EXTENDED COURSE DESCRIPTION:

It’s hard to overestimate the importance of the Linguistic Turn in philosophy: i.e. the turn to the study of language as itself the new paradigm of philosophical research. The study of language seemed to replace ancient and Medieval metaphysics, on the one hand, and early modern philosophy of mind, on the other, by suggesting that the study of being (ontology) and mind (epistemology) generated unsolvable conceptual problems, problems that seemed to dissolve when language was treated as the medium within which being and mind first became available. Although the Linguistic Turn is associated with Anglo-American philosophy in the 20th Century, it began in German philosophy in the early 19th Century with figures such as Johann Georg Hamann (1730–1788), Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803), and Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835). In the early 20th Century, Husserl, Heidegger, and Gadamer advanced the linguistic turn into a comprehensive study of human intentionality. The German mathematician, logician, and philosopher Friedrich Ludwig Gottlob Frege (1848-1925) is singularly responsible for our current understanding of semantics, the study of meaning. His works were funneled through the Vienna circle of logical positivist philosophers in the early 20th-century, finding their way into Great Britain through the migration of the philosophy Ludwig Wittgenstein. In Oxford and Cambridge, philosophers such as Bertrand Russell, G. E. Moore, John Austin, P. F. Strawson, John Wisdom, Norman Malcolm, and Ludwig Wittgenstein marshaled a “realistic” study of language, seen as a competitor to Frege’s “idealism,” and what is now known as “ordinary language philosophy.” The contemporary philosophy of language known as semantic and pragmatic theory properly begins in this milieu, migrating to the U.S. during the 1920s and 1930s and establishing
the cross-Atlantic dialogue knows as “Analytic” or, more properly, “Anglo-American” philosophy of language.

This course provides students with a basic and yet intensive introduction to a special branch of linguistics called “speech act theory” or “pragmatics”: the study of what we do with words. This focus upon pragmatics – the study of utterance acts – is, however, linked to semantics – the study of sentences – by a substantial claim on the part of the instructor: namely, that the two are inextricable interlinked: semantics and pragmatics are two sides of the same study of linguistic meaning. We will then examine the semantics/pragmatics divide with a special emphasis upon formal pragmatics (study of speech acts) instead of formal semantics (study of sentences). More specifically, we will be interested in the basic question of a theory of meaning: What are the necessary and sufficient conditions of understanding the meaning of a speech act? First, we will examine John Searle’s classic formulation of a theory of meaning in his inaugural speech act theory, which he developed in the later ‘60s and 70s after study with John Austin and Paul Grice at Oxford. We then turn our attention to a far-reaching – if ultimately untenable – theory of meaning offered by Jurgen Habermas in the 1980s and 1990s. Habermas developed a formal pragmatic theory of meaning that sharply contrasts two modes of language use: namely, communicative action, on the one hand, and strategic action, on the other. We will probe his distinction between communicative and strategic action by examining the ways in which language is used in three movies by David Mamet – *Glengarry Glen Ross*, *American Buffalo*, and *Oleanna* – that portray the contortions and distortions of contemporary language use in the context of real estate sale, small business environment, and, indeed, the classroom.

What makes Habermas’ theory of meaning significant and fascinating is his development of a series of interrelated normative concepts: namely, communicative reason, freedom, and power. It’s unusual to encounter normative issues – moral, ethical, and political – in Anglo-American discussions of semantics and pragmatics, but it’s a staple of the philosophy of language in the European-Continental tradition. We will follow the Trans-Atlantic confluence of these two traditions in Habermas’ account of communicative reason, freedom, and power. Habermas develops his formal pragmatics, in general, and its rational emancipatory power, in particular, to articulate the normative foundations of critical social theory (hereafter CST). With such concepts, Habermas turns to empirical diagnostic assessments of a pernicious social pathology: namely, systematically distorted communication. He links macro-social conditions of systematically distorted communication to the micro-psychological effects of damaged identities. This causal linkage between the social and psychological equips critically disposed theorists with the empirical ability to identify, analyze, and respond to contemporary social pathologies. Habermas explicitly develops his account as a precise way of understanding Hannah Arendt’s groundbreaking analysis of 20th-century totalitarianism discourse. We will read excerpts from *Origins of Totalitarianism* to better appreciate the critical reach of Habermas’ account of systematically distorted communication. This year, we will use Habermas’ concepts to analyze contemporary political discourse in the United States.

Many political philosophers have found Habermas’ attempt to locate a rational emancipatory power – i.e. communicative freedom – in language as such as thoroughly naïve, idealistic, and hence dangerous. They contend that language is not a reservoir of
reason, as Habermas claims, but, instead, a repository of illicit social power. In contrast to Habermas’ formal or “reconstructive” approach to the study of language, they turn to informal, empirical-social approaches. While formal approaches focus upon the (infinite) generativity of language, informal approaches focus upon the finite, local, and context-sensitive attunement of linguistic abilities as excluding non-standard or socially deviant possibilities of language use. For such theorists, social power resides in how language is used by a dominant group to oppress and dominate socio-cultural ways of speaking that deviate from the norm established. We take up this debate by examining one informal approach to the study of language: namely, to Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of speech genre.

Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of meaning a naïve and yet illuminating account of the complexities of everyday language use: he explores the threshold between formal (semantic) and empirical (pragmatic) linguistics. Bakhtin’s central claim is that the basic unit or vehicle of everyday commerce in an exchange, not of (formally described) speech acts, but, instead, context-appropriate or domain-specific ways of carrying out speech acts. “We speak,” Bakhtin claims, “in speech genre,” specific types of speech acts that arise within specific social domains. Bakhtin’s basic point is that we miss the tremendous social complexity of what we actually do in speaking if we do not appreciate the way our speech styles are tailored to specific, local, context-sensitive domains of practical interaction. Like Habermas who links (social) language use to (psychological) identity formation, Bakhtin links styles of speech to social recognition in specific domains of in social interaction. Bakhtin also (indirectly) contributes to CST by analyzing the generic styles of speech tailored specific types of situations as so many forms of social power, which allow groups to affirm their identities by means of group-appropriate speech styles. We link Bakhtin’s work to Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of “symbolic power,” the power to oppress and dominate wielded by privileged social classes, cultural groups, and ethnic communities. We will probe Bakhtin’s account of speech genre and Bourdieu’s account of symbolic power by appreciating raising questions about different speech communities in the United States, groups established around the differentially coordinates of gender, culture, ethnicity, and race.

Finally, we will familiarize ourselves with the most sophisticated and emphatic pragmatic theory of meaning on the contemporary scene – namely, Fracois Recanati’s truth-conditional pragmatics – which allows us to stabilize the intuitions and insights of Habermas’s formal pragmatics and Bakhtin’s empirical pragmatics.

OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES:
Student’s will be able to define and to use terminology formal semantics and informal pragmatic theory to describe, analyze, and diagnose actual language use.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Students are required to (1) take weekly vocabulary quizzes (50%), (2) a midterm essay assignment (20%) and (3) a final essay (30%). Students will also be responsible for in-class presentations and discussion (15%). Faithful attendance is expected, and active contribution to class discussion is required. Three absences will result in a full grade reduction. All assignments must be
completed for a passing grade, and late assignments will be marked down a half a grade per day.

**REQUIRED TEXTS:**
- Handouts:
  - Arendt, Hannah. Excerpts from *Origins of Totalitarianism*.
  - Bakhtin, M. M. “The Problem of Speech Genre,” in *Speech Genre and Other Late Essays* (University of Texas Press, Austin, 1986).
    - *Introduction* (Maeve Cooke)
    - “Towards a Critique of the Theory of Meaning” (1988)
    - “Some Clarifications of the Concept of Communicative Rationality” (1996)
    - “Reflections on Communicative Pathologies”
    - “Singularism *versus* Descriptivism” (2012)
    - “What is a Speech Act”

**FILMS:**
- *Glengarry Glen Ross* (American, 1992, adapted by David Mamet from his 1984 Pulitzer Prize- and Tony-winning play of the same name, directed by James Foley)
- *American Buffalo* (British-American, 1996, directed by Michael, based on David Mamet's 1975 play by the same name).
• *Oleanna* (1994, written and directed by David Mamet based on his play by the same name)
• *Do The Right Thing* (American, 1989, written and directed by Spike Lee)

**POLICIES:**
Open, respectful, well-informed, critical, and cooperative discussion is crucial to participating in this course. Students are expected to demonstrate these virtues of working well with others in the course, which requires not only sound preparedness by reading course materials and attending to lecture but also respect and cooperation in interacting with others. In particular, students are required to address others in a cooperative, caring, and coordinated manner, and any competitive, adversarial, or combative debate-style engagement will be considered a infraction of classroom behavior. Any discussion that falls below the threshold of preparedness, cooperation, and civility described above will be sharply redirected by the professor. Of course, attentiveness to the individual contributions of others is crucial for maintaining this cooperative setting of discussion, and talking side-by-side instead of within the forum of classroom discussion will not be permitted.

E-mail correspondence provides students with lecture materials important for our interpretation and criticism of texts, and students are expected to check their email at least once a day to pick up classroom correspondence. Weekly written responses to reading questions allow the professor to test students’ comprehension of basic issues and prepare students for participation in classroom discussion. Midterm assignments and the final paper offer students the opportunity to respond in depth to a single topic. The final paper is due on the day scheduled for the final examination. Late papers are graded a half grade down each day that they are late, and all assignments must be turned in to receive a grade for the course. 3 unexcused absences will result in a full grade reduction of the course grade. Attendance at movies in required, and students are expected to discuss course materials with others students in the course.

