

PHI 3700 Philosophy of Religion

Class Number 16508 Spring 2022
Complete Syllabus

Each student is responsible for reading the complete course syllabus and being familiar with the policies and procedures set out therein. You should be sure to review it prior to the end of the drop/add period.

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1. Basic information

1.1 Meeting times and location

Tuesdays period 4 (10:40 - 11:30) MAT 115
Thursdays periods 4-5 (10:40 - 12:35) MAT 115

Since Thursday's meeting time covers two periods, I will include a 15 minute break in the middle of the session (11:30 - 11:45) during which time you are free to leave the classroom, stretch your legs, use the restroom, get a drink, or the like. Note that if you fail to return for the second half of the class you will be marked absent for that day.

1.2 Instructor and contact information

D. Gene Witmer
gwitmer@ufl.edu
308 Griffin-Floyd Hall
Office phone: (352) 273-1830

1.3 Office hours

Office hours are times set aside so that I am available for you to ask questions, discuss material, and so on. You do not need special appointments to show up for office hours. In case there are problems meeting during regular office hours and we need to meet, we can make appointments at other times.

Wednesdays 10:00AM - 1:00PM
And by appointment

Regular office hours are not held during holidays or after the last day of classes (during exam week). However, it is possible to make appointments during exam week if needed.

1.4 Required texts

There are two required texts. You must have these with you during each class meeting. Note that if you only have the electronic copy of the coursepack, I require that you have ready access to that electronic text during class, whether it is through a laptop, tablet, or other device. I recommend having a print copy of the coursepack since that is likely easier to use in class. Note that there is no electronic copy of the Alter and Howell book available.

- Torin Alter and Robert J. Howell, *The God Dialogues*. Oxford University Press, 2011. ISBN: 978-0-19-539559-4. Available at the UF bookstore.
- Coursepack: a customized coursepack edited by myself and published by Cognella. You must purchase this online from the publisher. Note that Cognella provides copyright clearance for all material. Duplication of the material is a violation of applicable law. The direct link to purchase the coursepack is: <https://store.cognella.com/24003>. You have the option of an electronic copy (\$54.95) or a printed copy (\$68.45, including shipping). *Make sure you purchase this as soon as possible, as our initial readings are the first two from the coursepack and you need to have access right away.* If you need any help with ordering from Cognella, feel free to email orders@cognella.com or call 858-552-1120.

1.5 A note on COVID-19 and health precautions

Last semester (Fall 2021) many instructors (including myself) offered students the option of attending class via Zoom as a way of providing them both with a way to protect themselves against COVID-19 and to continue attending this way in case they have been diagnosed with COVID-19 and told they cannot come to campus. Rumor has it that many students now see themselves as entitled to attend via Zoom instead of in person whenever they want to do so, but that is not the case.

For this semester, I am **not** offering a Zoom or HyFlex option to students. You are expected to show up in person for class. This does not mean that things are entirely back to normal. The situation with COVID-19 is better but it is not over by any means. The University continues to strongly recommend that everyone wear face coverings when inside UF facilities. In light of the greater transmissibility of the omicron variant, it is now recommended that everyone use either an N95 or KN95 mask

Even if you are fully vaccinated and have received a booster, and even if you are yourself relatively safe, it is possible for you to be infected and for you then to spread the virus to others who might not be so protected. So it is important to continue using masks for now.

If you are "withheld from campus" (that is, be told by UF as the result of your having COVID19 symptoms or an unhappy test result that you must self-quarantine and stay off campus), you will of course be excused for your absence. Under certain circumstances — such as your being unable to be on campus for multiple weeks — I will consider allowing you to attend via Zoom, but this will only extend to people withheld from campus, will only be for a limited time, and will be decided on a case by case basis.

2. Course overview

2.1 Course description

The philosophy of religion can range over many different areas, including issues in epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics. Instead of a broad survey, however, in this course we focus on what is arguably the most fundamental question in this area, namely, whether or not there exists something deserving of the title "God." The course is structured around a fictional dialogue between a theist, an atheist, and an agnostic as well as supplementary papers (from a coursepack) that expand on parts of the dialogue. Topics include the relationship between God, value and morality; arguments from design (teleological arguments), including both classical biological and more contemporary "fine-tuning" arguments; cosmological or "first cause" arguments; the infamous ontological argument (which aims to show just from the definition of God that he must exist); the significance of religious experience and claims about miracles; the problem of evil as a reason to be an atheist; the idea that we might "bet" on God's existence as per Pascal's Wager; and the nature of faith. By the end of the course you should have a substantial understanding of the most important lines of argument concerning the existence of God.

2.2 Subjects and readings

Below is the planned list of readings, organized by main topic. "CP" indicates that the reading is in the coursepack, and "A&H" indicates a chapter of the book by Alter and Howell, *The God Dialogues*.

Preliminaries: Reasoning and God

- CP-1. Nicholas Everitt, "Reasoning about God."
- CP-2. Peter Van Inwagen, "The Idea of God."

God, morality, value

- A&H-1. Outside Boston: God, Value, and Meaning
- CP-3. C. Stephen Layman, "A Moral Argument for the Existence of God."

Teleological arguments

- A&H-2. Niagara, New York: Design and Evolution
- A&H-3. From Niagara To Chicago: Life and Fine-Tuning
- CP-4. Robin Collins, "God, Design and Fine-Tuning."

