

**DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY  
UNDERGRADUATE COURSE DESCRIPTIONS**

**Fall Semester August 30 – December 10, 2021**

**PHI 101 POW Introduction to Philosophy**

**Dr. Lewis Powell**

T Th, 11:10 AM – 12:25 PM

Class #: 15961

Philosophy is a broad field of inquiry, encompassing questions about the nature of the world around us, our own natures, our values, and about how we should live our lives. In this course, we will look to historical and contemporary writings on a vast array of issues, including debates in ethics, free will, metaphysics, and epistemology. Our inquiry will span from the extremely practical to the extremely abstract, and students will develop philosophical skills for engaging with these debates.

The course examines general topics in various areas of philosophy showing different sides of issues; develops critical thought and philosophical method.

**PHI 105 LON Contemporary Moral Problems**

**Dr. Duane Long**

ONLINE

Class #: 21468

This course will philosophically examine contentious moral issues of the day. Among the topics that may be discussed are abortion, capital punishment, affirmative action, obligations of wealthy nations to poor nations, duties to non-human animals, vegetarianism, sex workers, pornography, legalized gambling and lotteries, gun control, drone warfare, human enhancements through drugs and prostheses, homosexual marriage, racial profiling, and legalization of currently illegal drugs.

**PHI 107 GRA Introduction to Ethics****Dr. David Gray**

ONLINE

Class #: 21471

Ethics is the branch of philosophy examining the nature of morality, good and evil, and right and wrong action. At bottom, ethics addresses the most practical question: "What ought I do?" As such, this is not some hypothetical concern, but something with which we all continually wrestle, as we go about our day-to-day lives. This suggests that ethics is an inherent and inescapable part of human existence. In this course, we will look at several influential approaches and attempts to answer that practical question of ethics. Throughout, we will discover how these divergent, and often conflicting, approaches frame present-day debates surrounding the opioid crisis, drone attacks, quotas in admissions and hiring, political corruption, world poverty, animal rights, torture, national security, and human rights.

**PHI 115 BEE Critical Thinking****Dr. James Beebe**

T Th, 9:35 AM – 10:50 AM

Class #: 21504

This is a course on reasoning well-on what it means to reflect carefully about what you should or should not believe in light of your available evidence. You've been reasoning your whole life-sometimes well, sometimes poorly. This class will provide you with exercises that are aimed at refining your reasoning skills. What makes this class different from other classes that sharpen your reasoning skills in some respect is that we will not be solely focusing on reasoning within a particular domain or about a particular set of issues. The goal of this course is to improve reasoning skills that can be applied in any domain. Toward the end of the course, we will focus for a few weeks on the kind of reasoning behind conspiracy theories, but even there our goal will be to reflect upon and hone reasoning skills that are general rather than specific in nature. Some university courses are more content-focused, while others are more skill-focused. A course about art history falls into the former category, while a course about figure drawing falls into the latter. This course has both a content component and a skill component, but the skill component may be larger than you anticipated. This means that you will not merely be asked to sit and think about critical thinking, you will be asked to do a good bit of it.

**PHI 185 MUL Model-Based Reasoning****Dr. Ryan Muldoon**

T, Th; 11:10 AM – 12:25 PM

Class #: 21505

The world is full of complex problems and messy situations. This complexity makes it very hard for us to think through what is going on and how we might best try and develop solutions to our problems. The best tools we have for thinking through these problems are models. Models allow us to extract a simpler version of our problem from the messiness of the real world, and then test out our ideas to find the best solution. In this course, we will

learn about a variety of models that the social sciences use to think about the world, and then examine the philosophical challenges of using models to guide our reasoning. We will learn about when models might help us, and when models might mislead us, and what we can do about it. Students will not only learn about models, but learn to think like a modeler.

**PHI 199 BIT UB Seminar – Deductive Logic**

**Dr. Thomas Bittner**

M W F, 9:10 AM – 10:00 AM

Class #: 21475

Thinking well, i.e., *critically*, is a skill that every student needs to acquire. Logic plays an important role in critical thinking and acquiring skills in logical analysis and correct reasoning are mandatory. *Logic*, very generally speaking, is the study of correct reasoning. Typically, it is directed at evaluating reasoning expressed in written arguments. *Deductive* logic concerns itself with those forms of reasoning such that if some thoughts (“premises”) are certain, necessary or can be known, then other thoughts reasoned from them (“conclusions”) are also certain, necessary, or can be known. PHI 199 is an introduction to the basic concepts of *argument* and *validity*. We will also examine some of the techniques that have been advanced for assessing the quality of arguments, including Aristotle’s theory of the syllogism and various techniques that use diagrams.

The three credit UB Seminar is focused on a big idea or challenging issue to engage students with questions of significance in a field of study and, ultimately, to connect their studies with issues of consequence in the wider world. Essential to the UB Curriculum, the Seminar helps students with common learning outcomes focused on fundamental expectations for critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and oral communication, and learning at a university, all within topic focused subject matter. The Seminars provide students with an early connection to UB faculty and the undergraduate experience at a comprehensive, research university. This course is equivalent to any 199 offered in any subject. This course is a controlled enrollment (impacted) course. Students who have previously attempted the course and received a grade of F or R may not be able to repeat the course during the fall or spring semester.

