

# Advanced Epistemology

UPPER-DIVISION PHILOSOPHY  
SAMPLE SYLLABUS

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**Office Hours:** By appointment

## Course Description and Goals

This course is an overview of various issues in epistemology, including how to characterize knowledge, the problem of skepticism, how to think about justification, and whether the goal of epistemology is truth. The class will get to choose the last topic we cover from a list of several contemporary issues. By the end of the course you should have a grasp on the central issues that interest epistemologists, and you should also see significant improvement in your ability to analyze arguments and critique them.

## Required Texts

Various articles supplied by the instructor.

## Course Requirements

**Attendance and Participation (10%):** You're expected to come to class regularly and participate in class discussion. The articles we're reading are difficult and dense and you will almost certainly not get what you need out of them by simply reading them by yourself. You should take notes on what you read and be prepared to talk about the readings. On various days throughout the semester I will have you write short one-page reflection papers at the end of class.

**Two Critical Papers, 3-4 pages, 15% each (30%)** In these papers you will articulate the argument of a particular author and then critically engage with that argument. You should spend approximately half of the paper reconstructing the author's argument and the other developing your critique. These papers are practice for your final paper.

**Final Paper Outline, 2-3 pages (10%):** This is a full outline of your final paper (more instructions below). In it you should state the thesis for which you will be arguing, as well as descriptions of the arguments you plan to give. This will involve responding to at least one author that we've read this semester. We will discuss expectations for the outline and final paper in class.

**Final Paper, 5-8 pages (25%)** In this paper you will argue for your preferred position on one of our topics. You need to clearly present the arguments in favor of your view, show that you understand how people might object to it, and explain how you can respond to their objections. Make sure to engage and reference the authors and arguments we've read in class, but do your best to go beyond them in some significant way. Make your *own* contribution.

## Course Requirements, continued...

**Final Exam (25%)** The exam will cover all of the material for the course, and will be in the form of short answer and short essay questions. I will provide a study guide.

## Administrative Issues

**Classroom Conduct:** Please be respectful of others in this course. This means you should arrive to class on time and be an active participant. Pay attention to people when they are speaking. Of course people will disagree with one another in this course—one of the goals of the class is to explore such disagreement in a critical and structured manner. However, in presenting your thoughts make sure you speak with respect and professionalism. Anything that might be perceived as insulting or a personal attack will not be tolerated. Put your phones on silent or vibrate—texting or answering your phone in class is not acceptable.

**Late Assignments:** All papers are due at the beginning of class. Late papers will be penalized one partial grade per day starting with the due date. I understand that emergencies happen, so come talk to me if you encounter a problem that prevents you from turning in your papers on time. If, however, you do not bother to make arrangements with me within 24-hours of the due date there is no way to avoid the penalty. *Note:* you must turn in all assignments to pass the course.

**Office Hours:** I am always available during office hours to discuss any questions about the course material or philosophy in general. I'm also happy to help you work through paper ideas, including questions about how to get started. You will benefit the most if you come talk to me early on about anything confusing and if you discuss written work at least several days *before* it's due. I'm also happy to answer questions via email. If my scheduled office hours don't work for you, then please contact me to schedule a different time.

**Academic Integrity:** I will enforce the university's policy on academic integrity and report all academic misconduct. You are responsible for making yourself aware of the relevant policies and procedures in the undergraduate catalog. Offenses include cheating, fabrication, falsification and forgery, multiple submission, plagiarism, complicity and computer misuse. Please refer to the student code of conduct for more information.

**Accommodation for Disabilities:** Individuals who have any disabilities, either permanent or temporary, that might affect their ability to perform in this course are encouraged to inform me at the beginning of the semester. I will work in conjunction with the Office for Disability Services to adapt or modify methods, materials, and testing to ensure that everyone can participate equally.

## Course Outline

### WHAT IS KNOWLEDGE?

#### The Analysis of Knowledge (Week 1)

- Edmund Gettier (1963): Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?
- Linda Zagzebski (1994): The Inescapability of Gettier Problems

### THE THREAT TO KNOWLEDGE

#### The Argument From Skepticism (Week 2)

- Peter Unger (1974): An Argument for Skepticism
- G.E. Moore (1962): Certainty

#### Responses to Skepticism: Dogmatism (Week 3)

- G.E. Moore (1959): A Defense of Common Sense
- James Pryor (2000): The Skeptic and the Dogmatist

#### Responses to Skepticism: Sensitivity and Safety (Week 4)

- Robert Nozick (1981): Knowledge and Skepticism
- Ernest Sosa (1999): How to Defeat Opposition to Moore

#### Responses to Skepticism: Contextualism (Week 5)

- Gail Stine (1976): Skepticism, Relevant Alternatives, and Deductive Closure
- Stewart Cohen (1999): Contextualism, Skepticism, and the Structure of Reasons

### THE STRUCTURE OF KNOWLEDGE

#### Foundationalism and Coherentism (Weeks 6-7)

- Robert Audi (2003): Contemporary Modest Foundationalism
- Donald Davidson (1986): A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge
- Susan Haack (1997): A Foundherentist Theory of Empirical Justification
- Laurence Bonjour (1999): The Dialectic of Foundationalism and Coherentism

### WHAT IS JUSTIFICATION?

#### Proper Functionalism (Week 8)

- Kenneth Boyce and Alvin Plantinga (2012): Proper Functionalism
- Chris Tucker (2014): On what Inferentially Justifies What: the Vices of Reliabilism and Proper Functionalism

#### Reliabilism (Week 9)

- Earl Conee and Richard Feldman (1998): The Generality Problem for Reliabilism
- William Alston (1995): How to Think about Reliability

#### Evidentialism (Week 10)

- Richard Feldman and Earl Conee (1985): Evidentialism

**Course Outline, continued...**

**ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES**

**Virtue Epistemology** (Week 11)

Linda Zagzebski (2000): From Reliabilism to Virtue Epistemology

Heather Battely (2008): Virtue Epistemology

**Knowledge-First Epistemology** (Week 12)

Timothy Williamson (2000): A State of Mind

John McDowell (1995): Knowledge and the Internal

**Knowledge and Practical Matters** (Week 13)

Jeremy Fantl and Matt McGrath (2014): Practical Matters Affect Whether You Know

Baron Reed (2014): Practical Matters Do Not Affect Whether You Know

**Knowledge and Truth** (Week 14)

Jonathan Kvanvig (2005): Truth is Not the Primary Epistemic Goal

Marian David (2005): Truth as the Primary Epistemic Goal: a Working Hypothesis

Catherine Elgin (2004): True Enough

**TOPIC OF CHOICE**

**Options for student poll include:** (Week 15)

The Ethics of Belief – W.K. Clifford (1879): The Ethics of Belief; and

William James (1897): The Will to Believe

Epistemological Relativism – Lorraine Code (1991): Is the Sex of the Knower

Epistemologically Significant?

Testimony – Elizabeth Fricker (2006): Testimony and Epistemic Autonomy

Disagreement – Tom Kelly (2010): Peer Disagreement and Higher-Order Evidence

The Lottery Paradox – John Hawthorne (2003): Introducing the Puzzle