

PHI 1001 Conflict of Ideas (Quest 1)

Spring 2024
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 Instructor and TA information

Instructor:

Dr. D. Gene Witmer
gwitmer@ufl.edu
330A Griffin-Floyd Hall
Office phone: (352) 273-1830

Teaching Assistant:

Mr. Anthony Conde
condea@ufl.edu
Office hours and locations to be announced

1.2 Meeting times and locations

This is a class with multiple sections, where the entire class meets together for two hours a week (these are called "lecture sessions") and each individual section meets with a Teaching Assistant one hour a week (these are called "breakout sessions"). Details are below with information on each different section of the class identified by the five-digit class number.

Who	When	Where
Everyone	Tuesday period 7 (1:55 - 2:45)	Florida Gymnasium 220
Everyone	Thursday period 7 (1:55 - 2:45)	Florida Gymnasium 220
Students in class #28986	Friday period 4 (10:40 - 11:30)	Matherly Hall 115
Students in class #28989	Friday period 5 (11:45 - 12:35)	Norman Hall 1037
Students in class #28990	Friday period 7 (1:55 - 2:45)	Matherly 15

1.3 Office hours

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

Dr. Witmer's office hours

Wednesdays 1:00 PM - 4:00 PM
And by appointment
330A Griffin-Floyd Hall

Mr. Conde's office hours

Times and locations to be announced

Note that regular office hours are not held during holidays or after the last day of classes (during reading days and exam week). However, appointments during such times might be available if needed.

1.4 Required texts

Nearly all the readings for this course will be made available to you as PDF files on the Canvas site. There is one text, however, that you will need to purchase:

Anthony Weston, *A Rulebook for Arguments*, fifth edition. Hackett Publishing 2017.
ISBN for paperback version: 978-1-62466-654-4
ISBN for Adobe PDF ebook version: 978-1-62466-655-1

Print copies should be available at the UF bookstore. An electronic copy (the Adobe ebook version) is perfectly acceptable. (Previous editions of the book have not been reviewed to see if they're acceptable, but brand new versions of the fifth edition are at the time of this writing a mere \$13 at Amazon.)

Please note that you are required to have the readings accessible to you during class, both lecture and breakout sessions. The PDFs from the Canvas site can be printed out if you like, but however you retain them, you must be able, during class, to look up the readings at issue and review the text. (We might ask you during lecture or breakout sessions, for instance, "What does so-and-so say after that question?" and you need to be able to look it up.) The same goes for the Weston book.

1.5 Required techs

This course makes use of two "techs" — the application known as iClicker and the website known as Flip (formerly Flipgrid). Both are free for UF students to use. The iClicker app presumes you have a smart phone that you can use in class. If you do not have a smartphone, let me know so we can make other arrangements for you.

About iClicker. This is an application (free for all UF students) that can be downloaded to your smart phone and used in lecture sessions to record attendance and take quizzes. Here is an overview of the application provided by UF: <https://at.ufl.edu/service-teams/classrooms/classroom-technology/iclicker-response-system/>.

About Flip. Flip is a service that can be integrated with Canvas that enables students to record short videos of themselves to share with the class and instructor. This will be my first semester making use of it, so do bear with me if we run into technological trouble. You will be able to use it to introduce yourself at the start of the semester, and that will also serve as a test run. Later, you will have to use it as part of an assignment, where you do a core presentation of an argument on video as part of preparing for a final argumentative essay.

Here is the general Flip page: <https://info.flip.com/en-us.html>. You will find on our Canvas page a link to use it for both the class introductions topic and the later assigned core presentation. More details will be on the Canvas page.

2. Course overview

2.1 Course description

We live in a time of heated disagreement — over politics, religion, culture, and more. One may be tempted to react to such conflict by disengaging, perhaps deciding that there's no way to settle these disputes and so no point in arguing about them. There are many drawbacks to disengaging in this way, however, and one of the biggest is that it's not always even an option to just agree to disagree: sometimes a fight is inevitable. Since we are stuck having to deal with conflicts among our ideas, we should ask what we can do to make the fights fair and productive. In this course we look at work in logic, philosophy, linguistics, and psychology to explore strategies for doing this. Requirements include participation by means of ungraded writing exercises, some regular simple quizzes, a report on an experiential learning activity, a short video presentation, and two essays. Students are expected to attend

and be ready to contribute during both lecture and breakout sessions. The course provides 2000 words of WR credit and meets the Quest 1 requirement.