**Textbook:**

Our textbook is one of the several most widely used and “standard” introductions to the subject:

Patrick Hurley’s *A Concise Introduction to Logic* (13<sup>th</sup> edition) **electronic version**.

**PHI 199 BEE UB Seminar – Science and Religion**

**Dr. James Beebe**

T, Th; 12:45 PM – 2:00 PM

Class #: 17564

In this course, we will examine a variety of questions about the relationship between science and religion. Some religious believers argue that existing scientific evidence

supports their perspective, while others say that science undermines religion. Still others claim that science and religion exist in separate spheres and thus neither support nor disconfirm one another. In addition to examining some of these broad theories about the relationship between science and religion, we will look at the following specific areas of science and ask what (if anything) they tell us about core religious beliefs: Big Bang cosmology, scientific theories of the origins of life, evolutionary theory, and the psychological study of religion. Students will gain experience in constructing and evaluating arguments for and against controversial positions.

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### **PHI 215 BRA Symbolic Logic**

**Dr. David Braun**

M W F, 9:10 AM – 10:00 AM

Class #: 20229

We will learn techniques to distinguish between good arguments and bad arguments. More specifically, we will learn to distinguish between (i) arguments whose conclusions follow from their premises and (ii) arguments whose conclusions do not follow from their premises. We will call the first kind of argument “valid” and the second kind “invalid.” Our test for an argument’s validity will start with the creation of an artificial symbolic language. We will then apply precise formal techniques for determining whether the symbolic versions of the arguments are valid.

Pre-requisites: None. Required work (tentative): Weekly homework assignments (using online software) and three exams (taken in-person, if the course meets in-person, as planned). The third exam will take place during finals week.

### **PHI 234 PHI Environmental Ethics**

**Dr. Duane Long**

ONLINE

Class #: 19323

Examination of how humans should interact with the environment, both as individuals and as members of groups or organizations.

**PHI 237 HOV Medical Ethics: Social & Ethical Values in Medicine**

**Dr. David Hershenov**

T, Th; 11:10 AM – 12:30 PM

Class #: 18189

The course is designed both to provide moral guidance to future medical professionals as well as to enable citizens to develop informed and reasonable positions on the most important bioethical issues of the day. Students will become familiar with the leading arguments on both sides of the following contemporary bioethical controversies: abortion, euthanasia/physician-assisted suicide, commercial surrogate motherhood, enhancing human abilities, defining death, organ transplants, conscientious objection, curing the disabled vs. changing the society to accommodate them, patient autonomy and informed consent, rationing scarce resources and mandating vaccinations during the Covid-19 Epidemic.

The course is designed to present competing views about the above topics. Even if students don't switch sides on an issue due to the course readings, lectures, and discussions, the hope is that they will not only be able to give a stronger defense of their own positions but will also come to better appreciate the considerations that favor the opposing side. This might play a small role in making public debate more civil and reasonable.

The methodologies employed in the class should make students more aware of their own basic values, perhaps revealing to them commitments of which they were previously unaware. Students will learn how to construct philosophical arguments and critically read philosophy essays. All the required readings will be made available through UB Learns.

**PHI 237 PHI Medical Ethics: Social & Ethical Values in Medicine**

**Staff**

M W F, 9:00 AM – 9:50 AM

Class #: 20216

Examines current ethical positions and their application to ethical and social questions in medicine. This course is the same as SSC 237, and course repeat rules will apply. Students should consult with their major department regarding any restrictions on their degree requirements.

**PHI 248 LAW Philosophy and Popular Culture**

**Dr. James Lawler**

M W F, 10:20 AM – 11:10 AM

Class #: 24220

Contemporary television programs and films often involve the same issues, questions, and probing reflections that philosophers have explored since the time of Plato: How do we know what is a morally right action? How do we know whether something is real, or only a dream or illusion? Is there more to reality than what we can experience with our senses?

Do individuals have a purpose or destiny as a result of external conditions or forces, or is this a matter for individuals themselves to decide?

Bringing together pop culture and philosophy is beneficial to both sides. Stories told with skill and imagination in popular culture provide compelling illustrations of ideas treated abstractly and systematically by philosophers. Connecting popular culture with the concepts developed by philosophers makes the concepts seem less abstract, more personal. At the same time, by showing the presence of profound conceptual content in the works of pop culture, we will take these works more seriously – as more than mere entertainment. Often, the best of pop culture provides explorations that take philosophical ideas to unexpected levels, and so provide fresh stimulus for deeper philosophical reflection. Bringing together some prominent works in contemporary popular culture with relevant classical texts from the history of philosophy is both entertaining and intellectually fruitful.

The course will examine episodes from the TV series, *The Simpsons* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, as well as the films, *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, *The Matrix*, *Star Wars* and *The Da Vinci Code*. The main philosophical ideas are presented from the works of Plato, Kant, and Hegel. Course text: James Lawler, *The God Tube: The Hidden Spiritual Message in Pop Culture* (Chicago, Open Court Publishers, 2010).