Cosmological arguments

- A&H-4. Chicago, Illinois, outside the Adler Planetarium: The Cosmological Argument
- CP-5. Richard Taylor, selection from Chapter 11 of his *Metaphysics*.
- CP-6. William Lane Craig, "Philosophical and Scientific Pointers to Creatio Ex Nihilo."

Ontological arguments

- A&H-5. Chicago, Illinois, in the Hotel: The Ontological Argument
- CP-7. Norman Malcolm, "Anselm's Ontological Arguments."

Experience and miracles

- A&H-6. Somewhere in Iowa: Religious Experience, Testimony, and Miracles
- CP-8. William Wainwright, "Mysticism and Sense Perception."
- CP-9. David Hume, "Of Miracles."
- CP-10. Robert Hambourger, "Need Miracles Be Extraordinary?"

The problem of evil

- A&H-7. Holcomb, Kansas: The Problem of Evil
- CP-11. Louise Antony, "No Good Reason - Exploring the Problem of Evil."
- CP-12. Richard Swinburne, "Why God Allows Evil."
- CP-13. Stephen Law, "The Evil-God Challenge."

Wagers, reason, and faith

- A&H-8. Las Vegas, Nevada: Pascal's Wager
- A&H-9. California: Faith and the Rationality of Belief in God
- CP-14. Lara Buchak, "When is Faith Rational?"

2.3 Learning objectives

Students who successfully complete this course should be able to

- 1) explain the major arguments for and against theistic belief as well as the major options for responding to those arguments;
- 2) assess the strength and relevance of arguments and objections within the topic of debates over theism; and
- 3) present a sustained argument for some significant thesis regarding the existence or non-existence of God.

2.4 General Education credit

This course provides credit towards the General Education Humanities requirement. As per the General Education guidelines [<https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-programs/general-education/#objectivesandoutcomestext>], it meets the following description:

Humanities courses provide instruction in the history, key themes, principles, terminology, and theories or methodologies used within a humanities discipline or the humanities in general. Students will learn to identify and to analyze the key elements, biases, and influences that shape thought. These courses emphasize clear and effective analysis, and approach issues and problems from multiple perspectives.

3. Class routine

3.1 Schedule

The current projected schedule is available as a downloadable PDF on the front page of the Canvas site for this course. I reserve the right to adjust the schedule as needed to reflect our progress through the material. Any updates will be reflected in the schedule posted online.

The schedule is organized by weeks and specifies the topics, readings, and assignments for that week. There are two general rules to keep in mind:

- All written work is due in by 11:59 PM on the Monday of the week indicated unless otherwise announced.
- As a general rule, you should plan to complete at the very least a first, careful read of whatever is assigned as reading for the week prior to Tuesday's class.
- For tips on how to read philosophical material effectively, see the "Advice on Reading Philosophy" document on the "Tools for Students" page on the Canvas site.

3.2 Lecture and discussion

Class sessions are a mixture of lecture and discussion. In my experience students learn best when these two things are not separated but mixed together. You are encouraged to ask questions or make comments at any point. If I think it best to leave the question or comment till later, I will ask you to wait, but usually I am happy to address your thoughts immediately.

I will normally come to class with an outline of topics and/or activities for us that day, though I might depart from it considerably depending on how things go. I might make sparing use of PowerPoint and will not infrequently project for the classroom samples of exercises for discussion.

3.3 Attendance and participation

Given the importance of participation, attendance is critical to your success in this class. Attendance is therefore mandatory. I keep records of attendance at every session. The general rule is that you must be present within the first five minutes of class to be counted as present. Late entries are frankly distracting and annoying, and if you are excessively late I may refuse to let you in on the session.

Attendance is not counted as a separate factor in determining your course grade except by way of potential damages. You can accumulate four unexcused absences without penalty, but after those, each additional unexcused absence carries a significant penalty. For details, see the attendance policy in §6.1.

Merely showing up is obviously not enough, of course. I expect both that you will come to class having read the assigned material and prepared to discuss that material with the class. I urge you to make the most of class time by making some notes for yourself when doing assigned readings, where those notes specify things that puzzle you, objections that occur to you, and so on. *Doing such preparatory work will make the class time more fruitful for us all.*

The best way to learn in philosophy is by taking an active role in thinking about, discussing, and writing on the readings and arguments presented. It is essential to appreciate the material that you make the effort to work your own way through it, doing your best to decide what you think about it and confronting those thoughts with questions and objections you encounter in discussion with other people. Because participation is in this way important, *I have a policy of "cold-calling" on students.* That is, I will call on people even if they don't volunteer, and even if others are volunteering. I do this

as a matter of course, aiming to get everyone to participate. The reason I do it is to help you get past any reluctance you may have in articulate your thoughts in a challenging environment. I have seen many students in the past switch from being silent observers to eager participants as a result of being prodded to participate, and it is clear they benefit from being able to do so.

3.4 Philosophy and respectful dialogue

Philosophy is a highly critical enterprise; we are in the business of evaluating the merits of different arguments and claims. As a result, philosophical discussion can seem intimidating or even mean-spirited at times, at least when the participants let their enthusiasm bypass their usual sense of diplomacy. In no way do I want to discourage enthusiasm, but I want to stress that the critical points made in philosophy can all be directed at ideas and arguments, not people. Your aim should be to assess whether a given claim is plausible, whether certain arguments are cogent, and so on. Even if you decide a particular argument is a very bad one, you need not go on to think ill of the person who made the argument. The fact is that philosophy is *difficult*. In class discussion you should recognize that your fellow students are struggling with the ideas just as you are, and while you should feel free to criticize their ideas, you should also welcome their criticism of your own ideas.

