

PHIL 380: Advanced Topics in Philosophy/ Knowledge, Evidence, and Epistemic Problems of the Internet

Course Description:

What are good reasons like? Do I know anything at all? When do I need to do my own research, and when should I rely on others? In this course, we'll explore traditional issues in epistemology including knowledge, justification, and skepticism, and also social and applied epistemic issues raised by our communal involvement in the internet, including the epistemology of disagreement, testimony, conspiracy theories, and the impact of echo chambers and algorithms on our epistemic community. We will engage through writing, revision, and in-class discussion to dive deeply into these issues and consider the contemporary challenges we face to knowledge and rational belief.

Instructor: Dr. Kelley Annesley

Email: annesleyk@wittenberg.edu

Office Location: Hollenbeck 323

Office Hours: 2-4 Wednesdays, 4-5 Thursdays, and by appointment.

Textbook:

Matheson, Jonathan. *When It's Not Okay to Think For Yourself*, 2023.

- All other readings will be made available as PDFs and accessible via Moodle.

January 9: Introduction to Epistemic Questions

Reading due:

- Course syllabus and policies

January 11: The Contemporary Debate about Knowledge and Rationality

Reading due:

- Feldman Chapter 1. **Available via Moodle.**

January 16: Classical Skepticism

Reading due:

- Feldman Ch. 6 p. 108-119. **Available via Moodle.**
- Descartes, First and Second Meditations. **Available via Moodle.**

January 18: Responses to Skepticism

Reading due:

- Moore, "Proof of an External World." **Available via Moodle.**
- [Brain in a Vat Argument, The | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy \(utm.edu\)](https://www.iep.utm.edu/vat/) **Required: Only Section 4 & 5**

Homework due:

- Response paper A & B

January 23: Non-Classical Skepticism and Simulation Arguments

Reading due:

- Excerpt from Bostrom “Are You Living in a Computer Simulation” **Available via Moodle.**

January 25: The Concept of Knowledge

Reading due:

- Gettier, “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?” **Available via Moodle.**
- Contextualism reading, TBD. **Available via Moodle.**
- **Recommended:** [The Analysis of Knowledge \(Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy\)](#) **only section 3: short and helpful background**

Homework due:

- Response paper A

January 30: Peer Writing Workshop

Homework due:

- Come to class with an idea of what you’d like to write the first paper about and/or an outline of your paper idea.

February 1: Theories of Justification

Reading due: Feldman Chapter 5 **Available via Moodle.**

February 6: Internalism and Externalism about Justification

Reading due:

- Gibbons, “Access Externalism.” **Available via Moodle.**
- Feldman, “Justification is Internal.” **Available via Moodle.**

Homework due:

- Last day to choose discussion leadership day
- Paper 1 draft

February 8: Responsibility-Requiring Theories of Justification

Reading due:

- Excerpts from Code’s *Epistemic Responsibility* **Available via Moodle.**
- Excerpt from Goldberg “Evidence You Should Have Had” **Available via Moodle.**

Homework due:

- Response paper B

February 13: Missing Evidence and Justification

Reading due:

- Baehr, “Evidentialism, Vice, and Virtue” **Available via Moodle.**
- Ballantyne, “The Significance of Unpossessed Evidence” **Available via Moodle.**

February 15: Learning From Others, Thinking For Ourselves

Reading due:

- Matheson Intro, Ch. 1
- <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/testimony-episprob/>

Homework due:

- Response paper A

February 20: Testimony and Expertise

Reading due:

- Matheson Ch. 2, Ch. 3
- Additional reading TBD

Homework due:

- Paper 1

February 22: Vulnerability and Testimony

Reading due: Matheson Ch. 4, Ch. 7

Homework due:

- Response paper B

February 27: No class, FIRE Week

February 29: No class, FIRE Week

March 5: No class, Spring Break

March 7: No class, Spring Break

March 12: Intellectual Virtue and the Information Economy

Reading due: Matheson Ch. 9

March 14: Epistemic Injustice and the Credibility Economy

Reading due: Excerpt from Fricker "Epistemic Injustice" **Available via Moodle.**

Homework due:

- Response paper A

March 19: The Epistemology of Disagreement

Reading due: Christensen, "The Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News"

Available via Moodle.