As a Quest 1 course, this course aims to address certain essential questions — questions that we cannot avoid but which are not straightforward to answer. In particular, this course falls under the "War and Peace" theme for Quest 1; see a description of the various themes and questions here: <https://undergrad.aa.ufl.edu/uf-quest/faculty/quest-1/q1-themes-and-essential-questions/>).

2.2 Subjects and readings

Below is an overview of topics and readings (some of them are videos). Details on the readings, including bibliographic information, will be found on Canvas on the "Readings" page. Readings for some of the later topics are still not settled but will be announced when determined.

Please remember that readings are subject to change, as spelled out below in the section on the course schedule.

Part 1: Avoiding and facing conflict

- Goodman 2022. "The Elusive Civil Classroom."
- Corvino 2018 & 2015. "The Fact/Opinion Distinction" — video and text.
- Satris 1986. "Student Relativism."
- Haack 1999. "Staying for an Answer."

Part 2: Argumentation and knowledge

- Kuhn 2005. "Why Argue?"
- Weston 2017. Chapters 1-7 and appendices of *A Rulebook for Arguments*.
- Mill 1859/2017. Selections from "Of the Liberty of Thought and Discussion."
- McMahan 2010a. "The Meat Eaters."
- McMahan 2010b. "Predators: A Response."

Part 3: Conflict in context

- Frances 2014. Chapters 1 through 6 of *Disagreement*.
- Orwell 1946. "Politics and the English Language."
- Nguyen 2021. "How Twitter Gamifies Communication."
- Eggert 2017. "A Brief Introduction to Implicature." (video)
- Block 2018. "Grice's Maxims, Implicature, Presupposition." (video)
- Ross and Anderson 1982. Selection from "Shortcomings in the Attribution Process."
- Klein 2014. "How Politics Makes Us Stupid."
- Nisbett and Ross. 1980. "Judgmental Heuristics and Knowledge Structures."
- Levy 2022. "How Our Minds Are Made Up."

Part 4. Issues for practice

- *To be announced*

Part 5. Final thoughts

- Paulsen 2014. "The Uneasy Case for Intellectual Diversity."
- Saslow 2016. "The White Flight of Derek Black."

2.3 Learning objectives

Students who successfully complete this course should be able to:

1. Identify disagreements and recognize factors that make the fair assessment of conflicting views difficult. (Content)

2. Recognize the structure of arguments, identify errors in reasoning, and assess arguments in a fair fashion. (Critical Thinking)
3. Represent contrary views in a fair way and present one's own arguments clearly and effectively. (Communication)
4. Recognize one's own habits of reasoning and identify both strengths and weaknesses in those habits. (Connection)

Quizzes and writing exercises are relevant to SLO1 and SLO2. The first essay and the second larger essay project are relevant to SLO2 and SLO3. The interview and report assignment is relevant to SLO4.

2.4 General Education credit: Humanities, Writing Requirement and Quest 1

This course provides credit towards three different General Education requirements. Please note that a grade of C for the course is necessary to receive any such credit. (And for the Writing Requirement, a grade of C is necessary but not sufficient—see below.)

First, the course provides credit towards the *General Education Humanities* requirement. For that requirement and its official objectives, see <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-programs/general-education/#objectivesandoutcomestext>.

Second, it provides 2000 words of credit towards UF's *Writing Requirement*. For that requirement and its official description, see <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/student-responsibilities/writing-requirement/>. The Writing Requirement (WR) ensures students both maintain their fluency in writing and use writing as a tool to facilitate learning. Three writing assignments in this class are relevant to this requirement: the two argumentative essays and the report provided as part of the interview and report assignment. By the end of the course, you will be provided feedback on both of these written assignments with respect not only to content but also with respect to mechanical matters—grammar, punctuation, and the like.

