

PHI 3700 Philosophy of Religion

Class Number 29121 Fall 2024

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 7 (1:55 PM – 2:45 PM)
Thursdays periods 7-8 (1:55 PM – 3:50 PM)

Matherly Hall 117

1.2 Instructor and contact information

D. Gene Witmer
Email: gwitmer@ufl.edu
Web: <https://people.clas.ufl.edu/gwitmer>
Office: 330A 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 regular office hours. In case there are problems meeting during regular office hours and we need to meet, we can make appointments at other times.

Tuesdays and Wednesdays 3:30 PM – 5:00 PM
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 those times if needed. It is also possible to meet over Zoom as appropriate; I have a Zoom room (for "Ad Hoc Office Hours") set aside for such:

To join Ad Hoc Office Hours when you have an appointment: <https://ufl.zoom.us/j/97202458888>

Note that UF authentication is required to join this room.

1.4 Required texts

There are two required texts. You must have the current readings with you during each class meeting. Note that if you only have the electronic copy of the coursepack, I require that you have ready access to that electronic text during class, whether it is through a laptop, tablet, or other device. I recommend having a print copy of the coursepack since that is likely easier to use in class. (If you buy the hard copy you can get the electronic copy for just \$10 more.) Note that there is no electronic copy of the Alter and Howell book available.

- Torin Alter and Robert J. Howell, *The God Dialogues*. Oxford University Press, 2011. ISBN: 978-0-19-539559-4. Available at the UF bookstore.
- Coursepack: a customized coursepack edited by myself and published by Cognella. You need to purchase this from Cognella's online store at <https://store.cognella.com/>. You have both electronic and print options to select from, but be sure to have the material available to you during class time in whatever form you have purchased it. Here is the direct link to the coursepack: <https://store.cognella.com/26054>.

- The first few readings are from the coursepack, so you need to get the coursepack as soon as possible. If you purchase the hard copy alone, they make the first few readings available to you electronically anyway so you have immediate access. If you need any help with ordering from Cognella, feel free to email orders@cognella.com or call 858-552-1120.

Access to readings during class meetings. It is very important that you have access to the readings under discussion when we meet during class sessions. While you might be using an electronic copy of the coursepack instead of a hard copy you can carry to class, *I insist that you have some way to access those readings while in class.* You might use a laptop or an electronic “pad” to access the electronic copies; or you might print out hard copies for your own use and bring those. I suggest you *not* rely on a smartphone to access the readings in class, simply because the small size of the screen would likely make it harder to find what you're looking for in the text.

2. Course overview

2.1 Course description

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

2.2 Subjects and readings

Below is the planned list of topics. For details on the readings, see the course schedule, which includes reference information.

- Preliminaries: Reasoning and God
- God, morality, value
- Teleological arguments
- Cosmological arguments
- Ontological arguments
- Experience and miracles
- The problem of evil
- Wagers, reason, and faith

The initial schedule is provided on the Canvas page, but it may well be adjusted as we go along. I reserve the right to remove or add readings and adjust the schedule as needed to accommodate our progress through the material.

2.3 Learning objectives

Students who successfully complete this course should be able to:

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

2.4 General education credit

This course provides credit towards the General Education Humanities requirement. A minimum grade of C is required for general education credit.

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

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

3. Class routine

3.1 Schedule

The schedule for the course will be available as a PDF document on the Canvas site. If and when we need to make changes, those changes will be reflected on that document, which will also include information on when it was last updated.

For now, the projected schedule is as follows. Note that “CP-1” refers to the first reading of the coursepack and “A&H-1” refers to the first chapter of the Alter & Howell book.

Week	Topic	Readings	Tue	Thu	Assignments
1	Introductory	None	—	8/22	
2	Reasoning about God	CP-1 (Everitt)	8/27	8/29	Ex 1 due 8/26
3	Reasoning about God	CP-2 (van Inwagen)	9/3	9/5	Ex 2 due 9/2
4	God, morality, value	A&H-1	9/10	9/12	Ex 3 due 9/9
5	God, morality, value	CP-3 (Layman)	9/17	9/19	None
6	Teleological arguments	A&H-2, A&H-3	9/24	9/26	Ex 4 due 9/23
7	Teleological arguments	CP-4 (Collins)	10/1	10/3	Ex 5 due 9/30
8	Cosmological arguments	A&H-4, CP-5 (Taylor)	10/8	10/10	Ex 6 due 10/7
9	Cosmological arguments	CP-6 (Craig)	10/15	10/17	None
10	Ontological arguments	A&H-5, CP-7 (Malcolm)	10/22	10/24	Paper 1 due 10/21
11	Experience and miracles	A&H-6, CP-8 (Wainwright), CP-9 (Hume)	10/29	10/31	Ex 7 due 10/28
12	The problem of evil	A&H-7	11/5	11/7	Ex 8 due 11/4
13	The problem of evil	CP-10 (Antony), P-11 (Swinburne)	11/12	11/14	Ex 9 due 11/11
14	Wagers, reason and faith	A&H-8, A&H-9	11/19	11/21	Paper 2 due 11/25
15	Wagers, reason and faith	CP-12 Buchak	11/26	11/28	THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY WEEK
16	Final thoughts	None	12/3	—	Optional exercise due 12/2