So: you should be vigorous and engaged in class discussion, but keep your critical remarks relevant and polite. And remember that you can help as well as criticize: you may note that an argument has a problematic premise, point this out, and then suggest a better one to replace it! Philosophy is not a matter of combat between people; we are all engaged in a cooperative effort to achieve understanding, and while that may mean letting the ideas fight among themselves, so to speak, it does not require that we fight with each other.

4. Requirements

4.1 General expectations

As a student in this class, you are expected to

- be familiar with all policies and requirements as set out in the complete course syllabus
- attend and participate in all class sessions (unless excused for a legitimate reason)
- be aware of all deadlines throughout the semester
- stay informed by keeping up with all announcements made in class
- maintain academic integrity in all of your work—or risk failing the entire course
- be respectful of your classmates, even when engaged in lively critical dialogue with them
- inform the instructor promptly of any emergencies or problems that will affect your ability to do what is needed in the course ask questions and seek help when you need it

4.2 Assignments overview

There are three factors that determine your course grade:

- Ungraded but mandatory writing exercises
- Unannounced short exams ("pop exams")
- Two argumentative papers of modest size (1250 - 1500 words)

For the ways these affect the course grade, see the section on course grade determination (§5.3). You can find more information on each kind of assignment in this section.

Your course grade is basically determined by the three factors mentioned above, but there are two other factors that could play a role—one negative and one positive.

- The *negative* factor is this: an excessive amount of unexcused absences will incur penalties. See §6.1 for details.
- The *positive* factor is this: if you choose to participate in a trial run of an application ("Kritik") that makes intelligent use of peer assessment, you can earn some modest extra credit. For details see §4.4.

4.3 Writing exercises

What I call "writing exercises" or just "exercises" are short, mandatory writing assignments that are not individually graded. They are meant to force you to practice thinking and writing about the issues in the class without causing you anxiety about a grade. The credit you earn here is basically credit for effort. Just do your best to answer the question as well as you can while being as clear as you can.

Writing exercises are to be handed in online via Canvas. There is no specific word count target for exercises; you should simply do your best to answer the question. While you do not get individual feedback on your exercises, I always read all of them and select some of them for use in class. Keep in mind that there are *two* main ways in which you learn from these exercises. First, in the process of writing them, you will have to think more about the material and gain skills in writing about these issues. Second, when we go over selected exercises in class, you can correct your misunderstandings by comparison with what we get clear on in that discussion. Be sure to compare the thoughts you arrived at in your exercises with class discussion of the same material.

For any week in which an exercise is due, it is due via Canvas before 11:59 PM on Monday night. This ensures that I have time the next morning to read all of them, get a sense of how well the class is understanding the material, and select some for all of us to discuss in class — keeping them

anonymous, of course. How extensively we look at these in class will depend on various factors—including whether we are behind schedule on other things—but I will always provide some level of feedback of this sort on the exercises, and you are always welcome to discuss any one of your exercises with me in office hours.

Exercises figure into your final course grade as the “exercise participation” grade. Your score for that portion of your course grade is determined simply by how many of these you do—at least, so long as you make a real effort for each one. These are not individually graded, but if you hand in an exercise that seems to show no effort, you will be given one warning; if you do it again, that exercise will not be counted.

Here is how the exercise participation portion of your grade is determined. If you do all of them and make a real effort, you get a perfect A (4) grade for the exercise participation portion of your course grade. For each one you fail to hand in (or which is not counted because you didn’t make any real effort), that grade goes down by a full letter. The rule is simple: the grade drops by one letter for the first three missing exercises, after which the exercise participation part of your grade goes to zero:

Number of exercises you <i>failed</i> to do	Exercise participation grade
0	A
1	B
2	C
3	D
4 or more	E

I call these *exercises* because doing them on a regular basis vastly improves your chances of understanding the issues and being able to engage in philosophical discussion. They should also be a rather easy way to bolster your course grade. You don’t want to neglect them.

4.4 Special option: Kritik use

What's this all about?

Kritik is a software application designed to make intelligent use of anonymous peer assessment in student work. While I am in general very leery of educational products that might be marketed to me, my impression of Kritik is that the architects actually worked to make something of educational value, not just something that they could use to make a profit. So I decided to give it a “trial run” this semester in this class.

What that means is that I will see how well it works in practice, but students in this class are not required to participate in it at all, and for those who do participate, *it can only help your grade, not hurt it*. If you participate consistently, you will get some extra credit. If you participate consistently *and* earn an average grade of at least 4 out of 6 via the system, you will get some more extra credit. See below for details on the extra credit.

To participate you need to register for a modest \$24 fee. And it can only work if a decent number of students elect to participate, since it requires regular feedback from your peers. So if we don't have enough takers, this experiment won't go forward.

The basic idea behind Kritik

The basic idea of Kritik is this. First, you do an assignment for class as usual, handing it in via Canvas, but you *also* hand it in to the Kritik site. After the due date, your work is assigned anonymously to some of your peers who review it and assign a grade and provide some comments. The grade is guided by a rubric they have available. I have set the system so that every submission is reviewed by three peers; the rubric is very simple and should be easy for you to use. The grade assigned is a weighted average of those peers' grades. (How the weighting works is a complex matter about which more in a moment.) Take note: this assigned grade is not something that can possibly hurt you, since this is just a trial run! So if you participate, you can both avoid any stress about this and be honest in your grading of your fellow students' work.

