

Peter J Nelsen, PhD  
Office: (828) 262-8686  
Home: (828) 355-9188

Office: COE 212C  
Office Hours: W/Th 12:00 - 3:00  
and by appointment

Education occurs when we become friends of one another's minds.  
**Maxine Greene**

Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.  
**John Dewey**

**Introduction:** This course aims to help you explore and develop the critical thinking and writing skills needed both in the dissertation and other forms of academic writing. An essential component of academic writing is synthesizing and analyzing research and complex ideas while also advancing one's own argument and independent contribution to the scholarly discussion. Thus, in this course, we will examine what critical thinking means, how to develop an argument, and how to synthesize research within the context of constructing academic papers. My aim is to approach these topics collaboratively and to create an environment in which we support and challenge one another to develop our collective critical thinking and writing skills in ways that are meaningful and important. Thus, while I have outlined some initial ground for us to cover, you will find that we will define the subject matter of a substantive portion of the course together. Before diving into those specifics, let me begin by describing what I mean by the type of learning environment I have in mind...



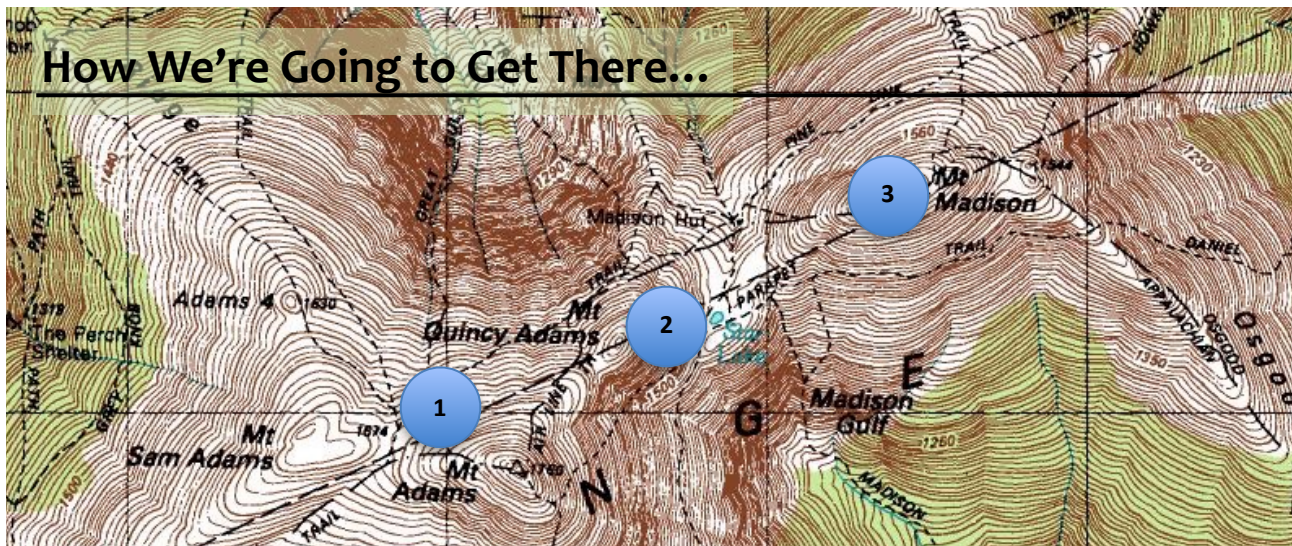
## A Community of Inquiry

There are multiple ways to craft arguments and write complex analyses, and this course will not prescribe a rigid format that you must follow. Instead, my aim is to create a community of inquiry in which we engage in the shared project of exploring the range of ways one might engage in academic writing. Let me translate: In addition to samples from the literature, we're going to read each other's writing throughout the course. We'll be giving each other feedback in order to help refine our own and each other's writing and analytic skills. That will require that we take intellectual risks with each other in multiple ways, so I will spend a significant amount of time this semester focusing on our group process. Engaging in the process of inquiry I have in mind this semester will require at least three kinds of active engagement from us all:

