

Phil. 100 Introduction to Philosophy RAP

Syllabus, Fall 2020

Prerequisites: None | Credits: 4 | Gen Ed: AL

Instructor

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Time: T/Th 11:30-12:45
Location: Zoom (Synchronous)
Course Website: <https://moodle.umass.edu/>
Office Hours: Thursdays 2-3pm and
by Appointment (via Zoom)

Course Description

Philosophy is, broadly speaking, the study of ideas that are central to the ways we think and live. Often times, however, the value of our concepts, and the relations they have to each other, is hidden from us. We take the way the world is or seems to be for granted and often don't stop to ask why it is that way and whether it should be the way it is. Philosophy aims to uncover these truths by cultivating reasoning skills that are broadly applicable to all disciplines and which will help you become clearer about what you think and what matters most to you. This course is more about thinking than it is about memorizing facts – the questions raised are our primary focus. Questions may include, amongst others: (a) how can we live a meaningful life? (b) can we be sure of the existence of an external world? (c) should everyone have the right to vote? (d) what makes you the same person now as when you were born? (e) how do implicit biases affect our understanding of the world? (f) can we ever act freely or are our actions pre-determined? (g) how should we understand the moral risks of new technologies? (h) are animals deserving of moral consideration? (i) what arguments are there for the existence of god? (j) how should we distribute scarce medical resources? We'll get at these questions through philosophical writing, science fiction, and film, allowing for both rigorous argumentation and visual storytelling to provide the fuel for a discussion-based community learning environment where together we will discover the philosophical foundations for human knowledge, values, society, and ultimately existence. This course isn't intended to be comprehensive or exhaustive, but to provide an introductory survey to key philosophical questions about the nature of human thought, values, and reality. The course is divided into four general topics: epistemology, ethics, metaphysics, and social and political philosophy.

Learning Goals and Outcomes

This course is an introduction to philosophy and will cover a wide array of topics from a philosophical perspective. As a result, students will become familiar with many of the core topics of the discipline. Additionally, by the end of the course students will be able to:

- Identify, properly interpret, and evaluate the philosophical views and arguments of a variety of philosophers and writers on the topics of the course.
- Engage in reflective and respectful discussion with your peers, especially in situations in which you may disagree.
- Reflect meaningfully on the relevance of what you've read and discussed for living a fruitful and happy life.

- Develop your own answers to the questions we discuss, as well as develop an increased ability to communicate them and argue for them by written means.

Completion of this course will fulfill the literature (AL) Gen Ed requirement. As a 4-credit course, the expected amount of work outside of classroom time by university standards is 8-12 hours per week (which includes reading, taking notes, preparing for class, and working on papers and your presentation).

RAP Component

This course is a Residential Academic Program (RAP) course. It is equivalent in content, credit, and workload to the non-RAP affiliated course section taught on the main campus. The advantage of a RAP course is that it is intended to facilitate a smooth transition to college life. This means that we will talk about some of the different campus resources that are available to you (e.g. Writing Center, Learning Resource Center, Five College Libraries and databases). We will also cultivate the skills that will help you in all of our college courses step by step, and we will make connections between this course, other courses, and life experiences. We will check in on these different components regularly throughout the semester because self-reflection is a key step to know how we learn and how we can improve our learning skills, too. As a part of your participation in this RAP course, you are required to attend a virtual RAP Wellbeing Session once during the semester dates and details will be provided. You will also be required to complete the RAP Mid-Semester Feedback Survey in class using your laptop, during week six of the semester.

Readings

There are no required textbooks for this course. All required readings will be posted to the course Moodle page as PDFs and if you have access to a printer you can print them out. Other required course materials, such as videos or podcasts or YouTube clips, will likewise be available on the course Moodle page.

Grading

Letter grades (corresponding to a 4-point scale: A=4, A-=3.7, B+=3.3, etc.) will be based on the following:

SNT	20%
Weekly Journal Entries	20%
Paper 1	15%
Paper 2	20%
Group Presentation	15%
Attendance and Participation	10%

The standard UMass conversion scale will be used and is included on the grading rubrics.

Assignments

Detailed instructions, grading rubrics, and due dates for each assignment are available on Moodle.

Socratic Note Taking (SNT)

The purpose of these assignments is to help you read articles more effectively, and to provide accountability for completing the readings. “Socratic Note Taking” is named after the philosopher

Socrates, who famously taught by asking questions. In these notes, you will write questions as you read. Think of it as a reading quiz that you create yourself, along with an answer key. A set of notes is due for each class. Students will be required to produce three questions and answers per reading. Collectively, these are worth 20% of your grade and they will be graded Pass/Fail. They are due by the start of the class in which we are discussing the relevant reading. Complete and submit your questions/answers on Moodle.

