

# **Syllabus**

## **Fall 2016**

## **PHI 4420**

### **Instructor Contact**

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- Office Hours: Correspondence via course messaging system
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### **Course Information**

- Course Name: Philosophy of Social Science
- Course ID: PHI 4420, section OW61
- Credit Hours:3
- Semester/Year: Fall 2016
- Location: Online

### **Course Description**

Ordinary folk make claims about people's beliefs and motives. That is, they do "folk psychology". We all have folk-psychological knowledge of ourselves and others. What is the source of this knowledge? Are we each normally aware of our own moment-to-moment psychological states in a direct way that makes it unnecessary to theorize about which psychological states we are in? If so, day-to-day psychological states are not theoretical postulates. If folk-psychological knowledge is grounded in a first-person non-theoretical perspective, is the scientific study of psychology impossible as a result? Moreover, we take ourselves and others to be rational creatures. Is rationality a normative notion, like morality? Would the normative character of rationality be further evidence for the impossibility of a science of psychology? What would such considerations tell us about disciplines that study social phenomena, such as sociology, history, and economics? Are they necessarily non-sciences?

These are just some of the issues covered in this course. We will also cover matters related to social ontology: Are collectives anything over and above the individuals that belong to them? In what sense can a group believe something or make a decision? What are class and race and what place might they occupy in our framework for understanding societies?

In general, the course should be of interest to anyone who wants to investigate topics fundamental to psychology, sociology, history, philosophy of mind, and cognitive science.

### **Course Objectives**

A major aim of this course is for you to develop your ability to read, write, and think. If you are successful in the course, you will see improvement with respect to the following skills:

- Comprehending complex written material
- Putting difficult material in your own words clearly and succinctly
- Evaluating philosophical arguments
- Advancing good philosophical arguments yourself

## Required Texts

There is no required textbook. All readings will be made available in Canvas.

## Course Requirements

There are three types of assignments in the course:

- Weekly Reading Quizzes
- Weekly Small-group Discussions
- Term Paper

## Course Scheduling

Every week has the same schedule:

- **Friday is a reading day. Start reading on Friday. You cannot possibly digest all of the material if you wait until Monday.** Also, in the course Modules, you will find an overview of each reading. These will help you keep perspective as you read the selections, which are quite difficult, so take the overviews seriously and be sure to refer to them as you read.
- **Reading quizzes are always due on Monday by 11:59 PM. They are open-book quizzes, but it is very important that you not try to complete the quizzes as you are reading a selection for the first time.** That approach is anxiety inducing and you will not have time to do well.
- Small group discussions have two parts. **The first part is always due on Tuesday by 11:59 PM, and the second part is always due on Thursday by 11:59 PM.** Don't expect to be able to complete Part 2 (which is commentary on your group mates' Part 1) as soon as you post Part 1 on Tuesday, as your group mates have until the deadline to complete Part 1. **Usually you will have to wait until Wednesday to complete Part 2.**

**The first week is an exception to the regular schedule.** There is a syllabus quiz due on Friday, by 11:59 PM. There is assigned reading for Friday to prepare you for Week 2. Week 2 will follow the scheduling outlined above and the assignments that week will be based on the readings assigned during the first week.

**The term paper will be due at the end of the semester.** There will be a pre-writing exercise to help you get started. Your task will be to develop a criticism of an argument found in one of the reading selections. The paper will be 10 pages in length. I do use Turnitin to check for plagiarism.

There is a "Weekly Assignment Schedule" file under Files. It would be a good idea to print this and keep it in a place that will make it serve a reminder. Be especially careful about forgetting to complete Part 2 of the small-group discussions. You are also advised to print the "Reading Tips and Quiz Advice" for regular review.

