

## Syllabus

# PHI 2010H Honors Introduction to Philosophy

3 CR, Fall 2016

Instructor: Dr. Mason Cash      E-mail: Mason.Cash@ucf.edu  
Phone: 407-823-6857      Office: PSY 246  
Office Hours: M 2:30-4:30 pm.      Web: [bit.ly/MasonCash](http://bit.ly/MasonCash)  
W 2:30-3:30 pm.      Classroom: BHC 126

Webcourses: <https://webcourses.ucf.edu/courses/1220164>

## Course Description

Philosophy courses explore different perspectives on deep and important questions. They also develop important skills, which are applicable in many areas of life. Through active participation in this course, you will improve your skills in:

- Understanding viewpoints different from your own
- Clearly explaining your views to others
- Assessing the reasons for holding your views
- Being convincing in defending your views

This course aims to develop these philosophical skills through critically reading, analyzing, discussing, and writing about classic and contemporary philosophical issues, questions and debates. During this course we will explore different approaches to questions such as:

- What is a good way to live one's life? Is there a best way?
- What would a just society be like? Is it even possible?
- What can we know? What does it take to "know" something?
- What is a person? Could a non-human be one?

The aim of the course is not merely to learn about what philosophers have thought about questions like these, but to *do* philosophy using philosophers' approaches to such questions as starting points.

By the end of this course, you should have your own answers to many of these questions, and should be able to explain your reasons for holding those views.

This course is an opportunity for you to think for yourselves, to examine and critically assess approaches to problems, and to defend ideas and positions of your own. The course, therefore, will require you to participate rather than simply take information in. You will read actively, and will be expected to reflect on what you read. You will also be given many opportunities to discuss with others, both verbally and in writing, your thoughts about the readings, questions and issues we cover.

## Required Textbook

*The World of Philosophy* (WP) Steven M. Cahn (Oxford University Press).  
You need the textbook by **Jan 21**. Get it at the UCF bookstore, or rent it or buy it from many other online sellers (if you get it elsewhere, make sure it is delivered before that date).

## Course Evaluation

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| • Class Attendance and Participation                        | 5%  |
| • In-class discussions (best 5) preparation & participation | 20% |
| • On-line discussion collaboration                          | 5%  |
| • On-line discussion leading and in-class summary           | 5%  |
| • Peer editing argument paper                               | 5%  |
| • Argument Paper (1200-1500 words)                          | 20% |
| • Two Quizzes   | 20% |
| • Final Exam  | 20% |

## Your week-one to-do list:

- Study this syllabus and bring any questions to class.
- Take the syllabus quiz after you have read this syllabus, by **Friday August 26<sup>th</sup>**. (Take it before then for participation credit. You should still take it after then for Student Financial Aid Academic Engagement recording purposes.)
- Buy or rent the textbook.
- Read the readings listed on the course schedule BEFORE the class in which they will be discussed. For Wednesday, read Beardsley and Beardsley: "What is Philosophy?" and Bertrand Russell: "The Value of Philosophy". The course schedule has links to pdfs for those who don't have the textbook yet.
- Begin the first on-line discussion on the purpose of education.
- Sign up to lead and report on one on-line discussion session this semester.
- Take the GEP pre-tests A, B, and C on Webcourses, linked from our Webcourses section, before **Sept 2**.

## A note about assigned readings

This course, like most philosophy courses, will involve a considerable amount of reading. Many of the assigned readings and exercises based on them ask you to think, write and talk about several authors' positions on important questions and issues, to encourage you to answer the questions for yourself.

So if you are committed to succeeding in this course, you should be prepared to read and study for about two hours or more for each class session.

Lectures will introduce and explain some of the basic points of assigned readings. But these will make much more sense if the lecture is explaining and elaborating on material you have already read and tried to make your own sense of, rather than introducing you to it for the first time. Thus by **reading the assigned chapters before class**, you will get more from the lecture and discussion, ask

more penetrating questions, and will have a better chance of a higher grade.

While you read, make notes. Highlight—even better, underline—the crucial passages. Make notes in the margin or ideally in a notebook. Try to answer the textbook's reading questions and critical questions (presented before and after readings). If there are any questions you cannot answer, read the relevant sections again. If you still do not understand, or if you do understand and they raise further questions (and I hope they do!), please ask questions about them in class. Try answering the questions again after class. Make sure you can answer them by then.

