



1 Course Objectives

This course is an introductory survey of epistemology: the theory of knowledge and rational belief. We'll discuss a wide range of topics, including: whether we can really *know* anything; the possibility that we might be brains in vats; whether we can rationally hold beliefs about the external world, given that we might be brains in vats; whether "knowledge" can be defined or analyzed; what we talk about when we talk about knowledge; what makes a belief rational or justified; whether we're in any position to know whether we're rational; whether beliefs come in degrees and how degrees of belief can be evaluated; and whether, for practical reasons, you should believe in God.

Readings: All readings will be available on the course website. There is no textbook. (You're welcome.)

2 Assignments

- Paper 1: 30%
- Paper 2: 35%
- Online posts: 20%
- In-class discussion: 15%

Papers: A week before papers are due, I'll circulate a list of paper topics. If you'd like to write on some other topic, you must explain your idea to me and receive permission from me in advance. Papers must

be 1300–2000 words (approx. 5–7 pages). I will provide a checklist explaining the requirements for each paper. For advice about writing philosophy papers, please see Jim Pryor’s [Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper](#). Extensions will be granted leniently, but must be requested at least 12 hours in advance. Without an extension, late papers will be deducted one third of a letter grade per day (A will become A–, B+ will become B, etc.). All papers must include a bibliography. Collaboration on papers is not permitted.

Online posts: The course website contains a discussion board. There will be separate threads for each day’s readings.

- An hour before every class (i.e. by 2:30 pm), students must post comments or questions about the day’s readings (at least four sentences long).
 - These comments and questions **must engage with the content** of the reading. If you ask a question, explain why you’re confused about that question and what some possible answers might be. If you make a comment, it shouldn’t be merely evaluative. (Not merely: “I liked this reading. It was really interesting. I’d been wondering about epistemic closure.”)
 - If your questions and comments make it obvious that you haven’t done the reading—for example, by asking some question about the beginning of the reading that was addressed at great length later in the reading—they may not receive credit.
- In addition, at least once a week, students must post at least one response to some other student’s post from the same week. (Again, at least four sentences). You’re welcome to respond to as many posts as you like at any time! These are due by Friday at 5:00 pm.

Late posts will not be accepted. Posts are expected to be friendly and constructive.

In-class discussion: You’ll be expected to participate in discussion in every session. This includes small group discussions, full-class discussions, and frequent low-stakes cold-calling. Because this class is discussion-based, any more than **two** absences from lecture or section will result in a reduction of your in-class grade, except in special circumstances.

3 Policies

Laptop/tablet/phone policy: Use of laptops, tablets, and phones won’t be permitted during lecture or discussion sections, except in special cases. Contact me for permission if you have specific reasons why you will need to use any of these devices.¹

Email policy: You do not need to email me to explain your absence from class unless you’ve missed more than two sessions. If you’d like to ask detailed philosophical questions, please come to my office hours.

Syllabus policy: To ensure that students are aware of all course requirements and policies, there will be a required syllabus review quiz on the course website. You must pass this test with a perfect score by Monday, Oct 3. You may consult the syllabus while taking the test and you may retake the test as many times as necessary to get a perfect score.

¹ Justification: Undergraduates who use laptops in lecture spend 40% of their time using non-course-related software. Academic performance is inversely correlated with multitasking on laptops. Even controlling for multitasking, students who take notes on laptops show reduced comprehension, in short and medium-term examination, compared with students who take notes by hand. Most importantly: being seated near someone using a screen to multitask impedes academic performance. See Mueller & Oppenheimer (2014), “The Pen Is Mightier Than the Keyboard: Advantages of Longhand Over Laptop Note Taking,” *Psychological Science*; Kraushaar & Novak (2010), “Examining the Affects of Student Multitasking with Laptops during the Lecture,” *Journal of Information Systems Education*; Sanaa, Weston, Cepedab (2013), “Laptop multitasking hinders classroom learning for both users and nearby peers,” *Computers & Education*.

4 Academic Integrity

Please familiarize yourself with **university policies** on plagiarism, cheating, and academic integrity. Note: “plagiarism,” in academic contexts, is defined very broadly. It includes any presentation of others’ ideas without proper attribution, even paraphrased, even from informal resources (websites, conversation with your roommate, ...). Proper attribution requires both in-text citation and bibliographic citation.

Note also that plagiarism need not be knowing or intentional to be penalizable. *Always err on the side of citing any sources that have influenced your thinking.*

Any form of cheating or plagiarism will be reported immediately. Penalties for academic integrity infractions may include failing the assignment, failing the course, suspension, and expulsion.

5 Tentative schedule

This schedule is subject to change.

Week	Topic	Assignment
Week 0		
Sep 22	Introduction	
Week 1	<i>Can We Know Anything?</i>	
Sep 27	Stroud, “The Problem of the External World”	
Sep 29	Moore, “Proof of an External World,” “Four Forms of Scepticism,” & “Certainty”	
Week 2	<i>The Structure of Justification</i>	
Oct 4	Chisholm, “The Myth of the Given”	
Oct 6	Bonjour, “Can Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation?”	
Week 3	<i>Is Knowledge Justified True Belief?</i>	
Oct 11	Gettier, “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?” & Feldman, “Modifying the Traditional Analysis of Knowledge”	
Oct 13	Goldman, “A Causal Theory of Knowing”	
Week 4	<i>Is Knowledge Analyzable</i>	
Oct 18	Zagzebski, “The Inescapability of Gettier Problems”	
Oct 20	Williamson, “A State of Mind”	
Week 5	<i>Reliabilism</i>	paper 1 due Sat.
Oct 25	Goldman, “What is Justified Belief?”	Oct. 29 at 5pm
Oct 27	Conee & Feldman, “Evidentialism”	
Week 6	<i>Reliabilism; Epistemic Closure</i>	
Nov 1	Conee & Feldman, “Internalism Defended”	

Nov 3	Dretske, "Epistemic Operators"	
Week 7	<i>Modal Theories of Knowledge</i>	
Nov 8	Nozick, "Knowledge and Skepticism"	
Nov 10	Vogel, "Reliabilism Leveled"	
Week 8	<i>What We Talk about When We Talk about Knowledge</i>	
Nov 15	DeRose, "Solving the Skeptical Problem"	
Nov 17	CLASS CANCELED	
Week 9	<i>Degrees of Belief</i>	
Nov 22	Christensen, "Two Models of Belief"	
Nov 24	Easwaran, "Bayesianism I" and "Bayesianism II"	
Week 10	<i>Probabilities, Knowledge, and Wagers</i>	paper 2 due Sat.
Nov 29	Hawthorne, excerpts from <i>Knowledge and Lotteries</i>	Dec. 3 at 5pm
Dec 1	Pascal, <i>Pensées</i> , Section 233, & Hajek, "Pascal's Wager"	