

**HONORS 101A**  
**SEMINAR IN CRITICAL THINKING**  
**FALL, 2004, UNIVERSITY HALL 305, MW 4-5:15PM**

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**  
**THINKING CRITICALLY ABOUT CONSUMPTION**

**Instructor: Stephen Simon**

Office: H-311, Cubicle J  
Office Hours: M, 2:45-3:45, W 2:00-3:00 or by appointment  
Mailbox: H-314 [Philosophy Department Office]  
Telephone Numbers:  
    [714] 278-7786 [my number]  
    [714] 278-3611 [Philosophy Department Office number]  
My email address: [ssimon@fullerton.edu](mailto:ssimon@fullerton.edu)

Please feel free to email me at any time if you have any questions about the class or just to discuss stuff with me. I regularly check email daily about 10pm. Come to office hours as frequently as you wish for discussion. If you cannot make my office hours, I have lots of time for appointments on M & W.

**Required Books**

Brooke Moore & Dick Parker: CRITICAL THINKING [CT] Eric Schlosser: FAST FOOD NATION [FFN]

These two books may be purchased at the Titan Bookstore. There will be other reading material for my particular section of the seminar which I will make available to you in class as we come to them. This includes my handouts of various sorts, articles from newspapers and pieces of other books, e.g., Larry Wright, PRACTICAL REASONING, Ch 3 [which contains an interesting strategy for thinking critically about inductive reasoning].

**General Course Description**

This course should be one of the most important foundational courses that you take as an undergraduate & more generally in your life in so far as it instills a spirit of critical thinking, reading, writing in your life. Consider the following:

All around us, and even within our own hearts and minds, we hear questions and claims, questions and claims about what we ought to believe and how we ought to act. Did Bush lie to the American People? If so, why? Does John Kerry act French? What does that mean? Should non-citizen immigrants in the U.S. have the some or all or none of the political rights that citizens have? If they pay taxes, shouldn't they have the right to vote? Can we support political systems in other countries that privilege certain of their citizens and cause others to suffer because of different religious beliefs even though it goes against what we believe just? "If it doesn't affect me, to hell with it!" Should you accept Bush's claim [he's the president!] that his new policy on "salvage logging" is

necessary to prevent forest fires which endanger the lives and property of many people? Racism is morally unjustified discrimination, you think, but what about affirmative action as a corrective....isn't it just reverse discrimination? Can any discrimination really be justified? Should we trust what we hear on TV news broadcasts about events in foreign countries when the TV stations are owned by corporations that are involved in various "deals" in those countries? Should we give up any of our rights and freedoms to protect against terrorism? What is terrorism, anyway?

These and other questions of this kind and claims and disagreements about their answers are not specialists' matters. They are not matters for pharmacists, geochemists, Mayan historians, experts in film noir [look it up], or motorcycle mechanics. They are matters for all of us, investigating them, discussing them with friends and enemies and lovers and strangers partly constitute the form of life that is human. [HMMMMM, really?? WHAT IS HE GETTING AT??? I WANT TO TALK TO HIM MORE ABOUT THIS!! EMAIL, OFFICE HRS]

Answering such questions & accepting or rejecting such claims involves clarifying and distinguishing questions, analyzing various claims offered in answers to them, constructing, analyzing and evaluating arguments that are offered in support of such claim-- such activities constitute critical thinking. Being interested in engaging such activities, too partly constitute our form of life. These activities are what we call, "critical thinking" -- the examination and evaluation of reasons that are offered in support of various claims on our assent and our action. In a way, activities that constitute such discourse are nothing less than ways of trying to develop a coherent human life.

### **Pedagogical Objectives**

Accordingly, in our honors seminar in critical thinking you will learn better how to do such things as:

- Identify, analyze, construct and evaluate arguments in general.
- Distinguish/clarify different sorts of claims
- Distinguish/analyze different specific types of reasoning
- Distinguish/clarify different sorts of issues about which we can reason.
- Evaluate evidence & testimony of others

There are the skills and your exercising of them with all sorts of examples, trivial & profound will constitute part of the course. There is, also, your application of those skills in ways that are not "merely exercises". Accordingly, they will, furthermore and specifically, be applied in the papers you write & oral presentations you give concerning topics that come up in FAST FOOD NATION about the idea that our mainstream social life has been largely informed by the, "fast food," its development & implications. Also, of course, fast food is a metaphor or things: "a McLife", we could invent: "a Mcrelationship," etc. Notice that it is an evaluation. What is its content? Is it ever OK? [See below, "course requirements," for specification of what the assigned

projects will be in this course.]