Course grades have two components. To receive Writing Requirement credit, a student must receive a grade of C or higher *and* a satisfactory completion of the writing component of the course. To receive a satisfactory completion of the (relevant) writing component of the course, *the average grade for those writing assignments (essay 1, the interview and report, and essay 2) must be a C or better*. Note that it is possible to get a C for the course overall while failing to get the Writing Requirement, since you could do poorly on those three assignments but well enough on other aspects to make up for that. For the WR credit you must do *both*: get a C for the overall course *and* have an average grade of C for those three writing assignments. Note that for each of these three assignments there is a rubric on the Canvas site. While those rubrics differ from each other in a few ways, they all have in common a judgement on the mechanics of the writing, as that is part of what the Writing Requirement is supposed to address. For details, see the assignments themselves when they open up on Canvas.

Third, the course satisfies the Quest 1 requirement for UF students. For that requirement and its official objectives, see <https://undergrad.aa.ufl.edu/uf-quest/faculty/quest-1/q1-objectives-and-slos/>. The main idea is to provide incoming students with a chance to take a course that is not just a survey of some required material but is about something genuinely interesting and challenging, something concerning an important question or questions that we all face. In this class, the essential question is this: Given the often difficult disagreements we find ourselves in, how should we best — effectively, fairly, honestly — approach those disagreements?

3. Class routine

3.1 Schedule

The schedule of readings and assignments is available as a downloadable PDF on the Canvas page; it will be updated as appropriate. I reserve the right to adjust that schedule as needed to accommodate our speed of progress and student comprehension. This includes adding new readings, removing originally assigned readings, and making adjustments to the due dates to assignments. I will announce changes in class, but you should be sure to refer regularly to the most recently updated schedule on Canvas to stay on top of things.

The schedule is organized by weeks and specifies the topics, readings, and assignments for that week. Each assignment (other than a quiz) is due in by the end of the day on Monday of the relevant week. (This might change if necessary, but having it always be the same day helps everyone remember when things are due.) Quizzes are held in class on lecture days. We will use the iClicker application both to take attendance at lecture sessions and to administer the quizzes. Note that it is not announced ahead of time whether or not a quiz will occur on a given lecture, but you can expect there to be a short quiz in most of the lecture sessions — probably between 70% and 90% of the time. But these are short quizzes (one question each!) and won't take that much class time. For details see the section on quizzes below.

3.2 Lecture meetings

Note that while "lecture session" is a typical name for the meetings attended by all in the class, it is rather misleading. I do not intend for these meetings to be ones where I lecture and you just sit and listen passively. Do not plan to come to class and just sit there without participating.

In a lecture session, I will in fact do some lecturing, but you should understand that you may ask questions or make comments during the lecture at any point. If I think it best to leave your question or comment until later, I will ask you to wait, but usually I am happy to address your question or comment immediately.

In addition, however, I expect people to participate and will *enforce* this by **calling on students to answer questions or share their thoughts even when they are not volunteering**. In other words, I am a big fan of "cold calling." This is a general policy of mine, and I aim to select people more or less at random. If you have trouble responding, I may just say "OK, I'll ask you about something else later" to keep you from being too embarrassed. But most of the time students are able to say something which is worth talking about; even if what you say is confused or mistaken, chances are that such errors are made by others, so discussing it will be valuable for the entire class.

I will also make use of brief group work in lecture sessions. In such cases I will ask you to collaborate with your neighbors (whoever is seated near you) to respond to a specific question I ask the entire class to consider.

One other way in which you need to participate is, of course, by taking the short quizzes when they are administered.

Finally, I should note that **you are explicitly prohibited from using a laptop, tablet or phone in class to spend time on anything that isn't directly related to the class material under discussion**. That means no browsing of social media, chatting with friends, quickly looking things up on Wikipedia, or whatever. Obviously, I have no foolproof way of checking on this, but if you are caught doing this, I reserve the right to make you leave the classroom then and there. In such a case, if there is a quiz in that session that occurs after you leave, you simply get a zero for that quiz.

