

# Theory of Knowledge

## **I Course Information**

- Course number: PHI 3300
- Section 03F2
- Period 8 (3:00 PM - 3:50 PM)
- Location: Zoom
- Instructor: Rodrigo Borges
- Office: Zoom
- Office hours: M, W, F 10:30 am – 11:30 (or by appointment)
- Contact Information: rodrigo.borges@ufl.edu.

*NOTE: it is your responsibility to read this document carefully. This is an agreement between you and your instructor. If you email me about something that is obviously stated in the syllabus, you will either receive no answer or I will reply, simply, “Read the syllabus!” However, if you read the syllabus and you still do not have an answer, then email me with your question.*

This syllabus and other materials for this course are available on Canvas.

## **2 Course Goals**

This course will enable students to think critically about some of the central issues in the theory of knowledge.

### 3 Course Requirements

Seven different instruments will be used in order to measure student progress through the course. The name of each instrument, and the relative weight each of them carries in determining your final grade is the following; a brief description of each instrument follows.

Assignment	Total Number	% of Course Grade
Short Writing Assignments	3	30%
Writing Exercises	3	10%
Tests	14	10%
Surprise Quizzes	?	10%
Participation in Discussion Boards	11	15%
Presentation	1	15%
Polls	35	10%

#### 3.1 Attendance and Classroom Policies

Students are expected to attend class and to have done all assigned reading in advance. Failure to do so will adversely affect students' ability to perform well in this course.

Although attendance is not required, it is expected. Polls and surprise quizzes will be conducted during class (see below for details).

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at:

- <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>.

#### 3.2 Textbook

There is no required textbook for this course. All readings will be provided through Canvas.

#### 3.3 Short Writing Assignments (SWAs)

There will be three (3) short (1400 – 1500 words) writing assignments. Each SWA will either ask you to present someone else's argument in your own words, or they will ask you to evaluate someone else's argument. The lowest grade will be dropped. SWAs comprise 30% of the final grade.

SWAs become available on Sunday morning and are due by midnight Friday. See Canvas for due dates.

No outside readings will be required for SWAs. A *sample SWA* is available on Canvas.

*Students must complete ALL SWAs in order to satisfy the Writing Requirement for the course.*

### **3.4 Writing Exercises (WEs)**

Students will write three (3) short essays (300–500 words) and sample answers will be analyzed in class anonymously (i.e., without the instructor revealing who wrote them). WEs comprise 10% of the final grade.

### **3.5 Outside Readings**

No outside readings are required for the completion of SWAs or WEs. *However*, if you do plan to use an outside reading, you **MUST** check with your instructor or TA whether the particular reading you have in mind is an appropriate source. There are **ONLY TWO EXCEPTIONS** to this rule:

1. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy;
2. The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

If you do not follow these instructions on the use of outside readings, you risk seriously harming your grade.

### **3.6 Tests**

There are fourteen (14) tests. They are designed to check your understanding of the materials. Each test consists of ten multiple choice questions and must be completed within twenty minutes. They are made available each Friday and are due midnight Sunday (see Canvas for specific dates). Different students will get different questions as determined in part by a random draw from the bank of questions. The questions cover only the material covered during the last few classes. Tests comprise 15% of the final grade.

*If you receive a grade lower than 8.5 for any test YOU MUST come to office hours to discuss your test ASAP. Failure to do so will result in you not having access to future tests.*

### **3.7 Surprise Quizzes**

There will be unspecified number of in-class surprise quizzes. Those will be on the reading assigned for the day of the quiz. There are no make-up surprise quizzes, but none will be given on religious holidays. Surprise quizzes will receive a pass/fail grade. Although, the quality of your answer will not be directly assessed. Only *real answers*

will be get a 'pass'. By a 'real answer' I mean something that (at least) tries to help someone wondering about the question in the quiz. Submitting your name, or a message such as 'Sorry, but I don't know the answer' will result in a 'fail'.

Students must take at least 60% of the quizzes in order to receive a perfect 10. For the purpose of grade, 'fail' will be the same as an absence. The point distribution scale is given by the following table:

Proportion of Quizzes	Points
at least 60%	10
60-50%	8
50-40%	6
40-30%	4
30-0%	0

You can consult any notes you took on the readings, or the readings themselves. The quiz will last only 10 minutes and it might take place at any moment during class.

### 3.8 Participation in Discussion Boards

You are required to come up with an appropriate question about the material (readings and/or lectures) in at least five (5) different discussion boards. Questions must be submitted by midnight Wednesday. You will not be able to see the discussion board and others' submitted questions until you have submitted your own. Participation in discussion boards comprises 15% of the final grade.

(NOTE: each discussion board will allow only ten (10) posts.)