### Class attendance and participation

You are expected to attend all classes. Your attendance grade will be calculated by totaling the portion of the classes you attended, ignoring up to three absences (to allow for illness and other important absences). Absences of more than three classes will negatively affect your participation grade. Only documented excuses that explain more than two absences will be accepted. No other explanations are expected.

### In Class Discussion Sessions

A worksheet will be posted on the web-site approximately a week before the discussion session. It may include links to relevant web-site(s) and questions about the issues they raise.

**Before class:** submit to the WebCourses assignment a copy of the discussion worksheet, completed with your own informed thoughtful answers to the questions. Bring a copy to class, too. You will use this to help you contribute to your small group discussions.

Up to 2 points per session will be based on preparation (completed worksheets submitted to webcourses before class; graded for evidence that you have read the relevant material and thought about the issues involved.)

**In Class:** Bring with you to the discussion session a printed completed worksheet, with your own answers to the questions. These answers will be the basis for small group discussions.

Up to 2 points for participation in the discussion.

The point is that a lot of useful learning can happen during informed participation in discussions. Neither alone is sufficient.

You are expected to participate in all discussions (think of them as small, fun, midterms). Absences will be excused only for *documented* exceptional circumstances (ideally, arranged in advance). In such cases, the worksheet must still be completed carefully. Other absences cannot earn discussion participation credit.

However, we will be doing this at least six times through the semester. Your best five will count towards your final grade.

The worksheet must be completed BEFORE the class session.

### On-line discussion participation

You will participate in weekly discussions on WebCourses in a small on-line discussion group, with several other students.

These groups will discuss assigned questions each week. The purpose of these discussions is to explore the questions in the context of assigned readings and lectures.

You will be required to:

- post your own considered thoughts on the week's question (your position and your reasons for holding that position)
- read others postings.
- respond to the posting of two other group members (add examples, ask questions, raise reasons for disagreement, etc.).
- reply thoughtfully to any responses to your postings.

This means you may need to make 2-3 postings per week.

Your collaboration grade for these discussions will be based in part on peer-evaluation (by other group members) of your contributions to the group's process and products.

### On-line discussion summary

Each week one group member will take a turn as leader for the week's discussion and will write a brief report on the discussion for the rest of the class.

By the end of week one, each member will have signed up to lead the discussion and report on the results for a particular week. Each member will take a turn leading the discussion. (You can lead for more than one week if you wish—your best report score will count—as long as everyone gets a turn once.)

It is the leader's responsibility to ask questions, make suggestions, identify problems and so on, so that they are able to fully articulate the positions people express as well as the reasons people have expressed for holding them. (E.g. if you cannot identify the reasons someone has for holding the position they do, then ask them about those reasons.)

**Each leader's report** will be posted on webcourses, and verbally presented to the class. The written version will be about **500 words** (being excessively longer or shorter than this may incur penalties). This will be posted to a separate discussion topic for Group leaders only. The verbal presentation should be explained to the class (not just reading the written version). Your grade will be based on clearly reporting:

- the most important aspects of your group's discussion,
- the conclusions many of you agree about
- the reasons for concluding that,
- the aspects of the issue or question that some disagree about,
- the reasons for dissent.

Your grade (5% of course grade) will be based on clearly reporting the most important aspects of your group's discussion, the

conclusions many of you agree about and the reasons for concluding that, the parts some may disagree about and the reasons for that dissent.

The report should be posted to the **SUMMARIES discussion forum before class**. Late penalties of class begins will incur a 1 point deduction. Each week one group member for each group will take a turn as leader for the week's discussion and will present a brief report on the discussion for the rest of the class.

Leaders will also verbally present a summary of the group's discussion to the class; about **two to four minutes**.

### Quizzes and Final Examination

Quizzes will consist of a few multiple choice questions and short answer questions. The final exam will include something similar, as well as one longer essay.

Exam and quiz questions will be based on lectures, discussions and on readings. Anything that I or anybody else says in class is potentially examinable.

### Grading & Evaluation

Your work for the course will total a score out of 100. I use this to determine a letter grade. I think a rigid set of cutoff points for grades is unfair because this would mean that people with very similar score get different grades (it would be unfair for a student who earns with 79.75 should not necessarily get a C+, while another student with 80.0 earns a B-).