After the grading is done by your peers (which will have its own deadline), you get back your grade and written comments from your peers and you will then have an opportunity to comment on how helpful that grading and feedback was. The Kritik system is set up so that this part is "hard wired": you will be asked to rate the evaluator on how critical and motivational their evaluation was. You are not required to do this to take part in this optional activity, but if you want to, I'd be curious to see how students experience it. If you want a chance at extra credit, though, you must do the other two stages consistently throughout the semester.

In the Kritik system, these three stages are given some names. Assignments are called "activities" and the three stages are:

- Stage 1: Create → Follow the instructions, read the provided rubric and create a submission
- Stage 2: Evaluate → Anonymously score your peers based on a rubric, and provide written comments
- Stage 3: Feedback → Provide peer evaluators anonymous feedback on how motivational/critical their comments were

As Kritik is set up, you get grades for each stage. A "Creation score," "Evaluation score," and "Participation score." The main thing is the first: the score for the creation, that is, the basic assignment. The evaluation score is an assessment of how well your evaluations of other students' assignments tracks the assessments other students make; it is basically a measure of well your own assessments match the assessments other students make. It plays a role in deciding how to weight the different assessments made by your peers in determining the Creation score. The participation score is nothing but a record of how often you did the feedback part.

One very interesting aspect of Kritik is that the instructor can set up a "Calibration" assignment. This is, in effect, an assignment in which all you are required to do is evaluate some assignments. The system then takes a measure of how well your own assessment of that assignment matches the instructor's assessment. In other words, it provides a way to measure your ability to emulate the instructor in his or her judgements. The results are subsequently fed into the algorithm for determining how student assessments are weighted.

The upshot of all this is that students help assess each other's work, but because of the way their skills as assessors is itself evaluated (by the "Calibration" assignment and the relation between a particular student's assessments and the weighted average of assessments) this should result both in your becoming more skilled at assessing the kind of work you do for yourself and in a grade for the activities that is not too distant from what the instructor would assign.

The use of Kritik in this class

In this class, my experiment with Kritik will use your Writing Exercises. If you are participating in Kritik, you will need to upload your exercise assignment *both* to Canvas *and* to the Kritik page with

the relevant activity. The assignment page on Canvas will include a *direct URL link to the relevant page on Kritik* to make it easy; all you need to do is submit your assignment twice.

For participants, the overall routine looks like this:

Writing Exercise due date: At this time, hand in the exercise to Canvas AND follow the link there to the relevant Kritik page to hand it in there as well. In all cases you have to use either a Word, text, or PDF file.

As soon as the Writing Exercise due date is past, you will receive a few anonymous exercises from your peers for you to assess. There is a due date for getting these done as well. For our schedule, this will just be a short period. The exercise will be due Monday 11:59PM and the assessment due Wednesday 11:59PM.

Once that deadline is past, you will see how your peers assessed your original assignment. You will then have a few more days to provide feedback on those assessments (though, again, this is not something you need to do to earn the extra credit). While this step is optional, I should note that if someone gives you feedback that seems completely off base, you can point that out in your own comments and—if it seems very problematic—you can ask me to take a look at it.

I will ask you to **let me know ASAP if you are going to participate in Kritik**. If you are participating and don't already have a Kritik account, then I will have Kritik send you an email invitation which includes a link to register for a Kritik account. Note that you can only use your UF email to sign up and access the course on Kritik. That is the email address that will receive the invite and you have to use that exclusively to interact with Kritik.

The login page for Kritik is: <https://us.kritik.io/login>

If you have problems with using Kritik, note that they have a live chat button on their website for immediate questions. A human agent will respond within a few minutes if this is during regular business hours. You can also find the "Help Center" which can help you address any questions you have about the platform. Finally, I should note that Kritik has its own YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/channel/UCTY4RL7OJSuEqc3Nq5880ZQ) that you can check out for more information or help.

I would like to know how easy you find this to use, since that is one of the considerations I will use in deciding whether to make more serious use of Kritik in the future.

The possible extra credit

My hope is that many of you will choose to participate, since I want to see how well this works and I want you to gain skills in assessing your own work. As a motivation, however, participation provides possible extra credit.

There are two levels of extra credit that you might get if you participate.

The first level is: consistent participation throughout the semester. If you do **both calibration exercises** and complete both the submission of your exercise and evaluation of peers' exercises for **at least 6 of the 8 writing exercises**, you get this extra credit. The reward is: your worst pop exam grade is dropped from the calculation of your exam grade. This is in effect a reward for effort.

The second level is: consistent participation plus reasonably good grades as determined by the Kritik system. The grades for the exercises via Kritik are given on a 6 point scale (see the rubric to see

where this comes from). **If your final weighted average for your exercises in the Kritik system is a 4 or better**, you get this extra credit as well. The reward is: your best pop exam grade is counted twice over. So if you participate consistently and get an average of at least 4 out of 6 on the grade determined by Kritik, you get to drop your worst exam and count your best one twice.

4.5 Pop exams

Instead of traditional large-scale exams, you will be tested by means of several short “pop exams”—exams that are not announced until the time they are administered. A number of such exams are held during the semester at various times. Each will require you to answer one question in 15 minutes. The question will require you to write a paragraph or two in response, probably taking up much of one side of a piece of paper (I will provide you with answer sheets to write on). There will always be a choice of at least two questions. While the questions are likely to focus on material most recently covered in class, you should be aware that each exam is officially cumulative in the sense that anything covered up to that point is fair game; further, the pop exams may cover points made in lecture but not in the readings. The number of exams is not settled in advance.

