



Theory of Knowledge

[PHIL 335.001, Fall 2025]

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill



Course Information

Credit Hours: 3

Pre or Co-Requisites: One prior philosophy class

Target Audience: Philosophy majors and minors; students whose interests in other fields (humanities, social and natural sciences) implicate questions about the methods and procedures through which knowledge is acquired, justified, and shared; students interested in pursuing a law degree after college

Meeting Pattern: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11am-12:15pm

Instructional Format: In-Person

Classroom: Peabody 2066

Instructor Information

Name: Alex Worsnip

Email Address: aworsnip@unc.edu

Office Location: Whitehead 113 [NB. The best entrance to use is the one facing McCauley Street. You may need to ring the bell to be let in. If you are having trouble, just drop me an email.]

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 2-3pm and Thursdays, 3-4pm (in-person), and by appointment (in-person or via Zoom)



Course Content

Course Description

This class is a survey of epistemology, the subfield of philosophy that deals with the nature of knowledge, evidence, and rational belief. The course is divided into three parts. Part 1 will be a whistlestop tour of the classic problems of traditional epistemology, such as the analysis of knowledge (what does it take for a belief to count as knowledge?), the problem of skepticism (can we know anything at all?), and the debate between “rationalists” and “empiricists” about whether we can know anything by reason alone, or whether all knowledge comes from experience. Parts 2-3 of the course will focus on



some lively current debates in epistemology. Part 2 focuses on some possible sources of doubt about the accuracy and/or rationality of our beliefs: namely, the existence of widespread disagreement, the phenomenon of our beliefs being causally influenced by irrelevant factors and biases, and the prevalence of what psychologists call “motivated reasoning”. We’ll ask to what extent these phenomena should make us less confident in our beliefs. Part 3 focuses on whether pragmatic and moral considerations play a role in determining what it is rational to believe, and if so in what way; including some questions about how epistemic and moral considerations interact in particular cases, such as racist beliefs.

Course Texts & Materials

Students are required to obtain a copy of Jennifer Nagel’s *Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction* (OUP). It is available at the Student Stores (or via other standard vendors) for around \$12. Please note that due to the class’s technology policy (see below), if you wish to make use of the book during class meetings you should purchase a **print**, not digital copy.

All other course materials will be posted on the course’s **Perusall** page, which you can access from Canvas.

Class Expectations

Students are expected to

- Consistently attend class, unless they have a University Approved Absence (see ‘Attendance Policy’ under ‘Policy Statements’ below).
- Participate actively and constructively in class activities and discussions.
- Complete all course readings and assignments, as detailed below. Students can expect the work *outside* of class for this course to take approximately 9-12 hours per week on average.
- Abide by the UNC Code of Conduct and the class’s AI Use policy (see ‘Code of Conduct’ and ‘AI Use Policy’ under ‘Policy Statements’ below).

Course Goals & Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

All our philosophy courses aim at the acquisition and nurturing of basic philosophic skills. One of the main goals of our philosophy curriculum is to instill and enable the development of skills that are distinct to philosophy, but which are foundational to all forms of knowledge. These basic philosophical skills involve being able to:

- Think critically;
- Deploy philosophical concepts and terminology correctly, in either a historical or contemporary setting;
- Represent clearly and accurately the views or argument of particular philosophers, in either a historical or contemporary setting;
- Identify the premises and conclusion(s) of a philosophical argument and assess both its validity and soundness;
- Apply a philosophical theory or argument to a new topic, and being able to draw and defend reasonable conclusions about that topic;
- Develop an argument for a particular solution to a philosophical problem in either a historical or contemporary setting;
- Write clearly, precisely, and persuasively in defense of a philosophical thesis;
- Participate in respectful, critical, and reflexive dialogues about difficult philosophical positions;
- Read, interpret, and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different philosophical texts and the philosophical positions presented in them.

