

## SAMPLE SYLLABUS: INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

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**COURSE:** PHIL XXXX  
**CREDIT HOURS:** 3  
**PREREQUISITIES:** NONE  
**SEMESTER:** SPRING 2016  
**MEETING TIME:** XXXX  
**CLASSROOM:** XXXX

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** An introduction to philosophy through historical and contemporary texts. This course will introduce to general topics in philosophy such as perception, knowledge, and skepticism; the relationship between mind and matter; free will, foreknowledge, and determinism; attempted proofs of God's existence; and the nature of morality. Related film selections and clips will be used to motivate topics and facilitate discussion. *This course satisfies the Humanities Liberal Education requirement.*

**TEXTS:** There are three required texts for this course:

1. John Perry's *A Dialogue on Good, Evil, and the Existence of God* (Hackett, 1999). ISBN: 087220460X.
2. Alfred Mele's *A Dialogue on Free Will and Science* (Oxford University Press, 2013). ISBN: 019932929X.
3. University Course Packet from the University Bookstore.

Students interested in looking at additional reading are advised to start by look at either the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy ([www.iep.utmn.edu](http://www.iep.utmn.edu)) or the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy ([www.plato.stanford.edu](http://www.plato.stanford.edu)) – the former is the less technical. *DO NOT* consult sources such as Wikipedia, blogs, online forums (e.g. reddit), or the dictionary for philosophical insight. These sources have not been vetted; their quality varies *widely* and they are *overall* unreliable.

**INSTRUCTOR E-MAIL:** On normal weekdays I will dedicate 2:00pm – 3:00pm to responding to student e-mail. On weekends and holidays I won't have a dedicated time for responding to e-mail but I will strive to respond within 24 hours. Plan accordingly.

### CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT AND STUDENT EXPECTATIONS:

- *E-mail and class website:* Check your e-mail and the class website at least once a day. Also, there will be discussion forums on the class website. These are meant to provide a venue for students to continue discussion beyond class, or to help you study with your fellow students. Be respectful of one another on these forums. You are *NOT* required to post anything to these online forums.
- *Come prepared:* Come to class prepared to discuss the topic for the day. This involves bringing your textbooks, bringing materials for taking notes, and doing the assigned readings *before* class. Philosophy is a dialogical activity; you should always be ready to engage in discussion about the topics with your teachers, classmates, and the authors of the readings.
- *Careful reading:* Philosophical writing can be dense and difficult to understand. Read *carefully*. Do not just skim the reading. Actively engage with the text while you read it. Underline or highlight important passages, write summaries and questions in the margins, copy down crucial definitions and distinctions, think of examples illustrating the ideas you're reading about, and attempt to reconstruct any arguments you find. You might also have to do read the selections multiple times.

- *Technology in class:* Using technology in ways *unrelated to the course* is prohibited. In fact, unless you have a special need of this technology, I *recommend* that you do not use a laptop even for taking notes. Research suggests that taking notes with paper and pencil helps students to better process, retain, and understand the information they receive in their classes.
- *Etiquette:* We will be discussing some controversial topics to which many of you might have a strong emotional connection over which reasonable people will disagree. Take care to articulate your views and arguments in ways that are respectful to your fellow students. Be especially careful when posting on the online discussion forum.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES:** By studying these topics students will gain a wide range of knowledge and skills whose value extends well beyond the classroom. Given that you put in the required time and effort, by the end of this course you will be able to:

1. Describe the process for evaluating arguments by both deductive and non-deductive standards.
2. Evaluate simple ordinary language arguments for validity, soundness, strength, and cogency.
3. Interpret, paraphrase, and explain difficult passages of philosophical prose and argumentation.
4. Reconstruct arguments found in the text into premise/conclusion format.
5. Construct cases for use with the counterexample method, and utilize different strategies for responding to supposed counterexamples.
6. Articulate the fundamentals of various philosophical theories and topics such as Divine Command Theory, The Problem of Evil, Consequentialism, Deontology, Libertarian Free Will, Compatibilist Free Will, Hard Determinism, Skepticism, Empiricism, Rationalism, Mind-Body Dualism, Mind-Brain Identity Theory, and Artificial Intelligence.
7. Appreciate and appraise the strength and weaknesses of competing philosophical theories.
8. Apply philosophical discussions in an informed way to contemporary scientific, social, and political issues in our society.
9. Construct your own arguments challenging or defending philosophical positions.
10. Appreciate weaknesses and anticipate objections to your own arguments.

**GRADING SCALE:**

A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	F
100-93	92-90	89-87	86-83	82-80	79-77	76-73	72-70	69-67	66-63	62-60	59-0

**GRADING BREAKDOWN:**

ASSIGNMENT	PERCENT OF FINAL GRADE	TOTAL
Take-Home Test: Introductory Concepts	10%	10%
Exam 1:	13%	23%
Exam 2:	13%	36%
Exam 3:	13%	49%
Paper 1:	11%	60%
Paper 2:	11%	71%
Paper 3:	16%	87%
In-Class Activities	13%	100%

*TAKE-HOME TEST:* The take home test will cover introductory material. It will focus on the material concerning standards for arguments and reasoning presented in class. However, it will also include some questions about what the different general areas of philosophy are.