3.3 Breakout sessions

Breakout sessions are meetings limited to the students in your particular section. These are led by the Teaching Assistant or Assistants, who will have authority over how those meetings are run. Very often

breakout sessions will be occupied by discussion of a "writing exercise" assignment that was handed in recently but may also include a variety of specific group activities. Just as in lecture sessions, you may be called on to answer questions or share your thoughts even when you are not volunteering to speak up.

While the Teaching Assistant(s) will come to those breakout sessions with a specific agenda for the discussion that day, you should feel free to raise any questions or worries of your own that you feel urgently needed to be addressed; it will be up to the TA's discretion how much time needs to be spent on those instead of the previously planned agenda.

4. Requirements

4.1 General expectations and overview

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

Merely showing up is obviously not enough, of course. You are expected to come to class having read the assigned material and being prepared to discuss that material in class. Very often a writing exercise assignment will require you to think ahead of time about some of the most recently assigned material. In addition, quizzes during lecture sessions may concern that recent reading, requiring you to have done that work ahead of time.

If you want to do well in this class — and indeed, in any class — it is a good idea to take the time, when doing the assigned readings, to make some notes for yourself about the reading. These can be notes on things that you find puzzling, objections that occur to you, or just the general structure of the reading (or video, if that's what you're assigned to view). Don't think of these as being terribly burdensome notes; the idea is not to do a comprehensive outline of the reading in your own words, but just to make a select few notes to keep key things in mind. Doing that kind of preparatory work will make the class time more fruitful for us all.

The assignments in this class fall into the following categories:

- *Short quizzes.* Simple one-question quizzes administered using iClicker.
- *Writing exercises.* Mandatory writing assignments that are not individually graded.
- *Interview and report.* An experiential learning activity that requires you to interview someone outside of the class and provide a written report of the results.
- *Two argumentative essays.* The first is a concise essay due earlier in the term; the second is a longer essay that will require two preparatory assignments prior to the essay itself: a video presentation and critical feedback on your peers' presentations.

You may notice that nothing about a midterm or final exam is mentioned above. That is because *there is no midterm or final exam* for this class. In my experience, such high-stakes in-class exams are of little value for undergraduates, both in terms of their learning from them and in terms of my learning from them how well you understand things. On my view it is crucial for assessed work to be spread throughout

the semester; such regular but less stressful work is better for your understanding and longer-term retention.

More details on each of these assignments is found below. For the way they factor into the course grade, see the section below on course grade determination. Final details for assignments will be provided on the assignments page on Canvas.

4.2 Short quizzes

When I say "short quizzes" I mean *very* short: each of these will consist of just one multiple-choice question that must be answered within about five minutes at most. There will be many of these — perhaps about 20 of them throughout the semester. The quizzes should not be difficult for students who have been doing the reading and paying attention in class. They are intended to ensure you stay on track as well as to let me know where the class might be having trouble understanding the material.

The quiz grade is determined by the percentage of correct answers on the following very simple scale (note that this scale is only for the quiz grade; it is not used for anything else).

Percentage correct	Quiz grade
90%	A
80%	B
70%	C
60%	D
Under 60%	E

If you miss a class due to an excused absence and as a result miss one of the short quizzes, your percentage will be based on the smaller total of quizzes you do take, unless you are so unlucky as to have good excuses to miss more than five of the quizzes. In that case, you will need to take a special exam outside of regular class hours that will substitute for the quizzes you missed. If with good excuse you miss, say, 7 quizzes, that special exam will require you to answer 7 different questions (different from the ones used in classes you missed).

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, we 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.

Exercises are due in by 11:59PM on the relevant Monday. I hope to review at least many of them the next morning prior to Tuesday's lecture, but they will all be reviewed in advance of Thursday's class, at least. Reading these gives me and the Teaching Assistant a good sense of how well the class is understanding the material. We will normally select some of these to present (anonymously!) in class, either in lecture or breakout, for critical review. Obviously, only a small percentage of the exercises will

be reviewed in class, but when they are reviewed, you should feel free to raise questions about the material that in effect help illuminate how good or poor your own exercise might have been. You are also welcome to bring in any of your individual exercises to office hours to discuss with us.