The exams are designed so that if you have been attending regularly, putting in a reasonable amount of effort, and following what is going on, you should have no trouble doing well. As I think of exams in general, they are tools that do two things. First, they inform me of your level of comprehension and skill; second, they serve as an incentive for you to not tune out or neglect the class. Other sorts of written work in this class will help you learn, while these exams merely keep you on your toes and keep me informed. They are not intended to be terribly stressful but only to serve those two purposes.

I prefer these kinds of exams instead of one or two major exams for the following reason. In my experience (both as a student and as a teacher) major mid-term and/or final exams encourage “cramming” and induce a lot of stress. Having to study frequently throughout a semester is much better than cramming both for comprehension and retention. Further, the stress built into studying for a single big test can well be counterproductive, causing you to do worse on the exam than your abilities should allow. Of course, some stress is inevitable if one is going to take any tests at all, but frequent exams that are lower stakes each time should be less stressful.

One general piece of advice about these pop exams: 15 minutes is actually a fairly long period of time to write out an answer to just one question. It is important that you pace yourself. If you start writing in a rush you can cause yourself more grief than necessary. Instead, I suggest you take your time to think through what you want to say, jot down a few notes first, and then write out the answer with care. (Make sure any notes are kept separate from the answer itself.) I will mark on the board the time remaining for the exam so that you know how much time you have left. Use your time wisely.

After the end of the 15 minutes I will collect the exams and we will discuss the questions and correct responses immediately. Pop exams might be held at the beginning, the middle, or even near the end of class—though in that case I will want to allow enough time afterwards for some discussion of the answers. If you come late to class when an exam is in progress, you can sit down and take the exam but will have to finish at the same time as everyone else.

Attendance and the exams. If you miss one of the exams because of an unexcused absence, you will receive a zero for that exam. Fair warning: when attendance is especially low, I am likely to spring an exam on the class. If you miss one of the exams because of an excused absence, that exam will not be counted in determining the exam portion of your course grade (i.e., it will be “dropped” from calculating that average). But this can only happen once; if you miss more than one exam because of an excused absence, you will be required to make (all of) them up by taking a special final exam.

Students in such a situation (missing two or more exams with a good excuse) will need to make arrangements to take the special exam at the end of the term (as a group). The questions on the special final exam will all be new—none will be taken from earlier exams—and they will in fact be made a bit harder than the usual exam questions to make up for the fact that, unlike the regular pop exams, you will have the advantage of knowing ahead of time just when you have to take the exam. If you are taking the special final exam and have missed n exams with good excuse, you will have to select n questions from the options made available and will have $n \times 15$ minutes to take the exam. Each answer is assessed just as if it were a single exam and the grade for it entered in the gradebook as if it were the grade for the missed exam.

4.6 Graded writing assignments: general guidelines

One of the primary benefits of an education in philosophy is that it enables you to develop the skill to write clearly and persuasively. In this section I review some general points about philosophical writing, whereas in the next I review the specific writing you will do in this class.

Writing style. Philosophy essays and papers may be importantly different from papers or essays you've written in other sorts of classes; you should not assume that advice you may have been given for writing in other classes will be appropriate in a philosophy class. For example, many students have been taught not to use "I" in their papers, but it is perfectly standard to use "I" in an argumentative paper in philosophy, as you need to say things like "I am going to argue that..." and "I respond to this objection as follows...." For another example, in philosophy, clarity is highly valued, much more so than elegance or being "pretty" in any way. "Logic before beauty" is a good slogan to keep in mind: if you have written something that sounds lovely but is hard to understand, redo it to make it easier to understand. If you have written something clear but doesn't seem especially beautiful, that's fine: just keep it clear!

Target word count ranges. Graded writing assignments will include a target word count range. These word count ranges are *targets*, not hard and fast requirements. It is possible to go over or under those ranges without penalty. They are meant to give you a sense of how extensive the paper or essay should be. Think of them this way: if you haven't written at least that much, you likely haven't done enough work; if you've written much more the upper limit of the target range, then you likely need to work on being more concise. *Under no circumstances should you simply pad the paper with filler material to make it reach the target word count range.* A shorter paper full of good content is preferable to a longer one burdened with pointless filler.

Feedback on your written work. Essays and papers are returned to you via Canvas. When they are returned, you should be able to see not only the grade but also marginal (that is, in-text) comments and an overall comment. You will probably look first to see what grade you received. That is understandable. But you will be doing yourself no favors if you don't also look at the other feedback on your work. The best way to improve your papers is by taking the time to seriously review that feedback and try to apply the lessons to the next paper. Remember that you can always meet with me for more clarification of that feedback and discussion of how to improve. For directions on how exactly to see the in-text feedback, see the Canvas instructions here: <https://community.canvaslms.com/t5/Student-Guide/How-do-I-view-annotation-feedback-comments-from-my-instructor/ta-p/523>.

Late work. Late essays and papers are not accepted for credit unless by prior arrangement for a good excuse or some legitimate emergency has made it impossible for you to hand it in on time. I do not offer the option of handing in written work with a late penalty. If there is no good excuse, a later paper receives a zero. If there is a good excuse, you won't be penalized.

4.7 Papers assigned in this class

In this class you will complete two papers—more precisely, argumentative essays—in the range of 1250 to 1500 words. For each of these assignments I will provide a list of suggestions for coming up with your main thesis. Be clear that *these suggestions do not constitute exact blueprints for what you should write*. They are not exam questions; they are not orders telling you to do exactly this kind of thing, then that kind of thing, or so on. Your graded written work—in contrast to the exercises, which are much less formal—must be structured around your thesis and the argument you offer for it. If you wish to pursue a topic of your own which does not fit comfortably in the range of the suggested topics, check with me first for approval.

