Philosophy 1900G: Logical and Critical Reasoning

(Technology Delivered)

Fall 2010

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Office Hours (Fall 2010):

On-line: Monday 5-7 PM (Central Time) and by appointment

1. Introduction. This course will provide an introductory survey of techniques for evaluating arguments and reasoning. It will cover largely the same material as in my traditionally taught (on-campus) sections of PHI 1900, but is presented in a technology delivered format entirely through the internet.

Since there is no fixed class time for a technology delivered course, you are free to work on the material when it is most convenient. But with this convenience comes an added responsibility: you must make sure, *on your own,* that you keep up with the work. In courses of this sort it is particularly easy to put off work, and so quickly fall behind. Since the assignments will be scheduled, with time limits on completion

(see below), the course does provide boundaries. But I stress at the outset that **if you are not a self-motivated person, capable of holding yourself to a schedule, then this is NOT the course for you**.

The main problem students have had with my WebCT courses has been **falling behind** in doing the readings and course work.   Once a student is well behind in the readings, it is **very hard** to catch up. And **"falling behind" will NOT count as a legitimate excuse** for missing (or doing poorly on) assignments.

The course will be run *entirely* on the web, through EIU's **WebCT** system. The home page for WebCT at EIU is:

http://www.eiu.edu/online/home/

Instructions for using WebCT are available at the following address.

http://www.ux1.eiu.edu/~bbeakley/class/webct/intro/intro.htm

The **'textbook'** for the course will consist entirely of handouts from a Logic textbook I am writing. **You do not need to get any books from EIU's Textbook Rental Service**. (In case you are curious: the material will be from Chapter One, and Chapters Three and Four, of the book.) These readings will be available in the **Readings** section.

All the readings will be available from the beginning of the semester.

The readings will be in Adobe Acrobat file format. To view these files you will need the **Acrobat Reader**, which can be downloaded free here:

Specific reading assignments, as well as practice problems and further class information, are listed in the **Calendar** for the class. A complete schedule for the assignments and readings is available in the Calendar from the beginning of the semester, and will not change.

NOTE: failing to notice that an assignment is due is **NOT** an acceptable excuse for missing that assignment.

Even though the schedule and readings are all established and available from the outset, **you must still log in to WebCT at least three different days each week**.

2. Topics. The course will divide into two parts. *Part One* will study **Informal Logic**, setting out the basic concepts of Logic in an entirely non-technical manner, and applying these concepts to simple ordinary-language examples. Those basic concepts will be sharpened and refined in *Part Two* (occupying most of the semester), where we study two forms of introductory-level **Formal Logic**. In this part of the course we develop techniques for evaluating arguments which are too complex for a purely informal approach.

3. Assignments. Your grade will be based on a series of quizzes, a midterm exam, and a final exam. Assignments will be found in the *Assessments* section of WebCT.

Each **quiz** will be worth **6** points. There will be **7** quizzes, for a total of 42 points.

As with all assignments, their dates are stated in the *Calendar* section, from the beginning of the semester. You can also see

the assignment dates and times listed in the *Assessments* section. **All assignment dates are fixed from the beginning of the semester**, and will not be changed. (Students regularly write me asking that an assignment deadline be extended, or moved to another day. That will not happen.)

Quizzes are typically available on WebCT for **three days.** You can take the quiz at any time within that period. Each quiz will have a **time limit of 20 minutes**, within which it must be completed. (WebCT tells you, as you are taking the assignment, how much time you have left.)

WebCT will tell me if a student has gone over the 20 minute time limit. **Quizzes submitted past the time limit are NOT accepted**.

You will need to finish the quiz within one session – that is, once the quiz is begun, it cannot be 'paused'.• That means: if you close your web browser window or lose your internet connection without submitting the assignment, the clock will keep running in WebCT, until I open it for grading. (When I see that a student has taken 48 hours and some-odd minutes on an assignment, it's because the student quit WebCT without clicking "Submit".)

Answers to quizzes and exams must be submitted in the **Assessments** section of WebCT. **Answers CANNOT be emailed to me**.

I give specific instructions on how to do WebCT assignment, in a separate reading. I also hold a practice assignment the first week of class, before beginning graded quizzes, in order to ensure that everyone knows how to use the Assignment function of WebCT.

The **midterm** and **final exams** are worth **40** points each. Each exam will be made available for **three days** in the Assignments section of WebCT. Each exam will have a **two hour** time limit. **Exams submitted past the time limit will not be accepted**. (That means: **not even partial credit** will

be given for the exam in that case.)

(For the first one or two quizzes of the semester, and for the exams, I allow a *second* **attempt** at an assignment, in case there is a technical mistake such as accidentally clicking "Submit" before finishing the quiz. The second attempt is to be used **only** as such a last resort. If a student submits two attempts at an assignment, **I grade the last attempt submitted, unless it is blank**. But the **total** time limit -- for both attempts, **combined** -- is still 20 minutes for a quiz, and 2 hours for an exam. That means, for example: not 2 hours each, for two different exam attempts; but rather 2 hours total, for both exam attempts **combined**.)