**First**, I will ask you to engage with others in the course to create a community of inquiry in which individuals feel acknowledged for whom they are and for the experiences that they bring to the group. This kind of engagement helps create a level of mutual trust and caring that can serve as a foundation for our critically discussing educational ideas as well as our own pieces of writing. It is often difficult to achieve this sense of community, and overcoming the various obstacles that stand in the way requires honesty, openness, and diligent attention in our day-to-day work. While I cannot guarantee success, I will create opportunities for us to provide each other with feedback about our progress throughout the semester. I will also actively seek your input for creatively responding to our particular group dynamics.

**The second** kind of engagement that I will ask of you has to do with the assumptions, beliefs, and past experiences that you bring to the course. To engage with these aspects of ourselves may sound simple enough, but to do so in the true spirit of critical inquiry can sometimes cause us to feel frustrated, defensive, or even angry. We should not overlook these obstacles to self-knowledge or allow them to diminish the significance of insights that we might gain about ourselves. Striving for this kind of engagement requires personal commitment to honest and critical self-reflection on the goals and commitments in relation to the material presented in the course. It also requires the kind of supportive community of inquiry described previously.

Finally, there is a **third** kind of engagement with which we are all perhaps most familiar in higher education: engagement with the arguments and ideas of others through critical analysis, i.e. engagement with the readings assigned in a course. As in our face-to-face interactions in class, there is good reason to read and discuss the work of others in a way that looks for the best reasons and rationale for a given position. To search for the most tenable understanding and interpretation of a view is an important aspect of engagement, even if we subsequently develop strong arguments against a particular view or practice. Both prior forms of engagement described here facilitate this kind of critical inquiry.



## How We're Going to Get There...

We will discuss, and I hope we will practice, these forms of engagement throughout our time together this semester. We cannot predict what this will actually look or be like; the answer will only emerge from the experiences that we share. I have designed the course to consist of three phases:

1

**Crafting Arguments:** In the first introductory section, we'll set the stage for our future work by focusing on the nature of critical thought and its relationship to developing and analyzing arguments. We'll primarily use a text on argumentation to provide us with detailed practice that we'll use to create our own working guide to crafting analytical pieces. We'll also use this time to focus on our community and to identify a key topic to explore together as a group in our final phase.

2

**Conceptual Analysis and Synthesis of Literature:** In the next phase, we'll explore two intertwined topics that are grounded in the skills we refine in the first section of the course: How do we work with concepts in our writing, and how do we discuss an issue through the complexities of reviewing, synthesizing, and analyzing the research literature? In order to practice and explore these writing/thinking issues, we will read and write about a shared topic through a text and a set of articles I provide you. This means you won't have to conduct a literature search, and we'll all share the same resources. As a result, we'll be able to compare and contrast how different members of our group approach the synthesis of literature differently. We'll also be well poised to understand the argument moves people make. We'll workshop papers and discuss different strategies that we find in articles we read and in our own writing. Our writing will be focused on the notion of integrity, a philosophical topic that is both complex and accessible. It is one that I anticipate will resonate across a wide variety of your professional interests while also providing us with a vehicle for deepening our inquiry into critical thought and argument creation.





**Shared Complex Writing Project:** In the final section, my plan is to continue our exploration of how to synthesize complex literature and to develop arguments through a more complex version of the previous assignment. I consider the first paper as the warm-up for this second, more complex one. Early on in the semester, we will choose a topic that we will all explore together, one that is rich enough to offer everyone in the group some way to make it meaningful. Throughout the first and second sections, we'll begin collecting literature that we'll then collectively read and use to ground our individual papers. (I plan to join you in writing versions of both papers this semester, too. Similar to the previous section, then, we'll be well poised to understand the conceptual and argumentative moves that group members make because we'll know the same literature. This time, though, our literature review will be much more comprehensive with the aim to conduct enough research to support the writing of papers that are of publishable quality. We will write highly refined short papers (4,500 words) on our shared topic that we will use as the basis for a public demonstration of learning: We will host a mini-conference and invite community members to think with us about the topic we've chosen to explore.

