

Phil 140.001: Knowledge and Society (online)

Summer Semester 2, 2022, UNC Chapel Hill
MTWRF 9.45am-11.15am

Instructor: Dominik Berger
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Office Hours: TR 11.15am-12.15am

Course Description: PHIL 140. Knowledge and Society (3 Credits)

An examination of questions about knowledge, evidence, and rational belief as they arise in areas of social life such as democratic politics, the law, science, religion, and education. Honors version available.

IDEAs in Action Gen Ed: FC-KNOWING or FC-POWER.

Making Connections Gen Ed: PH.

Grading Status: Letter grade.

Learning Outcomes

At the end of the course:

1. Students will be able to identify both the main conclusion and the supporting premises of that conclusion in philosophy papers.
2. Students will be able to assess how well philosophical contributions capture the phenomena they describe.
3. Students will be able to draw connections between the readings and their personal knowledge and experiences.

Readings

All readings will be made available on Sakai.

Course Requirements and Grading Policy

Attendance: 10%

A-Range: 90-93 = A-, 94-100 = A

Special Participation: 30%

B-Range: 80-83 = B-, 84-86 = B, 87-89 = B+

Short Paper 1: 20%

C-Range: 70-73 = C-, 74-76 = C, 77-79 = C+

Short Paper 2: 20%

D-Range: 60-66 = D, 67-69 = D+

Final Exam: 20%

F-Range: 0-59 = F

Assignments

Attendance

Attendance at lectures is required as part of UNC's policy (see also the appendix at the end of the syllabus). But it is especially important during this course for two reasons: (1) The ideas we are discussing are often fairly difficult to grasp and so it's important that you come to lecture to make sure that you are understanding the readings accurately. (2) A large component of this course is for you to share your ideas and perspective with others — but if you don't come to class or don't participate, others will miss out on hearing your thoughts! To make sure that your incentives align with UNC's attendance policy, attendance will contribute **10% to your overall grade**.

Special Participation

The issues discussed in this class are relevant to all of our lives and I think it is important that throughout the course everyone is able to share their perspective. This is why **four times** throughout the semester you will be required to take on a leading role in the group discussions of the small study group to which I will assign you at the beginning of the semester. This means that you should (i) think of questions to discuss about a particular paper beforehand and send them to me before the day that the reading is due, (ii) manage the discussion of your group during that day, and (iii) write a short reflection indicating how the topics discussed in class that day relate to your own experience. The questions and reflection together should add up to **1 page of writing**. Each instance of your special participation assignment will be worth **7.5% of your overall grade**. I will distribute more information about this assignment and who is in your group at the beginning of the semester.

Short Papers

You will be expected to write 2 short papers over the course of this semester. To help you learn how to incorporate the concepts we are learning in this class into the conversations you have with your friends and family we will not be writing traditional philosophy papers in this class. Instead each of you will write **two letters** to people that you are close to in which you will explain a point from a particular reading we did in this class and explain why you think that point is important. Each of these letters will be **3 pages long** and worth **20% of your overall grade**. I will distribute more information about this assignment at the beginning of class.

Final Exam

There is evidence that studying for a final exam improves long-term retention of the material covered on the exam. This is why we will have a final exam that covers all the material we have studied over the course of the semester. It will consist of short answer questions that are designed to test your understanding of the main points discussed in the course. I will distribute a list of questions beforehand that you can use to prepare for the exam — the questions on the final exam will be a subset of those questions. The final exam is worth **20% of your overall grade**.

Note: These exercises will add up to 10 pages of writing.

Late Policy

I am happy to grant **short** extensions of two days for the two short papers and the special participation *reflection* as long as you send me an email beforehand. If you should suffer a serious and genuinely unforeseen medical or personal emergency and need a longer extension, that emergency has to be verified with the Dean of Students Office (<https://deanofstudents.unc.edu/>) first. If an assignment is more than two days late it will be docked 1/3 of a letter grade for each day that it is late, unless you were experiencing a serious and genuinely unforeseen medical or personal emergency, and only when the emergency can be verified with the Dean of Students Office.

