

Department of Philosophy Graduate Course Descriptions Spring 2018

PHI 528LEC Selected Topics: Philosophy of Language

Professor David Braun

Tu 1:00 PM – 3:50 PM

Class #: 24060

Attitudes and attitude ascriptions, specifically belief and belief ascriptions. (Belief ascriptions are sentences that ascribe belief, such as ‘Mary believes that all dogs are mammals’.) I tentatively plan to start with Frege’s and Russell’s theories of meaning, propositions, propositional attitudes, and propositional attitude ascriptions (e.g., belief ascriptions). We will consider modern versions of their, especially those of Salmon, Soames, Richard, and Crimmins and Perry. I will then move on to possible-worlds semantics (such as that advocated by Montague and Stalnaker) and its apparent problems with propositional attitude ascriptions. We will consider very recent attempts to overcome those difficulties. We will also consider views (such as Lewis’s) which say that the objects of attitudes such as belief are not propositions but rather properties (or related objects). We may also consider some problems raised by desire ascriptions.

Required work: (a) About eight to twelve short papers (two to three pages each). One of these will be due nearly every week during the first eight to twelve weeks during the semester. (b) A one-hundred word abstract of a seminar paper, due several weeks before the end of the semester. (c) A seminar paper of twelve to fifteen pages, due near the end of the semester.

Pre-requisites: This will be an advanced course in philosophy of language. I will assume that all students in the seminar have taken a course equivalent to UB’s Philosophy 328 (Philosophy of Language) and UB’s Philosophy 215 (Symbolic Logic). Many of the readings in this course will feature technical material. I will explain this material, but those who have taken the equivalent of UB’s Philosophy 519 (Topics in Logic) or UB’s Philosophy 619 (Modal Logic) will find this material easier than those who have not.

Enrollment: This course will be open to matriculated graduate students in philosophy. All others must have my permission to enroll.

PHI 579 SEM Special Topics-Topics in Ethics: Metaethics

Assistant Professor Alexandra King

Thursday 1:00-3:50 PM

Class # 23913

This course will serve as a primer to the major contemporary metaethical theories. We will examine questions about the objectivity and metaphysical status of morality, how it motivates us, how we know about it, and how moral language works. We will pay special attention to the ways in which these different considerations intertwine, and why an answer to one of these questions often forces answers to others. As background, it is recommended that students have some familiarity with (in rough order of importance) philosophy of language, metaphysics, philosophy of mind, and/or epistemology.

PHI 596 Graduate Dissertation Seminar

Assistant Professor Lewis Powell

Wednesday 1:00 PM - 3:50 PM

Class #22342

This course is a required course for all philosophy graduate students who have completed their coursework and are now either preparing a thesis topical or writing thesis chapters. Students may enroll more than once, and are encouraged to do so, but if space is limited (14 max.) priority will be given to students who have recently defended or are working on Topicals, typically in their 3rd or 4th year of grad studies. The aim is to help students complete their dissertations in a more timely manner, and achieve greater success with career placement through practical skills training.

Offered once each year, this course is a writing intensive course with a central presentation component. Course content is entirely dictated by the dissertation topics students are engaged in— students will be presenting original work in preparation for thesis prospectus or dissertation chapters. All students will get exposure to the issues covered by their peers, and gain useful presentation skills and practice. Students will be instructed in how to improve their presentation skills, and will receive oral and written feedback from their peers and the instructor. The number and format of presentations given by students will depend on the enrollment in the course, but typically involves at least two presentations of one's own work, as well as presenting comments on another student's work. The course will be graded Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory (S/U).

PHI 598 Ontological Engineering

Professor Barry Smith

Online

Class # 23854

The aim of the course is to provide an introduction to the methods and uses of ontological engineering, focusing on applications in areas such as military intelligence, healthcare, and document processing. It will provide an overview of how ontologies are created and used, together with practical experience in the development of ontologies and in the use of associated web technology standards. It will also address some of the human factors underlying the success and failure of ontology projects, including issues of ontology governance and dissemination.

The course is built out of fifteen 3-credit-hour sessions, each consisting of an on-line video lectures, video presentations created by students, and discussion sessions covering the topics of each lecture.

PHI 604LEC Teaching Philosophy

Professor David Braun

M 4:00 PM – 6:50 PM

Class #: 19438

This will be a course in philosophical pedagogy. We will meet for one hour a week. Required work may include preparation of syllabi and assignment, practice lectures, and similar exercises intended to prepare students to teach their own courses in philosophy. This course is open only to matriculated graduate students in philosophy.

PHI 619 Modal Logic

Associate Professor T. E. Bittner

Monday 1:00 PM – 3:50 PM

Class # 22338

Studies logical systems designed to express concepts of necessity and possibility. Develops semantic accounts employing systems of possible worlds. Examines philosophical topics and problems related to necessity and possibility.

PHI 634 Action Theory and Intention

Visiting Assistant Professor Devlin Russell

Wednesday 4:00 PM - 6:50 PM

Class #24007

Is an intention a belief or a conative mental state? Or is it something else altogether? This course will look at the current debate over what it is to intend to do something, as opposed to doing it, wanting to do it, or trying to do it. First we will look at arguments for non-cognitivism—the view that an intention is a conative mental state, like desire. Next we'll consider criticisms of this view and arguments for cognitivism—the view that an intention is a belief. Finally, we'll consider criticisms of the whole idea that an intention is a mental state and consider arguments for placing intention in the category of process and action, rather than state.