

Professor: Jennifer Carr

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Office Hours: MW 12-1

H&SS 8037

1 Overview

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; how to reason clearly and rigorously in the face of uncertainty; and whether it's rational to believe in God.

Structure: There will be new assigned readings for each Monday and Wednesday class. Friday classes will not include new readings; these sessions will focus heavily on discussion. You should refresh your memory of the Monday and Wednesday readings before each Friday session.

Readings: All readings will be available on the course website. The course has no required textbook.

Advice: This class will not be an easy A or even an easy B. In order to do well in this class, you will need to attend class consistently, complete all readings before class, and most importantly, *ask questions when you're confused about something*. Even if you think the answer might be obvious to other students. Even if you think it was already answered in class, but you accidentally tuned out the answer. In order to receive a passing grade on your papers, you will need to show a strong understanding of the topics under discussion in this course and to develop your own original philosophical arguments. I strongly suggest you start work on your papers early, and outline your ideas before you begin drafting your papers.

2 Assignments

- Paper 1: 32%
- Paper 2: 36%
- Thrice-weekly online reading responses: 20%
- In-class discussion: 12%

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 a minimum of 1500 words (approximately six 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. You are not permitted to show others your paper, see other students' papers, or collaborate on your papers in any way.

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

- By each Monday and Wednesday **before class**, students must post a reading response with comments or questions about the day's readings (at least five sentences). Your posts may start new threads or may be responses to other students' comments and questions. By Friday before class, students must post a response to another student's post on one of that week's topics. (No posts are required for holidays.)
- Reading responses **must engage carefully 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 reading responses 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—you will not receive credit.
- *Be prepared to discuss your reading responses in class.*

Late reading responses will not be accepted. These reading responses will be used to structure Friday discussions. Your reading responses may at any point be read aloud and discussed.

In-class discussion: You'll be expected to participate at least a few times weekly, particularly on Fridays. 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. If you think your circumstances warrant more than two absences, please contact me before each further class that you miss and be prepared to provide documentation.

3 Policies

Laptop/tablet/phone policy: Use of laptops, tablets, and phones won't be permitted in class, 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: 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 of week 2. 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.

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.

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*.

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.

Some behaviors that count as cheating: helping other students, or receiving help from anyone, on your online reading responses; collaborating on your papers with anyone; giving another student access to your paper; looking at another student's paper; having someone translate your paper for the class; mentioning ideas from any source other than yourself, formal or informal, without both main text and bibliographic citation. This list is not exhaustive. Use good judgment and ask questions.

5 Accommodations

Students requesting accommodations for this course due to a disability must provide a current Authorization for Accommodation (AFA) letter issued by the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) which is located in University Center 202 behind Center Hall. Students are required to present their AFA letters to Faculty (please make arrangements to contact me privately) and to the OSD Liaison in the department in advance so that accommodations may be arranged.

(858) 534-4382 (phone) | osd@ucsd.edu (email) | <http://disabilities.ucsd.edu> (website)

6 Tentative schedule

This schedule is subject to change. Week 1 is Oct. 1-5; you can figure out the rest. Monday readings are listed first after each week number and topic; Wednesday readings are listed second (unless otherwise specified).

Week 1 *Skepticism*

Descartes, Meditations 1 and 2; Williamson, "Knowledge Maximization"

Stroud, "The Problem of the External World"; Moore, "Proof of an External World" and "Four Forms of Scepticism"

Week 2 *Responses to Skepticism*

Unger, "An Argument for Skepticism"; DeRose "Solving the Skeptical Problem" §1-2 (p. 1-13)

Rinard, "Reasoning One's Way out of Skepticism"

Week 3 *The Structure of Justification: Foundationalism and Coherentism*

Chisholm, "The Myth of the Given"

Bonjour, "Can Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation?"

Week 4 *The Analysis of Knowledge*

Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" and Feldman, "Modifying the Traditional Analysis of Knowledge"

Zagzebski, "The Inescapability of Gettier Problems"

Week 5 *Epistemic Externalism*

Goldman, "A Causal Theory of Knowing"

Goldman, "What is Justified Belief?"

[Paper 1 due Sunday, Nov 4, at 5pm](#)

Week 6 *Against Externalism*

Conee and Feldman, "The Generality Problem for Reliabilism" (skip §4)

Conee and Feldman, "Evidentialism"

Week 7 *Truth-Tracking*

[Veterans Day: no class Monday]

Nozick, "Knowledge and Skepticism" (Wed)

Vogel, "Reliabilism Leveled" (Fri)

Week 8 *Contextualism about Knowledge*

DeRose, "Solving the Skeptical Problem": re-skim §1–3; read remainder

Lewis, "Elusive Knowledge"

[Thanksgiving: no class Friday]

Week 9 *Partial Beliefs and Choices*

Christensen, *Putting Logic in its Place*, 1.1, 2.1–2.3

Sinnott-Armstrong and Fogelin, *Understanding Arguments* ch. 12, "Choices"

Week 10 *Pragmatic Reasons for Belief*

Pascal *Pensées*, Section 233, & Hájek, "Pascal's Wager," §1–4

Hájek, "Pascal's Wager," §5