Note: The instructor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus, including project due dates and test dates. These changes will be announced as early as possible.

Course Schedule:

Week 1 — Bullshit

Monday, June 20th - Introduction

Tuesday, June 21st - Harry Frankfurt, “On Bullshit”

Wednesday, June 22nd - Hans Maes and Katerin Schaubroeck, “Different Kinds and Aspects of Bullshit”

Thursday, June 23rd - Kenneth A. Taylor, “Bullshit and the Foibles of the Human Mind, or what the Masters of the Dark Arts Know”

Friday, June 24th - Heather Douglas, “Bullshit at the Interface of Science and Policy: Global Warming, Toxic Substances, and Other Pesky Problems”

Week 2 — Conspiracy Theories

Monday, June 27th - How to write a Philosophy Paper

Tuesday, June 28th - Susan Feldman, “Counterfact Conspiracy Theories.”

Wednesday, June 29th - M. Giulia Napolitano, “Conspiracy Theories and Evidential Self-Insulation”

Thursday, June 30th - M.R.X. Dentith, “Debunking Conspiracy Theories.”

Friday, July 1st - Katherine Hawley, “Conspiracy theories, impostor syndrome, and distrust”
Paper 1 due.

Week 3 - Fake News

Monday, July 4th - No classes

Tuesday, July 5th - Nikil Mukerji, "What Is Fake News?"

Wednesday, July 6th - Regina Rini, "Fake News and Partisan Epistemology"

Thursday, July 7th - Elizabeth Stewart, "Detecting Fake News: Two Problems for Content Moderation"

Friday, July 8th - Catch-up

Week 4 - Echo Chambers and Belief Polarization

Monday, July 11th - C. Thi Nguyen, "Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles"

Tuesday, July 12th - Alex Worsnip, "The Obligation to Diversify One's Sources: Against Epistemic Partisanship in the Consumption of News Media"

Wednesday, July 13th - Podcast: The Philosopher & The News, "Elizabeth Anderson & Talking to the Other Side"

Thursday, July 14th - Hrishikesh Joshi, "What are the Chances You're Right about Everything? An Epistemic Challenge for Modern Partisanship"

Friday, July 15th - Catch-up

Paper 2 due.

Week 5 - Disagreement and Irrelevant Influences on Belief

Monday, July 18h - G.A. Cohen, "Paradoxes of Conviction"

Tuesday, July 19th - Katia Vavova, "Irrelevant Influences"

Wednesday, July 20th - Richard Feldman, "Reasonable Religious Disagreements"

Thursday, July 21th - Review

Friday, July 22th - Reading Day

Week 6 - Final Exam

Monday, July 25th — **Final Exam at 8.00am**

Appendix: University Policies and Support Services

Attendance Policy

No right or privilege exists that permits a student to be absent from any class meetings, except for these University Approved Absences:

1. Authorized University activities
2. Disability/religious observance/pregnancy, as required by law and approved by [Accessibility Resources and Service](#) and/or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](#) (EOC)
3. Significant health condition and/or personal/family emergency as approved by the [Office of the Dean of Students](#), [Gender Violence Service Coordinators](#), and/or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](#) (EOC).

Instructors may work with students to meet attendance needs that do not fall within University approved absences. For situations when an absence is not University approved (e.g., a job interview or club activity), instructors determine their own approach to missed classes and make-up assessment and assignments.

Honor Code

All students are expected to follow the guidelines of the UNC honor code. In particular, students are expected to refrain from “lying, cheating, or stealing” in the academic context. If you are unsure about which actions violate the honor code, please see me or consult [honor.unc.edu](#).