## **Missed Assignments/Make-Ups**

Missing a deadline is not something that can be taken lightly because of fairness and assignment security. **You should consider it very unlikely that you will be able to make up a missed assignment.** I can allow such make-up work only if your circumstances are truly extraordinary and you provide proper documentation in a reasonable amount of time. Excusable failures to meet deadlines include documented medical emergencies, deaths in the family, and some university sponsored activities. Telling me that you were sick or having a roommate write a note will not count as documentation. A conflict with prior travel plans, etc. or other personal commitments does not constitute an excuse. **All due dates are specified in Eastern Time, so if you are not in this time zone it your responsibility to compensate for the time difference.**

Since this is an online course, you need to have a well-functioning computer and decent internet. The weekly quizzes cannot be retaken if you have an electronic issue in the middle of one and as a result cannot complete the quiz. This rarely happens, but because of the possibility, **your two lowest quizzes will be dropped.** If you find yourself having connection problems, it is best to take care of it right away instead of dropping two grades and hoping it doesn't happen again.

It is the student's responsibility look to **verify that an attempt to submit a small-group discussion post was successful.** You should be able to see your comments once you submit them.

## **Attendance and Participation**

There is no class to attend, since this is an online course. However, punctuality, participation, and civility still apply. I strongly encourage you to be a full participant in the class discussions. Don't worry about getting something wrong. If something is unclear to you, it is probably unclear to several other people, and your input may well help us focus in on the difficulty. Voicing your opinion, putting an idea on the table for examination, or just asking a question can be very helpful in a class discussion. Always remember to be civil towards people who have different beliefs from yours.

Small-group discussions are integral to this course. Your group mates' completion of these assignments depends on your timely submission of your individual post. Moreover, if you submit something on time but your submission lacks substance, you give your group mates little to work with, which affects their ability to do good work. **For this reason, any small-group discussion submission that is either late or lacks substance will receive no credit. Every discussion has two parts, and lateness or no substance with respect to either part earns you a 0 for that part. There is no partial credit for discussion submissions for which you submit something late or insubstantial. At least two replies to your group mates are required for Part 2, and**

**if you submit only one reply or one of your replies lacks substance you will receive a 0 for Part 2. Please note that if you don't submit Part 1 you will not have access to the discussion in order to complete Part 2, which means a 0 for both parts. If you fail to submit Part 1 on time you can submit it late (for no credit) so that you can complete Part 2.**

You are expected to have a meaningful (i.e., sincere and contentful) dialogue with the members of your small group in response to a prompt. Expressions of agreement, disagreement, or praise are insufficient. You are not commenting on writing style and effectiveness or the psychological impact a post had on you. You are not assessing your group mates' performance on the assignment. Focus on philosophical content. Examples of insubstantial posts are:

- Great post! Your example really cleared up the reading for me!
- I like your post, but it would have been better if you had provided an example.
- Your post is really similar to mine -- I guess we think alike!

Sometimes your group mates will reveal a failure to understand something important or make a leap that is not clearly justified. To point this out would be to engage them on a matter of substance. Also, a group mate's example might not really show what he or she thinks it does. To point this out with an explanation (and perhaps modify the example to make it work better) would be to engage your group mate on a matter of substance.

Keep in mind that your goal is to be helpful!

## **Grade Determination**

There are 100 possible percentage points for the course. This percentage will be displayed in the course grade book throughout semester as you complete the assignments. The grade scale is as follows:

<b>Letter Grade</b>	<b>Points</b>
A	90 – 100%
B+	87 – 89%
B	80 – 86%
C+	77 – 79%
C	70 – 76%
D+	67 – 69%
D	60 – 66%
F	59% and below

The grade scale is subject to change at the instructor's discretion, depending on the final grade distribution. A change in the grade scale would only increase grades -- no grades would be reduced. Please do not contact the instructor at the end of the semester to ask whether you could

be "bumped up" to a higher grade because you came so close or because you really need the grade. To do so is to ask someone to do something unethical.

There are four types of assignments for you to complete. Each category of assignment is worth a percentage of your final grade:

<b>Assignment Group</b>	<b>Percentage of Grade</b>
Weekly Reading Quizzes	30%
Small-group Discussions	35%
Term Paper	35%

## **Academic Honesty**

Plagiarism and cheating of any kind on an examination, quiz, or assignment will result at least in an "F" for that assignment (and may, depending on the severity of the case, lead to an "F" for the entire course) and may be subject to appropriate referral to the [Office of Student Conduct](#) for further action. See the [UCF Golden Rule](#) for further information. I will assume for this course that you will adhere to the academic creed of this University and will maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. In other words, don't cheat by giving answers to others or taking them from anyone else. I will also adhere to the highest standards of academic integrity, so please do not ask me to change (or expect me to change) your grade illegitimately or to bend or break rules for one person that will not apply to everyone.

