

**Phil 140: Knowledge and Society**  
UNC Chapel Hill, Spring 2019

**Instructor:** Alex Worsnip ([aworsnip@unc.edu](mailto:aworsnip@unc.edu))

**TAs:** Aliosha Barranco Lopez ([aliosha@live.unc.edu](mailto:aliosha@live.unc.edu))/Alex Campbell ([alexjc@live.unc.edu](mailto:alexjc@live.unc.edu))

**Lectures:** Mon & Wed, 11:15am-12:05pm, Howell Hall 115

**Recitations:**

- 1) Fri, 10:10-11am, Caldwell Hall 213 (Barranco Lopez)
- 2) Fri, 11:15am-12:05pm, Woollen Gym 302 (Campbell)
- 3) Fri, 12:20-1:10pm, Dey Hall 303A (Barranco Lopez)
- 4) Fri, 1:25-2:15pm, Carolina Hall 204 (Campbell)

**Office Hours:**

- Worsnip: Mon 3:30-4:30pm & Thurs 11am-12pm, Caldwell Hall 202A
- Barranco Lopez: Tues 3:35-4:35pm & Fri 2-3pm, Caldwell Hall 12B
- Campbell: Mon 3-4pm & Fri 10-11am, Caldwell Hall 107B

**Course Description.** *Epistemology* is the branch of philosophy that deals with questions about knowledge, rational belief, evidence, and the like. Philosophical introductions to epistemology are often quite abstract, beginning with very general questions like ‘what is knowledge?’ or ‘what is rationality?’ and only turning to applied questions much later. This course inverts that trend by beginning with some of the areas of social human life in which questions about knowledge, rationality and evidence matter to us: areas like democratic politics, the law, science, education, and religion. It investigates particular “knowledge problems” that we, as 21<sup>st</sup> century citizens, face. For example: when there is so much contradictory information out there in the media, how can we know which sources to trust? Should we be worried about the ways that our upbringings and social characteristics (e.g. gender, race, class, etc) shape and bias our beliefs, and if so what should we do about it? Should we even *have* beliefs about complex policy questions about which we are not experts? Should the existence of widespread disagreement about politics, morality and religion make us less confident in our own views? Is it ever really “beyond reasonable doubt” that someone is guilty of a crime, and why should that be the standard that matters anyway? Through investigating these specific, applied questions, we hope to learn something about the nature of knowledge, evidence and rationality more generally.

**Course Goals.** This course aims

- to help students think more critically and systematically about their beliefs and belief systems, about the “epistemic status” of such beliefs (are they rational? do they amount to knowledge?), and about the methods that they use to form such beliefs
- to introduce students to key philosophical concepts that relate to knowledge, evidence and rationality, and to give them a vocabulary and conceptual framework to express their ideas about these topics in a more sophisticated manner

- to introduce students to the art of reading and writing philosophy, and to prepare them for further philosophical study, as well as to give them philosophical underpinnings for classes in related disciplines (especially the social sciences)

**Enrollment.** This course is designed as an introductory philosophy class, so there are no curricular prerequisites and it is aimed at students who have never studied philosophy before.

### **Requirements/Assessment**

**Participation** (*15% of total grade*). You will receive **two** participation grades, one for the first half of the semester and another for the second half, each of which will be worth 7.5% of your overall grade for the class. Your participation grade will be based on:

- Your attendance record (including punctuality). **Attendance at both lectures and recitations is required.** Your TA will take attendance in recitations. I won't take attendance in every lecture, but I will know if you are regularly missing lecture because you will miss the unannounced pop quizzes (see below).
  - If you have an emergency that means you have to miss a recitation, please have the Office of the Dean of Students write to your TA on your behalf. Otherwise, you will be marked as absent without excuse.
- Your TA's assessment of your participation in recitation, based on:
  - (i) *Alertness/attentiveness.* You should (obviously) be fully awake. You should not be on your computer, tablet or phone during discussions.
  - (ii) *Regularity of participation in discussions.* This doesn't mean that you have to talk in every recitation, and you don't get extra points for sheer quantity of contributions. But you should be participating in discussions with some regularity (as a guide, aim to contribute something to the discussion at least once per two recitations). Without doing so, you cannot get a strong participation grade.
    - To help make participation easier, we're going to try out the "traffic light system" described [here](#) in sections. Let me know what you think of it!
  - (iii) *Respectfulness of participation in discussions.* You should be respectful to your TA and to other students. This includes not talking over others or drowning them out, as well as listening to others and responding to what they say.
  - (iv) *Preparedness.* Your participation should reflect having done the reading, having attended the lectures, and having thought about the material.
- Note: you will not be graded on the philosophical quality of your contributions. Recitations are a place to speak freely and try out ideas without fear of judgment. Also, asking questions, including clarificatory questions, can be a great way to participate.

