

Syllabus

CrCrTh 601 Critical Thinking

Fall 2019

Hybrid format (Face-to-face students: class #10921; online students: class #10914)

September 9 – December 9, 2019; Mondays 7:00-9:45pm

UMass Boston, Wheatley Hall 4th Floor, Room W04-170 or online through web video conferencing

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Key Links

- Course site (starting point for all course material): <http://blogs.umb.edu/crcrth601-szteiter/>
- Class Meetings – Zoom: <https://umassboston.zoom.us/j/214073705>
- Fall 2019 academic calendar for College of Advancing and Professional Studies (notes dates for Add/Drop/Withdraw): <https://www.umb.edu/academics/caps/credit/fall/calendar>

Course Format

Hybrid format, with weekly meetings and assignments. All students attend all meetings either on campus or online through web-based video conferencing.

Catalog Description

This course explores issues about the nature and techniques of critical thought, viewed as a way to establish a reliable basis for our claims, beliefs, and attitudes about the world. We explore multiple perspectives, placing established facts, theories, and practices in tension with alternatives to see how things could be otherwise. Views about observation and interpretation, reasoning and inference, valuing and judging, and the production of knowledge in its social context are considered. Special attention is given to translating what is learned into strategies, materials, and interventions for use in students' own educational and professional settings.

Course Overview:

This course on Critical Thinking involves a practical emphasis which helps students to move from the concepts of critical thinking to practice. Critical thinking is understood through a variety of meanings (emphasizing reasoning, questioning, recognizing assumptions and biases, and the teaching or learning of related skills and dispositions) and contexts (such as having effective discourse in social life, knowing about logical fallacies and developing good written or spoken argumentation, discerning truth and relevance to information presented through the media).

Our course takes on a wide perspective that allows individual students to explore multiple aspects of critical thinking and focus on those that are most relevant to their work and lives. Two particular orientations toward practice are involved here: 1) how we engage in critical reflection on our experience (individually and in groups) and bring new thinking to our practices, and 2) how we guide, support, teach, and promote critical thinking in our communities, workplaces, and schools. The purpose then is to start to define practices, strategies, and behaviors that can help ourselves and others build that support and establish environments where critical thinking is more the norm than the exception. We explore specific aspects of critical thinking such as asking effective questions, examining beliefs, and increasing dispositions that get us to seek out and appreciate alternatives.

Because critical thinking does not have a single fixed definition, and because participants in the course come from a variety of backgrounds, the course requirements often involve making connections between individual concepts and your own situations. Many of the assignments provide a general framework, tool, or methodology and ask that you decide how it fits in with your own experiences and needs. The class work involves reading (from both scholarly and popular sources) and writing that helps you to make sense of the varied (and sometimes conflicting) views of what makes “good thinking”. Also, activities introduced during class meetings and others to try on your own offer multiple possibilities for increasing the potential for critical thinking. Additionally, you are asked to continue to observe closely in your own settings and notice where assumptions are being made, how questions are used to uncover details and meaning, and ways that evidence is presented in supporting reasoning.

Preparation Assumed for this Course

This course has no prerequisites and is appropriate for a student who has not previously taken a graduate course in critical thinking. Students should generally expect to spend about 8-10 hours per week on course requirements (including time spent in class meetings).

General Expectations

Students should know their umb.edu email address and password and be prepared to use these to sign in to university-supported systems, including the course site. Students are required to check their umb.edu email account regularly or have it forwarded to a personal address, as messages from the instructor will be sent there.

Please note that you are required to attend class meetings in the format under which you registered (exceptions should be confirmed by the instructor in advance of the class meeting).

Students are expected to meet all standards specified in the Student Code of Conduct, available here: http://www.umb.edu/life_on_campus/policies/community/code

Course Learning Objectives

At the end of this course, students will have:

1. Examined a number of aspects of critical thinking as well as considered perspectives that offer a range of alternatives for understanding critical thinking.
2. Identified a number of principles that help you to clarify your own beliefs about what amounts to genuine critical thinking.

3. Experienced and practiced a number of critical thinking skills, strategies, and dispositions through classroom and independent activities in order to make connections between theory and applications to real-life work and personal situations.
4. Created a final project that allows you to develop your knowledge around a specific issue or topic related to critical thinking and consider plans for bringing this to practice beyond the course (such as developing a toolkit or set of strategies for integrating critical thinking into a program, curriculum, or personal habits, or supporting others to do so).