### **PHI 320 BRA Philosophy of Mind**

**Dr. David Braun**

M W F, 11:30 AM – 12:20 PM

Class #: 24221

We will discuss some fundamental questions about the nature of minds and mental states, and what is sometimes known as the mind-body problem. Among the questions we will discuss are the following: Are minds and mental states physical or non-physical in nature? Are mental states just complex dispositions to behave in certain ways? Are mental states identical with certain kinds of brain states? In what respect (if any) is a mind like a computer? Could a purely physical object be conscious? How can a mental state represent something, or be about something? Could a physical state of a brain or computer do this? Our consideration of these questions will begin with arguments for and against several theories of the nature of minds and mental states, including dualism, materialism, behaviorism, and functionalism. The course will emphasize readings in contemporary philosophical literature.

Pre-requisite: one prior course in philosophy. Required work (tentative): Between three and thirteen online quizzes, two to three short papers, and two exams (taken in-person, if the course meets in-person, as planned). The second exam will occur during the final exam period.

**PHI 329 WIL Metaphysics****Dr. Neil Williams**

T Th, 9:35 AM – 10:50 AM

Class #: 24222

Metaphysics is concerned with the most fundamental categories of existence. These include events, particulars, properties, persons, facts, and so on. The best way to approach metaphysics is through the consideration of certain problems; as one begins to think about how best to solve these problems, the connections between the many metaphysical problems become clear.

Our aim in the course is to consider answers to, and methodologies employed in answering, the question: what is there? With that in mind, this course will pay close attention to five major metaphysical issues (universals; particulars; time; causation; persistence) but in so doing we are likely to touch on most of the topics that fall within the range of metaphysics.

Students are required to have taken at least one previous philosophy course to register. Given the content of the course, more than one previous course is highly recommended.

**PHI 335 LON Contemporary Ethical Theory****Dr. Duane Long**

M W F, 12:40 PM – 1:30 PM

Class #: 24223

This course will explore contemporary issues about the relation(s) between reason and desire and the phenomenon of moral motivation (and its failure). We will consider the nature of moral reasons and whether judgments about moral reasons are really judgments of subjective preference or whether they are a kind of belief, whether one needs to invoke desires at all in explaining why someone would be motivated to do what they think is morally right, and whether it is possible to make a sincere moral judgment but have no motivation to act in accordance with that judgment.

**PHI 341 GRA Social Philosophy****Dr. David Gray**

T Th, 12:45 PM – 2:00 PM

Class #: 21508

In this course, we investigate how the interplay of individual behaviors, informal norms, and social institutions may contribute to structural injustice. In doing so, will consider questions, such as: What are social justice and injustice? How does social justice intersect with notions of equality? What does it mean to be equals within society? How might injustice and inequality become imbedded within our basic social structures? Even if we aren't to blame for structural injustice, do we have a responsibility to address it? How can these discussions help us better understand, appraise, and respond to the injustices perpetuated by sexism and racism?

### **PHI 353 GRA Conflict and Dispute Resolution**

**Dr. David Gray**

M W F, 1:50 PM – 2:40 PM

Class #: 24224

Conflict is an intractable feature of life, occurring between family members, friends, coworkers, political organizations, citizens, nations, and even within oneself. As a result, you will often find yourself in situations where achieving your goals and meeting your obligations requires that you are able to secure the legitimate cooperation of others without resorting to force or fraud. Ultimately, it is up to you-and you alone-to negotiate and secure that cooperation in order to do your job, advance your career, and even maintain meaningful personal relationships with your family and friends. Utilizing the latest research in negotiation and conflict resolution, this course will prepare you for these challenges. In particular, you will learn the fundamentals of conflict resolution, while developing interpersonal techniques and tactics for effectively influencing others, especially in difficult situations involving strong emotions. By the end of the course, you will have more control and confidence for productively approaching interpersonal interactions that may cause stress, anxiety, or frustration.

### **PHI 370 POW Early Modern Philosophy**

**Dr. Lewis Powell**

T Th, 2:20 PM – 3:35 PM

Class #: 18190

Reviews the history of metaphysics and epistemology from the Renaissance to Kant.

We're all familiar with the claim that 'appearances can be deceiving,' or that 'things aren't always what they seem.' And we've all had experiences that exemplify those claims as well; we glance quickly from a distance and wind up mistaking a stranger for a close friend, or we get confused by an optical illusion. Since we make our judgments about the way things *are* on the basis of the way things *seem*, it makes sense to ask ourselves how we can tell the cases where appearances are deceiving from the cases where they are not.

What is reality like, and how can we figure that out from the way things seem or appear to be? This question was a major concern for philosophers in the early modern period, and in this course, we will study some of the most important/influential attempts to answer it offered by leading scholars of the day. We will also see how their answers to these questions relate to their views on freedom of the will, ethics, and personal identity.

#### Undergraduate Tutorial Sections:

PHI 498 Philosophy Undergraduate Tutorials

PHI 499 Philosophy Undergraduate Tutorials

*Meeting days and times as arranged with professors.*