

Philosophy 412: Epistemology

Fall 2019

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Office hours: Tuesdays, 12-1 and by appointment

Overview: This class is about epistemology, the study of knowledge, justification and rationality more generally. We will cover a mixture of classic issues, like skepticism and the nature of knowledge, and more recent questions, like what we learn from peer disagreement and whether there is always a uniquely rational opinion, for a given body of evidence. Epistemology is an enormous branch of philosophy, so this course focuses on a smaller number of issues in detail.

Prerequisites: Officially, 730:201 and two additional courses in philosophy. However, logic will not be a major focus so if you are interested in taking the class but have not taken 730:201, contact me.

Website: The course website can be found on Sakai (<https://sakai.rutgers.edu/portal>). I will use it to make announcements, distribute handouts and readings and to post paper topics. It is very important that you are able to access the website. If you are not able to, let me know straightaway.

Reading: All readings will be posted on the Sakai site.

Forum: There is a forum page on the website that you will use to discuss the readings ahead of one reading **every week**. Forum posts should be 100-200 words and should include a short summary of some aspect of the reading and some thought or comment on or objection to that aspect. Often I will post prompts to discuss specific parts of the reading. (If I don't, you're free to choose for yourself.)

Forum posts must be made by **midnight the day before lecture**.

Assessment: You will write one medium length paper (~3,000 words) and one longer final paper (~5,000 words). The first paper will be due on November 12 and the final paper on December 16.

There will be three short writing assignments, distributed throughout the semester. These will be shorter assignments (/longer versions of forum posts) that ask you to summarise some argument in more detail and give a short response. These may form the basis for your longer papers, if you so choose.

There will also be a participation grade based on your contribution to discussion in class and a grade based on your forum posts.

The grades will be broken down as follows:

Writing assignments: 5% (x 3 = 15%)
Paper 2: 25%
Paper 3: 35%
Participation in class: 12.5%
Forum posts: 12.5%

Paper drafts: I am happy to discuss drafts of your papers with you before you submit them. However, if you wish to do so, you must email the paper to me and arrange a meeting to discuss it with me. Requests must also be made in a timely manner: I will not accommodate requests to meet that happen with 36 hours before the deadline.

Class Policies:

Attendance: Unexcused absences will have a negative impact on your participation grade. If you will be absent, I expect you to use the university website, <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/>, to report this, indicating the date of and reason for your absence.

Late Assignments: Late assignments will not be accepted, except in the case of illness, bereavement and other extenuating circumstances. Any extensions must be cleared ahead of time.

Academic Integrity: Violations of academic integrity are a very serious matter and the consequences can be extremely severe. Among the most serious violations are cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, denying others access to information or material, and facilitating violations of academic integrity. (For a more thorough overview of what violations are and what their consequences can be, see <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/>.)

Plagiarism can occur unintentionally from ignorance; but ignorance is not an excuse. If you are not sure what counts as plagiarism, consult the following tools:

The Camden Plagiarism Tutorial (INTERACTIVE):

<http://library.camden.rutgers.edu/EducationalModules/Plagiarism/>

Consult Don't Plagiarize: Document Your Research! For tips about how to take notes so that you don't plagiarize by accident. http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/avoid_plagiarism

Further resources are available at <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/resources-for-students/>.

Laptop Policy: I strongly encourage you all to take notes *by hand*: it's well-documented that taking notes by hand better facilitates learning. But however you decide to take notes, please refrain from using phones in class and from using laptops for social media and other non-class related activities during lectures.

Schedule of Readings:

9/3 Intro, no reading

The Definition of Knowledge

9/5 Getter, "Is Knowledge Justified True Belief" and Pollock, *Contemporary Theories of Knowledge*, selections

9/10 Goldman, "Discrimination and Perceptual Knowledge"

9/12 Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations*, selections

9/17 Descartes, *Meditations*, selections and Nozick, *PE*, §2

9/19 Kripke, "Nozick on Knowledge", selections

9/24 Kripke, "Nozick on Knowledge", selections

(Writing assignment 1 due)

9/26 Sosa, "How to Defeat Opposition to Moore"

Skepticism and Debunking

10/1 Descartes, *Meditations*, Meditation 1 and Moore, "Proof of an External World"

10/3 Pryor, "The Skeptic and the Dogmatist"

10/8 Lewis, "Elusive Knowledge"

10/10 Rinard, "Reasoning One's Way Out of Skepticism"

10/15 Sher, "But I Could Be Wrong";
Cohen, excerpt from *If You're an Egalitarian, then How Come You're so Rich?*

10/17 Elga, "Lucky to be Rational"

10/22 Class cancelled
(Writing assignment 2 due)

10/24 White, "You Just Believe that Because..."

10/29 Vavova, "Irrelevant Influences"

Disagreement

- 10/31 Feldman, "Rational Religious Disagreement"
- 11/5 Kelly, "The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement"
- 11/7 Kelly, "The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement", again
(Writing assignment 3 due)
- 11/12 Elga, "Reflection and Disagreement"
- 11/14 Christensen, "Epistemology of Disagreement: the Good News"
- 11/19 Paper writing workshop

Permissivism

- 11/21 White, "Epistemic Permissiveness"
- 11/24 Paper 1 due**
- 11/26 Kelly, "How to be an Epistemic Permissivist"
- 11/28 Thanksgiving break
- 12/3 Schoenfield, "Permissivism and the Value of Rationality"

Higher-order evidence

- 12/5 Christensen, "Higher-Order Evidence"
- 12/10 Horowitz, "Epistemic Akrasia"
- 12/16 Paper 2 due**