

***Thinking Straight* DESCRIPTION**  
**Faculty: David W. Paulsen, Ph.D.**

The *Thinking Straight* program focused on techniques of understanding and criticizing arguments and theories. It covered standard topics in informal logic including argument reconstruction, assessment of validity and soundness and fallacies as treated in Cederblom and Paulsen, *Critical Reasoning*, (7<sup>th</sup>). The program contained an extensive discussion of ethical theory and reasoning about moral issues using Rachels and Rachels' *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, (6<sup>th</sup>) as well as other relevant readings. Topics included ethical subjectivism, ethical egoism, utilitarianism, Kantianism, Contract Theory and Virtue Ethics as well as related issues regarding cultural relativism, religion and ethics, and the ethics of care. This portion of the program involved critique of argument for and against various potential ethical theories as well as application of critical reasoning techniques to moral decision making in specific cases--some of which were contained in films such as "3:10 to Yuma" and "Gone Baby Gone." Students also discussed arguments concerning intelligent design as an alternative to the scientific theory of evolution and explored some issues in statistical and scientific reasoning including sampling, correlation, and elements of research design and scientific reasoning.

Students dealt with the elements of the program through a series of structured workshops, including small and large group discussion as well as mini-lectures and assignments. They were evaluated in terms of their participation in program activities, assignments, and performance on exams. In addition, students were expected to submit essays growing out of the topics covered in the ethics component of the program, a cumulative portfolio that reconstructed and evaluated arguments and theories from a variety of student collected sources, as well as to participate in a team project leading to a cooperative, critical exchange that debated two sides of a question in front of the class by providing arguments and appropriate criticism.