**Short Homework Assignments** (*30% of total grade*). There will be five short homework assignments (not including the final paper), due every other Monday until 3/18. The idea is to gradually build your philosophical reading and writing skills, building up to writing a paper defending a view of your own.

- Homework Assignment #1: Summarizing a Philosophy Article.  
*Due: Mon, 1/21, 11am. Grading Method: Letter grade (A-F). Length: 300-500 words ( $\approx 1\frac{1}{2}$  double-spaced pages). 5% of total grade.*
- Homework Assignment #2: Argument Reconstruction.  
*Due: Mon, 2/4, 11am. Grading Method: Points, converted to a letter grade (A-F). 5% of total grade.*
- Homework Assignment #3: Critically Responding to a Philosophy Article #1.  
*Due: Mon, 2/18, 11am. Grading Method: Letter grade (A-F). 500-750 words ( $\approx 2$  double-spaced pages). 5% of total grade.*
- Homework Assignment #4: Critically Responding to a Philosophy Article #2.  
*Due: Mon, 3/4, 11am. Grading Method: Letter grade (A-F). 500-750 words ( $\approx 2$  double-spaced pages). 10% of total grade.*
- Homework Assignment #5: Spotting Good and Bad Features of a Philosophy Paper.  
*Due: Mon, 3/18, 11am. Grading Method: Pass/fail. 5% of total grade.*

**Final Paper** (20% of total grade). A longer paper – around 1500 words ( $\approx 5$  double-spaced pages) – defending a philosophical view in response to one of several distributed prompts. Since this will be a first philosophy class for most people, we'll do two drafts of the paper, with the first draft counting for relatively little of your overall grade. Your TA will send you comments on your first draft before you write the second.

- First draft due Sat, 3/30, 5pm. 5% of total grade.
- Second draft due Sat, 4/20, 5pm. 15% of total grade.

Both drafts will be assigned a letter grade (A-F), based on a grading rubric that will be made available on Sakai.

**In-Class Mock Trial Activity** (5% of total grade). To be held on Friday, 4/12 in recitation. You will work in groups. Everyone who completes the exercise in full (including both preparation in class on Wed, 4/10 and the exercise itself in class on Fri, 4/12) will receive full credit (100%).

**Quizzes and Exams** (30% of total grade).

- *Pop quizzes* (10% of total grade). To be administered in lecture, unannounced, on an occasional basis over the semester, using PollEverywhere software (see below). Quizzes are designed to check that you completed the reading and to test basic comprehension of its main points.
  - Each quiz will consist of 4 multiple-choice questions. If you get 4 right, you get an A (100%). If you get 3 right, you get a B (85%). If you get 2 right, you get a C (75%). If you get 1 right, you get a D (65%). If you get 0 right, you get an F (50%). If you aren't present, you get a 0 (unless you have the Office of the Dean of Students write to me to excuse you).
- *Final exam* (20% of total grade). To be held Tuesday, 5/7, 12-2pm, in our usual classroom.