Once you have access to the discussion board, you should read what other questions students have posted. Think about which questions you would most like to see answered, and then use the 'like' function to indicate those you most want addressed. You should complete this by Thursday evening, since your vote will inform the discussion in class on Friday.

The quality of your question in that discussion board is not a factor in determining your grade. What *is* a factor in determining your grade is following: whether or not you submit appropriate questions for at least six of the discussion boards. Here's what makes a question an appropriate one.

There are two requirements.

1. *Specificity*: your question must be reasonably specific. That is, it must refer to some particular point in the material introduced that week. You will not get away with open-ended questions like 'What is A's view about X?'
2. *Precision*: your question must fit into one of the categories below. When you post your question, you must indicate which category it belongs to. (You can simply put the name of the category at the start of your question.)

- *Clarification*: questions of clarification ask for help in understanding a specific point or passage in the lectures or readings. For example, you might ask, ‘Why does Descartes bring up the discussion of an “evil demon” set on deceiving him if he doesn’t actually think such a demon exists? How could that demon be relevant to his argument if he doesn’t think it’s real?’
- *Significance*: questions of significance ask how a particular view or argument in a reading or lecture might have broader significance – that is, how it might have relevance for other things that aren’t explicitly addressed in the readings or lectures. For example, you might ask, ‘If Descartes is right that we don’t know anything about the external world, does that mean that we should never trust what science tells us? Does it mean that we should live as if every day is our last day? What difference would it make if he’s right?’
- *Criticism*: questions in this category proposes a criticism of some argument or claim made in a reading or lecture. For example, you might ask, ‘Descartes thinks we can’t know at the moment that we’re not just dreaming everything, but this seems to me false. If I flap my arms right now and don’t find myself flying around like in a dream, doesn’t that show that I’m not just dreaming?’

If you submit an appropriate question for at least five of the regular discussion boards, your participation grade is a perfect 10. You lose one point for each question shy of six you fail to submit. If you submit less than three questions, you get zero (0) points.

### **3.9 Presentation**

The class will be divided into small groups of 4 - 5 students. Each group will choose and topic (to be provided on Canvas). The main goal of the presentation will be the defense of a particular argument. The presentation will comprises 15% of the final grade.

Some readings are suggested in Canvas that might help inform those presentations. But those should be taken as background readings, in the sense that students are not expected to engage with those readings during the actual presentation.

### **3.10 Poll and iClicker**

There will be polls in class throughout the semester. Your overall poll grade will count for 10% of your grade for the course.

Polls will use the iClicker system. For information on this system, please see

- <https://classrooms.at.ufl.edu/classroom-technology/iclicker-response-system/>

For this class, you will use the iClicker Reef application, either on a smartphone or a computer.

You must register your clicker as soon as possible, but certainly before the first graded poll on Wednesday 9/9/20. See the iClicker registration page for more details.

There will be no poll in the first week of the semester, to give everyone time to acquire the application.

There will be ungraded polls in the second week of the semester, to allow you to check your clicker is working properly. At all times during the semester, it is your responsibility to make sure that you have your clicker with you, and that it is working properly. Makeup polls will not be given for clicker problems.

Starting on Wednesday 9/9/20, there will be at least two graded poll questions in every lecture. Typically, the first question will be soon after class begins, and the second will be at the end of class. For each question, you will receive two points for a correct answer, one for an incorrect answer, and zero for not answering.

You will receive a poll grade for each lecture from 9/9/20. Your three (3) lowest scores will be dropped. The remaining scores will each count equally towards your poll grade. Dropping those three lowest scores will allow for occasional absences. Make-up polls will only be given if you have an appropriate excuse that shows you had to miss two or more classes during the semester.

Unless otherwise determined by your instructor, polls are individual assignments. You may not consult other students while taking an individual poll. You may not use someone else's clicker for them, or have someone else use your clicker. These are violations of academic honesty (see section 5 below).

## **4 Grade Scale**

See UF grading policies for assigning grade points at:

- <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>.

	Grade Scale	Grade Value
A	100 - 93	4.00
A-	92 - 90	3.67
B+	89 - 86	3.33
B	85 - 82	3.00
B-	81 - 79	2.67
C+	78 - 75	2.33
C	75 - 72	2.00
C-	71 - 69	1.67
D+	68 - 66	1.33
D	65 - 62	1.00
D-	61 - 60	0.67
E	59 - 0	0.00

## 5 Academic Honesty

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge, which states, ‘We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: ‘On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.’ The Honor Code

- <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>

specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class. Plagiarism on any assignment will automatically result in a grade of ‘E’ for the course. Plagiarism is defined in the University of Florida’s Student Honor Code as follows: ‘A student shall not represent as the student’s own work all or any portion of the work of another. Plagiarism includes (but is not limited to): a. Quoting oral or written materials, whether published or unpublished, without proper attribution. b. Submitting a document or assignment which in whole or in part is identical or substantially identical to a document or assignment not authored by the student.’ Students found guilty of academic misconduct will be prosecuted in accordance with the procedures specified in the UF honesty policy.