March 21: The Epistemology of Disagreement p. 2

Reading due: TBD in accordance with student interest

Homework due:

- Response paper B

March 26: Alternative Views of Knowledge & Epistemology

Reading due:

- Burkhart, "What Coyote and Thales Can Teach Us: An Outline of American Indian Epistemology." **Available via Moodle.**

Homework due:

- Final paper draft

March 28: Alternative Views of Knowledge and Epistemology

Reading due:

- TBD in accordance with student interest

Homework due:

- Response paper A

April 2: Critical Epistemology

Reading due: Toole, "From Standpoint Epistemology to Epistemic Oppression."

Available via Moodle.

April 4: Applied Epistemology and the Internet: No Platforming

Reading due:

- <https://aeon.co/ideas/why-no-platforming-is-sometimes-a-justifiable-position>
- Levy: "No-Platforming and Higher-Order Evidence, or Anti-Anti-No-Platforming."

Available via Moodle.

Homework due:

- Response paper B

April 9: Applied Epistemology and the Internet: Conspiracy Theories

Reading due:

- M.R.X. Dentith, "Conspiracy Theories in Accordance with the Evidence."

Available via Moodle.

April 11: Applied Epistemology and the Internet: Echo Chambers

Reading due:

- Thi Nguyen, "Echo chambers and epistemic bubbles." **Available via Moodle.**
- Excerpts from Lackey 2021 **Available via Moodle.**

Homework due:

- Response paper A

April 16: Fringe Beliefs & Extreme Belief

Reading due:

- Miriam McCormick "Engaging with Fringe Beliefs: When, Why, and How."

April 18: The Epistemic Impact of Isolation / Writing Workshop

Reading due: TBD

Homework due:

- Response paper B

April 23: Final topic TBD in accordance with student interest

April 25: Last day of classes: writing workshop & content review

*****Final Paper due April 29 @ 11:59pm**

Course Policies

Course Learning Objectives:

Upon completing this course, students will be able to:

- 1) Think critically about the epistemic aspects of everyday life, and ask clear, critical epistemic and philosophical questions
- 2) Write strong, well-supported arguments in a concise, clear, philosophical style
- 3) Understand and appreciate the motivating questions and potential answers in important debates and disagreements in traditional, social, and applied epistemology
- 4) Apply concepts from various philosophers and philosophical subfields related to epistemology to new contexts

Attendance and participation:

Attendance and participation are key components of this seminar-style, discussion-based course. Significant absences and/or lack of participation will impede your ability to engage with the content of the course. Absences will of course be excused in case of illness or emergency. If you need to miss class on any particular day, please inform me as soon as possible.

Participation in this course is not measured merely by the amount of time spent speaking in class or the number of classes during which you speak; active listening, preparation for class, and participating in discussions are all required for full marks in the participation and attendance category. If you have any concerns about participating adequately in class, please feel free to contact me.

Response papers:

The purpose of response papers is to help you to gather your thoughts prior to class to help facilitate class discussion, and to get practice pulling out specific problems with the argument of a reading, or presenting specific questions you have about a reading in a philosophical style. You will be assigned either the A or B group, and you will have a response paper due every other week, either according to the A or B group (marked on the course schedule). You may turn the response paper in on either Tuesday (if you are responding to Tuesday's reading), or Thursday (if you are responding to Thursday's reading), at least 30 minutes before class time on that day. Late response papers will not be accepted except in extenuating circumstances discussed in advance.

Discussion leadership:

On their designated day, students will lead class discussion of one (or more!) of the articles assigned. On the day you lead discussion, be sure to be prepared to walk your classmates through the most important parts of at least one article, review the argument of the piece, and prepare questions to kick start our discussion of the topic. Please feel free to meet with me in advance of your discussion leader day to go over any questions you may have about the material, or how to successfully lead a discussion.

Respect:

I expect that we will discuss issues on which we disagree, and will have strong opinions about those disagreements. It is absolutely crucial that our disagreements are respectful. Respectful engagement with our peers includes actively listening, refraining from distracting behaviors in class, taking others seriously, and respecting each others' time.

Inclusivity:

Please know that this classroom respects and welcomes students of all backgrounds and abilities, and that I invite you to talk with me about any concern or situation that affects your ability to complete your academic work successfully.

Late work:

Late response papers and in-class writing will not be accepted, except in cases of emergency or otherwise unavoidable absences. If this applies, you must contact me in order to have the late penalty waived, and to make up the work missed in class.

For papers, each day the assignment is late results in a 1/3 grade penalty. (For example, if the paper earned an A, but is turned in after the deadline, but on the day of the deadline, it will earn an A-. If the paper is two days late, it will earn a B+... etc.) If a draft is turned in late, the grade penalty will accumulate and be applied to the final paper grade. (E.g. if the paper earns an A, and the draft was turned in a day late, the paper will earn an A-.)