*Please note that this syllabus is a work in progress. It is a plan for proceeding with the course without our having met and developed some shared understanding of our collective aims and interests. Please feel invited to talk with me at any point about the course and the approach I'm taking: I welcome feedback on the design. We may choose to modify the schedule and any of the assignments at any point in the semester.*



## Assignments

---

### **A. Weekly Agenda Sheets (40%)**

- These are meant to aid your reflection and on-going analysis of course questions, themes and readings. Depending upon our aims, the tasks will vary each week. Regardless of the variation, these are meant to be a private conversation between us each week, and I encourage you to ask questions and raise relevant issues that you want to discuss. I will post weekly assignments to a shared Google Drive folder.
- Please email me your Agenda Sheets each week before the start of class. Please also bring a working copy to use during class.

### **B. Argument Construction Project (15%)**

- This will be a formal argumentation paper (roughly 5-8 pages long).
- Papers must follow APA citation style and be free of APA errors.

### **C. Final Demonstration of Learning: *Crafting a Professional Publication* (40%)**

- In this final demonstration of learning, your aim is to write a clear argument in defense of your analysis of the concept of integrity. We will decide upon a final question to guide these papers collaboratively, but here is a sample working question: *How is integrity possible within the context of oppression?*
- Length: 4500 words: *I will not read papers that exceed this limit.*
- Papers must follow APA citation style and be free of APA errors.

### **D. Final Self-Assessment and Reflection (5%)**

- Due with final paper submission. Details to follow.

**NOTE:** In the spirit of a mentor, I believe that intelligence is primarily (or wholly) a property of communities. Thus, I urge you to work collaboratively with others on all your assignments.



## Course Texts

---

I suggest you purchase used (read: INEXPENSIVE) copies of the second two or use a digital copy of the third. (The first text is a revised edition that just came out in November 2015, and I'd like you to have that version.)

- **Anthony Weston: *A Workbook for Arguments: A Complete Course in Critical Thinking, 2nd Edition*.** Hacked Publishing (2015). ISBN-13: 978-1624664274
- **James Rachels: *The Elements of Moral Philosophy, 5th Edition*.** McGraw Hill (2006). ISBN-13: 978-0073125473 NOTE: There are more recent editions, but their prices are quite high. For our purposes, this inexpensive edition will work just fine. I don't want you to spend a lot of money getting the most recent edition as the changes aren't worth the substantial price difference. There are used copies for under \$5.00 available (including shipping) on Amazon and other online sources. For example: [http://www.amazon.com/gp/offer-listing/0073125474/ref=dp\\_olp\\_all\\_mbc?ie=UTF8&condition=all](http://www.amazon.com/gp/offer-listing/0073125474/ref=dp_olp_all_mbc?ie=UTF8&condition=all)
- **John Wilson: *Thinking with Concepts*.** Cambridge University Press (1963). ISBN 13: 978-0073125473. NOTE: The ASU library has a *digital* version of this text, so if you feel comfortable reading it on your computer/portable reader, you can choose not to purchase it. If you do choose to buy a copy, please don't purchase an expensive one. Just like the previous text, there are used copies for under \$5.00 available (including shipping) on Amazon and other online sources. For example: [http://www.amazon.com/gp/offer-listing/0521096014/ref=olp\\_page\\_1](http://www.amazon.com/gp/offer-listing/0521096014/ref=olp_page_1)

## Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

---

Appalachian State University is committed to making reasonable accommodations for individuals with documented qualifying disabilities in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Those seeking accommodations based on a substantially limiting disability must contact and register with The Office of Disability Services (ODS) at <http://www.ods.appstate.edu/> or 828-262-3056. Once registration is complete, individuals will meet with ODS staff to discuss eligibility and appropriate accommodations.