In addition, **PHIL 335** satisfies our metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of mind, and philosophy of language requirement for the philosophy major and minor and thereby aims at developing the following learning outcomes:



- being familiar with some of the most important philosophical answers to fundamental questions about what is real and what we can know;
- Recognize and use distinctly philosophical approach(es) to developing and validating knowledge of the unfamiliar world;
- Being able to evaluate ways that temporal, spatial, scientific, and especially philosophical categories structure knowledge;
- Interrogate assumptions that underlie our own perceptions of the world by recognizing that these presuppose ‘ontological’ and ‘metaphysical’ claims that are not always warranted or sustainable and by recognizing that our knowledge is limited;
- Employ strategies to mitigate or adjust for preconceptions and biases and to address the challenges posed by skepticism and relativism.
- Apply philosophical insights to understand patterns of experience and belief.

IDEAs in Action General Education Curriculum

This course satisfies the **Ways of Knowing** (FC-KNOWING) Focus Capacity of the IDEAs in Action curriculum.

Student Learning Outcomes for FC-KNOWING:

1. Recognize and use one or more approach(es) to developing and validating knowledge of the unfamiliar world.
2. Evaluate ways that temporal, spatial, scientific, and philosophical categories structure knowledge.
3. Interrogate assumptions that underlie our own perceptions of the world.
4. Employ strategies to mitigate or adjust for preconceptions and biases.
5. Apply critical insights to understand patterns of experience and belief.

Questions for Students for FC-KNOWING:

1. What norms and expectations do I take for granted?
2. What categories and concepts frame my assumptions, experiences, and beliefs?
3. What practices of investigation or inquiry best challenge those assumptions and expectations?
4. How can I consider whether my beliefs might be wrong?

Recurring Capacities

Every focus capacity course includes the following activities:

- **Writing**, totaling at least 10 pages in length or the intellectual equivalent
- **Presenting** material to the class, smaller groups, or the public through oral presentations, webpages, or other means
- **Collaborating** in pairs or groups to learn, design, solve, create, build, or research

These elements – referred to as “recurring capacities” – will help you repeatedly practice crucial skills for future study, life, and career success.





Course Assignments & Assessments

Summary Table

Component	Percentage of Grade	Recurring Capacity	# of pages of writing
Class Participation (including On-Call Days)	15%	Presenting	-
Pop Quizzes	10%	N/A	-
Perusall Annotations	10%	Writing	~5pp. in total
Written Reflections on Class Discussions	15% (3 reflections @ 5% each)	Writing	2pp. per reflection x 3 = 6pp. in total
Flipped Classroom Presentation	7.5%	Presenting, Collaborating	-
In-Class Exams	42.5% (10% for Exam 1, 12.5% for Exam 2, 20% for Final Exam)	Writing	~4pp. each for Exams 1 & 2; ~6pp. for Final Exam

Assignment Descriptions

Class Participation (including On-Call Days) (15% of grade)

You will receive two participation grades over the course of the semester, each worth 7.5% of your course grade. Your participation grade will reflect:

- Your attendance record (including punctuality)
- Your contributions to class discussions
 - This will be assessed in terms of whether you made a good-faith effort to make productive and helpful contributions. This includes contributing with at least moderate frequency, in a way is respectful, reflects having listened to others' contributions and having done and thought carefully about the reading.
 - You will not be graded on the philosophical quality of your contributions: I want class to be a place to speak freely and try out ideas without fear of judgment. Also bear in mind that asking questions, including clarificatory questions, can be a great way to contribute.
 - To help make participation easier, we'll use the "traffic light system" described [here](#). If you are finding participation difficult or intimidating, please get in touch, and we will work on strategies together.
- Your answers on "on-call days"
 - Each student will be assigned **two** days on which they are "on call", meaning that they should be ready to be called on to explain, answer questions about, or offer thoughts on material from the reading for that day. ("On-call days" are a common feature of law school classes.) On your on-call days, you cannot set your "traffic light" (see above) to red.

