Important Details:

**PHIL 106: Introduction to Epistemology**

- **106 meets**: MWF 1:15 to 2:30 in UL 210
- **Your host**: Dr. Michael P. Wolf
- **Office**: 231 Dow Science
- **Phone**: 7-7077
- **E-mail**: wolf@kzoo.edu
- **Office Hours**: M 9:00-11:00 and by appointment

**Required Texts**


Finally, I recommend a short book called *How to Get the Most Out of Philosophy*, available at Amazon.com. It is not required reading, but it contains a great deal of helpful advice for someone taking their first or second philosophy class.

**What Is This Course About?**

My aim in this course is to make you do some philosophy. Just what it means to "do some philosophy" is a matter of some debate, though. If you asked twenty philosophers what it means to do philosophy, you would get somewhere between twenty-five and thirty answers. Just which questions are important, and just how we ought to pursue answers for them are not matters on which philosophers agree. The one element that seems to be common to all these conceptions of philosophy seems to be that we must give and ask for reasons for what we believe. We may judge that some reasons are better than others, and so some views may be more plausible to us. Giving and asking for reasons is a practice that belongs to all rational animals - Earthly or extraterrestrial, human or not - and this is what we will focus our attention on this course. The goal of this course is not to provide you with information (names, dates, and famous quotes) that you can recite at cocktail parties for the shareholders of your Fortune 500 Companies in the future, although in many cases, knowing those details is an important part of taking part in the class. Rather, my goal here is to teach you (or improve upon) a certain kind of skill: the skill of giving and asking for reasons, and evaluating the reasons other may give. If you cannot remember who Rene Descartes or John Searle are a year from now, but you can think more clearly about why you do and why should believe something, then the class will be a success.

To this end, I have not tried to make this a survey course of several important philosophical topics. Instead, we will focus on just one philosophical problem - the skeptical problem in the theory of knowledge - and largely on recent accounts of this problem. This allows us to focus on the arguments different philosophers give for their views, and to compare those accounts in a little more depth. (By looking at contemporary accounts, we also eliminate most problems of translation and archaic language.) One reason that I decided to teach a course on the philosophy of mind was because it is a subject that I know a good deal about, but also one in which I am not convinced that there is one definitive account among the current theories that we all must accept. So any of the theories suggested here are fair game for both criticism and defense, *so long as you give good reasons to accept or reject them*. Just what will count as a good reason is something we will address.

**Assessment**
Discussion will be an important part of how we run this class, and each member of the class should contribute something over the course of the semester. This is not to say that everyone must speak every day, nor that everyone has to offer some great insight every time they ask a question. The idea is to get you talking, shed your inhibitions about expressing an opinion, and get you accustomed to thinking about how someone might object or reply to what you have to say. To this end, I will assign a handful of short papers - a page at most, something you could write over lunch before class - that will be due for the following class. I will give these assignments in class, I will collect them, and they will count towards your grade. So attendance is not counted towards your grade, but missing classes is likely to hurt you all the same. I will combine all of these factors into a class discussion grade, and it will count for 15% of your final grade. Part of what I will look at in determining this is who contributes to the class discussion board, accessible through the College's web server. Follow the links for "Dr. Wolf's Board" and then look for the section devoted to this class. There will also be days set aside specifically for discussion where we will spend some time in smaller groups and then reconvene. Your attendance and participation will be expected on these days. You will also note on the syllabus that specific dates are set aside for "class discussion". On these days, there will be no lecture and the class will break into smaller discussion groups that will address specific questions on the recent material. This is not a test per se - I will not put a letter grade on notes handed in - but it will count towards class participation and unexcused absence on these days will affect your grade.

You will also have three 1500-2000 word papers to write over the course of the term on topics I will hand out to you in class. These are not meant to be research papers, they are meant to be arguments for a specific position in a particular debate. While you will not be penalized for going to the library and hunting down some additional sources, I believe this will tend to distract you from your real task, and I encourage you not to do it. There will be more information on how to write these papers and what will be expected over the course of the semester. The first of these papers will be worth 25% of your final grade and each of the remaining papers will be worth 30% of your final grade. The reason I add this minor wrinkle is that people are often writing their first philosophy papers in this class, and the first of three papers and the only way to figure what one is doing right or wrong is to simply try it. With this in mind, it seems more fair to have later work carry more weight.