# Course Calendar

## Week 1: January 13 — Introduction to the Course

**Read:** The Course Syllabus

**Due:** Bring questions about syllabus and the course to the first class.

## Week 2: January 22 –What is Critical Thinking?

**Read:**

- Palmer 87: *Conflict & Community Ways of Knowing*
- Paul 90: *Critical Thinking: Fundament to Education for a Free Society*
- Paul 94: *Teaching Critical Thinking in the Strong Sense*
- Govier 88: *Are there two sides to every question?*
- Clinchy 94: *On Critical Thinking & Connected Knowing*
- Phelan & Garrison 94: *Toward a Gender-Sensitive Ideal of Critical Thinking: A Feminist Poetic*

**Due:** Agenda Sheet 1

## Week 3: January 27– Refining Our Critical Thinking Tools Part 1

**Read:** Weston Chs. 1, 2, & 3 & Appendix III (*Argument Mapping*)

**Due:** Agenda Sheet 2

## Week 4: February 3 – Refining Our Critical Thinking Tools Part 2

**Read:** Weston Chs. 5, 6, & 7

**Due:** Agenda Sheet 3

## Week 5: February 10 – Introduction to Moral Theory

**Read:** Rachels Chs. 1-2, 4, 6-9, & 12

**Due:** Agenda Sheet 4

| <b>Week 6: February 17 – Introduction to Conceptual Analysis</b> |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Read:</b>   | Wilson: <i>Thinking with Concepts</i> (pp. 1-60 and samples from the rest of the text) |
| <b>Due:</b>  | Agenda Sheet 5   |

| <b>Week 7: February 24 – What is Integrity? Part 1</b> |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Read:</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frankfurt 88: <i>Identification and Wholeheartedness</i></li> <li>• Taylor 81: <i>Integrity</i></li> <li>• McFall 87: <i>Integrity</i></li> <li>• Schaubert 96: <i>Integrity, Commitment and the Concept of a Person</i></li> </ul> |
| <b>Due:</b>  | Agenda Sheet 6   |

| <b>Week 8: March 1 – What is Integrity? Part 2</b> |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Read:</b>                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Davion 91: <i>Integrity and Radical Change</i></li> <li>• Calhoun 95: <i>Standing for Something</i></li> <li>• Babbit 01: <i>Integrity</i></li> <li>• McLeod 04: <i>Integrity and Self-Protection</i></li> </ul> |
| <b>Due:</b>  | Agenda Sheet 7  |

**March 7 - 11 Spring Break - No Class**

| <b>Week 9: March 16 – Integrity Paper Workshops</b> |                                       |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| <b>Write:</b>                                       | Bring drafts of your papers to class. |
| <b>Due:</b>   | Papers Due Saturday at noon           |

| <b>Week 10: March 23 – Collaborative Research (Library APA Presentation)</b> |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Read:</b>   | TBA   |
| <b>Due:</b>  | Agenda Sheet 8<br>3 Research Articles (uploaded to Google Drive folders)<br>Lit Review Annotations (on our shared Google Doc) |



|   |                |
|---|----------------|
| <b>Week 11: March 30 – Collaborative Research (Faculty Writing Panel)</b> |                |
| <b>Read:</b>  | TBA            |
| <b>Due:</b>   | Agenda Sheet 9 |

**April 6/7: Research Week (no class)**

|  |                                       |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| <b>Week 12: April 13 – Paper Workshops</b> |                                       |
| <b>Due:</b>                                | Bring drafts of your papers to class. |

|   |                 |
|---|-----------------|
| <b>Week 13: April 20 – Collaborative Research</b> |                 |
| <b>Read:</b>                                      | TBA             |
| <b>Due:</b>                                       | Agenda Sheet 11 |

|  |                                       |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| <b>Week 14: April 27 – Paper Workshops</b> |                                       |
| <b>Due:</b>                                | Bring drafts of your papers to class. |

**Public Demonstrations of Learning  
 Wednesday, May 4 3:30 - 6:00  
 Mini Conference with Invited Guest Respondents  
 Final Papers Due at the start of Class**