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## 1 Overview

Language is a phenomenon in the natural world that can be approached scientifically, by studying language usage patterns, human language apprehension and cognition, visual and auditory perception of language, and formal mathematical models of the structure and interpretation of linguistic expressions. This course will examine the *theoretical foundations* of the linguistic sciences. The most foundational question within philosophy of language is: *how can an object in the world have “meaning”?* From there, we build outward: how do words have meanings? How do sentences have meanings, and how are their meanings related to words’ meanings? How does communication work? We will work through classic papers in philosophy of language on central topics of meaning, truth, reference, names, descriptions, natural kind terms, conversational implicatures, presuppositions, and social and political philosophy of language.

This course has no textbook; all readings are freely available on the course website.

**Advice:** This class will not be an easy A or even an easy B. The material we’ll be studying is conceptually demanding. Learning to use certain formal tools will be necessary for gaining a clear understanding of the philosophical questions this class focuses on. In order to do well in this class, you will need to:

- do all of the readings before we discuss them in class, and preferably again afterward;
- attend class consistently, missing no more than two sessions;
- work hard to understand and become opinionated about the theories under discussion; and
- ask questions and make comments often (even if you think the answer might be obvious to other students; even if you think your question was already answered, but you accidentally tuned out the answer).

## 2 Assignments

- Perusall assignments, approx. twice weekly: 16%
- In-class discussion: 12%
- Three short papers: 24% × 3

### 2.1 In-class discussion

You are expected to participate in discussions in every session of the course. This may include small group discussions, full-class discussions, and low-stakes cold-calling. Participation in in-class discussion includes asking questions, raising objections, suggesting examples, and so on. **Attendance ≠ participation:** if you are present in class but make no significant contributions to discussion, you will not receive participation credit.

In-class polls/ungraded mini-quizzes will be conducted primarily on **Class Question** (a free alternative to iClicker). Sign up for an account and register for this class with class code **GXPHS**. There is a sign-up link on Canvas. These polls track attendance, gauge understanding, and keep attention on-task. Use of Class Question  $\neq$  participation.

Because this class is discussion-based, any more than **two** absences from class will result in a reduction of your in-class grade, except in special circumstances. If you encounter *unexpected* circumstances that require your absence more than twice, please use the Missed Participation Google Form to provide an explanation.

## 2.2 Perusall comments

All of the course readings are available on **Perusall**, a collaborative reading and commenting platform. Commenting on these readings, and responding to each other's comments, is one of the course requirements.

Perusall comments are required on the dates in the schedule below. Comments must be completed **by 3:00pm** on the day of the assigned reading. For unexcused late Perusall assignments, the credit for your annotations linearly decreases from 100% at the deadline to 0% at three days after the deadline (so, for example, if you submit annotations precisely one day late, they'll be worth  $\frac{2}{3}$  credit. If you provide a legitimate reason for your late assignment via the online form **within 24 hours** of the original due date, lateness won't affect your score. You can view your scores for Perusall assignments on the Perusall website.

For more information about using Perusall, and how your annotations are graded, see the Perusall Information page on the course website.

## 2.3 Papers

Paper topics will be circulated in advance. Papers must be 1200–1700 words.<sup>1</sup> I will provide a checklist explaining the requirements for each paper. Extensions will be granted leniently, but must be requested at least 12 hours in advance (except in extraordinary circumstances). 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 be written entirely by you, based on your understanding of the readings and your original ideas. You are not permitted to show others your paper, see other students' papers, or collaborate on your papers in any way.

## 2.4 Legitimate and illegitimate reasons for late assignments

- *Legitimate reasons*: illness or other medical emergency; power outage; death of a family member; ...
- *Illegitimate reasons*: not knowing how to use Perusall; not having registered on time; adding the course late; conflicts with other courses; ...

## 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.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Approximately five to seven pages in typical formatting: double-spaced 12pt serif font.

<sup>2</sup> 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*.

**Email policy:** I'm happy to answer brief logistical questions via email, generally within 48 hours. However, if you have questions that would take more than a few sentences to answer, please bring them to class or to office hours—it's much more efficient, and you'll understand better if you can ask follow-up questions!

**GenAI/ChatGPT policy:** *any use whatsoever* of ChatGPT or other generative AI on assignments for this class—reading comments, papers, etc.—will be counted as cheating/plagiarism and sanctioned accordingly. Don't even use ChatGPT even to check your phrasing/grammar: it'll just end up sounding plagiarized. (Note: I have degrees in literary studies from Harvard and Stanford. I've also done editorial work for literary magazines, literary publishing companies, and academic journals. I have an *exceptional* ear for writing voice and idiolect, even among academics. I can spot ChatGPT and other GenAI a mile away.)

## 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, your roommate, ...). Note also that cheating and plagiarism need not be knowing or intentional to be penalizable. You're responsible for learning what's permitted; ignorance is no excuse. 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.

### I Foundations of language

#### Week 1 *Meaning and Verification*

Mon. April 1 Introduction

Wed. April 3 Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic*, Ch. 1, 6

Fri. April 5 Hempel, “Empiricist Criteria of Cognitive Significance: Problems and Changes”

#### Week 2 *Against Verificationism*

Mon. April 8 Hempel, cont.

Wed. April 10 Quine, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism”

Fri. April 12 Cont.

#### Week 3 *Formal and Psychological Theories of Meaning*

Mon. April 15 Tarski, “The Semantic Conception of Truth and the Foundations of Semantics”

Wed. April 17 Grice, “Meaning”

Fri. April 19 Cont.

#### Week 4 *Synthesis*

Mon. April 22 Stalnaker, “Propositions”

Wed. April 24 O'Connor, *Games in the Philosophy of Biology* (excerpts)  
Lewis, “Languages and Language” (one Perusall assignment; annotate both readings)

Fri. April 26 Cont.

**First paper due Saturday, April 27 at 6pm**

## II Semantics

### Week 5 *Sense and Reference*

Mon. April 29 Frege, "On Sense and Reference"

Wed. May 1 Russell, "On Denoting"

Fri. May 3 Cont.

### Week 6 *Semantic Externalism*

Mon. May 6 Kripke, "Naming and Necessity"

Wed. May 8 Putnam, "Meaning and Reference"

Fri. May 10 Cont.

## III Pragmatics

### Week 7 *Semantics and pragmatics: modality and context-sensitivity*

Mon. May 13 von Fintel, "Modality and Language"

Wed. May 15 DeRose, "Solving the Skeptical Problem"

Fri. May 17 Cont. NB: class will be conducted **via Zoom**.

**Second paper due Saturday May 18 at 6pm**

### Week 8 *Performatives and Implicatures*

Mon. May 20 Lycan, "Speech Acts and Illocutionary Force"  
Austin, "Performative Utterances"

Wed. May 22 Grice, "Logic and Conversation"

Fri. May 24 Cont.

### Week 9 *Presupposition and Conversation*

Mon. May 27 **Memorial Day: no class**

Wed. May 29 Lewis, "Scorekeeping in a Language Game"

## IV Social and Political Philosophy of Language

Fri. May 31 Keiser, "The 'All Lives Matter' Response: QUD-Shifting as Epistemic Injustice"

### Week 10 *Semantics and Pragmatics of Race and Gender*

Mon. June 3 Dembroff & Wodak, "How Much Gender is Too Much Gender?"

Wed. June 5 Khoo, "Code Words"

Fri. June 7 Wrap-up

**Final paper due Mon. June 10 at 6pm (no final exam)**