The total for the class is: **122** points.

4. Practice Problems (Non-Graded). In addition to the graded assignment, I will also regularly assign **practice problems**, to provide practice in the material prior to your taking quizzes or exams. These problems will **not** be collected or graded. They are just like the practice problems, with answers provided, that you would find in a "teach yourself" book such as a Schaum's guide.

But it is still important that you do all the practice problems before you read the answers. Since Logic – like music, sports, or martial arts – involves learning *skills*, regular practice is necessary to learn the material. And because the course is cumulative – later material builds on earlier material – you will not be able to move on successfully to later sections if you have not mastered the previous ones. One of the most reliable ways I know to **fail** the course is to skip the practice problems.

I want to repeat: the **practice problems** are for **practice**, and are **not graded**.

5. Class Proceedings.

A. Mail. You can email me at any time, using the **Mail** function of WebCT. In practice, I have found that email is the most-used means of one-on-one communication in my WebCT classes.

Note: any email sent to your WebCT mail account will *not* show up in your ordinary EIU email account – only in your special WebCT "Inbox". You need to be logged in to WebCT to get your WebCT email.

B. Office Hours and Chat. As listed at the top of this syllabus, I will be logged in to WebCT on Monday afternoons from 4 to 6 PM (and other times, by appointment) using the **Chat** function of WebCT. This operates just like ordinary chatroom software (though it is restricted to students logged in to this course in WebCT).

When you enter the Chat program during my office hours, you will see my name listed (as already being present). You just type text into the text-entry box and hit "Enter"€ • to start talking.

In my experience students' question are typically best dealt with through WebCT **email**; I don't get many questions during office hours. (I check my email every day.) But I am available in office hours if you want to speak to me "live".

C. Announcements. WebCT also offers an Announcements function. I will use this when sending a message to everyone in the class.

6. Policies.

A. Excused Make-Ups. Ordinary issues of missing quizzes should not pose the same problem in WebCT that they do in an ordinary course, since WebCT will not require you to leave your home, and moreover should provide enough time

flexibility (several days per assignment) to let you pick the best time to complete the work.

For that reason, a student will need to be very sick indeed, for an **extended** period of time, in order to excuse missing assignments. In such a case, the student would need to provide me with sufficient **documentation** (from a doctor, hospital, or other medical center) that the illness was acute and prolonged.

Barring such severe illness, there should be no reason why a homework or quiz is missed. Again, **I stress**: simply falling behind, or failing to notice that an assignment was scheduled, is **NOT** an acceptable excuse for missing an assignment, and will not qualify for a make-up assignment.

Likewise, not noticing the due date for an assignment is **NOT** an acceptable excuse for missing an assignment, and will not qualify as an excuse for a make-up assignment. Nor will allegations of failed internet connections excuse a student from any assignments; **it is each student's responsibility to secure adequate internet access**.

This holds all the more so for exams: a student will need to provide thorough and official documentation of an **extremely** urgent problem, to be allowed to make up an exam.

If a student misses the Midterm Exam, or if I receive a blank exam answer from the student (as a result of the student's submitting the assignment improperly), one makeup exam will be permitted, with a **penalty of 20 points**. Since the Midterm Exam is worth 40 points, everyone should recognize a missed Midterm Exam for the **DISASTER** that it is.

There are no makeups for the Final Exam (except, as usual, for documented medical emergencies). If you miss the Final Exam, it is officially the end of the world.

B. Free Make-Ups. I do allow **one free make-up quiz** for the

semester. It's a make-up, for a **missed** assignment (**not** a re-take of a quiz the student took). It's a "free" make-up because **no excuse is required**. I will hold free make-ups twice in the semester: once in the middle (around the midterm), and once in the last week of class. If you missed a quiz in the before the first free make-up, you can take that one; if you missed after the first free make-up, you can take the second one. The free make-up times are set in advance in the calendar, and I will send an announcement reminding people shortly before each make-up is offered. Once I announce the free make-up, you should email me telling me to put your name on the make-up list. (I will remind everyone of this in a class announcement, at the time.)

(I count an assignment as "missed" if the student received a "0" on it. That includes quizzes where a blank answer was turned in.)

Note: the free make-up may deal with any topic covered up to that time. So it may not be on the same topic as the original quiz (which was missed). For example: if a student missed a quiz on informal logic, the free make-up may be on formal logic.

IMPORTANT NOTE: the free make-up is only for a quiz -- **not** for an exam.

C. Technical Issues. In the unlikely event that the WebCT system encounters a **technical problem** interfering with testing functions, I will of course make accommodations for any missed assignments caused by such problems. But I have not encountered such problems so far.

If a student reports a problem that prevents completing an assignment, I will check with the computing office at EIU for problems; but here again, if the allegation cannot be documented (particularly if it is only reported by one individual), it will not qualify as an excuse for a missed

assignment.

Finally, since this course is delivered over the internet, **each student is (obviously) required to insure reliable access to the internet**. Claiming that one didn't have internet access **does NOT** count as a legitimate excuse for missing an assignment.