## Further Policies

### **Policies For Submission of Written Work.**

- All written work should be submitted via the Assignments function on Sakai.
- To facilitate anonymous grading, please don't include your name anywhere on your paper or in the file name. Use your UNC PID instead.
- *Extensions & Late Penalties.*
  - For short homework assignments:
    - No extensions will be granted, since the nature of the assignment involves completing the work *without the benefit of the lecture*.
    - Late submissions will lose 1/3 of a letter grade immediately, and a further 1/3 of a letter grade every 24 hours thereafter. **Additionally, late submissions of short homework assignments will receive a maximum grade of C.**
      - *Example 1: suppose an assignment would have received a B+ if it had been submitted on time. If submitted late by less than 24 hours, it will receive a C. If submitted late by 24-48 hours, it will receive a C-. Etc.*
      - *Example 2: suppose an assignment would have received a C if it had been submitted on time. If submitted late by less than 24 hours, it will receive a C-. If submitted late by 24-48 hours, it will receive a D+. Etc.*
    - In the case of a genuine emergency that prevents you from submitting on time, have the Office of the Dean of Students contact your TA on your behalf, then arrange with your TA to do a makeup assignment (rather than submitting the original assignment late).
  - For final papers:
    - Extensions may be granted in case of a genuine emergency. Have the Office of the Dean of Students contact your TA on your behalf. The final decision is at your TA's discretion.
    - Late submissions (without an extension) will lose 1/3 of a letter grade immediately, and a further 1/3 of a letter grade every 24 hours thereafter.
      - *Example: suppose an assignment would have received a B+ if it had been submitted on time. If submitted late by less than 24 hours, it will receive a B. If submitted late by 24-48 hours, it will receive a C+. Etc.*
- You are more than welcome (indeed, encouraged) to meet with me or your TA while working on assignments. This is free advice that almost always improves your grade.

### **Policies about Grades.**

- The grade boundaries for the course are as follows: A = 93% or higher, A- = 90-93%; B+ = 87-90%, B = 83-87%, B- = 80-83%, C+ = 77-80%, C = 73-77%, C- = 70-73%, D+ = 67-

70%, D = 63-67%, F = less than 63%. Note: these boundaries should be interpreted so that 93.0% is an A, but 92.99% is an A-, and similarly for each other boundary.

- In addition to communicating them to you directly, we'll post all grades for the course on the Gradebook feature of Sakai, and you can track your running average as the course progresses.

**Honor Code.** UNC's honor code, which is available at [honor.unc.edu](http://honor.unc.edu), applies to all class assignments. Violations of the honor code will be taken very seriously and will be reported to the Student Attorney General. In addition, please take note of the following points:

- Reusing a paper that you have written for another class qualifies as academic dishonesty.
- Summarizing ideas or arguments that you have found in articles or on the internet, without citing your sources, qualifies as academic dishonesty. It doesn't matter if you put them into your own words. If you have gotten an idea from a source, you must acknowledge the debt by citing the source.

If you are in any doubt at all about whether something constitutes academic dishonesty, err on the side of caution and talk to me or your TA before you submit the assignment to clarify the policies.

### **Polling & Electronic Devices.**

- We will periodically use PollEverywhere software in lecture, for pop quizzes and other purposes. To prepare for this:
  - Sign up for a PollEverywhere account at [poll.unc.edu](http://poll.unc.edu) if you don't already have one. You can also find answers to FAQ about the software there.
  - Join the PollEverywhere group for our class by clicking [here](#).
  - Bring a device (laptop, tablet or phone) to every lecture so that you can participate in any quizzes and other polls. You can participate either through a web browser, through the mobile app, or by text message.
    - **Important:** to receive credit for pop quizzes, you must be identifiable when you answer, which means that you must be either logged in to your PollEverywhere account, or participate by text from a number linked to your account. Other polls will typically be anonymized.
  - Let me know if you have any questions or concerns. We will do a test of the software before the first quiz to sort out any issues.
- When we are not using PollEverywhere, use of electronic devices is prohibited (unless they are required for class participation due to a special accommodation).

### **Accessibility & Equity.**

- I am committed to making class fully accessible, and to providing accommodations for those who need them. If I can do anything to help make class more accessible to you, please let me know, or have UNC Accessibility Resources & Service (ARS) contact me on your behalf.
- I am also committed to making the class a safe space for everyone irrespective of gender, ethnicity, race, sexuality, religion, or other individual or group identity. As should go without

saying, personal attacks or discriminatory treatment of others on any of these bases will not be tolerated under any circumstances.

- I encourage you to make use of the following campus resources as appropriate:
  - Accessibility Resources & Service (ARS): [ars.unc.edu](http://ars.unc.edu)
  - Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS): [caps.unc.edu](http://caps.unc.edu)
  - LGBTQ Center: [lgbtq.unc.edu](http://lgbtq.unc.edu)

### **Schedule of Readings**

Each of the readings listed below is compulsory. The reading load for this course is fairly light; many of the extracts below are short. The idea is that this will leave you with enough time to do the reading slowly and carefully. All readings will be posted in the Resources folder on Sakai, except for the web items that are linked to below.

