Course description. This course is an introduction to informal logic and the analysis of arguments in everyday discourse. This course aims to improve the student’s power of critical, rational reasoning—both “defensively”, to protect the individual from falling prey to logically flawed but persuasive arguments from others, and “offensively”, to help the student to formulate and to communicate his or her own arguments. The focus upon reasoning in this course is not to win arguments (at any cost), but rather to attain a better understanding of the nature of argumentation and to improve one’s abilities as a producer and consumer of arguments; rationality is not limited to one or to a few individuals, it is a goal to be achieved by individuals working together to solve problems. Students will demonstrate their knowledge of basic logical and rhetorical features of arguments and of the process of arguing by producing diagrams and critiques of sample arguments. There will be a great deal of in class participation in learning to analyze and critique argumentative discourse.

This course satisfies the University of Texas at Arlington core curriculum requirement in Language, Philosophy & Culture.

Learning outcomes. Students will learn how to distinguish deductive from inductive reasoning, and common formal, probabilistic, and informal fallacies. Students will also learn how to distinguish mere rhetoric from proper argumentation and to apply this skill in the analysis of arguments from a variety of argumentative contexts (legal, ethical, political, philosophical, scientific, etc.). Students will demonstrate that they can isolate arguments from written passage and orally delivered communications, distinguish premises from conclusions, diagnose fallacies, and diagnose when there is a need to seek for more evidence bearing on a conclusion. These skills will be demonstrated in in class activities, on homework assignments, class projects, and exams. The successful student will be able to apply his or her deeper of understanding of logic and argumentation in any areas of life where argument and the exchange of evidence and viewpoints is crucial (academic, political, personal, etc.). This course should also improve a students academic writing and reading skills.

Core curriculum objectives.
- Critical Thinking Skills: to include creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, and analysis, evaluation and synthesis of information;
- Communication Skills: to include effective development, interpretation and expression of ideas through written, oral and visual communication;
- Social Responsibility: to include intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national and global communities; and
- Personal Responsibility: to include the ability to connect choices, actions and consequences to ethical decision-making.

Example schedule.
Weeks 1-3: Basic Concepts of Reasoning, Argumentation, and Debate
Weeks 4-5: Language, Meaning & Definitions
Weeks 6-7: Informal Fallacies, Rhetoric, Ideology
Weeks 8-9: Basic Formal Reasoning
Weeks 10-11: Basic Inductive and Probabilistic Reasoning
Week 12-13: Analogy, Precedent and Legal and Moral Reasoning
Weeks 14-15: Scientific Reasoning, Pseudoscience, and Superstition

Signature assignments. The following assignments (among others) will be used to assess the student’s level of achievement of the Core Curriculum Objectives:

1. Each student will analyze an argumentative passage pertaining to a contemporary ethical, religious, political, or scientific controversy in order to determine which proposition functions as the conclusion of the argument and which propositions function as the premises. (Critical Thinking Skills)
2. Each student will participate in an individual project in which the objective is (a) to take a position on a matter of the role of epistemic responsibility at both personal and social levels and support that position with reasons; and (b) write an essay setting forth the argument. (Critical Thinking Skills, Communication Skills, Social Responsibility, Personal Responsibility)

[The remainder of the syllabus will be filled in by the instructor and will include the mandated policy statements of UT Arlington.]