I will also provide on Canvas some additional resources to help you with your writing, including a basic assessment. But as a brief way to remember what I look for in graded writing, just remember three factors: **CLARITY**, **COMPREHENSION**, and **ARGUMENTATION**. The ideal paper will be very clear, show a good comprehension of the material and issues at hand, and present an argument that has at least some genuine merit, demonstrated in part by your showing how it can be defended against anticipated objections. See the “Philosophical Writing: Advice for Students” document on the “Tools for Students” page for more elaboration.

Of the two papers, the one that receives the better grade is weighted more heavily (35% instead of 25%). This is intended to give you a chance of a decent grade even if you do poorly on one of them, and given how challenging it can be to write a good philosophical paper, you should not underestimate the chances of that happening.

5. Grading information

5.1 General grade information

In accordance with UF policy, a grade of C- or lower for the course is not a qualifying grade satisfying any requirements beyond a sheer number of credits. Other information on current UF grading policies in general can be found in the UF catalog at <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/>.

The grading system I use is not one that fits perfectly well into the grade book function on Canvas. Hence, I do not use that system, so you should **not** look to what Canvas provides you by way of information to find out how you are doing. Instead, as a courtesy to you, I provide you with an Excel spreadsheet that you can download and use to keep track of your own grades. You'll find this on the "Tools for Students" page on the Canvas site.

5.2 Grade scale

Many faculty use a grade scale based on 100 points—defining an A as a score between (for example) 94 and 100, an A- as 90 to 93, and so on. For various reasons I am convinced this is not a good method for calculating grades in a philosophy class. Instead, all grades in my classes are based on the 4-point scale for letter grade values, where an A is 4 points, an A- is 3.67 points, and so on.

Grades are initially determined according to a letter grade; they are then entered into the gradebook as numeric values. Going from the grade symbol to the numeric value looks like this:

Letter	Numeric		Letter	Numeric
A	4		C	2
A-	3.67		C-	1.67
B+	3.33		D+	1.33
B	3		D	1
B-	2.67		D-	0.67
C+	2.33		E	0

If you get a B+ on a particular assignment, for example, I enter that grade in my gradebook as 3.33. Each graded element is given a number in this way.

For those courses in which pop exams are a factor, I don't use the standard letter grade. Instead, they are graded on a coarse-grained "check scale" of just five possible values:

Symbol	Numeric
★	4
✓+	3.5
✓	2.5
✓-	1.5
∅	0

The reason I use this other scale for pop exams is that I do not believe it makes sense to try to assign a grade any more precise than this for one answer to one question done in only 15 minutes.

For the course grade, *each element is multiplied by its percentage weight for the course grade and the results summed* for the course grade as a numeric value. The result is a numeric value between 0 and 4.

How then is that numeric value translated back to a letter grade? I take the standard value of a letter to count as the *center* of the range of numeric values that will yield that letter. In other words, I think the range of x to y should count as a B if the standard value for B (that is, 3) is in the *midpoint* of the range between x and y . To get this result, we first think about the distance between each letter grade (which is .33) and cut it in half (.165) to get the relevant midpoint. Think of it this way. The lower endpoint for a B is halfway down to the next lower letter grade, which is a B- (2.67). Halfway down is .165 down, or 2.835. The upper endpoint for a B is halfway up to the next higher letter grade, which is a B+ (3.33). Halfway up is .165 up, or 3.165. So the range for a B is 2.835 to 3.165, which has 3 in the middle. I round up to the nearest second decimal and count the borders as belonging to the higher grade. The result is that going from the numeric value to the letter grade looks like this:

Numeric	Letter		Numeric	Letter
3.84 - 4.00	A		1.84 - 2.16	C
3.51 - 3.83	A-		1.51 - 1.83	C-
3.17 - 3.50	B+		1.17 - 1.50	D+
2.84 - 3.16	B		0.84 - 1.16	D
2.51 - 2.83	B-		0.51 - 0.83	D-
2.17 - 2.50	C+		0.00 - 0.50	E

5.3 Course grade determination

The course grade is determined by the following factors with the indicated percentages:

Factor	Percentage
Exercise participation	20%
Pop exams	20%
Papers (best worth 35%, other 25%)	60%

The course grade is determined by multiplying these percentages by the grade for the indicated element.

6. Policies

6.1 Attendance and make-up policy

If you miss a class, excused or not, *you need to take responsibility* for finding out what you have missed. You are advised to get to know some of your fellow classmates so that you can consult them for help in such cases. If you need to, you can contact me about what was missed, but I cannot reproduce lectures or the details of class discussion for you; I can only indicate what sort of material was covered and convey information about scheduling, assignments, or the like.

If you do have a good excuse for an absence or a missed assignment, you need to get in contact with me in a reasonable amount of time and make any relevant arrangements and/or provide me information on the cause of your absence. Of course, in the case of serious illness or emergency, you should not worry about class and focus on the immediate illness or emergency, getting in touch with me only after it is feasible to do so.

UF's general policy on attendance, including an official statement of what counts as an acceptable reason for missing class, can be found in the catalog at <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/>. In general, I aim to give students the benefit of the doubt about excuses, but I may demand documentation on a case-by-case basis. Your previous attendance and history of participation may make a difference to your credibility.