**Wed 1/9      Introducing Epistemology**

Read: Jennifer Nagel, *Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction*, ch. 1

**Mon 1/14      The Project of Criticizing Beliefs**

Read: Mark Rowlands, “A Right to Believe?” [[link](#)]

**Wed 1/16      Any necessary catchup plus: Skills Day 1: Reading and Summarizing a Philosophy Paper**

Read: James Pryor, “Guidelines on Reading Philosophy” [[link](#)]

[Mon 1/21      *No class – University Holiday for MLK Day*  
*Short Homework Assignment #1 due, 11am*]

**Wed 1/23      Deference and Expertise I**

Read: Michael Huemer, “Is Critical Thinking Epistemically Responsible?”

**Mon 1/28      Deference and Expertise II**

Read: Allan Hazlett, “The Social Value of Non-Deferential Belief”

**Wed 1/30      Any necessary catchup plus: Skills Day 2: Argument Reconstruction**

[No new reading]

**Mon 2/4      Skepticism**

Read: The text (written by me) to be distributed as part of the homework assignment  
*Short Homework Assignment #2 due, 11am*

**Wed 2/6      Climate Change Skepticism**

Read: Extracts from Naomi Oreskes & Erik Conway, *Merchants of Doubt*, ch. 6;  
extracts from PEW Research Center, *The Politics of Climate*

- Mon 2/11**      **Bullshit**  
Read: Harry Frankfurt, “On Bullshit”
- Wed 2/13**      **Any necessary catchup plus: Skills Day 3: Critically Responding to a Philosophy Paper**  
[No reading]
- Mon 2/18**      **The Media I: Fake News**  
Read: Regina Rini, “Fake News and Partisan Epistemology”  
Homework Assignment #3 due, 11am
- Wed 2/20**      **The Media II: Bias**  
[No new reading]
- Mon 2/25**      **The Psychology of Bias: Motivated Reasoning and Cultural Cognition**  
Read: Extract from Ziva Kunda, “The Case for Motivated Reasoning”; extract from Dan Kahan & Donald Braman, “Cultural Cognition & Public Policy”
- Wed 2/27**      **Irrelevant Influences on Belief**  
Read: G.A. Cohen, “Paradoxes of Conviction”
- Mon 3/4**      **Disagreement**  
Read: Richard Feldman, “Reasonable Religious Disagreements”  
Homework Assignment #4 due, 11am
- Wed 3/6**      **Catchup**  
[No new reading]
- [Mon 3/11      *No class – Spring break*  
Wed 3/13      *No class – Spring break*]
- Mon 3/18**      **Skills Day 4: Writing a Philosophy Paper**  
Read: James Pryor, “Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper” [\[link\]](#)  
Homework Assignment #5 due, 11am
- Wed 3/20**      **Speech, Disagreement & Debate**  
Read: Extracts from J.S. Mill, *On Liberty*, ch. 2

- Mon 3/25**      **Speech & The Market For Ideas**  
 Read: Extracts from Alvin Goldman & James Cox, “Speech, Truth and the Free Market for Ideas”
- Wed 3/27**      **Speech & Education I**  
 Read: Kate Manne & Jason Stanley, “When Free Speech Becomes a Political Weapon” [\[link\]](#)
- [Sat 3/30]      *First draft of final paper due, 5pm*
- Mon 4/1**      **Speech & Education II**  
 Read: Steve Kolowich, “State of Conflict” [\[link\]](#)
- Wed 4/3**      **Social Characteristics & Statistical Generalizations**  
 Read: Extract from Tamar Gendler, “On The Epistemic Costs of Implicit Bias”
- Mon 4/8**      **Statistical Evidence in the Law**  
 Read: Extract from Judith Jarvis Thomson, “Liability & Individualized Evidence”
- Wed 4/10**      **Statistical Evidence in the Law: Preparation for Mock Trial Activity**  
 [No new reading]
- [Fri 4/12]      *In recitation: mock trial activity*
- Mon 4/15**      **The Burden of Proof**  
 Read: Larry Laudan, “Is It Finally Time to Put “Proof Beyond a Reasonable Doubt” Out to Pasture?”
- Wed 4/17**      **The Burden of Proof, continued**  
 [No new reading]
- [Fri 4/19]      *Note: no recitations; University holiday*
- [Sat 4/20]      *Second draft of final paper due, 5pm*
- Mon 4/22**      **Open Q&A for Final Exam Preparation**  
 [No new reading]
- Wed 4/24**      **Final Roundup**  
 [No new reading]