Assignments are due in to Canvas by 11:59PM of the day indicated. So, for instance, Exercise 4 is due by 11:59PM on Monday, September 23, and the first paper is due by 11:59PM on Monday, October 21. This is the general pattern, but depending on our progress I might need to adjust these; any changes will be on the updated schedule (and updated assignments on Canvas).

As a general rule, you should plan to complete all the readings assigned for a week prior to the Tuesday class of that week, as there isn't much time between Tuesday and Thursday to do the readings.

3.2 Lecture and discussion

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

I will normally come to class with an outline of topics and/or activities for us that day, though I might depart from it considerably depending on how things go. I might make sparing use of PowerPoint and will frequently project for the classroom samples of exercises for discussion.

3.3 Participation and attendance

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.

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. After a certain number of unexcused absences, some potentially severe penalties kick in. For details, see the attendance policy spelled out in §6.1.

Merely showing up is obviously not enough, of course. I expect that you will come to class having both read the assigned material and being prepared to discuss that material with the rest of us. 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.

3.5 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 and via Canvas
- keep up with reading assignments and hand in work on time
- 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:

- Writing exercises
- Pop exams
- Two argumentative papers (about 1250-1750 words each)

For the ways these affect the course grade, see the section on course grade determination (§5.3).

The rest of this section provides more information on each of these factors.

Note that while attendance and participation are not explicitly given in the list above, without regular attendance and participation you will have virtually no chance of doing well in the course. In addition, excessive unexcused absences will trigger some grade penalties (§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.

The normal due date for a writing exercise is 11:59 PM on the day before the next class. This ensures that I have time the following 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.

Your score for the exercise 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 serious effort, you will be given one warning; if you do it again, that exercise will not be counted.

Here is how the exercise 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 that 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.

Anonymous posting of exercises on discussion boards. Canvas now has the ability to set up discussion boards whereby students can post anonymously. We will take advantage of this capacity in the following way. When you complete your writing exercise, you must *both* (i) hand it in on the assignment page *and* (ii) post it anonymously on the discussion board topic set aside for that exercise. This ensures everyone gets to see all the exercises, making it easier for you to learn from each other. Note that you will also be able to use that discussion board to respond to others' posts and pursue the topic further, beyond what we may be able to get to in class. This should be a good opportunity to engage in critical exchange without fear of embarrassment. However, it might also be an opportunity for people to be insulting or abusive, and I won't put up with that. If you post something that attacks the person as opposed to the thoughts expressed, I will intervene to remove the post and/or speak to you about the need to do a better job of engaging in civil critical exchange.

4.4 Pop exams

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

The exams are designed so that if you have been attending regularly, putting in a reasonable amount of effort, and following what is going on, you should have no trouble doing well. As I think of exams in general, they are tools that do two things. First, they inform me of your level of comprehension and skill; second, they serve as an incentive for you to not tune out or neglect the class. Other sorts of written

work in this class will help you learn, while these exams merely keep you on your toes and keep me informed. They are not intended to be terribly stressful but only to serve those two purposes.

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

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

After the end of the 15 minutes I will collect the exams and we will discuss the questions and correct responses immediately. If you come late to class when an exam is in progress, you can sit down and take the exam but will have to finish at the same time as everyone else.

If you miss one of the exams because of an unexcused absence, you will receive a zero for that exam. *Fair warning:* when attendance is especially low, I am likely to spring an exam on the class.

If you miss one of the exams because of an *excused* absence, that exam will not be counted in determining the exam portion of your course grade (i.e., it will be “dropped” from calculating that average). But this can only happen *once*; if you miss more than one exam because of an excused absence, you will be required to make (all of) them up by taking a special final exam. Students in such a situation (missing two or more exams with a good excuse) will need to make arrangements to take the special exam at the end of the term (as a group if possible). The questions on the special final exam will all be new—none will be taken from earlier exams—and they will in fact be more difficult than the usual exam questions to make up for the fact that you have the advantage of knowing ahead of time just when you have to take the exam. If you are taking the special final exam and have missed n exams with good excuse, you will have to select n questions from the options made available and will have $n \times 15$ minutes to take the exam. Each answer is assessed just as if it were a single exam and the grade for it entered in the gradebook as if it were the grade for the missed exam.