Journals

Students will also record weekly journal entries, to be submitted on Moodle, collectively worth 20% of the final grade. These entries involve three components: first, students will make connections between this week's course readings/topics and one other thing (another class, a movie, conversation with friends); second, students will discuss one problem they had in college that week and what they did or will do to solve it; third, I'd like to hear how you're doing in general. The purpose is to accustom you to writing regularly, journaling is cathartic and can help address problems with the transition to college, and you will learn to make connections between what you learn and other aspects of your life. Journal entries will be graded on a 3-point scale.

First Paper

Students will write a short paper (approximately 750-1000 words or 2-3 pages), that chooses an emerging technology as a case study, worth 15% of the final grade and due mid-semester. As they become more advanced, various technologies pose new ethical challenges. Students will report on the moral implications and difficulties their chosen emerging technology poses using the philosophical concepts and theories we learned in class. Students will then give recommendations for future researchers, designers, users, and policy makers on how to address these challenges.

Second Paper

Students will write a second paper (approximately 1000-1250 words or 3-4 pages) due at the end of term, which counts for 20% of the final grade. This will be a more standard philosophy paper, whereby students will choose one philosophical article from the syllabus and summarize the author's main argument, provide an objection to the argument and discuss how the author should best reply to the objection. Students will then conclude with their own assessment of the argument and provide an introduction and conclusion. Students are encouraged to discuss their topics with me ahead of time.

Group Presentations

Students will get into small groups of 3-4 and present on a philosophical question relevant to, but not the same as, those we discussed in class. A list of such questions is provided on Moodle. The presentation is worth 15% of the final grade. Presentations will take place during the last week of the semester and should be 10-15 minutes long and will be followed by a short Q&A by your peers.

Attendance and Participation

There is an attendance and participation grade, worth 10% of your final grade. Your showing up and being attentive and engaged in lecture will be reflected in your attendance and participation grade. This grade will start off at 100%, but can be negatively affected by unexcused absences (you have two 'freebies') and if you are disruptive in lecture (on your phone, not at your computer, regularly arriving late, etc.). Students may gain participation marks by coming to office hours.

Class Expectations

Here's a chart that lays out what you should and should not expect from this class:

<i>Do expect...</i>	<i>Don't Expect...</i>
To complete writing assignments aimed at ensuring that you <i>understand</i> assigned materials.	To complete tests/quizzes aimed at ensuring that you have <i>memorized</i> assigned materials.
To have many comprehension questions about the assigned reading.	To understand the readings perfectly after your first read-through.
To take notes or annotate the assigned text so that you can come to class prepared to discuss the assigned materials.	To be able to read 10-20 pages in just a few minutes without taking notes and have the same level of comprehension that you may have in other subjects after that same amount of effort.
To reread materials and talk with me and colleagues when you find them confusing. This will be an important component of doing well on writing assignments.	To browse the internet to help you do better on the assignments. There are cases when this may help, but it is certainly not required, and in many cases, it may cause further confusion.
To try and use a simple straight forward writing style that will help you communicate ideas clearly.	To be encouraged to use a needlessly complicated, verbose, or flowery writing style in an effort to make your writing sound professional/sophisticated. I am not saying that we don't care about style, but I am saying that clarity will take precedence in this class.
To learn a lot, even if you don't form settled views about the philosophical questions under discussion.	To feel totally satisfied by the different philosophical positions we discuss or leave the class with all your philosophical questions answered.

Here are some more specific policies and expectations:

- **Course Readings:** Students should do all the assigned readings *before* the class in which they're discussed. All readings are available on the course webpage.
- **Attendance and Participation:** Attendance in class (via the Zoom link, which will be posted to the course Moodle page) is expected. I will take attendance and keep track of student contributions in class. You can miss up to 2 classes without penalty and without notifying me. Any further absences will need to be justified. It is your responsibility to contact me about any absences beyond the second one.
- **Electronics Policy:** Since this class is online, you need to use electronics. However, unless you're using a device to connect to Zoom, use of electronics is not permitted during class.

This principally applies to cellphones. If you require a special accommodation regarding electronics please contact me to request an exemption.