Your score for the exercise portion of the course grade (the "Writing Exercise Participation" grade) is basically a grade for effort. So long as you make a serious effort on each one, you will get an A for that part of your grade. 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 (even if it's a much later exercise).

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 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:

# Missing exercises	Exercise 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 thinking about the questions we're focused on. They should also be a rather easy way to bolster your course grade. You don't want to neglect them!

4.4 Interview and report

This project is a kind of "experiential learning" assignment. In brief, the idea is to select someone you know to disagree with you on something, where even if that topic is not in itself terribly important (for example, on whether it's more enjoyable to relax on a vacation or to experience new things) it's a disagreement that you take seriously enough that each of you think the other is missing something important. Upon getting permission from that person, you will conduct an interview about their views on this matter in which you try to get a better understanding of why they hold this view with which you disagree. The interview will not itself be a debate or an attempt to convince each other; it will be primarily diagnostic — you trying to get a sense of what reasons they have for the view, how they think about those reasons, and so on.

The report will concern what you found out about the sources of your disagreement; it will ask you to specify what it is you disagree about, what you think leads to that disagreement, how you think you might proceed if you were trying to resolve the disagreement, and your reflections on what you've learned about how you've formed your own views on that issue.

4.5 Argumentative essays

The most challenging part of this class for most students will be the two argumentative essays. The first one is intended to be rather concise and will be done earlier in the semester, while the second one will require two preparatory assignments in addition to the essay itself and will be due at the end of the semester. Those preparatory assignments are intended to help you develop your main arguments so as to present a more sustained, serious argumentative essay by the end of the class.

More detailed instructions will be provided for these in the assignments on Canvas, but I want to note here in the syllabus a couple of important points that apply to both of these argumentative essays.

Not mere summaries. These essays must not be mere expositions or summaries. An essay handed in that merely summarizes material from elsewhere, even if the exposition is clear and well-written, **will receive a failing grade.** These are argumentative essays where the goal is to set out your own claim and provide an argument for that claim as well as a defense of that argument against anticipated objections. To put it bluntly: mere BS and filler material will not do.

As this may be your first attempt at writing such an essay, I want to assure you that you will be given some samples of such essays and a variety of pointers about how to write them. There will be on the "Tools for Students" page on the Canvas site a document providing specific advice on writing such essays as well as a sample or two (or three...).

Assessment. I will also provide on Canvas some additional resources to help you with your writing, including some rubrics for each argumentative essay. But as a brief way to remember what I look for in graded writing, keep in mind these 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. In this class, since it is a Writing Requirement credit class, the graded writing is also assessed on mechanics — that is, on whether it avoids grammatical errors, spelling errors, and similar problems. My approach to assessing mechanics is not to try to look for every error you make in mechanics. Rather, I have selected nine specific errors of that sort that are unfortunately very common in student writing, and this aspect of your grade is determined by looking specifically for just those errors. See the "Nine Egregious Mechanical Errors" document on the Canvas site for details.

Style. An argumentative essay 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 this 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 essay, as you need to say things like "I am going to argue that..." and "I respond to this objection as follows...." For another point, in this class, clarity is more highly valued than elegance or beauty. "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! Try to be write beautifully if you like but never allow that to take priority over being clear and precise.

Target word count ranges. The 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. These essays are returned to you via Canvas with several comments. 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. For these essays, you should see (i) the grade; (ii) the filled in rubric; (iii) a summary comment; and (iv) marginal or in-text comments. Make sure you look at all of these. 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>.

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/>.

While the grading system I use is not a very familiar sort, I have ensured that it can be used with the gradebook function on Canvas. However, please review the material below to make sure you understand how the system works.

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 most of the work I assign. (The quiz grade in this class uses percentages, but that is the exception, and the scale is not the usual one in any case.) Instead, grades in my classes are (mostly) 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 letter grade 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. Note that on Canvas, the grade will appear as a letter grade, but it is a letter grade that works as a numeric value as per the above equivalences.