Pop Quizzes (10%)

Occasional, unannounced pop quizzes will be administered (on paper) at the start of some class meetings. 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 an approved excuse for your absence).
- At the end of the semester, I will drop your lowest pop quiz from your grade.



Perusall Annotations (10%)

Beginning on 9/23 (when we switch from the textbook to individual articles), you will submit annotations on class readings through Perusall, which is integrated with Canvas. There are eleven articles, and you must submit Perusall annotations on at least **eight** of them; you may choose up to three articles to skip. Whenever you are submitting annotations, you should submit them **by the time that class starts on the day that the reading is assigned**.

Annotations are a way for you to engage critically with the text by highlighting key points, asking questions, and making connections to other readings or class discussions. Each week, you will be expected to submit at least 3 substantive annotations. Substantive annotations go beyond mere highlighting or describing arguments; they should include thoughtful comments, questions, or critiques that demonstrate your engagement with the material. Specific instructions and expectations for annotations, including how to submit them correctly, will be detailed in the assignment instructions on Canvas. The final grade for this assignment group will be an average of scores over the course of the semester.

Written Reflections on Class Discussions (15%)

You will take turns writing short written reflections (~2 double-spaced pages each) **after** class. Every student will write three written reflections over the course of the semester, according to a schedule that will be distributed after the semester begins. In your reflection, you should react to the discussion that took place in the relevant class meeting. Your written reflection should (i) explain a question, point, or debate that came up in the class discussion, and (ii) offer your own view about it. The written reflection will be graded on how it demonstrates both careful and charitable listening to the contributions of your peers, and also the capacity to critically (but respectfully) and philosophically engage with these contributions.

Written reflections are due at 8pm on the day after the relevant class. Each reflection will be worth 5% of your grade, for a total of 15%.

Flipped Classroom Presentation (7.5%)

The class will be divided into five groups, each of which will be assigned to one class meeting, with the task of designing a lesson plan for a 30-minute segment of that day's class, focusing on the day's assigned reading, and then leading the class that day based on the lesson plan developed. Lesson plans may include lecture-style presentations by your group as well as activities for the whole class to participate in. In designing the lesson plan, you should think carefully about what approach to the day's material will best facilitate learning and productive exploration of the issues.

In-Class Exams (42.5%)

There will be three exams over the course of the semester, one on each of the three parts of the course. The first two exams will each be administered during a normal, 75-minute class period. The third (which will act as the final exam for the course) will be administered during the final exam period; you will have three hours, though the exam will be designed to be completable in two hours. These exams will contain a mixture of short-answer questions about concepts and ideas from the course readings and lectures, and longer-answer questions asking you to articulate and defend your own views about the issues. (The Final Exam will have more of these latter, longer-answer questions than the first two exams will, but it is not cumulative—i.e., it is only on the third part of the course.) Each exam is preceded by a review session.

- Exam 1, on Part 1 of the course, is in class on **Thursday 9/18** and is worth 10% of the course grade.
- Exam 2, on Part 2 of the course, is in class on **Thursday 10/23** and is worth 12.5% of the course grade.
- The Final Exam, on Part 3 of the course, is from **12-3pm on Tuesday 12/9** and is worth 20% of the course grade.

These exams will be administered using the Respondus lockdown browser, and you will need to bring your fully charged laptop to class on the day of each exam. You will also be required to install the university-approved Respondus application on your laptop prior to the first exam. Detailed installation instructions and support resources will be provided.



Grading Scale & Schema

Late Work

If you anticipate not being able to submit work on time, please email me (if at all possible) before the deadline. If you do this, I will often be willing to grant extensions, within reason (i.e., within the constraints imposed by your need not to get so behind that it interferes with future assignments, and my need to have all your work graded in time to submit your final course grade).

Once the deadline has passed, I will only grant extensions with an official excuse from the Office of the Dean of Students. Without an extension or an official excuse, late work will lose 1/3 of a letter grade immediately, and a further 1/3 of a letter grade every 24 hours thereafter.