- **Communication:** You can contact me via e-mail. I will endeavour to respond within 24 hours, but usually don't respond after 5pm on weekdays nor on weekends. My principal method of communicating with you will be via your UMass e-mail, so be sure to check this daily. If e-mail is too clunky we can schedule a virtual meeting ("office hours") via Zoom.
- **Late Work Policy:** Late assignments without an extension will be downgraded by 1/3 of a letter grade per day after the due date (e.g. A to A-), up to a penalty of 2 full letter grades (after which they won't be accepted). Consult with me to request an extension. Extensions will not be granted for the SNTs; late SNTs will be graded as 0.
- **Grade Disagreement:** I am happy to discuss your graded assignments with you. I ask that you first read through my comments on your assignment, write down any questions you have, and then schedule an appointment with me. Note that I require a 24-hour "cooling off" period before discussing grades. If you think a grade you have received is unfair, please write a paragraph explaining why and send it to me via email. Note that this can result in your initial grade being *either raised or lowered*.
- **Extra Credit:** As a matter of general policy, no extra credit will be offered in this course unless *extremely* unusual circumstances arise which necessitate it.
- **Classroom Etiquette:** Students are expected to respect each other, allow others the chance to speak, and be open-minded to views different from their own. The topics covered may be controversial and evoke strong reactions. Please be aware of, and sensitive to, the feelings and experiences of others. We're here to learn and that's best done through community building, a prerequisite of which is respect and toleration.
- **Zoom Expectations:** Since this class will be online with synchronous lectures, you are expected to attend the class meetings at the designated class time via the Zoom link with your video connection turned on (use of a virtual background is totally fine). Online learning is difficult and uncomfortable but it is far more humane if we can all see each other – I don't want to stare at a field of blank squares. Your microphones should be muted so we don't hear background noise. To speak in class, I will use the raise hand function and call on you when it's your turn.
- **Syllabus:** Readings and schedule are subject to change. Any changes will be announced in class and on the course Moodle page.

Academic Honesty

Students should not plagiarize their work. I will follow UMass official policies when handling cases of academic dishonesty. After meeting with the me, a student who has plagiarized can choose between two options. The formal option involves a hearing before the Academic Dishonesty Board. The informal option involves agreeing to the instructor's terms and signing a document to that effect. This informal resolution is filed with the Academic Dishonesty Board. Should a student have three filed

informal resolutions, official disciplinary action will be taken. Consult UMass' website for further information: <https://www.umass.edu/honesty/>.

Accessibility

I am committed to making this class accessible and welcoming for all students. Students with documented disabilities are encouraged to contact Disability Services in 161 Whitmore, or at <http://www.umass.edu/disability> to register and request any accommodations you might need. If you anticipate receiving accommodations from Disability Services, but are still waiting on paperwork, please tell me as soon as possible so that we can put necessary accommodations in place.

Provisional Course Schedule

Week 1: Aug. 25, 27

Introduction

T Introduction and course overview (No readings)

Th What Is Philosophy? (Plato, Euthyphro)

Week 2: Sept. 1, 3

Epistemology

T Skepticism (Descartes; Moore)

Th Echo Chambers (Nguyen)

Week 3: Sept. 8, 10

Epistemology

Add/Drop Deadline: Monday, Sept. 7

T Implicit Bias (Valian; Holroyd et al)

Th Meaning of Life (Wolf); **Presentation Groups and Topics Assigned**

Week 4: Sept. 15, 17

Ethics

T Rape Culture (Pineau)

Th Sexual Consent (Perry; Roupenian)

Week 5: Sept. 22, 24

Ethics

T Animal Ethics (Singer)

Th Emerging Technologies (Ferré; Chiang)

Week 6: Sept. 29, Oct. 1

Ethics

T Allocation of Medical Resources (Rescher)

Th Cognitive Enhancement (Veit; Chiang); **Mid-semester RAP Survey**

Week 7: Oct. 6, 8 **Philosophy of Science**

T Scientific Expertise (Little and Backus)

Th Feminist Critiques of Science (Saul); **First Paper Due**

Week 8: Oct. 13, 15 **Metaphysics**

T Free Will (Sider)

Th Existence of God (Aquinas; Paley; Hume)

Week 9: Oct. 20, 22 **Metaphysics**

T Personal Identity (Sider)

Th Time Travel (Lewis; Chiang)

Week 10: Oct. 27, 29 **Art and Aesthetics**

T What Is Art? (Gracyk)

Th Aesthetic Disagreement (Nguyen)

Week 11: Nov. 3, 5 **Social and Political Philosophy**

T Free Speech (Mill)

Th Voting/Citizenship (Brennan)

Week 12: Nov. 10, 12 **Social and Political Philosophy**

T Race (Moody-Adams)

Th Gender (Hi-Phi Nation Podcast); **SRTIs**

Week 13: Nov. 17, 19 **Presentations and Wrap-Up**

T Presentations

Th Presentations

Wednesday, November 25: Second Papers Due by 11:59pm (by e-mail in PDF or Word)

Final grades due by Midnight, Monday, December 14