I should mention a few things in closing. First, you are of course bound by the honor code here and any form of plagiarism will be severely punished. (Speak to me or consult a student handbook if you are unsure what counts as plagiarism.) The policy of the philosophy department on this matter is to automatically fail a student on any plagiarized assignment and to submit their names for discipline under the College’s Honor Code. This does not mean that you cannot use another source, or discuss and consult with your classmates about your assignments. I permit you to do the former and strongly encourage you to do the latter, so long as all the sources and classmates in question are properly cited in your paper. Finally, be forewarned that I reserve the right to lower the grades of papers given to me whose grammar and spelling do not meet college-level standards.

A Tentative Syllabus

Readings in the Sosa and Kim anthology are followed by "(SK)".

**Class 1. January 6:** Introduction

**Class 2. January 8:** Descartes's Approach
Read Descartes, *Meditations*, especially 1,3 and 5.

**Class 3. January 10:** Descartes's Approach
Read Descartes, *Meditations*, especially 1,3 and 5.
Read Descartes, *Meditations*, especially 1, 3 and 5.
See the IEP site on Descartes for further information.

Class 5. January 15: Foundationalism
Read Crumley, pp. 93-121 and Chisholm, "The Myth of the Given" (SK).
Click here for the handouts on non-dogmatism and principles of foundationalism.

Class 6. January 17: Visiting Lecture

January 20: Martin Luther King Holiday (No class will be held)

Class 7. January 22: Foundationalism
Read Crumley, pp. 93-121 and Chisholm, "The Myth of the Given" (SK).
See the Stanford site on Foundationalism for further information.

Class 8. January 24: Against Foundationalism
Read Sellars, "Does Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation?" (SK)

Class 9. January 27: CLASS DISCUSSION

Class 10. January 29: NO CLASS

Class 11. January 31: Coherence Theories
Read Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge" (SK).
See some guy's page at Harvard on Coherentism for further information.

Class 12. February 3: Against Coherence Theories
Read Crumley, pp. 121-57.

First Paper Due February 3 - Click here for topics

Class 13. February 5: Global Skepticism?
Read Unger, "An Argument for Skepticism" (SK).
See the Stanford site on Skepticism for further information, but stick to sections 1-9.

Class 14. February 7: NO CLASS

Class 15. February 10: Global Skepticism?
Read Unger, "An Argument for Skepticism" (SK).
(Recommended: Stroud, "The Problem of the External World" (SK).)

Class 16. February 12: CLASS DISCUSSION

Class 17. February 14: Epistemic Reliability
Read Goldman’s “What is Justified Belief” (SK) and Crumley, pp. 66-90.

Class 18. February 17: Epistemic Reliability
Read Goldman’s “What is Justified Belief” (SK) and Crumley, pp. 66-90.

Class 19. February 19: Problems With Reliability
Read Conee and Feldman’s “The Generality Problem for Reliabilism” (SK)
**Class 20. February 21:** CLASS DISCUSSION

**Class 21. February 24:** Virtue Epistemology and Proper Functioning
Read Plantinga’s “Warrant: A First Approximation” (SK).
See the IEP site on Virtue Epistemology for further information.

**Class 22. February 26:** Virtue Epistemology and Proper Functioning
Read Greco’s “Virtues and Vices of Virtue Epistemology” (SK).

Second Paper Due February 26 - Click here for topics

**Class 23. February 28:** Social Pragmatism
Read Brandom "Knowledge and the Social Articulation of the Space of Reasons" (SK).

**Class 24. March 3:** Social Pragmatism
Read Brandom "Knowledge and the Social Articulation of the Space of Reasons" (SK).

**Class 25. March 5:** Feminist Epistemologies
Read Tanesini, "Feminist Objections to the Traditional Epistemic Subject" (Handout)

**Class 26. March 7:** Feminist Epistemologies
Read "What is a Standpoint: Beginning from Women's Experience" (Handout)

**Class 27. March 10:** Skills and the World
Read Dreyfus and Dreyfus, selections from *Mind Over Machine*. (Handout)
(For brave souls, there is a copy of Bert Dreyfus's *Phenomenology and Mechanism* available through JSTOR. Note that this will be accessible only via computers hooked up to KNET or RESNET.)

**Class 28. March 12:** Skills and the World
Read Dreyfus and Dreyfus, selections from *Mind Over Machine*. (Handout)

**Class 29. March 14:** CLASS DISCUSSION

Third Paper Due March 17 - Click here for topics