Plagiarism includes copying and submitting as your own a passage from a text, the work of a fellow student; handing in a paper prepared by another as your own; using sources for writing your paper and not citing them in the paper. Plagiarism does cover materials found on web-sites. Note that it is possible to plagiarize even if you cite your sources, if, e.g., the wording is too close to the cited text.

If, in writing a paper, you have any questions about what counts as plagiarism or how to avoid plagiarism, please discuss the paper with me before turning it in.

## **Diversity and Inclusion**

This class is an educational safe zone. It welcomes and respects the viewpoints of students of all sexual orientations and gender identities as well as all races, ethnicities, religions and abilities. All members of the learning community are expected to treat each other with respect and dignity.

## **Students with Disabilities**

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 met with the professor to request accommodations. Students who need accommodations must be registered with [Student Disability Services](#), Ferrell Commons, 7F, Room 185, phone (407) 823-2371, TTY/TDD only phone (407) 823-2116, before requesting accommodations from the professor.

## **Important Notice for Financial Aid Recipients**

As of Fall 2014, all faculty members are required to document students' academic activity at the beginning of each course. In order to document that you began this course, please complete the academic activity below. Failure to do so will result in a delay in the disbursement of your financial aid.

Activity: Complete the Syllabus Quiz.

## **Copyright**

This course may contain copyright protected materials such as audio or video clips, images, text materials, etc. These items are being used with regard to the Fair Use doctrine in order to enhance the learning environment. Please do not copy, duplicate, download or distribute these items. The use of these materials is strictly reserved for this online classroom environment and your use only. All copyright materials are credited to the copyright holder.

## **Third-Party Software and FERPA**

During this course you might have the opportunity to use public online services and/or software applications sometimes called third-party software such as a blog or wiki. While some of these could be required assignments, you need **not** make any personally identifying information on a public site. Do not post or provide any private information about yourself or your classmates. Where appropriate you may use a pseudonym or nickname. Some written assignments posted publicly may require personal reflection/comments, but the assignments will not require you to disclose any personally identity-sensitive information. If you have any concerns about this, please contact your instructor.

## **Topics and Readings**

### **1: Mind, Theory, and Observation**

#### *Knowing other Minds*

- P.F Strawson: Persons
- Bertrand Russell: Analogy

#### *Theory vs. Observation*

- Grover Maxwell: The Ontological Status of Theoretical Entities

- P. F. Strawson: The Objects of Perception

## **2: Could there be Social Scientific Laws?**

- Carl Hempel: The Function of General Laws in History
- Nancy Cartwright: The Truth Doesn't Explain Much
- John Searle: Prospects for Social Science
- Amy Thomason: Foundations for a Social Ontology

## **3: Rationality, Normativity, and Interpretation**

- R.G. Collingwood: Human Nature and Human History
- Clifford Geertz: Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture
- Dagfin Føllesdal: Hermeneutics and the Hypothetico-Deductive Method

## **4: Individuals and Collectives**

*What are groups?*

- Steven Lukes: Methodological Individualism Reconsidered
- Harold Kincaid: Reduction, Explanation, and Individualism

*Class*

- Karl Marx: The North American Civil War
- Karl Marx: The Civil War in the United States
- John Cassidy: Is America an Oligarchy?
- Martin Gilens and Benjamin I. Page: Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens

*Race*

- T-Nehisi Coates: How Racism Invented Race in America
- T-Nehisi Coates: Slavery Made America
- Cornel West: On Affirmative Action

## **5: Economics: Science or Non-Science?**

- Nancy Cartwright: Economics as Science
- Alexander Rosenberg: If Economics Isn't a Science, What is it?