

# Theory of Knowledge

*NOTE: it is your responsibility to read this document carefully. This is an agreement between you and your instructor. If you email me about something that is obviously stated in the syllabus, you will either receive no answer or I will reply, simply, "Read the syllabus!" However, if you read the syllabus and you still do not have an answer, then email me with your question.*

## **I Course Information**

- Course number: PHI 3300
- Class 13858, section 3200
- Period 5 (11:45 PM - 12:35 PM)
- Location: Matherly Hall 116
- Instructor:
  - Rodrigo Borges
  - Office: Griffin–Floyd Hall, room 314.
  - Office Hours: Mondays and Fridays 3:00pm – 4:00pm (or by appointment).
  - Contact Information: rodrigo.borges@ufl.edu.

## 2 Course Goals

This course will enable students to think critically about some of the central issues in the theory of knowledge, such as the concepts of knowledge, justification, evidence, and reliability.

## 3 Readings

All required readings are available on Canvas.

### Recommended Reading

1. A terrific guide to general writing rules is Strunk and White's 'The Elements of Style.' The first edition is available online for free: <http://www.bartleby.com/141/>.
2. A more recent style manual is Steven Pinker's 'Sense of Style: The Thinking Person's Guide to Writing in the 21st Century.' The book can be found anywhere books are sold.
3. The philosopher Jim Pryor (UNC) has his suggestions on how to read philosophy freely available here; he has also published suggestions on how to write philosophy here.

## 4 Attendance and Classroom Policies

Students are expected to attend class and to have done all assigned reading in advance. Failure to do so will adversely affect students' ability to perform well in this course.

***Attendance is required and expected (see below for details).***

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at:

- <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>.

Our class sessions may be audio-visually recorded for students in the class to refer back and for enrolled students who are unable to attend live. However, the recording will not be shared unless you have a valid excuse. Students who participate with their camera engaged or utilize a profile image are agreeing to have their video or image recorded. If you are unwilling to consent to have your profile or video image recorded, be sure to keep your camera off and do not use a profile image. Likewise, students who unmute during class and participate orally are agreeing to have their voice recorded. If you are not willing to consent to have your voice recorded during class, you will need to keep your mute button activated and communicate exclusively using the 'chat' feature, which allows students to type questions and comments live. The chat will not be recorded or shared. As in all courses, unauthorized recording and unauthorized sharing of recorded materials by students or any other party is prohibited.

## 5 Course Requirements

Eight different instruments will be used in order to measure student progress through the course. The name of each instrument, and the relative weight each of them carries in determining your final grade is the following; a brief description of each instrument follows.

| Assignment       | % of Course Grade |
|------------------|-------------------|
| Attendance       | 10%               |
| Weekly Briefs    | 10%               |
| Brief Discussion | 10%               |
| Presentation     | 10%               |
| Midterm Paper    | 20%               |
| Paper Project    | 10%               |
| Final Paper      | 30%               |
| Extra Credit     | ?%                |

## 5.1 Attendance

Starting on Wednesday 1/21, attendance will use the iClicker system. For information on this system, please see

- <https://classrooms.at.ufl.edu/classroom-technology/iclicker-response-system/>

For this class, you will use the iClicker Student Mobile application (or its web version).

You must create an iClicker account and download the app as soon as possible, but certainly before we start taking attendance on Wednesday 8/30. I will allow two (2) unexcused absences without penalty. Every other absence must either be excused by your instructor in accordance with UF attendance policy or your grade will incur a penalty of 2- percentage points of the attendance grade. However, once a student accumulates seven (7) or more unexcused absences in total they will receive a zero in their attendance grade (i.e., 10% of their total grade).

## 5.2 Weekly Brief

Starting on 1/19 students submit weekly 300 - 400 word briefs that engage with one of the week's assigned reading. Students must submit at least 5 briefs the midterm paper, and 10 briefs before the end of the term. The goal is not to summarize, but to practice core philosophical skills. Each brief should isolate a single argument, reconstruct it logically, and offer a concise critical analysis (e.g., raise an objection, question an assumption, or explore an implication). This provides regular, low-stakes practice in foundational analytical writing. This assignment aligns with the Student Learning Outcomes 1, 2, and 3 above.

## 5.3 Brief Discussion

Twice during the semester, each student must schedule a 15 - minute meeting during office hours to discuss one of their weekly briefs. In this one-on-one session, the student will verbally present the argument they analyzed and their critique. This informal presentation helps students practice articulating philosophical ideas clearly and defending their analysis in a conversational setting, improving their verbal acuity and confidence. This assignment aligns with the Student Learning Outcomes 1, 2, and 3 above.