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? Consider a course grade of 3.44. Now, a B+ is 3.33 and an A- is 3.67. Should this be a B+ or an A-? One option here counts the midpoint between two adjacent letters as the threshold. On that option, a 3.44 is a B+, not an A-. Another option is to think of the range of numeric values that count as an A- as extending from 3.67 all the way down to 3.33—or, rather, just a smidgen (say, .01) over 3.33. There are various pros and cons here, but in this class, anyway, I am using the second, more generous scheme, which is illustrated below:

Numeric	Letter		Numeric	Letter
3.68 - 4.00	A		1.68 - 2.00	C
3.34 - 3.67	A-		1.34 - 1.67	C-
3.01 - 3.33	B+		1.01 - 1.33	D+
2.68 - 3.00	B		0.68 - 1.00	D

2.34 - 2.67	B-		0.34 - 0.67	D-
2.01 - 2.33	C+		0.00 - 0.33	E

This grading scheme has been incorporated into Canvas, so you should be able to use the gradebook function there to see how you are doing.

5.3 Course grade determination

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

Quizzes	20%
Writing Exercise Participation	20%
Interview and Report	15%
Argumentative Essay 1	15%
Video presentation	5%
Feedback for peers	5%
Argumentative Essay 2	20%

Note that the "video presentation" and "feedback for peers" assignments are part of the preparatory work you must do as part of the second argumentative essay assignment.

You will note that the various elements are weighted in a way to ensure that the course grade is not overly dependent on any single item. This is by design to help ensure that a catastrophe in one area won't automatically have a dramatic effect on the overall course grade.

6. Policies

6.1 Attendance and make-up policy

Attendance at all lecture and breakout sessions is required and recorded. For lecture sessions, we will use the iClicker application to take attendance. You should be able to record yourself as present through iClicker within the first 15 minutes of class; after that, you will not be counted as present. **Please note that anyone who "checks in" to iClicker as present when they are not in fact in the classroom will receive a zero grade for their writing exercise participation grade.** If the number of students allegedly present according to iClicker is more than the number actually present, I will have to resort to a verbal roll call and the person pretending to be present will be noted and penalized in this way.

If you miss a session, 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 myself or the Teaching Assistant about what was missed, but we cannot reproduce lectures or the details of class discussion for you; we can only indicate what sort of material was covered and convey information about scheduling, assignments, or the like.

Attendance is not counted as a separate factor in determining your course grade except by way of potential penalties. You can accumulate three unexcused absences without penalty, but after those, each additional unexcused absence incurs a penalty. More precisely:

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 writing exercise grade is reduced by an entire letter.

For example, if you handed in all the exercises and earned a perfect 4 for the exercise 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 grade would go from an A to a C. Note that it's easy to make an A for the exercise grade, so having that cut down because of excessive unexcused absences is really not something you want to let happen.

Note that an unexcused absence during a lecture session in which a quiz is administered means that you automatically get a 0 for that quiz grade. In case you miss a quiz for an excused reason, that quiz grade will not figure into the quiz grade; see the section on the short quizzes above.

If you do have a good excuse for an absence or a missed assignment, you need to get in contact with us in a reasonable amount of time and make any relevant arrangements and/or provide us 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 us 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, we aim to give students the benefit of the doubt about excuses, but we may demand documentation on a case-by-case basis. Your previous attendance and history of participation may make a difference to your credibility.

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, we 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 we may require documentation for any such excuse, depending on your credibility at that point in the class.

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.

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 humanities 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 §7.2 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 explicitly stated otherwise*.

In fact, there is an element of collaboration in this class in the preparatory work done for the second, longer argumentative essay. Part of that work is providing peer feedback, and that is not only acceptable but required. That collaboration is entirely in the open, so to speak, in that it will be presented to your peers in a format I will make available and we can see just what feedback you provided each other.

The general 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, 2022.

You can also cite the work of other students if 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, 2022.

