

Experimental Syllabus Cooperative Problem Solving

Description: Most decision making and problem solving in our daily lives is done in cooperative environments: the workplace, home, in teams or with partners. Yet, most critical thinking classes focus on the individual thinker and develop reasoning skills through logic and rhetoric. Those skills are invaluable and can contribute to the problem solving abilities of anyone, but are somewhat limited in their effectiveness when dealing within groups. This class will focus on the dynamic decision making techniques and group problem solving. It will take into consideration various power structures as well as the varying contributions of members. The goal will be to make the students better at handling situations where group or cooperative work is required. The course will deal with both projects and short term problems or disputes. The class will also deal with a variety of philosophical issues, ethical, metaphysical and epistemological in the process.

Format: The class work will be divided into three main areas: class discussion, individual preparation and group role-playing. There will be few lectures except to start projects and assist the students with regard to some unfamiliar material. The students will be expected to prepare outside of the class hours to do well. Participation is mandatory. Class discussions will be done in groups, with partners, and with the whole of the class. These will deal with issues such as sharing responsibilities, power relations and intellectual property. Individual preparation will be done mostly outside of class and will involve mostly reading the assigned materials and preparing short written notes to facilitate the discussions and role-playing. The most unusual aspect will be the role-playing. Students will form small groups and the instructor will facilitate scenarios where the students play the part of people, either themselves or others, in both regular and fantastical situations. These will be used to develop both the ability to reason critically and articulate ones concerns to others, but also to reflect on the process of the group decision making and problem solving.

Texts: Philosophical critical thinking and reasoning books, educational works, and business management works (team building etc..) will be used. To be determined.

Grades: Evaluations will consists of short opinion papers and one larger group project. Participation will also be evaluated. Students will also be required to evaluate themselves and their groups throughout the course.

Schedule: Each week there will be at least one day dedicated to role-play scenarios. At least once there will be a larger project that will require extensive work outside the class, in groups and individually.

Prerequisites: None