Required Texts and Materials

1. Texts: no books need to be purchased. All required readings will be provided in digital format through the course site.
 - Optional: Costa, A. L. (1991). *Developing minds*. Alexandria, Va: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. Some assigned readings come from this book, which is compilation of diverse of articles, of particular interest to teachers looking to integrate critical thinking directly into curriculum or elsewhere within educational settings.
2. Microphone + webcam for students participating from a distance (a headset-microphone and USB webcam, or a laptop with built-in mic. and video camera, for example). Online participants should have a reliable Internet connection (wired preferred over wireless).
3. Students attending the meetings face-to-face are encouraged to bring their own laptops to get online during class. Materials will be available on the course site and typically not made available as printouts.

General Course Logistics and Schedule

Course materials are organized on a week-to-week schedule (Monday to Monday). Materials for the week are posted on the course site by the start of each class meeting, and in general, work assigned on a Monday is due by start of class the following Monday. Some other assignments extend beyond a single week. All times referenced in course materials should be regarded as Eastern time zone if not otherwise noted.

Assessment & Requirements

Written assignments and presentations (63% of grade):

- **W1:** Reading Responses (at least 10 submissions; total 20 points)
- **W2:** Group Project – Learning Activity (presentation to class + brief written review) (4 points)
- **W3:** Mid-term Critical Reflection (3 points)
- **W4:** Commentaries/evaluations on presentations and group activities (8 points =4 items, 2 points each).
- **W5:** Manifesto (3 points)
- **W6:** Final Project (including proposal, presentation, final paper) (25 points)

Participation Items (30% of grade):

- **P1:** Prepared class attendance, including completion of all required readings and contributions to discussions (during class meetings) or through independent activities (weeks with no meeting) (14 weeks x 2 point per week = 28 points); includes completion of occasional brief written “homework” activities.
- **P2:** Dialogical Briefing (points are included as part of P1).
- **P3:** Instructor conference (on project proposal) (2 points).

Quality Contributions Rubric (7% of grade):

Beyond the points achieved for the written assignments and participation, additional points come from the following rubric based on the instructor's own evaluation (total points divided by 2):

2 = did this quite well; often exceeded expectations

1 = mostly met the minimum expectation, but with some room for improvement

0 = not a particular strength of mine for this course

Quality Statement	0	1	2
1. On-time submission of assignments, where the combined total days late of all written assignments is ≤ 10)			
2. Reading Responses that show thoughtful attention to issues, where you seek to make your own reasoning clear, show awareness of your thinking, and avoid broad statements and overgeneralizing.			
3. Initiative taken in keeping up with the course, making up for missed sessions, and seeking out clarification around the course process and expectations in a timely way when you are not clear about something.			
4. Supporting small-group interactions in class by 1) taking initiative during small group discussions and activities to facilitate when needed and help maintain focus on relevant issues, and 2) offering substantive peer commentary (informally, or formally through written assignment based on observing class activities or presentations) that stimulates thinking beyond superficial praise or reactions.			
5. Final Project that is well-structured, organized, and serves as a foundation for practical extensions beyond the course term.			
6. Written work is almost entirely free from mechanical, grammatical, formatting, and spelling errors, uses consistent academic standards, and is presented professionally.			
7. Commitment to a constructive approach in your participation during class meetings, where you contribute frequently in class discussions and support the class as a learning environment (for example, by asking questions to clarify instructions for activities, by experimenting with the processes used in a hybrid-format course and offer appropriate feedback, etc.).			

A = 93+, A- = 88-92, B+ = 82-87, B = 76-81, B- = 70-75, C+ = 64-69, C = 58-63

ASSIGNMENT SUBMISSION POLICY

All work must be submitted as a digital file in either Microsoft Word or PDF format (no Apple .pages files, please). See instructions on the course site for online submission of files (and note that work should **not** be sent as email attachments).

Late policy: The due date for most items is Monday by the start of class, the week following the class in which they are assigned. No formal extensions are granted for late work, but late work is accepted, and items submitted late but within one week of the due date will count for up to half credit. Items submitted more than one week later than the due date will not receive credit but will be considered in the case of a borderline grade at the end of the course. Missed meetings cannot be made up directly, but students are responsible for reviewing weekly materials and conferring with the instructor or peers to keep up with current topics.