This is a practical course, i.e., "how to do it [better] course". Hence, there will be no long discussions of theoretical or historical issues. I hope students will leave this course with an awakened or a heightened sensitivity to the presence of reasoning in a natural language, and with a more practiced habit of approaching statements wondering what their implications might be and as perhaps needing clarification or rational support--and considering the worth of claims in terms of the acceptability of the reasons given and the strength of the reasoning forthcoming. For, to be able to do such things is one of the chief virtues of a mind well-educated.

### **Course Requirements**

1. **Reading Assignments.** I will make regular reading assignments from CT]. You will be expected to have read them all & for the class for which they are assigned. When the time comes I will make reading assignments from Practical Reasoning [PR]. I will introduce a few other short items to read.
2. **Written Exercises.** As homework, I will assign short exercises in argument analysis and evaluation found in PSA, PR, plus my supplements. You will have roughly 1 a week except, perhaps, when there are exams or presentations.
3. **Examinations.** There will be two in class examinations. You must take both of them. The first examination is 11 Oct. The second is on 17 Nov. These will both be over material we've covered from PSA & PR, etc. [not, FFN] Exams will be just like the homework & in class exercises that we do from time to time. The second examination will focus on the material since the first exam although knowledge of previous material will certainly help you negotiate its problems. It is not cumulative. There will be no final examination.
4. **Short Papers.** There will be 2 short papers. I mean by "short," 2 or 3 pages long. NO FAT!! The first of these will be from an assigned topic from FFN. It is due: Sept 29. The second Supersize Me or Schlosser's lecture. Due 22 Oct.
5. **Initial Oral Presentation.** Some of you will present on 1 Nov and some of you on 3 Nov. Presentations will be about 3 minutes long. There will be a short class discussion of each presentation. On the day you do the oral presentation, you must turn in a written outline of the presentation. Notice: there is an oral and a written part to this assignment. This oral presentation will be about topics in FFN. Topic[s]/guidelines will be forthcoming.
6. **Final Oral and Written Work.** Ideally, not necessarily, this will draw/build on all of your previous work. This consists of two parts: an oral presentation of about 7 minutes. In addition it consists of a paper of about 6 pages. You should present from an outline, but must hand in an essay. It is due when you do your oral presentation. Dates: 6, 8, 15 Dec [5-6:50pm for the last presentations,] Attending all of these sessions is required even if you have already done yours.
7. **Plenary Sessions** [in H-123]
  - a. 1 Sept: Discussion of Plagiarism & Study Abroad

b. 25 October: Viewing the film Supersize Me [a video of which will be on reserve, I hope, in the reserve desk of the main library for those of you who cannot stay for the entire showing. N.B. if you write a paper on this film it is due 1 Nov, even if you cannot stay on 25 Oct for the entire showing. It is your responsibility, in that case, to check out the video & watch the rest of it.]

c. 3, 8, or 15 November [undetermined at this time]: Eric Schlosser talks about Fast Food Nation & entertains questions about it from YOU.

### **Grading**

	Percent of Course Grade
Exercises [1 each =]	10
Two Short Papers [7.5 ea =]	15
Initial Oral Presentation	10
First Examination	20
Second Examination	20
Final Oral Presentation & Paper	25

### **Other Important Matters**

Class attendance is required. If you miss a class you should tell me &, if possible, arrange ahead of time to get the information from another student. You will be, in any case, responsible for it. Note that attendance is required of all students for all of the final project presentations [Yes, even if you have already done your presentation! Your comments are still worth hearing.]

There will be no make-ups for the examinations or short papers unless you notify me ahead of time or if it is an emergency you can document it. There will be no make ups for exercises or for either of the oral presentations [unless, of course, you drop out of school & are getting an Incomplete]. To get credit for homework exercises they must be turned in by you on time, you must be in class for their discussion & they must demonstrate at least satisfactory understanding of the material. Class participation can improve borderline grades, but I will not penalize students who do not participate more than is required. I am, also, positively impressed by work that improves during the semester.

There MAY be more than 10 homework assignments. If there are, they will count as extra credit at 1 pt. each. There will be one 5 pt. extra credit short paper written in response to Adam Keller's presentation which will probably take place 21 Sept.. [I'll discuss this in class.]

There are some tentative, contradictory or vague parts in the course schedule as written [e.g., look at 3 Nov]. Don't worry. I will clarify matters in a timely manner.