*EXAMS 1-3:* Exams will consist of true-false, multiple-choice, short answer, and *one* essay question on the material covered in class and in the readings. *Exams are NOT cumulative.*

*PAPERS 1 AND 2:* The first two papers will be short 2-page (double-spaced) writing assignments that focus on developing one particular skill necessary for writing an argumentative paper. These are meant to help ease you into philosophical writing and prepare you for the third and final paper.

*PAPER 3:* The third and final paper will be a longer 4-5 page (double-spaced) argumentative paper that will ask you to introduce a controversial philosophical issue, present an argument for your own view on that issue, and predict and respond to a potential objection to your argument.

*IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES:* The in-class activities will consist of various forms of both individual and group work. These might consist of pop-quizzes, worksheets, free writing sessions, directed writing sessions, group work, writing test questions, peer-review projects, etc. These assignments are my way of grading attendance and participation, and are my way to make sure you are keeping up with the readings.

- Each in class assignment will be graded on a 0-2 point scale
  - 0 = Assignment wasn't attempted
  - 1 = Assignment shows only minimal effort or a failure to do the readings.
  - 2 = Assignment shows good effort and good-faith attempt to do the readings.
- The lowest three in-class assignments will be dropped at the end of the semester.

**LATE WORK AND MAKE-UP POLICY:** *Unexcused* late papers will receive a 3% grade reduction for each day that they are late. *Unexcused* missed tests/exams will receive a 3% grade reduction for each day that passes prior to taking a make-up exam. Since in-class activities are my way of tracking attendance and participation, these can *only* be made up when you have an excused absence. If you have an *excused* absence during an exam or in-class assignment, you should contact me within a week to initiate arrangements to make up the work.

**ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION POLICY:** Attendance and participation in class will be factored into your grade via the in-class activities as explained above. See the student handbook for more information on the University's attendance policy. NOTE: leaving early for a scheduled university holiday or break is *NOT* an excused absence. Schedule your rides and flights accordingly.

**ACADEMIC HONESTY:** I will use turnitin.com. Plagiarism and cheating will not be tolerated. Plagiarism and cheating will result in a zero for the assignment and will be reported to the university. I expect that you understand what constitutes plagiarism, but if you are unsure then please see the university's student academic integrity webpage (see link below). *Trust me... Plagiarism is not in your best interest; I will catch you!*

**NOTES ABOUT THE SCHEDULE:** A *tentative* schedule for the course can be found on the next page. Readings with a "\*" can be found in the course packet.

**SCHEDULE**

<b>WEEK 1:</b> Introduction	*Handouts on Argument, Definitions, and Counterexamples *Anselm: The Ontological Argument	
<b>WEEK 2:</b> Does God Exist?	*Paley: Natural Theology	
<b>WEEK 3:</b> God, Evil, and Morality	*Dostoevsky: Selections from <i>The Brothers Karamov</i> John Perry: A Dialogue on Good, Evil, and the Existence of God	<i>Monday: Take-home test due</i>
<b>WEEK 4:</b> God, Evil, and Morality	... <i>Perry Continued...</i>	<i>Wed: Peer-reviews of paper 1 draft.</i>
<b>WEEK 5:</b> God, Evil, and Morality	*Elizabeth Anderson: If God is Dead, Is Everything Permitted?	<i>Wed: Paper 1 due.</i>
<b>WEEK 6:</b> Doing the most good	*John Stuart Mill: Chapter 2 of <i>Utilitarianism</i>	<i>Monday: In-Class Exam 1</i>
<b>WEEK 7:</b> The Trolley Problem	*Judith Jarvis Thomson: Turning the Trolley	
<b>WEEK 8:</b> What is Free Will?	Alfred Mele: A Dialogue on Free Will and Science	<i>Wed: Peer-reviews of paper 2 draft.</i>
<b>WEEK 9:</b> Science & Free Will	Alfred Mele: A Dialogue on Free Will and Science	<i>Wed: Paper 2 due.</i>
<b>WEEK 10:</b> Science & Free Will	Alfred Mele: A Dialogue on Free Will and Science	
<b>WEEK 11:</b> What do you know?	*Rene Descartes: 1 <sup>st</sup> Meditation	<i>Monday: In-Class Exam 2</i>
<b>WEEK 12:</b> Knowing your mind	*Rene Descartes: 2 <sup>nd</sup> Meditation *See examples of change blindness & inattention blindness	
<b>WEEK 13:</b> What is the mind?	*Brie Gertler: In Defense of Mind-Body Dualism *Patricia Churchland: Substance Dualism	<i>Friday: Peer-reviews of paper 3 draft</i>
<b>THANKSGIVING BREAK</b>		
<b>WEEK 14:</b> What is the mind?	... <i>Churchland Continued...</i> *Jackson: What Mary Didn't Know	<i>Friday: Paper 3 Due</i>
<b>WEEK 15:</b> Conclusion	*Turing: Computing Machinery and Intelligence	
<b>FINAL EXAM</b>		