4.5 Graded writing assignments

Philosophy essays and papers might be importantly different from papers or essays you’ve written in other sorts of classes. Do not assume that advice you may have been given for writing in other classes will be appropriate in a philosophy class.

While on rare occasion I assign papers that are intended to focus on exposition, for the most part papers in my classes are argumentative essays. This means that they must set out a thesis, present your own original argument for that thesis, and defend that argument against anticipated objections. They cannot be mere 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.* (Yes, really.)

There is much one can say about what goes into a good argumentative essay or paper. The Canvas page for this class includes a “Tools for Students” page on which you can find several relevant documents: a brief primer on argumentation, a model philosophy paper, some guidelines on how I assess

argumentative papers, and (probably most important) a document called "Argumentative Essays – Writing Advice."

As a short slogan to remember what matters most in these papers, think: *clarity, comprehension, and argument*. A good argumentative 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.

Typically, paper assignments in my classes are intended to give you a good deal of freedom in deciding what to write on. I will provide a list of suggestions for a particular paper. These suggestions are intended to help you come up with your own main thesis. Be clear: *these suggestions do not constitute exact blueprints for what you should write*. They are not exam questions; they are not orders telling you to do exactly this kind of thing, then that kind of thing, or so on. Your graded written work—in contrast to the exercises, which are much less formal—must be structured around *your* thesis and the argument you offer for it. If you wish to pursue a topic of your own which does not fit comfortably in the range of the suggested topics, check with me first for approval.

When I return graded writing assignments, I provide three things: a grade, a summary overall comment, and various comments on specific parts of the text itself. When you get these assignments back in Canvas, you will — understandably! — first look to see what grade you received. But if you stop there, you are doing yourself no favors. You need to look at the other feedback, and not just the summary comment, but the more detailed feedback that points to specific parts of the paper you handed in as well. That more detailed feedback is called "annotation feedback comments" by Canvas; I am inclined to call them "marginal comments" or "in-text comments." Whatever you call them, you should be sure to read them.

I have on a few unhappy occasions in the past discovered that some students didn't even realize that I had provided such comments on their work. It's not like the good old days (so to speak!) when the comments were written out on the hard copy, perhaps in red ink, where you could hardly miss them. On Canvas, you might well fail to see them. Fortunately, Canvas has recognized that it's not entirely obvious how to see them and has provided a page explaining just how to see them:

How do I view annotation feedback comments from my instructor?

<https://community.canvaslms.com/t5/Student-Guide/How-do-I-view-annotation-feedback-comments-from-my-instructor/ta-p/523>

Finally, I want to emphasize that you can always meet with me to discuss that feedback. If, however, you come to office hours wanting to talk about a grader and you haven't yet looked at that feedback, I will send you away until you have read it.

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.

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 rather different from that used by many other instructors. I will use the Canvas gradebook, but the way I use it makes use of the grade scale described below. You'll see that on the Canvas gradebook every graded assignment is worth 4 points total; you should see the appropriate letter grade show up, but the underlying mechanics uses 4 points, multiple of 4 points, and percentages of those point totals.

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.

Assigned work is initially assigned 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 record it as 3.33. Each graded element is given a number in this way.

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

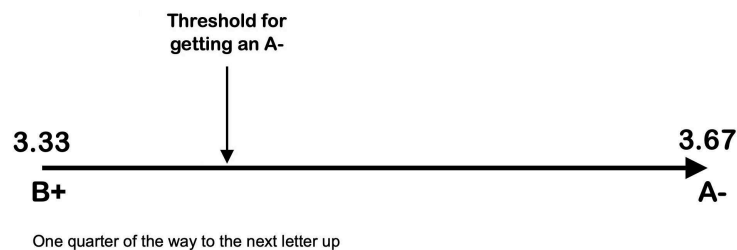
Symbol	Numeric
★	4
√+	3.5
√	2.5
√-	1.5
∅	0

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

For the course grade, *each element is multiplied by its percentage weight for the course grade and the results summed* for the course grade as a numeric value. The result is a numeric value between 0 and 4. That numeric value then needs to be turned back into a letter grade, and there are various options for

how one might do that. For example, suppose someone has a numeric course grade of 3.44. Should that count as a B+ or as an A-? An A- is worth 3.67 (more than 3.44) but a B+ is worth 3.33 (less than 3.44). So where should the threshold be set?