Absences and work done outside of class. For assignments completed outside of class, an excused absence from class doesn't automatically translate into any kind of extension or make-up. You should be planning your time outside of class to allow you time to complete the graded work before the due dates. But of course illness or other disruptions can make it unreasonable to expect you to be able to complete the work in a timely fashion. In such a case, I will offer either an extension or a make-up opportunity. For writing exercises, you will normally be asked to do a make-up exercise at a later date. For graded writing assignments, an extension is more likely. Keep in mind, of course, that I may require documentation for any such excuse, depending on your credibility at that point in the class.

Excessive absences and penalties. While I do not expect to see absentee problems in this class, attendance and participation in class discussion is too important not to have some unhappy consequences in place just in case this becomes an issue. For that reason, for this class, the following policy (which is consistent with UF's general attendance policy linked above) is in effect.

You can accumulate up to **THREE** unexcused absences without penalty. However, at that point every further unexcused absence incurs serious penalties. For each unexcused absence past those three, your Exercise Participation grade is reduced by an entire letter.

For example, if you handed in all the exercises and earned a perfect 4 for the Exercise Participation grade and missed class without any good excuse five times, then the penalty is to have your exercise participation grade reduced by two letters. In this case, the Exercise Participation grade would go from an A to a C.

6.2 Academic honesty

As stated in the UF Student Honor Code [<https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/>], all UF students are bound by the following "Honor Pledge"

The Honor Pledge: We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity by abiding by the Student 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 specifies a number of activities that constitute academic dishonesty as well as the sanctions (that is, penalties) that may result, including suspension and expulsion. The policy in my classes for academic dishonesty is simple:

ZERO TOLERANCE POLICY FOR ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

All incidents are reported to Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution.

CLEAR EVIDENCE OF ACADEMIC DISHONESTY MEANS AN AUTOMATIC FAILING GRADE FOR THE ENTIRE COURSE.

In submitting a report of academic dishonesty I recommend *at minimum* a failing grade for the course and cite this warning in the syllabus.

If you are at all unsure whether something might violate the code, it is your responsibility to find out. Please consult the code and/or ask the instructor.
Do not be afraid to ask.

In philosophy classes, the most common kind of academic dishonesty is plagiarism. In academic writing (including any writing exercise, essay, or paper you write in this class) if you use an idea you got from someone else—whether it's one of the assigned readings, another student, something you saw online, or the like—you are obliged to inform the reader of the source of that idea. Failure to do so is plagiarism. (For information on how to cite sources, see the section on basic writing assistance §8.3 below.)

If you are ever tempted to cheat, please keep in mind that it would be better to get a failing grade for a particular assignment than to get both a failing grade for the entire course and a record of academic dishonesty on file with the University of Florida.

6.3 Academic honesty and collaboration

The honor code specifies a number of activities that constitute academic dishonesty as well as the sanctions (that is, penalties) that may result, including suspension and expulsion. Please note that *collaboration in this class is forbidden unless stated otherwise*. No student may collaborate with any other person (in this class or not) on any assigned work. If group work is assigned or this policy changes, I will provide that information in writing on individual assignment instructions.

This prohibition on collaboration does not mean that you cannot make use of ideas from others that arise during the class, *so long as you give credit in an appropriate way*. For instance, in class discussion a student might say something that you want to use in your paper. You can refer to that idea in your work, so long as you include a reference like this:

as suggested in class discussion on March 1, 2016.

You can also cite the work of other students when that work is put online for the class to see. In that case, you might include a reference like this:

as suggested by an anonymous student for writing exercise #6 on March 1, 2016.

If the class includes discussion boards online where students' names are used, you can cite posts on that board with both the date and the actual student's name.

6.4 Outside sources

There are many resources out there about philosophy, including on the internet. I cannot stop you from looking at those sources, but I want to *strongly discourage* you from looking at them. Doing so will probably hurt you more than it can help you. Here's why.

- The variety of material out there is of very inconsistent quality. While there are many sites with good, informed discussion by people who know what they're talking about, there are *many* other sites about which that cannot be said.
- Even if the site you are reading has high quality material on it, there is a good chance it will be more bewildering than enlightening. Without any help in approaching the material, you could end up much more confused than before.
- If you find yourself browsing through the results of a Google search on the philosophical topics under discussion in this class, you may find yourself tempted to make use of ideas you get from what you found without citing them properly. If you do that, however, that will constitute plagiarism, and you then run the risk of getting an automatic failing grade for the course as stressed above. If you refrain from such browsing, you avoid that temptation and risk.
- Even if you are entirely conscientious and cite everything you use that you find from these outside sources, you might be tempted to do something else that, while honest, is definitely not to your advantage. This is the temptation to *lean on* the ideas of the outside sources without trying to think through the issues on your own. More precisely, you may be tempted to fill up the paper by explaining someone else's argument, then someone else's objection to it, and then someone else's reply to it, and end with nothing by way of your own contribution. This is not an acceptable way to go about writing a philosophy paper. You are supposed to come out of this class with skills in both thinking for yourself and being critically rigorous. If you merely assemble other people's ideas, you are not developing those skills.

6.5 Help with papers

For philosophical writing, there are at least two relevant documents on the the Tools for Students page that are intended to help: "A Brief Primer on Argumentation" and "Philosophical Writing: Advice for Students." You should be sure to download and review those *well in advance* of starting work on writing any of your argumentative papers.

