

# **PHI 4930 Special Topics: A Priori Knowledge**

Class Number 20238 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 8-9 (3:00 - 4:55) - MAT 151

Thursdays period 9 (4:05 - 4:55) - MAT 151

Since Tuesday's meeting time covers two periods, I will include a 15 minute break in the middle of the session (3:50 - 4:05) 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 is one required text that should be available at the UF Bookstore.

- Laurence Bonjour, *In Defense of Pure Reason* (Cambridge University Press, 1998). ISBN: 978-0521597456. This is the paperback edition that should be available at the UF bookstore. An electronic Kindle copy is available if you prefer. The ISBN for the Kindle version is 978-0521592369

In addition, there will be a variety of additional readings made available in PDF form on the Canvas site.

You must have the readings under discussion with you during each class meeting. If you have an electronic copy of the Bonjour book, you need to have ready access to that electronic text during class. Similarly, for the supplemental PDF documents you must either have a printed copy with you or, again, ready access to the electronic version.

### 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

Is it possible to know something without relying on experience? It appears so: candidates for such a priori knowledge can be found in logic, mathematics, ethics, and philosophy generally. Such knowledge is, however, rather mysterious. If you know something, it seems it cannot be an accident that you got things right; shouldn't there be some kind of connection between you and the facts that make the belief correct? Without experience, however, it is not clear what connection there could be that would fit the bill.

This is an exploratory special topics course on some key questions about a priori knowledge. We will consider just how to understand the category of a priori knowledge, arguments for thinking it is not possible, traditional and contemporary attempts to explain its possibility, questions about whether we can do without a priori knowledge, and questions about how extensive such knowledge might be. Our starting point will be Laurence Bonjour's seminal study *In Defense of Pure Reason* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), followed by a variety of readings that will in part be determined by student interests as we go along.

### 2.2 Subjects and readings

This special topics course is deliberately exploratory in character. In other words, insofar as is possible, I aim to conduct this like a seminar in which all students participate regularly and the decisions about readings and topics are shaped in part by your own interests as we go along. I plan to spend the first 9 weeks on the Bonjour book, with the remaining weeks determined later in response to what particular issues students find of most interest and would like to present on. More precisely, students are given the choice of doing a presentation on part of the Bonjour book or one of the as-yet-undetermined readings. If you choose the latter, you will tell me more about what you find most interesting and I will aim to select an appropriate additional reading (which, of course, the entire class will have to read — not just you!). Presentations will be scattered throughout the semester depending on choices students make.

### 2.3 Learning objectives

Students who successfully complete this course should be able to

- 1) explain the major positions regarding the possibility, character, and extent of a priori knowledge or a priori justification, including the main arguments for and against those positions
- 2) assess the strength and relevance of arguments and objections within the topic of debates over a priori knowledge; and
- 3) present a sustained argument for some significant thesis regarding the possibility, character, or extent of a priori knowledge or a priori justification.

### 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. However, given the advanced character of this class, discussion will dominate each session. I will at various points provide a straight lecture if needed, but the goal is to have the majority of time spent on discussion based on the readings, your exercises, and additional prompts or questions I bring to the table. In case of very poor quality or distracting discussion, I may reassert control, so to speak, to revert to more of a lecture to keep things on target. I would like, however, to see these discussions develop in a more organic fashion according to your own questions, arguments, and objections.

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. For lectures I might make sparing use of PowerPoint. I will very frequently make use of your written exercises in class to prod 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
- One presentation, including a short post-presentation report on your own presentation
- A major final paper (2500 - 3500 words), including a separately grade paper proposal that must be completed in advance.

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 if you have an excessive amount of unexcused absences, that will incur severe penalties. Especially in a class of this sort, designed for serious philosophy students, I will have no patience for such absences. For details, see §6.1.

### 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 Presentations

For the presentation assignment, you will either select or be assigned a particular argument in one of the reading assignments and be given 25-30 minutes of class time in which to:

- Provide your account of how the argument works
- Make at least one critical remark about the argument, which can be either an objection you think hurts the argument or a defense of the argument against an objection you can anticipate
- Have several questions about these two things that you can use to guide a brief class discussion of the argument

I will provide you with a model of a document appropriate to such a presentation on the "Tools for Students" page in advance of anyone's assigned date of presentation.

Your presentation assignment is not limited to the actual event of giving the presentation, however. It is in effect a two-part assignment. The first part is to prepare that document and give the presentation in class. The second part is to provide a written report on your presentation that does the following things:

- Explain anything you thought went well or poorly during the presentation
- Provide an improved representation of the argument under discussion, using the feedback from class to do so
- Provide further thoughts of your own on how good or bad the argument is in light of the feedback from class discussion.



The two parts are graded separately. The presentation itself is graded relatively lightly, where the main thing I will assess is whether or not you have done the assignment properly. The presentation report is graded more strictly, looking at the actual quality of your written report: its clarity, its evidence of comprehension, and its argumentative skill. The report need not be very long; I imagine something between 500 and 1000 words might be good, but you should not worry too much about the length of the report.

Finally, I want to offer students the option of doing a standard paper instead of a presentation if they find the presentation assignment problematic either due to fear of public speaking, discomfort with leading discussions, or a worry about having a particular topic assigned to them before they've had a chance to read the relevant material. If you choose this option, the paper will be a mid-sized one of 1500 - 2000 words and will be worth 35% of the course grade. If anyone takes this option, I will determine a due date somewhere in the first half of the semester for this paper.

Decisions on presentations must be settled within the first weeks of class so they can be scheduled and planned for appropriately.

#### 4.5 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.

#### 4.6 Papers assigned in this class

In this class you will complete a major final paper in the range of 2500 to 3500 words. This is a very serious undertaking and the combination of your final paper proposal and the final paper itself is worth nearly half of your course grade.

The paper proposal will be neither a draft nor an outline. It is, instead, a worksheet that you must complete, with the questions designed to help you think through details of the paper you want to write. The proposal will receive its own letter grade and count for 10% of your course grade. It is graded not on the quality of argument or writing or the like—that's for the final paper itself! It is graded, rather, on whether you do the right sort of thing in preparation for the final paper, namely, settling on a thesis, being clear about what readings are relevant, having several arguments at least in rough form ready for development, questions a reader might have about what you are up to, and so on.

The final paper itself must be a very carefully written extended treatment of a major argument in the areas we have discussed. Given the exploratory character of this class, I am not giving you suggested topics, but we can always talk in office hours about various possible topics. The greater length of the paper should allow you to spell things out very explicitly and be very careful in anticipating objections and responding to them. The greater length does not mean you should aim for a grand thesis that is too big to take on in a serious way; having a reasonably curtailed and focused thesis will make for a better paper.

I will also provide on Canvas some additional resources to help you with your writing, including some basic assessment rubrics for papers. 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.

## 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 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:

<b>Numeric</b>	<b>Letter</b>		<b>Numeric</b>	<b>Letter</b>
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:

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Exercise participation	20%
Presentation	10%
Presentation report	25%
Final paper proposal	10%
Final paper	35%

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 **FOUR** unexcused absences without penalty. However, at that point every further unexcused absence incurs serious penalties. For each unexcused absence past those three, your **OTHERWISE FINAL COURSE GRADE** is reduced by **.33** (a third of a letter) on the 4-point scale.

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 <http://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](mailto: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](mailto: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.