If you imagine a number line starting at 3.33 and going up to 3.67, at what point in the line should the grade cross over from being a B+ to an A-? A very generous option would be to make the threshold right at the lower level, so anything over a 3.33 gets one an A-; another more demanding option would be to make the threshold right at the midpoint, so that one needs at least a 3.5 to get an A-. This latter option is very demanding, though, as it would require, for an A, a final numerical score of 3.835, which seems a bit too much. So one more option is to consider a compromise between those two and make the threshold halfway between the lower bound and the halfway point — in other words, at one quarter of the way towards the next letter value.



This is, I believe, an acceptable compromise between the overly demanding and overly generous scales. On this scale, then, your final numeric course grade (or the percentage equivalent, as Canvas deals with percentages only) is turned into a letter grade according to the following table:

Numeric greater than or equal to	Percentage greater than or equal to	Letter
3.7525	93.81%	A
3.4125	85.31%	A-
3.0825	77.06%	B+
2.7525	68.81%	B
2.4125	60.31%	B-
2.0825	52.06%	C+
1.7525	43.81%	C
1.4125	35.31%	C-
1.0825	27.06%	D+
0.7525	18.81%	D
0.0825	2.06%	D-
0	0.00%	E

5.3 Course grade determination

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

Exercise Participation	20%
Pop Exams	15%
Paper 1	30%
Paper 2	35%

Note that the potential penalty for excessive unexcused absences has its effect on the Exercise Participation portion of your grade. If that happens, you will see a notation to that effect on the Canvas gradebook.

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. Attendance and participation in class discussion is too important in philosophy classes to be cavalier about excessive absences. For that reason, for this class, the following policy (which is consistent with UF's general attendance policy linked above) is in effect.

You can accumulate up to **THREE** unexcused absences without penalty. However, at that point every further unexcused absence incurs serious penalties. For each unexcused absence past those three, your exercise grade is reduced **by an entire letter** (1 point).

For example, if you handed in all the exercises and earned a perfect 4 for the exercise portion of your 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 portion of your grade would go from an A to a C. Given that it's easier to get a good grade for the exercises — all you have to do is make a serious effort — it is especially foolish to squander those grades by skipping classes.

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 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 §7.2 on basic writing assistance.)

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, 2022.

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, 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

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.
- 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. That would be mere summary, and as noted above, if you hand in a mere summary for an argumentative essay assignment, that paper will receive a failing grade. 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 AI as an outside source

A recent 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 the external sources described in §6.4, 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 papers 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 the original written assignment an assessment of your verbal presentation and whatever writing you do in the controlled environment.

I am sorry to have to issue this kind of threat, but let me say something about why this is the policy. One of the most important skills developed in a philosophy class is the ability 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 won't rule that out, 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 that you should be developing.

One other comment about ChatGPT and Large Language Models in general. If you know the basic story behind how they work, you might see them as a kind of fantastic *imitation* machine: they take what others have said already and says something that is aimed at fitting the patterns evident in what others have already said. Now consider what you are trying to do when trying to answer philosophical questions. Is your goal to say things that fit the patterns evident in what others have already said? Recall that your work in this class will be to try to provide your own, original arguments for positions regarding the issues we will discuss; you cannot let your work be guided by the idea of imitating the patterns in what others have already said.

6.6 Help with papers

Be sure to look at the Tools for Students page on the Canvas site, which includes documents intended to help you with writing an argumentative paper, especially "Argumentative Essays – Writing Advice." You should be sure to review these *well in advance* of starting work on 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 the paper is due in less than 72 hours (3 days).

6.7 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.

6.8 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

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 (<https://phil.ufl.edu>) you can find many items of interest, including announcements of upcoming philosophy-related events, an archive of previous events, information on the major, minor, and the undergraduate curriculum generally.

One of the things that make the philosophy community here great is the lively **Undergraduate Philosophy Society** [<https://phil.ufl.edu/philsoc/>]. The group normally meets once a week during fall and spring semesters; they organize reading groups, visiting speakers, and have for several years organized an annual undergraduate philosophy conference bringing philosophy students from both UF and elsewhere together to present their work, get feedback, and enjoy good philosophical discussion. Getting involved in the Undergraduate Philosophy Society—affectionately 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 strongly recommend getting involved.

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 <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 “Argumentative Essays – Writing Advice” document and the model philosophy paper I have made available* on the Tools for Students 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. Again, though, while I don't forbid the use of such outside sources, I do strongly discourage it for the reasons given in §6.4.

7.3 Technical support for Canvas

If you have questions regarding Canvas, your internet connection, or any other technology used to support or deliver this course, please do not contact your instructor. Instead, please 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)

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.