I am happy to meet with you in office hours to discuss your work in progress on philosophy papers. I have a policy, however, that I will *not* look at any actual *drafts* of those papers. You can bring to our meeting a draft and/or notes on your paper and talk through what you are doing in the paper instead.

The reason for this policy is that I have learned from (frustrating) experience that commenting on actual student drafts often does more harm than good. Students find it very hard to resist reacting to such comments by thinking that their job is to make no changes in the paper other than those that are direct responses to specific comments made by the professor. And this, I can tell you, is not a good approach. Most of the time, the revisions you need to do are much more extensive than that, and it is often a good idea just to start a new file—a blank document—and start writing again, as opposed to constant tinkering with what you already wrote.

On a related note: While I am happy to talk with you in office hours about your work in progress, I do not appreciate it when students come in for help at the last minute and make it plain that they have not started in any serious way. You need to get started on your papers early, and if you want any help with it you must meet with me for such help a few days at least prior to the due date. I reserve the right to decline to help if you come to me for assistance at a time when there are fewer than 3 weekdays remaining before the paper itself is due.

6.6 Disability accommodations

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the Disability Resource Center [<https://disability.ufl.edu/>]. It is important for you to share your accommodation letter with your instructor so we can discuss any special access needed as early as possible in the semester.

7.6 Course evaluations

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful [<https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>] feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Please note that these evaluations are anonymous and only made available to the instructor after the final grades for the course have been submitted. I always read through all of these evaluations so as to find ways to improve the course and I encourage you to complete one at the assigned time.

You will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email you receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluer.com/ufl/>.

Public data providing summaries of course evaluation results are available online at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

7. Resources

7.1 Philosophy at UF

The Department of Philosophy at the University of Florida includes a great community of faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students. If you visit the department's web page (<http://web.phil.ufl.edu>) you can find many items of interest, including announcements of upcoming philosophy-related events, Philosophy in the News, and information on the major, minor, and the undergraduate curriculum generally.

One of the things that make the philosophy community here great is the lively UF Undergraduate Philosophy Society. You can read about them on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/8317358197/about/>. The group normally meets once a week during fall and spring semesters; they organize reading groups, visiting speakers, and have for the last several years now organized an annual undergraduate philosophy conference bringing philosophy student from both UF and elsewhere together to present their work, get feedback, and enjoy good philosophical discussion. Getting involved in the Undergraduate Philosophy Society—often called “Phil Soc”—is a great way to get to know your fellow philosophy students, get advice on courses, find out how other philosophy students think about post-graduation plans, and so on. I recommend getting involved.

7.2 Tools for Students

On the Canvas site for this course you will find a link to a page called “Tools for Students.” This page includes a variety of items intended as general guidance for doing well in any undergraduate philosophy class. It includes documents I have written and may include links to some external sites that I think helpful. I encourage you to take a look to see what is there right at the start of the semester.

7.3 Basic writing assistance

You may find it helpful to use the influential guide by Strunk & White, *The Elements of Style*, available free online at www.bartleby.com/141/.

Another very useful resource is Purdue University's Online Writing Lab, also known as the “OWL.” It is especially good for getting detailed information on *how to cite sources properly*. You can find it at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>

UF has a dedicated writing program with a “writing studio” that is intended to provide students with several resources for improving their writing. The site includes several resources, including links to the OWL site just mentioned and other items. See <http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/>.

The writing program provides assistance with writing for UF students, including distance students who are pursuing online-only courses. You can login to <http://tutortrac.clas.ufl.edu/> to make arrangements to meet with a tutor. I must warn you, however, that what makes for a good paper in philosophy is not always the same thing that makes for a good paper in other disciplines, and if you get help from a tutor for a philosophy paper, you should share with him or her the “Philosophical Writing” document and the model philosophy paper I have made available on the General Philosophy Advice page.

Citation. Any time you quote someone or some text you must provide a reference for that quotation, including page numbers. There are several different, equally acceptable ways of providing reference information. (See <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/> for information on major style guides.) If you are

only citing material provided in class, I am not going to be picky about how you cite them, so long as you make it clear what you are citing and what page the material is on. If you refer to outside materials at all, however, I need to insist on two things. First, you must refer to that source wherever you use it in your own essay; second, you must include a "works cited" list at the end that provides information on the author(s), title, publisher, and date of publication. If you use an online source (other than the webpage for this class) you must also provide the complete URL and the date accessed.

7.4 Technical support

If you have questions regarding Canvas or related technology used in connection with this course, you should contact the UF Computing Help Desk through one of the following:

- Email: helpdesk@ufl.edu
- Web: <https://helpdesk.ufl.edu/>
- Phone: (352) 392-HELP (4357)

One thing in particular that might cause some issues for you is seeing the marginal or "in-text" feedback on writing assignments. See Canvas's instructions [<https://community.canvaslms.com/t5/Student-Guide/How-do-I-view-annotation-feedback-comments-from-my-instructor/ta-p/523>] for seeing that feedback. If you have trouble I can always individually prepare for you a PDF version of your work with comments easily visible, so let me know if you need me to do that.

7.5 Other support services

U Matter, We Care: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392- 1575, or visit the U Matter, We Care website [<https://umatter.ufl.edu/>] to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.

Counseling and Wellness Center: Visit the Counseling and Wellness Center website [<https://counseling.ufl.edu>] or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.

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 [<https://shcc.ufl.edu/>].

University Police Department: Visit the UF Police Department website [<https://police.ufl.edu/>] or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).

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 [<https://ufhealth.org/emergency-room-trauma-center>].

Library Support [<https://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask>] provides various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.