I think it is better for you to earn a fair grade, even if this means that your final grade is not completely predictable grade. You should have a sense of the approximate grade your performance so far would earn, and should just do you best to improve our grade in whatever assignments or exams remain.

So I try to make principled distinctions between groups of students, rather than using arbitrary cutoffs. Borderline cases are decided using (in order): exam scores, quiz scores, discussion participation, class participation.

**VERY ROUGHLY**, the following are the **approximate** bounds of the ranges at which I often award grades.

| Score  | 0-59 | 60-69   | 70-79   | 80-89   | 90+  |
|--------|------|---------|---------|---------|------|
| Grade: | F    | D- D D+ | C- C C+ | B- B B+ | A- A |

**IMPORTANT:** Final grades may not necessarily precisely follow the above approximate boundaries; they may vary by +/- 3 points or so. If, for example, you end up with 79.5, this does not necessarily mean that you were 0.5 points from earning a B-. The cutoff for B- might be as high as 83 or so in some semesters.

**You should be able to earn a B (+/-) grade for this course. You can do this by:**

- Coming to class most of the time
- Taking notes to help you remember the lectures
- Doing most of the assigned readings, and often taking notes about the authors' arguments while you read
- Occasionally thinking about the textbook's study questions; sometimes writing down your answers
- Using the textbook site's resources to review each chapter at the end of the course
- Putting some thought into your preparation for the in-class discussions, and occasionally contributing to your group's discussions of the topic at hand.
- Participating in the on-line discussions most of the time.
- When it is your turn to summarize the on-line discussion, writing a brief summary of some of the main points some people raised in on-line discussion. Submitting the summary on time. Giving a mostly organized presentation.
- Spending some time crafting and editing the draft of your paper. Taking peer-editor's feedback and suggestions into account when editing the final draft.
- coming to office hours to discuss with the professor any small problems you have about the course, before they turn into big problems

**You can increase your chance of earning an A/A- in this course by:**

- Actively participating in all classes
- Always taking notes to help you remember and think about the class content
- Doing all of the assigned readings, and taking detailed notes about the positions argued for and each author's reasons for holding that position
- Regularly writing out your answers to the textbook's study questions
- Using the textbook site's resources to review each chapter as we finish that section of the course, as well as for reviewing at the end of the course
- Always contributing to your group's in-class discussions of the topic at hand, asking questions of others, engaging with others in a deep examination of the topic or question at hand.
- Always actively participating in the on-line discussions, giving thoughtful responses to others' posts, and taking an active role in asking for reasons for people's views and clearly articulating your own reasons.

- When it is your turn to summarize the on-line discussion, writing a thoughtful summary of the most important points some people raised in on-line discussion, and clearly explaining the reasons given in support of those views. Submitting the summary on time and giving a clear presentation in class.
- Spending some time crafting and editing several drafts of your paper. Taking peer-editor's feedback and suggestions into account when editing the final draft. Talking about your paper topic with anyone you can get to listen. Having friends, roommates, parents and others read and ask questions about your draft, and taking their confusions, questions and objections as suggesting aspects to clarify and to better explain and defend your position.
- Thinking about the issues we discuss, relating them to examples from your own life, and talking about them with friends and relations
- Coming to office hours to discuss with the professor any small problems you have about the course, before they turn into big problems

**You can increase your chance of earning a C (+/-) grade for this course by:**

- Avoiding coming to class on days when you don't feel like coming
- Resisting the urge to take notes to help you remember the lectures
- Resisting the inclination to read the assigned readings (in spite of your curiosity about them), and not taking notes to help you remember the main points when you do read them
- Avoiding reading or thinking about the textbook's study questions
- Participating in the on-line discussions only some of the time.
- When it is your turn to summarize the on-line discussion, writing a very brief summary of one or two points other people raised. Submitting the summary a little late. In class, rambling about some of the things you vaguely recall people talking about.
- Spending little time crafting and editing your paper. Ignoring peer-editor's feedback and suggestions, and submitting a paper that has changed little from your initial draft.
- Not coming to office hours to discuss with the professor any small problems you have about the course; wait until they turn into big problems.