Acceptable Use Policy

By enrolling as a student in this course, you agree to abide by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill policies related to the acceptable use of IT systems and services. You may be asked to participate in online discussions or other online activities that may include personal information about you or other students in the course. The rights and protection of other participants are protected under the UNC-Chapel Hill [Information Technology Acceptable Use Policy](#), which covers topics related to using digital resources, such as privacy, confidentiality, and intellectual property. Consult the University website “[Safe Computing at UNC](#)” for information about the data security policies, updates, and tips on keeping your identity, information, and devices safe.

Accessibility Resources and Services

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability or pregnancy complications resulting in barriers to fully accessing University courses, programs and activities. Accommodations are determined through the Office of Accessibility Resources and Service (ARS) for individuals with documented qualifying disabilities in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. See the ARS Website for contact information: <https://ars.unc.edu> or email ars@unc.edu.

Counseling and Psychological Services

CAPS is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body through timely access to consultation and connection to clinically appropriate services, whether for short or long-term needs. Go to their website: <https://caps.unc.edu/> or visit their facilities on the third floor of the Campus Health Services building for a walk-in evaluation to learn more.

Title IX Resources

Any student who is impacted by discrimination, harassment, interpersonal (relationship) violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, or stalking is encouraged to seek resources on campus or in the community. Reports can be made online to the EOC at <https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/>. Please contact the University's Title IX Coordinator (Elizabeth Hall, interim-titleixcoordinator@unc.edu), Report and Response Coordinators in the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office (reportandresponse@unc.edu), Counseling and Psychological Services (confidential), or the Gender Violence Services Coordinators (gvsc@unc.edu; confidential) to discuss your specific needs. Additional resources are available at safe.unc.edu.

Policy on Non-Discrimination

The University is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and to ensuring that educational and employment decisions are based on individuals' abilities and qualifications. Consistent with this principle and applicable laws, the University's [Policy Statement on Non-Discrimination](#) offers access to its educational programs and activities as well as employment terms and conditions without respect to race, color, gender, national origin, age, religion, creed, genetic information, disability, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Such a policy ensures that only relevant factors are considered and that equitable and consistent standards of conduct and performance are applied. If you are experiencing harassment or discrimination, you can seek assistance and file a report through the Report and Response Coordinators (see contact info at safe.unc.edu) or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](#), or online to the EOC at <https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/>.

Diversity Statement

I value the perspectives of individuals from all backgrounds reflecting the diversity of our students. I broadly define diversity to include race, gender identity, national origin, ethnicity, religion, social class, age, sexual orientation, political background, and physical and learning ability. I strive to make this classroom an inclusive space for all students. Please let me know if there is anything I can do to improve. I appreciate suggestions.

Undergraduate Testing Center

The College of Arts and Sciences provides a secure, proctored environment in which exams can be taken. The center works with instructors to proctor exams for their undergraduate students who are not registered with ARS and who do not need testing accommodations as provided by ARS. In other words, the Center provides a proctored testing environment for students who are unable to take an exam at the normally scheduled time (with pre-arrangement by your instructor). For more information, visit <http://testingcenter.web.unc.edu/>.

Learning Center

The UNC Learning Center is a great resource both for students who are struggling in their courses and for those who want to be proactive and develop sound study practices to prevent falling behind. They offer individual consultations, peer tutoring, academic coaching, test prep programming, study skills workshops, and peer study groups. If you think you might benefit from their services, please visit them in SASB North or visit their website to set up an appointment: <http://learningcenter.unc.edu>.

Writing Center

The Writing Center is located in the Student and Academic Services Building and offers personalized writing consultations as well as a variety of other resources. This could be a wonderful resource to help with your writing assignments in this course (and any assignments in your other courses). You do not need a complete draft of your assignment to visit; they can help you at any stage! You can chat with someone in the writing center or set up an appointment on their website: <http://writingcenter.unc.edu>.

Grade Appeal Process

If you feel you have been awarded an incorrect grade, please discuss with me. If we cannot resolve the issue, you may talk to our departmental director of undergraduate studies or appeal the grade through a formal university process based on arithmetic/clerical error, arbitrariness, discrimination, harassment, or personal malice. To learn more, go to the [Academic Advising Program](#) website.