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 and use of AI

There are many resources out there relevant to the ideas we discuss in this class, especially online. 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.
- If you find yourself browsing through the results of a Google search on the 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.

A new issue in college work is raised by the advent of a certain kind of artificial intelligence—namely, the Large Language Models most famously illustrated by ChatGPT. As you no doubt are aware, ChatGPT is an application that does an astonishingly good job of appearing to be an intelligent interlocutor, and it is possible to ask it to write things for you that meet certain descriptions. ("Write me an essay on the dangers of grade inflation!") As a result, I count ChatGPT—and any relevantly similar AI application—as a kind of outside source one might use as a student but with the following difference. Unlike other external sources where you are discouraged from using them but are not prohibited from using them, the rule for this particular kind of outside source is different:

AI SOURCES PROHIBITED

The use of ChatGPT or similar AI applications **in generating text for any assignment** in this course is strictly prohibited.

This includes all writing assignments, including both graded essays or reports and ungraded writing exercises.

Use of such counts as academic dishonesty and merits the standard penalty for academic dishonesty, namely, a failing grade for the entire course.

There are various telltale signs of a ChatGPT generated essay, but it is true that they are far from conclusive. Here, however, is something that is a very good method of detection. If you did not write the paper yourself, you will have a hard time explaining it in person. Let me make this clear: **I reserve the right, for any written work you hand in for an assignment, to require you to meet with me in person immediately to answer questions about your written work so that I can establish the degree of your understanding of what you handed in.** If you cannot talk about your work in a way that makes it believable that you are the author, I may then require you to write about the same topic in my office or another controlled environment where you cannot make use of external aids. If it gets to that point, I reserve the right **to substitute as a grade for that written assignment an assessment of your verbal presentation and whatever writing you do in the controlled environment.**

I am sorry to have to issue you this kind of threat, but let me say something about why this is the policy. One of the most important skills developed in a class like this is to write and think clearly about tricky issues. Use of ChatGPT or similar applications will take away the primary method of gaining that skill—letting something else do the hard work of formulating points, seeing connections between points, and assessing the merit of various arguments. I understand that some professors see ChatGPT as a technology that might be fruitfully used as a learning tool, and I am willing to consider that in the future, but for now I don't see how it can be used without making it too easy to succumb to the temptation to not do the work in writing and thinking for oneself that is crucial to developing the cognitive and verbal skills this course is aimed at developing. In any case, the policy is as given above: no use of such AI is allowed, and as a precaution, I may request anyone to come in to talk about their work to test their understanding, with further in-person writing as an additional test.

6.5 Help with papers

We are happy to meet with you in office hours to discuss your work in progress on the argumentative essays (or any other work). However, we have a policy of not looking at any actual *drafts* of those essays. You can bring to the meeting your notes and talk through what you are aiming to do in the essay instead and we will work with that. In general written feedback is not provided except for completed work that is handed in for a grade.

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.

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.

6.7 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.bluera.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

While this is not a class intended specifically for students wanting to study philosophy, you may find some of the philosophical work we touch on of interest and want to explore more. Further, since this course focuses on matters of argumentation, which is perhaps the most important skill developed in philosophy, you may want to find out more just to see what you can gain by way of developing that skill.

So, to that end, I recommend checking out the website for the Department of Philosophy at <http://web.phil.ufl.edu>. You will find there announcements of upcoming events, information on upcoming courses, and the like. In particular I want to draw your attention to the Undergraduate Philosophy Society (see <https://phil.ufl.edu/philsoc/>). This group normally meets once a week during fall and spring semesters and you do not need to be philosophy major or minor to participate. Getting to know those

students may be a very useful thing for anyone thinking about philosophical issues or just wanting to know how to improve their skills at argumentation, including the skill of writing argumentative essays.

7.2 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 <https://tutortrac.clas.ufl.edu/> to make arrangements to meet with a tutor. I must warn you, however, that what makes for a good argumentative essay is not always understood the same way in different disciplines. See the points about the style of argumentative essays in the section on those essays above. If working with a tutor, be sure to share that material with them.

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.

7.3 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.

7.4 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.