The following are course rules:
• No electronic devices such as computers, ipads, cell phones, or other instruments are allowed: they must be turned off for the duration of the class.
• Classroom notes are not to be shared or in any manner distributed beyond the roster of students and professor.
• Aggressive or combative behavior toward other students or insubordination toward the professor will not be tolerated.
• Students are required to maintain (1) attention to the progressive and cumulative nature of course material and (2) attentiveness to classroom discussion or lecture.

Three infractions of the above expectations will result in being suspended from the course.

**READING SCHEDULE**

**INTRODUCTION: SEMANTICS AND PRAGMATICS:**

**TUESDAY:**

**WEEK ONE**
• Course Mechanics.
• Lecture: Pragmatics, Semantics, Syntax, and Other Modes of Abstraction.
• "What is a Speech Act" (John Searle, 1965).
1. THE BASIC STRUCTURE OF SPEECH ACTS AND THEIR CLASSIFICATION:

THURSDAY:
- Quiz #1.

2. CONTEXTUAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO SPEECH ACT DETERMINACY AND LINGUISTIC INFERENTIALISM:

TUESDAY: WEEK TWO
- Reading of Amelia Bedelia.
- "Literal Meaning" (John Searle, 1979).
- Visit website for ten-minute gloss on indirect speech acts:
  http://comment.rsablogs.org.uk/2011/02/14/rsa-animate-language-window-human-nature/

THURSDAY:
- Medina: “Meaning, Sense, and Interpretation.”
- Quiz # 2.

3: THE INTERPRETIVE APPROACH TO SEMANTIC MEANING, LANGUAGE ACQUISITION, AND LINGUISTIC INDETERMINACY:

TUESDAY: WEEK THREE
- Medina: “Linguistic Creativity and Relativism.”

4: FORMAL AND INFORMAL APPROACHES TO THE SEMANTICS/PRAGMATICS DEBATE:

THURSDAY:
- Medina: “Speakers, Linguistic Communities and Histories of Use”
- Medina: “Language and Identity.”
- Quiz #3.

5. HABERMAS’ FORMAL PRAGMATICS: THE VALIDITY-BASED CLASSIFICATION OF SPEECH ACTS:

TUESDAY: WEEK FOUR
  - Introduction (Maeve Cooke)

**Wednesday Evening Movie: Glen Gary, Glen Ross** (8:00 PM, Dewing 103).

**THURSDAY:**
  - “Towards a Critique of the Theory of Meaning” (1988)
- **Quiz # 4.**

6. **SYSTEMATICALLY DISTORTED COMMUNICATION, LINGUISTICALLY INDUCED PSYCHOPATHOLOGIES, AND SYMBOLICALLY DEPLOYED SOCIAL POWER:**

**TUESDAY:**  **WEEK FIVE**
  - “Reflections on Communicative Pathologies”

**Wednesday Evening Movie: American Buffalo** (8:00 PM, Dewing 103).

7. **THE PROBLEM OF SPEECH GENRES AND EMPIRICAL PRAGMATICS:**

**THURSDAY:**
- Arendt, Hannah. Excerpts from *Origins of Totalitarianism*.
- Bakhtin: “The Problem of Speech Genres”

**TUESDAY:**  **WEEK SIX**
- Bakhtin: “The Problem of Speech Genres” [Continued]
- Quiz #5.

**Evening Movie: Oleanna** (8:00 PM, Dewing 103).

**THURSDAY:**
- Latiolais, Christopher: “The Pragmatics of Speech Genre” [Manuscript]
- Discussion: **Oleanna**
8. THE CONTEMPORARY SEMANTICS/PRAGMATICS DEBATE: THE CONTEXTUALIST CHALLENGE TO FORMAL SEMANTICS

TUESDAY: WEEK SEVEN
- Recanati: *Introduction*
- Recanati: “Two Approaches to What is Said”

Evening Movie: *Do The Right Thing* (8:00 PM, Dewing 103).

THURSDAY:
- Recanati: “Primary Pragmatic Processes”
- Recanati: “Relevance-theoretic Objections”
- Quiz # 7.

TUESDAY: WEEK EIGHT
- Recanati: “The Syncretic View”
- Recanati: “Non-literal Uses.”

THURSDAY:
- Recanati: “From Literalism to Contextualism.”
- Review Medina: “Linguistic Creativity and Relativism.”
- Quiz # 8.

TUESDAY: WEEK NINE
- Recanati: “Contextualism: How Fare Can We Go.”
- Recanati: “Conclusion.”
- Review Medina: “Linguistic Creativity and Relativism.”

THURSDAY:
- Recanati:
  - Review
  - Discussion

9. PRESERVING THE DIRECT REFERENCE REVOLUTION: SINGULARISM VERSUS DESCRIPTIVISM:

TUESDAY: WEEK TEN
  - “Singularism _versus_ Descriptivism” (2012)

THURSDAY:
- Review
- Student Evaluations