| Course Title | Public Reasoning | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Programme Title | BA/B Sc BEd | | |
| Specialisation | | | |
| Mode | **M1** | **Level** | 1 |
| Course ID | | **Credits** | 3 |
| Course Type | Core | **Semester** | 2 |
| Version | 2.0 | **Academic Year** | 2022-2023 |
| Course Development Team | Asim Siddiqui, Radhika Mahadevan, Ramchander K., Kit Patrick, Nishok G U, Aditi Chaturvedi | | |

## VERSION HISTORY

| PRE, Common Curriculum, Core, January 2023 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| VERSION NO | DATE | CHANGES | REMARKS |
| 2.0 | October 2022 | <ul><li>ILOs edited for clarity</li><li>Rationale, introduction, and unit descriptions edited for conciseness and clarity</li><li>Textbook Section 1 omitted</li><li>Number of weeks per unit modified</li></ul> | <ul><li>Changes based on student and instructor feedback from the last two iterations of PRE</li><li>Textbook Section 1 removed because it does not serve ILOs</li></ul> |

**Rationale and Introduction**

One of the key aims of the Undergraduate programme, and particularly the courses within the Common Curriculum, is to prepare students to become young citizens of India who are aware of critical social, political and economic issues and are able to make informed choices. This ambition naturally requires students to develop the ability to understand and explore matters of public interest and to arrive at their own views and choices that they are able to communicate through peaceful democratic means.

With the above aim in view, this course will introduce students to the practices of making and arguing for claims in the public realm. We will teach them a range of tools by showing how these can

be applied in various kinds of public reasoning.  Our case studies will include instances of legal reasoning, public scientific reasoning, arguments about trends in the social and political life of the nation, and reasoning about matters of universal human concern such as the climate crisis.

The broad intention of the course is to introduce students to the mechanics of building an argument for a considered position and defending it using the norms of public discourse. The norms in question presuppose notions of reasonableness, justifiability in terms of evidence and moral worth, and distinctions that frame the notion of a public sphere such as public/private, personal/political. Students will be equipped with the means to establish and defend – both orally and in writing –  a line of argument through sustained critical questioning of their assumptions about what they regard as being true, reasonable, or morally significant.

**Prerequisites**
None

**Learning Objectives**
By the end of the course, students should be able to:

1.  Identify arguments and debates in public discussions
2.  Use broad inferential techniques: deduction, induction, inference to the best explanation, and argument by analogy
3.  Introspect about their own biases and normative positions
4.  Critically evaluate debates and dissent in the public sphere
5.  Cooperate with one another to engage in reasoned debate about public issues

**Syllabus & Readings**
The only mandatory reading will be the PRE coursebook.  All other readings here are optional. The course will follow the Public Reasoning Textbook. The table below lays out the relevant textbook sections for each week. In Unit 1, we will focus on cognitive biases and fake news. We'll learn how to identify as well as guard against both of these. Unit 2 will introduce us to deductive reasoning. We will learn to identify premises, conclusions, and arguments and will also put them into standard form; we'll then use the tools of propositional calculus to evaluate validity. Unit 3 is focussed on inductive reasoning and we'll learn about probabilistic reasoning, inference to the best explanation, and arguments from analogy. Finally, Unit 4 will draw upon all the previous units and introduce a new framework for identifying and evaluating moral arguments through the frameworks of consequentialism, deontology, and virtue ethics.

| Unit Name | Weeks |
|---|---|
| Cognitive Biases and Fake News | 2 weeks |
| Deductive Reasoning | 4 weeks |
| Inductive Reasoning | 4 weeks |
| Moral Reasoning | 4 weeks |
| Assessment Week | 1 week |

## Unit I – Cognitive Biases and Fake News (2 weeks)

We will consider problems such as confirmation bias and how these, in turn, make us vulnerable to (as well as perpetrators of) fake news. We'll learn to identify fake news, guard against confirmation and other cognitive biases, and learn to assess the reliability of various sources of news, including social media.

| | Topic \| Textbook Section | Recommended Readings |
|---|---|---|
| 1.1 | Cognitive Biases \| 1.3 | Kahneman, D., 2011. Thinking, fast and slow. Macmillan. |
| 1.2 | Fake News \| 2.1-3 | Stanford History Education Group (2016) Evaluating information. Here: https://sheg.stanford.edu/ <br><br> Caulfield, M A (2016) Web literacy for student fact checkers. Here: Web Literacy for Student Fact-Checkers Mukerji, Nikil (2018) "What is Fake News?" *Ergo* Vol 5, No 35 <br><br> Rini, Regina (2017). Fake News and Partisan Epistemology. *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal*, *27*(S2), 43–64 |

## Unit 2 – Deductive reasoning (4 weeks)

In this unit, students will learn to analyse and evaluate arguments from real public reasoning. The goal for this unit is to use propositional calculus (a simple logic and proof system) in order to

charitably reconstruct and evaluate arguments found in, e.g., the press, social media, judgments, and policy papers.

|  | Topic | Textbook Section | Recommended |
|---|---|---|
| 2.1 | Identifying Conclusions and Premises | 3.1-3.3 | Gary Seay and Susana Nuccetelli, *How to think logically* |
| 2.2 | Writing out Arguments in Logical Form | 3.6 | Anthony Weston, *A Rulebook for Arguments*, Baggini, J., & Fosl, P. S. (2011). *The Philosopher's Toolkit: A compendium of philosophical concepts and methods.* John Wiley & Sons. |
| 2.3 | Assessing Arguments 1 | 3.4-3.5 | J. Garfield, J. Henle and T. Tymoczko, Sweet Reason, Chapter 2, "What Follows from What". |
| 2.4 | Assessing Arguments 2 | 3.7 | Papineau, D. (2012). *Philosophical devices: Proofs, probabilities, possibilities, and sets.* Oxford University Press. |