## 5.4 Presentation

The class will be divided into small groups of 3 - 4 students. Each presentation will defend a particular thesis. The readings in this course will help inform your presentation. You might include your own research as well. This assignment aligns with the Student Learning Outcomes 1, 2, and 3 above.

## 5.5 Midterm Paper

This 3000-word paper serves as a bridge from single-text analysis to original research. Students choose a specific debate from the first half of the course and synthesize the views of at least three authors. The paper should map out the core question, explain each philosopher's position, and highlight key points of disagreement, concluding by identifying the most significant unresolved issue. This assignment specifically hones the crucial skill of conducting a literature review. This assignment aligns with the Student Learning Outcomes 1, 2, and 3 above.

*Students must complete ALL PAPERS.*

## 5.6 Paper Project

This two-part assignment formalizes the plan for the final paper.

1. Written Proposal: A 1-2 page document submitted mid-semester that includes a specific research question, a provisional thesis statement, a structural outline of the argument, and an annotated bibliography of sources.
2. Proposal Defense: After submitting the proposal, each student must schedule a 15- minute office hours meeting to present and defend their project. They will articulate their core thesis and argumentative strategy and respond to critical questions and potential objections. This step is crucial for sharpening their research question and anticipating challenges before they begin writing the final paper.

This assignment aligns with the Student Learning Outcomes 1, 2, and 3 above.

## 5.7 Final Paper

The capstone assignment is a 4500/5000-word research paper that advances an original thesis on a course-related topic. Building on the feedback from the proposal and prospectus defense, this paper requires the student to move beyond summarizing existing views and construct their own sustained, well-defended philosophical argument. It directly simulates the scope and depth of an honors thesis chapter.

## Outside Reading

No outside readings are required for the completion of SWAs or WEs. *However*, if you do plan to use an outside reading, you **MUST** check with your instructor or TA whether the particular reading you have in mind is an appropriate source. There are **ONLY TWO EXCEPTIONS** to this rule:

1. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy;
2. The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

If you do not follow these instructions on the use of outside readings, you risk seriously harming your grade.

### Basic Writing Assistance

You may find it helpful to use the influential guide by Strunk and White, *The Elements of Style*, available free online at [www.bartleby.com/141/](http://www.bartleby.com/141/).

Another very useful resource is Purdue University's Online Writing Lab, also known as the 'OWL.' It is especially good for getting detailed information on how to cite sources properly. You can find it at [owl.english.purdue.edu/](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. You can find that site at [writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/](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 [tutortrac.clas.ufl.edu/](http://tutortrac.clas.ufl.edu/) to make arrangements to meet with a tutor. We must warn you, however, that while those tutors are surely good at helping you avoid certain kinds of problems, many writing tutors are not familiar with writing philosophy papers. What counts as a good paper for, say, an English class might not count as a good paper for philosophy. In philosophy, clear structure and explicit argumentation is at a premium. If you do meet with a tutor, you would be well advised to share with the tutor the sample argumentative essay so that he or she knows what sort of paper is needed in this class.

## 5.8 Extra Credit

Perfect Attendance (justified absences included) and perfect assignment punctuality (i.e., no late assignments) will earn you extra credit (up to half a letter grade).

## 6 Grade Scale

See UF grading policies for assigning grade points at:

- <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>.

|    | Grade Scale | Grade Value |
|----|-------------|-------------|
| A  | 100 - 93    | 4.00        |
| A- | 92 - 90     | 3.67        |
| B+ | 89 - 86     | 3.33        |
| B  | 85 - 82     | 3.00        |
| B- | 81 - 79     | 2.67        |
| C+ | 78 - 75     | 2.33        |
| C  | 75 - 72     | 2.00        |
| C- | 71 - 69     | 1.67        |
| D+ | 68 - 66     | 1.33        |
| D  | 65 - 62     | 1.00        |
| D- | 61 - 60     | 0.67        |
| E  | 59 - 0      | 0.00        |

## 7 Academic Honesty

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge, which states, ‘We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the 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

- <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>

specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class. Plagiarism on any assignment will automatically result in a grade of ‘E’ for the course. Plagiarism is defined in the University of Florida’s Student Honor Code as follows: ‘A student shall not represent as the student’s own work all or any portion of the work of another. Plagiarism includes (but is not limited to): a. Quoting oral or written materials, whether published or unpublished, without proper attribution. b. Submitting a document or assignment which in whole or in part is identical or substantially identical to a document or assignment not authored by the student.’ Students found guilty of academic misconduct will be prosecuted in accordance with the procedures specified in the UF honesty policy.

## 8 Students with disabilities

Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu>). The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation.

## 9 Online course evaluation

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course based on 10 criteria. These evaluations are conducted online at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester. Students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results>.