If you suspect that you cannot turn in an assignment by the deadline, it is crucial that you reach out to me **ahead of time** to arrange an extension. Except in cases of true emergencies, it is unlikely that late penalties for work turned in after the deadline will be waived without a previously arranged extension.

Academic Honesty:

Any form of academic dishonesty is unacceptable in this course; it will not be tolerated. This includes (but is not limited to) plagiarizing by failure to include proper citations on a written work, cheating on exams/assignments, and acquiring and/or using pre-written essays as a tool (regardless of the source of the pre-written essay. So, this includes work that is generated in part or in whole by a large language model or other writing algorithm).

To ensure that you never run afoul of this policy, one helpful principle is to never cede your role as the author of any paper or homework you turn in in this course (we will discuss further in class). To ensure that you know what exactly will be counted as academic dishonesty, I encourage you to review the university's policy on academic integrity. All academic work submitted at Wittenberg will carry the honor statement: "I affirm that my work upholds the highest standards of honesty and academic integrity at Wittenberg, and that I have neither given nor received any unauthorized assistance."

Addendum: For the purposes of this course, due to the specific learning outcomes of the course, no generative AI may be used as a part of your writing process for work that is turned in and/or graded, unless otherwise noted for a specific assignment or in-class activity.

Electronic Devices:

Devices will be allowed for *proper use* in class. You have a good sense already about what counts as proper use in class. Your improper use of electronic devices will distract your classmates, and impair your ability to participate in class and understand course material. This is especially true in this small, seminar style class. Improper use of electronics during class, especially cell phones, *will result in a deduction of your participation/attendance grade*. I also reserve the right to instate a ban on all electronic devices in the case of widespread improper use. In the case of a blanket ban on devices, exceptions will be granted for those with confirmation of need, or individual permission granted after a conversation with me. I'm happy to talk through any questions about device use on an individual basis!

Grading scheme:

Participation and attendance: 20%
Discussion leadership: 10%
Response papers: 20%
Paper 1: 20%
Paper 2: 30%

Grading Scale:

Your final grade in this class will be assigned using letter grades A-F:

94 - 100 = A	73 - 76.9 = C
90 - 93.9 = A-	70 - 72.9 = C-
87 - 89.9 = B+	67 - 69.9 = D+
83 - 86.9 = B	63 - 66.9 = D
80 - 82.9 = B-	60 - 62.9 = D-
77 - 79.9 = C+	Below 60 = F

Expectations for Time Outside of Class:

In this course, students should expect to spend *at least twice as much time out of class doing work for each course as they spend in class*. This will include time reading assigned material, ensuring one is prepared to discuss the assigned material, preparing response papers, and drafting and revision for longer paper assignments.

Additional Direct Instruction: Students will also engage in an average of one hour a week of out-of-class direct instruction. This hour outside of class will consist of meeting with me during office hours, discussing writing feedback with your instructor and peers, and attending events held by the university related to philosophy, including this semester's philosophy conversation series. I will distribute a list of qualifying events, and expectations for attending those events in class.

Syllabus Revision Policy:

The instructor reserves the right to change ***any content on the syllabus and/or course policies, including grading scheme and course assignments at any time during***

the semester. Changes will be announced in class, and a new syllabus/course policy document will be distributed via email and via Moodle if and when they are made.

On Campus Resources:

Accessibility and ADA Accommodation:

Your learning in this course is important to me. I invite you to talk with me about ways to ensure your full participation in and access to this course. Please be aware that Wittenberg is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities. If you are eligible for course accommodations because of a disability, you must register with the Accessibility Services Office, located in the COMPASS: Sweet Success Center in Thomas Library. After you register, please forward me your accommodation letter from Academic Services and arrange a meeting to discuss your learning needs privately in a timely manner. Early identification at the start of the term is essential to ensure timely provision of services as accommodations are not retroactive. If you have questions or would like more information about services for students with disabilities, please contact the Accessibility Services office at accessibilityservices@wittenberg.edu.

Counseling Services:

Please check out the following website to see what is available to you in terms of on-campus counseling services:

<https://www.wittenberg.edu/administration/healthwellness/tiger-counseling-services>. The counseling center is a fantastic resource for many different issues related to university life.

Writing Center:

The writing center is an excellent place to get more support on your writing projects, like the papers we will be working on in this class. For more information, and to make an appointment for writing assistance, check out the following link:

<https://www.wittenberg.edu/administration/writingcenter>