Weekly Schedule

Week	Date	Topics
1	September 9 Meeting: 7:00-9:45pm ET	Course Overview and Introductions; Thinking About Thinking; What is Critical Thinking? Where is Critical Thinking?
2	September 16 Meeting: 7:00-9:45pm ET	Definitions, Aspect, and Obstacles of Critical Thinking
3	September 23 Meeting: 7:00-9:45pm ET	The Language of Critical Thinking; Critical Reflection
4	September 30 Meeting: 7:00-9:45pm ET	Creating Environments for Supporting/Teaching Critical Thinking
5	October 7 Meeting: 7:00-9:45pm ET	Developing Dispositions and Habits of Critical Thinking
6	October 14 <i>NO MEETING (holiday)</i>	Emotional Dimensions of Critical Thinking
7	October 21 Meeting: 7:00-9:45pm ET	Belief and Doubt; Certainty and Uncertainty
8	October 28 Meeting: 7:00-9:45pm ET	Strong-Sense Thinking and More on Beliefs
9	November 4 Meeting: 7:00-9:45pm ET	Longer-term Change and Paradigm Shifts
10	November 11 <i>NO MEETING (holiday)</i>	Critical Thinking as Social Process
11	November 18 Meeting: 7:00-9:45pm ET	Thinking About Justice, Equity, and Social Change
12	November 25 Meeting: 7:00-9:45pm ET	Critical Thinking and Creative Thinking; Thinking Through Stories and the Arts
13	December 2 Meeting: 7:00-9:45pm ET	Additional Controversies; Global Perspectives on Critical Thinking
14	December 9 Meeting: 7:00-9:45pm ET	Authentic Assessment of Thinking; Course Evaluations; Extensions and Applications for Ongoing Practice

Course Evaluation

At the end of the course, you will be asked to complete an anonymous, online course evaluation (<http://bit.ly/CCTEval>) as required by the Critical and Creative Thinking program and the College of Advancing and Professional Studies. No personally identifiable information is captured from this evaluation; at the same time, the comments made benefit the program as a whole and wider university in continuing to develop the course, and so evaluation responses may be made viewable to faculty, administrators, and future prospective students so that all may learn from the experiences of past students. No responses will be released to instructors until final course grades have been posted.

Reflective Practice Portfolio

This only applies to students in the Critical and Creative Thinking MA Program: the mid-term critical reflection essay or selections from your final project/paper are appropriate for inclusion in the program's required Reflective Practice Portfolio. Other items may also be acceptable for inclusion.

Note on Recording of Class Meetings

Please note that class meetings (or portions) may be recorded (audio and/or video) through the software used for web conferencing. Recorded class sessions are intended for the sole use of students currently enrolled in a course in order to view missed sessions or review segments for personal use, and these may only be viewed for the purpose of fulfilling course requirements. Links to recordings are only available under the password-protected site to registered students and are not listed or findable through public web sites. Recordings may not be shared with anyone not registered in the course, and they will be deleted at the end of the course term.

Accommodation Statement

Sections 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 offer guidelines for curriculum modifications and adaptations for students with documented disabilities. If applicable, students may obtain adaptation recommendations from the Ross Center (617-287-7430). The student must present these recommendations to the professor by the end of the Drop/Add period if possible.

Instructor Background and Experience

Jeremy Szteiter is a graduate of Carnegie Mellon University (Cognitive Science) and University of Massachusetts Boston (Critical and Creative Thinking) and now serves as the Assistant Director of the graduate program in Critical and Creative Thinking at UMass Boston. His work has centered on program and organizational development, particularly in adult education in community-based human services and has involved managing, developing, and teaching programs to lifelong learners, with an emphasis on a learning process that involves the teaching of others what has been learned and supporting the growth of individuals to become nonformal teachers of what they know. Jeremy's work draws upon principles and practices of social change pedagogy, technology-enhanced collaboration, instructional design, and participatory theater.

Extended Bibliography

Some readings will be provided and are drawn from certain selections in the following list.

- Barrett, T., & Moore, S. (2011). *New approaches to problem-based learning: Revitalising your practice in higher education*. New York: Taylor & Francis.
- Brockman, J. (2009). *What have you changed your mind about?: Today's leading minds rethink everything*. New York: Harper Perennial.
- Brookfield, S. (2012). *Teaching for critical thinking: Tools and techniques to help students question their assumptions*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
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- Brookfield, S. (1995). *Becoming a critically reflective teacher*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
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- Kuhn, D. (2018). A role for reasoning in a dialogic approach to critical thinking. *Topoi*, 37(1), 121-128.
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- Paul, R., & Elder, L. (2007). Critical thinking: The art of Socratic questioning. *Journal of developmental education*, 31(1), 36.
- Ritchhart, R. (2015). *Creating cultures of thinking: The 8 forces we must master to truly transform our schools*.
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- Robertson, J. F., & Rane-Szostak, D. (1996). Using dialogues to develop critical thinking skills: A practical approach. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 39(7), 552-556.
- Taylor, P. J., & Szteiter, J. (2019). *Taking yourself seriously: processes of research and engagement*. Pumping Station.
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- Walters, K. S. (1994). *Re-thinking reason: New perspectives in critical thinking*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Syllabus Version

August 2019; This syllabus is subject to change and updated versions may be distributed throughout the course term if adjustments become necessary, but the overall workload will continue to reflect the written assignments and participation items described above.