## **6 Students with disabilities**

Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drp>). The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation.

## **7 Online course evaluation**

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course based on 10 criteria. These evaluations are conducted online at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester. Students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results>.

## **8 Office Hours**

I strongly encourage you to set up a meeting to discuss anything related to the course. I will hold office hours on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays 10:30 – 11:30 AM (or by appointment). To set up an appointment please email me at: [rodrigo.borges@ufl.edu](mailto:rodrigo.borges@ufl.edu).

## **9 Technical Issues**

Please, direct any questions about technical issues you might have to UF Helpdesk. The website is <https://helpdesk.ufl.edu/>. You may also call them at 352 392 4357.

## **10 Campus Resources**

- Health and Wellness:
  1. U Matter, We Care: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact [umatter@ufl.edu](mailto:umatter@ufl.edu), 352-392-1575, or visit U Matter, We Care website ([www.umatter.ufl.edu](http://www.umatter.ufl.edu)) to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.
  2. Counseling and Wellness Center: Visit the Counseling and Wellness Center website ([www.counseling.ufl.edu](http://www.counseling.ufl.edu)) or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.



3. Student Health Care Center: Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or visit the Student Health Care Center website ([www.shcc.ufl.edu](http://www.shcc.ufl.edu)).
4. University Police Department: Visit UF Police Department website ([www.police.ufl.edu](http://www.police.ufl.edu)) or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).
5. UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center: For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; Visit the UF Health Emergency Room and Trauma Center website ([www.ufhealth.org/emergency-room-trauma-center](http://www.ufhealth.org/emergency-room-trauma-center)).

## **II Academic Resources**

1. E-learning technical support: Contact the UF Computing Help Desk at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at [helpdesk@ufl.edu](mailto:helpdesk@ufl.edu).
2. Career Connections Center: Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services.
3. Library Support: Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.
4. Teaching Center: Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352-392-6420. General study skills and tutoring.
5. Writing Studio: 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.
6. Student Complaints On-Campus: Visit the Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code webpage ([here](#)) for more information.
7. On-Line Students Complaints: View the Distance Learning Student Complaint Process ([www.distance.ufl.edu/getting-help/student-complaint-process](http://www.distance.ufl.edu/getting-help/student-complaint-process)).

## **12 Class Schedule (Subject to Change)**

*[SEE UP-TO-DATE SCHEDULE ON CANVAS FOR DUE DATES.]*

### **1. ARGUMENTS AND HOW-TOS**

8/31 – Logic and Arguments

9/2 – Logic and Arguments

9/4 – Discussion

9/7 – Holiday (Labor Day)

9/9 – How to read and write for this course

9/11 – Discussion

### **2. KNOWLEDGE AND THE GETTIER PROBLEM**

9/14 – Edmund Gettier: is justified true belief knowledge?

9/16 – Edmund Gettier: is justified true belief knowledge?

9/18 – Discussion

9/21 – Michael Clark: knowledge and Grounds: A Comment on Mr. Gettier's Paper

9/23 – John T. Saunders and N. Champawat: Mr. Clark's definition of 'knowledge'

9/25 – Discussion

9/28 – Plato: Theaetetus

9/30 – A.J Ayers: the right to be sure

10/2 – Discussion

10/5 – Alvin Goldman: a causal theory of knowing

10/7 – Alvin Goldman: a causal theory of knowing

10/9 – Discussion

10/12 – Linda T. Zagzebski: what is Knowledge?

10/14 – Linda T. Zagzebski: what is Knowledge?

10/16 – Discussion

### **3. MODERN SKEPTICISM**

10/19 – Descartes: 1st meditation

10/21 – G.E. Moore: proof of an external world

10/23 – Discussion

10/26 – Hilary Putnam: brains in a vat  
10/28 – Hilary Putnam: brains in a vat  
10/30 – Discussion

#### 4. ANCIENT SKEPTICISM

11/2 – Sextus Empiricus: the five modes  
11/4 – Laurence Bonjour: the structure of empirical justification  
11/6 – Discussion

11/9 – Laurence Bonjour: the structure of empirical justification  
11/11 – Holiday (Veterans Day)  
11/13 – Discussion

11/16 – William Alston: has foundationalism been refuted?  
11/18 – William Alston: has foundationalism been refuted?  
11/20 – Discussion

11/23 – Lewis Carroll: what the tortoise said to Achilles  
11/25 – Holiday  
11/27 – Holiday

11/30 – [TBD]  
12/2 – Presentation  
12/4 – Presentation

12/7 – Presentation  
12/9 – Presentation