lines: Covering Washington in the Age of Trump (2-4 pm, Sapinsley Hall). This is a mandatory class event; **pre-registration is required.**

Reading: None
Thursday, October 18: Bad arguments
Reading: Aikin & Talisse, Ch. 5

Tuesday, October 23: Bad arguments
Reading: Aikin & Talisse, Ch. 6
Thursday, October 25: Bad arguments
Reading: Aikin & Talisse, Ch. 8

Tuesday, October 30: Lying and politics
Reading: Bok, Ch. 2
Final paper draft assigned Tuesday

Thursday, November 1: Lying and politics
Reading: Bok, Ch. 7

Tuesday, November 6: NO CLASS – ELECTION DAY HOLIDAY
Thursday, November 8: Lying and politics
Reading: Bok, Ch. 12

Tuesday, November 13: Lying and politics
Reading: Bok, Ch. 8
Final paper draft due Tuesday

Thursday, November 15: Bullshit and politics
Reading: Frankfurt, pp. 1-34

Tuesday, November 20: Bullshit and politics
Reading: Frankfurt, pp. 34-end
Thursday, November 22: NO CLASS - THANKSGIVING

Tuesday, November 27: When arguments aren't enough
Reading: ***Plato, *Crito****
Final paper peer comments due Tuesday

Thursday, November 29: When arguments aren't enough
Reading: ***King, "Letter from Birmingham Jail"***

Tuesday, December 4: When arguments aren't enough
Reading: None

Thursday, December 6: Conclusion
Reading: Aikin & Talisse, Conclusion

Finals week
Final paper due December 18