## 10 Office Hours

I strongly encourage you to set up a meeting to discuss anything related to the course. Rodrigo will hold office hours on Mondays and Fridays 3:00-4:00PM (or by appointment via [rodrigo.borges@ufl.edu](mailto:rodrigo.borges@ufl.edu)).

## 11 Technical Issues

Please, direct any questions about technical issues you might have to UF Helpdesk. The website is <https://helpdesk.ufl.edu>. You may also call them at 352 392 4357.

## 12 Campus Resources

- Health and Wellness:

1. U Matter, We Care: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact [umatter@ufl.edu](mailto:umatter@ufl.edu), 352-392-1575, or visit U Matter, We Care website ([www.umatter.ufl.edu](http://www.umatter.ufl.edu)) to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.
2. Counseling and Wellness Center: Visit the Counseling and Wellness Center website ([www.counseling.ufl.edu](http://www.counseling.ufl.edu)) or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.
3. 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 ([www.shcc.ufl.edu](http://www.shcc.ufl.edu)).
4. University Police Department: Visit UF Police Department website ([www.police.ufl.edu](http://www.police.ufl.edu)) or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).
5. 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 ([www.ufhealth.org/emergency-room-trauma-center](http://www.ufhealth.org/emergency-room-trauma-center)).

## 13 Academic Resources

1. E-learning technical support: Contact the UF Computing Help Desk at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at [helpdesk@ufl.edu](mailto:helpdesk@ufl.edu).
2. Career Connections Center: Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services.
3. Library Support: Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.
4. Teaching Center: Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352-392-6420. General study skills and tutoring.
5. Writing Studio: 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.
6. Student Complaints On-Campus: Visit the Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code webpage ([here](#)) for more information.
7. On-Line Students Complaints: View the Distance Learning Student Complaint Process ([www.distance.ufl.edu/get-help/student-complaint-process](http://www.distance.ufl.edu/get-help/student-complaint-process)).

## 14 Class Schedule (Subject to Change)

### I. Some Preliminaries

Mon 1/12: Introduction, How to read and write for this course (reading: slides)

Wed 1/14: Validity, Fallacies (reading: Perry et al.)

Fri 1/16: Validity, Fallacies (reading: Perry et al.)

Mon 1/19 - Holiday (MLK Day)

### 2. What is Knowledge?

Wed 1/21: Plato, Theaetetus (201)

Fri 1/23: Chisholm, Perceiving (p.16), A.J. Ayer, The Right to Be Sure (selection)

Mon 1/26: Gettier, What is justified True Belief?

Wed 1/28: Gettier, What is justified True Belief?

Fri 1/30: Zagzebski, The Inescapability of Gettier Problems (selections)

Mon 2/2: Criticisms of Gettier (notes)

Wed 2/4: Criticisms of Gettier, (Williamson selections)

Fri 2/6: Discussion

Mon 2/9: Knowledge as safety from error, (selections)

Wed 2/11: Problems for safety (selections)

Fri 2/13: Discussion

Mon 2/16: Knowledge as Intellectual Virtue (Aristotle, selections)

Wed 2/18: Knowledge as Intellectual Virtue (Sosa, selections)

Fri 2/20: Discussion

### 3. Paper Writing Week

Mon 2/23: Discussion - Paper Rubric/Expectations

Wed 2/25: Workshop

Fri 2/27: Workshop

**Sun 2/29: Midterm Paper is due**

### 4. Skepticism: Simulations, Demons, and Brains-In-Vats

Mon 3/2: Descartes, (Meditation 1)

Wed 3/4: Chalmers, The Simulation Argument (selection)

Fri 3/6: Chalmers, Evidence that we are in a simulation (selections)

Mon 3/9: Chalmers, Arguments against Simulation (selections)

Wed 3/11: Chalmers, Arguments against Simulation (selections)

Fri 3/13: Discussion

Mon 3/16 - Spring Break

Wed 3/18 - Spring Break

Fri 3/20 - Spring Break

### 5. Social and Applied Epistemology

Mon 3/23: Goldman, Knowledge in a Social World (selections)

Wed 3/25: Goldman, Knowledge in a Social World (selections)

Fri 3/27: Discussion

Mon 3/30: Sahebi, M., and H. E. Smart, AI-mediated communication (selections)

Wed 4/1: Freedom of Speech (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). Section on AI and Content Moderation.

Fri 4/3: Discussion



Mon 4/6: Goldman, Alvin I. Knowledge in a Social World. Chapters 9 ("Law")

Wed 4/8: Johnson, Casey Rebecca. Epistemic Care (selection)

Fri 4/10: Johnson, Casey Rebecca. Epistemic Care (selection)

Mon 4/13: TBD

Wed 4/15: TBD

**10. Presentation**

Fri 4/17: Presentation

Mon 4/20: Presentation

Wed 4/22: Presentation

**Sun 4/26: Final Paper is Due**