## Unit 3 – Inductive reasoning (4 weeks)

This unit complements the previous one but focuses on a different kind of reasoning: inductive. The focus will be on inference to the best explanation, arguments from analogy, and Bayesian inference. As with the previous unit, we will also consider the range of possible responses to each type of argument, and apply these to real world cases.

|  | Topic | Textbook Section | Recommended |
|---|---|---|
| 3.1 | Inference to the Best Explanation | 4.1-4.3 | R. Fogelin and W. Sinnott-Armstrong, *Understanding Arguments: An Introduction to Informal Logic* |
| 3.2 | Bayesian Confirmation Theory| 4.4 | Strevens, M. (2012). Notes on Bayesian confirmation theory. 2006. |
| 3.3 | Arguments from Analogy |4.5 | R. Fogelin and W. Sinnott-Armstrong, *Understanding Arguments: An Introduction to Informal Logic* |
| 3.4 | Fallacies | 4.6 | R. Fogelin and W. Sinnott-Armstrong, *Understanding Arguments: An Introduction to Informal Logic* |

## Unit 4 – Moral Reasoning (4 weeks)

This final unit brings together ideas from the previous sphere and allows us to see how normative

arguments function differently from other kinds of argument. Public discourse abounds with ideas of 'good' and 'right' and what we 'ought' to do. By the end of this unit, we'll understand the different ways in which these terms can be understood and deployed in arguments. We'll see how many of our policies and political decisions presuppose normative conceptions of various kinds. The discussion of three kinds of normative ethical reasoning (consequentialism, deontological, virtue ethical) will help students better appreciate the frameworks of values that shape public reasoning about moral issues.

|  | Topic | Textbook Section | Recommended |
|---|---|---|
| 4.1 | Identifying Moral Arguments | 5.1-5.2 | Fogelin and Sinnott-Armstrong, Chapter 19, "Moral Reasoning". (Up until the end of the Thompson essay on abortion.) Thomson, A. (1999).<br><br>Critical reasoning in ethics. *London and New York: Routledge.* |
| 4.2 | Consequentialist Arguments | 5.3 | Alexander, Larry and Moore, Michael, "Moral Theories: Deontology and Consequentialism ", Excerpts from The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy |
| 4.3 | Deontological Arguments | 5.4 | Onora O'Neill, "A Simplified Account of Kant's Ethics" From Matters of Life and Death, ed. Tom Regan |
| 4.4 | Virtue Ethics Arguments | 5.5 |  |

**Week 15 (assessment week) : PRE vivas will take place during regular class timing during assessment week**

**Pedagogy**

The two main components of the course are interactive lectures and seminars. In the interactive lectures, instructors will introduce key ideas but also offer students the opportunity to practice the application of these ideas. During the seminar, students will use the tools they've acquired in the first half of the week and engage in reasoned debate about an issue of current public concern.

Instructors will also be available for a variety of pedagogical engagements outside class hours, including guidance in reading and reasoning. Weekly optional tutorial hours will be the main way in which we'll ensure this. The main writing assignment has also been broken down into smaller components in order to make this more accessible for students who might otherwise struggle with longer writing assignments. Our in-class examples will involve various media – e.g. newspaper articles, video clips, audio clips, and social media – to make this course more accessible to students

not accustomed to reading lengthy academic articles. Seminars will take into account divergent learning styles of students.

**Assessment and Grading**

In this course, students are required to demonstrate their grasp of a range of key concepts, record their incremental understanding of the point and mechanics of reasoning about public issues and present their learnings in writing and speech.

| Assessment | Week(s) due | Percentage | ILOs served |
|---|---|---|---|
| Quizzes | 2,6,10,14 | 45 (15*3) | 1,2,3,4 |
| Problem Class | Weekly | 10 (1*10) | 1,2,3,4,5,6 |
| Op-Ed | 14 | 25 | 2,5,6. |
| Viva | 15 | 10 | 2,5,6 |
| Student Engagement | n/a | 10 | 2,3,4,5,6 |

1) **Quizzes:** There will be four quizzes at the end of each unit. These will be based on the readings, lectures, problem classes, and seminars. Each quiz will count for 15% of the grade and the worst quiz score will be dropped.
2) **Problem Class:** These are to be completed in groups outside of class time and will be graded Complete/Incomplete. A 'complete' requires that every question be attempted in good faith. Instructors will be available during tutorial hours to discuss the problem sheet.
3) **Op-Ed Assignment**:  In this assignment students will bring together all they've learned in the course in order to create a work of public reasoning. They will write an opinion piece on a current topic of public relevance.The op-ed assignment will be divided into several smaller sections and students will work on this throughout the semester:
    Week 3: Come up with a rough argument concerning a topic of public interest, to be revised and refined over the course of the semester
    Week 6: Last week for changing topic
    Week 9: Come up with a counter-argument
    Week 11: Respond to counter-argument
    Week 14: Final Submission

    The op-ed will be graded according to the PRE Essay Rubric

4) **Group Viva:** Students will be assessed on their ability to engage in verbal public reasoning with other students, in small groups. The skills learnt during the weekly seminar discussion will be assessed: asking questions of other students, listening closely, developing ideas, analysing arguments well etc. The viva will be graded according to the PRE Viva Rubric

5) **Student Engagement:** Different sections of PRE will come up with their own system for assessing continuous student engagement. This might include: participation in seminars and problem classes, participation on a class discussion board, regular contribution to a class blog, etc.