

Philosophy 5935: Proseminar Syllabus

PHI 5935
Fall 2025
Tuesdays 9:35am - 12:35pm
Griffin-Floyd Hall, Room 0200

Instructor Information

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Course Description

This course is designed to familiarize incoming graduate students with the expectations and standards of graduate level work in philosophy. In particular, it aims to develop the tools necessary to read, write, and converse about philosophy at the graduate level. We will study and discuss a wide range of papers, drawn from many areas of philosophy and written in a variety of philosophical styles.

Each student will give three presentations: two of them will be co-presented with another student, and one of them will be solo. The paired presentations will occur in roughly the first half of the semester, and the solo presentations in the second half. The readings for the paired presentations are pre-selected (see the schedule at the end of the syllabus). The readings for the solo presentations are to be chosen by the presenting student in consultation with myself.

Students will be asked to write a short paper every week in which they are *not* assigned to present (except for the first week). The papers should be between 500 and 1000 words and can discuss any aspect of the reading. Papers are due at the start of each class. I will drop your two lowest short paper grades at the end of the semester.

Students will also be asked to write a final paper of roughly 3500-4000 words.

Student Learning Outcomes

At the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Critically read philosophy articles and identify the thesis, arguments, and potential weak points
- Contribute effectively to class discussions
- Comfortably give presentations to the rest of the class
- Structure a philosophy paper in a manner that is clear, concise, and rhetorically effective

Canvas e-Learning Environment

This course is supplemented by online content in the e-Learning environment known as "Canvas." To login to the e-Learning site for this course, go to <https://elearning.ufl.edu>, click the **e-Learning in Canvas** button, and on the next page enter your Gatorlink username and password. You can then access the course e-Learning environment by selecting PHI 5935 from

the **Courses** pull-down menu at the top of the page. If you encounter any difficulties logging in or accessing any of the course content, contact the UF Computing Help Desk at (352) 392-4537. Please do not contact the course instructor regarding computer issues.

Syllabus Policy Links

For information about the academic honesty policy, disability resources, GatorEvals, in-class recording, and a list of academic and health and wellness resources, please visit <https://syllabus.ufl.edu/syllabus-policy/uf-syllabus-policy-links/>.

Course Texts

- None. Readings will be provided as PDFs on Canvas.

Materials and Supplies Fee: N/A

Course Requirements

Attendance/Participation: **5%**

Presentations: **30%** total (3 presentations: 10% each)

Short Papers: **45%** total (7 short papers, lowest 2 dropped: 9% each)

Final Paper: **20%**

Participation

Respectful participation in class discussions is expected of everyone. Each class meeting has assigned readings, which will require critical engagement and reflection. You should come to class prepared to discuss these readings and demonstrate that you have thought critically about them beforehand.

Presentations

Each student will give three presentations in the course, two of which will be paired with another student, and one of which will be solo. For paired presentations, it is the job of both students to divide the work evenly between them. Paired presentations will occur in Weeks 4-9; solo presentations will occur in Weeks 10-13.

The readings for paired presentations are pre-selected (see the schedule below) and represent a variety of classic/contemporary philosophy papers, on a variety of topics, using a variety of methodologies. The readings for solo presentations are to be selected by the presenting student, in consultation with myself, at least a week before the presentation is to occur.

Each presentation itself can be in whatever form you like: it may involve a handout, a Powerpoint presentation, or simply some prepared notes and use of the chalkboard. The goal of the presentation is to provide an accurate summary of the reading, set the stage for group discussion, and help guide that discussion. Your grade will be determined based on how well your presentation accomplishes these things.

Short Papers

Every week that you are *not* assigned to do a presentation (except for the first week), you will be asked to submit a short paper on the assigned reading (or on *one of* the assigned readings on days when there are multiple). The paper should aim to do more than merely summarize the reading: it should present some sort of avenue for further work. For example, it might present an objection to part of the argument in the reading, suggest an alternative argument that would serve the author's purposes better, articulate a counterexample, draw out an interesting implication of the paper's argument, etc. These papers do not need to involve outside research (though you are of course welcome to do so). As a guideline, I would expect each of these papers to be between 500 and 1000 words.

Students will be expected to write seven short papers through the course of the semester, but *I will drop your two lowest short paper grades*. This means that if on some week you find yourself to be exceptionally busy, you can forgo writing a short paper that week and just opt to receive a 0 on it. But don't do this more than twice!

Final Paper

As a final assignment, you will be asked to develop a longer piece of roughly 3500-4000 words that makes a contribution to some philosophical debate. Ideally this piece will be related either to one of the short papers you wrote throughout the semester or to one of the presentations you gave. It ought to involve significant outside research (reading of other papers, background literature, SEP entries, etc.).

Grading

Course grades are assigned on a pass/fail basis. Numerically, the minimum passing grade is 80%.

Course Schedule and Readings

The following is a tentative schedule for the course. Any official changes to the schedule will be announced on Canvas. The syllabus is divided into weeks; the items listed for a given week are to be read before class that week.

Week 1: August 26

- The 'Justification' of Induction (P. F. Strawson)
 - No short paper assignment this week

Week 2: September 2 - No class

Week 3: September 9

- Selection from *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Kripke)

Week 4: September 16

- Moral Saints (Susan Wolf)
 - Paired Presentation: Students A and B

Week 5: September 23

- Two Dogmas of Empiricism (Quine)
 - Paired Presentation: Students C and D

Week 6: September 30

- What is it Like to be a Bat (Thomas Nagel) *and* Is There Anything it is Like to be a Bat? (Peter Hacker)
 - Paired Presentation: Students E and F

Week 7: October 7

- Real Patterns (Daniel Dennett)
 - Paired Presentation: Students A and C

Week 8: October 14

- Other Minds (J. L. Austin)
 - Paired Presentation: Students B and E

Week 9: October 21

- On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme (Donald Davison)
 - Paired Presentation: Students D and F

Week 10: October 28

- Readings TBD (selected by Students A and B)
 - Solo Presentation 1: Student A
 - Solo Presentation 2: Student B

Week 11: November 4

- Readings TBD (selected by Students C and D)
 - Solo Presentation 1: Student C
 - Solo Presentation 2: Student D

Week 12: November 11 - No Class (Veteran's Day)

Week 13: November 18

- Readings TBD (selected by Students E and F)
 - Solo Presentation 1: Student E
 - Solo Presentation 2: Student F

Week 14: December 2

- TBD

Final Paper Due Sunday, September 7 at 11:59pm