**To Earn a D (+/-), do some or all of the following:**

- Do even more of the things described above for earning a C.

**To earn an F, do some or all of the following:**

- Never come to class.
- Never do the readings
- Never complete any assignments
- Never contribute to group discussions

- Never reading or participating in on-line discussions.
- When it is your turn to summarize the on-line discussion, you forget about writing a summary.
- Never discussing with the professor any small problems you have about the course. Let them turn into big problems, but still don't discuss them with the professor. Wait until they become complete fiascos. Be at the stage of wishing you had a time machine before you decide to talk to the professor.

## Course Policies:

### Class attendance

You are expected to attend all classes. Absence of more than three classes can adversely affect your grade.

Absences for more than three classes will be accommodated only for *documentable* exceptional circumstances (medical or family emergencies, representing UCF on a sports team, religious holy day, etc.). You only need to contact me for such documentable absences. If you anticipate an absence, let me know beforehand.

### Extensions and Late Penalties

Extensions will be granted only for *documentable* exceptional circumstances (medical or family emergencies). Ask for the extension as soon as you are aware of the problem, not on the due date. Anticipated absences are not reasons for extensions (submit it before you leave).

Late assignments will be deducted 5% of their potential value per day late, so an assignment worth a maximum of 10 points loses 1/2 a point a day; four days late its score will be deducted 2 marks. Weekend days count fully.

However, if you feel that your circumstances warrant consideration as an exception, discuss this with me as early as possible.

### Plagiarism & Cheating

UCF faculty support the UCF Creed. **Integrity** - practicing and defending academic and personal honesty - is the first tenet of the UCF Creed. This is in part a reflection of the second tenet, **Scholarship**: - I will cherish and honor learning as a fundamental purpose of membership in the UCF community.

Course assignments and tests are designed to have educational value; the process of preparing for and completing these exercises will help improve your skills and knowledge. Material presented to satisfy course requirements is therefore expected to be the result of your own original scholarly efforts.

UCF's Golden Rule defines **plagiarism** as follows: "whereby another's work is used or appropriated without any indication of the source, thereby attempting to convey the impression that such

work is the student's own." **Cheating** is using unauthorized material, or giving or accepting unauthorized help on assignments or tests. These contradict the educational value of course assignments and quizzes. Students who attempt to obtain unearned academic credentials that do not reflect their skills and knowledge can also undermine the value of the UCF degrees earned by their more honest peers.

I have a responsibility for your education and the value of a UCF degree, and so have a responsibility to discourage and prevent unethical behavior, and to respond to infringements of academic integrity when necessary. Plagiarism is a serious academic offense.

The *typical* penalty for plagiarism or cheating in this course will be a loss of credit for the assignment AND a deduction of one grade for the course (e.g. a B+ becomes a B), which may result in a failing grade in the course. (So you would do better to do a bad job honestly than to cheat and get caught.) Perpetrators may also be required to take an academic integrity seminar. Serious cases can lead to academic probation, suspension, expulsion from the University, or the revocation of a degree. <http://www.osc.sdes.ucf.edu/> has more about UCF's Rules of Conduct.

#### **Multiple Submissions:**

Note: UCF policy also makes Multiple Submissions an infringement of the Code of Academic conduct. This forbids submitting the same academic work for credit more than once without the express written permission of the instructor.

I use [www.TurnItIn.com](http://www.TurnItIn.com) and other methods to make it difficult to plagiarize or cheat and relatively easy to detect attempts to do so. I hope you will consider it not worth the risk, and can appreciate that **doing the assignments honestly is part of the educational experience** that you came to university to have. Copies of papers may be retained by TurnItIn.

#### **Classroom Behavior**

Your responsibilities as a student of UCF are outlined in The Golden Rule. <http://www.goldenrule.sdes.ucf.edu/>.

#### **Accessibility and Classroom Accommodations**

The University of Central Florida is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for all persons with disabilities. This syllabus is available in alternate formats upon request.

Students with disabilities who need accommodations in this course must contact the professor at the beginning of the semester to discuss needed accommodations. No accommodations will be provided until the student has discussed appropriate accommodations with the professor. Students who need accommodations must be registered with Student Accessibility Services, Student Resource Center Room 132, phone (407) 823-2371, before requesting accommodations from the professor.