Grading Rubrics

Grading rubrics for course assignments will be made available on Canvas.

Grading Scale

Numeric Grade (%)	Letter Grade
93.0 and above	A
90.0 – 92.99	A-
87.0 – 89.99	B+
83.0 – 86.99	B
80.0 – 82.99	B-
77.0 – 79.99	C+
73.0 – 76.99	C
70.0 – 72.99	C-
67.0 – 69.99	D+
63.0 – 66.99	D
62.99 and below	F

Course Schedule

Note #1: this schedule is a draft and is subject to change.

Note #2: usually, course schedules like this one also include assignment due dates. However, for this class, the due dates for most assignments (not including in-class exams, which are listed below) are different for each student. Once the list of students taking the course is pretty much finalized, I will produce a comprehensive assignment schedule that shows, for each class, (i) who is “on call”, (ii) which group (if any) is doing a Flipped Classroom Presentation, and (iii) who is assigned to submit a written reflection on the class discussion by 8pm the following day. This schedule will be posted on Canvas. As a reminder, Perusall annotations are due for *every* class for which there is an assigned reading beginning 9/23, except that you may skip annotation up to three readings over the course of the semester.



Date	Topic(s)	Reading(s) and Assignments Due
Part One: A Whistlestop Tour of “Traditional Epistemology”		
Tues 8/19	Introduction	Jennifer Nagel, <i>Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction</i> , ch. 1
Thurs 8/21	Skepticism	Jennifer Nagel, <i>Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction</i> , ch. 2
Tues 8/26	Discussion/Catchup	
Thurs 8/28	Rationalism vs. Empiricism	Jennifer Nagel, <i>Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction</i> , ch. 3
Tues 9/2	The Analysis of Knowledge	Jennifer Nagel, <i>Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction</i> , ch. 4
Thurs 9/4	Discussion/Catchup	
Tues 9/9	Internalism vs. Externalism	Jennifer Nagel, <i>Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction</i> , ch. 5
Thurs 9/11	Testimony	Jennifer Nagel, <i>Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction</i> , ch. 6
Tues 9/16	Discussion/Catchup/Review	
Thurs 9/18	In-Class Exam on Part One	
Part Two: Current Debates: Sources of Doubt		
Tues 9/23	Disagreement I	Thomas Kelly, “The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement” <u><i>First Perusall annotations due by start of class</i></u> (Annotations also due on each subsequent reading, except that you may skip up to three sets of annotations)
Thurs 9/25	Disagreement II	David Christensen, “Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News”
Tues 9/30	Discussion/Catchup	
Thurs 10/2	Irrelevant Influences I	G.A. Cohen, “Paradoxes of Conviction”
Tues 10/7	<i>No Class – Well-Being Day</i>	
Thurs 10/9	Irrelevant Influences II	Miriam Schoenfield, “Permission to Believe”
Tues 10/14	Motivated Reasoning	J. Adam Carter & Robin McKenna, “Skepticism Motivated”
Thurs 10/16	<i>No Class – Fall Break</i>	
Tues 10/21	Discussion/Catchup/Review	
Thurs 10/23	In-Class Exam on Part Two	
Part Three: Current Debates: The Effect of Practical and Moral Factors on Rational Belief		
Tues 10/28	Evidentialism	Thomas Kelly, “The Rationality of Belief”
Thurs 10/30	Pragmatism	Susanna Rinard, “No Exception for Belief”
Tues 11/4	Discussion/Catchup	
Thurs 11/6	Pragmatic Encroachment	Jeremy Fantl & Matthew McGrath, “Evidence, Pragmatics, and Justification” (abridged)
Tues 11/11	Moral Encroachment	Rima Basu, “Radical Moral Encroachment”
Thurs 11/13	Discussion/Catchup	
Tues 11/18	Externalism Revisited	Amia Srinivasan, “Radical Externalism”
Thurs 11/20	Internalism Revisited	Zoe Johnson King, “Radical Internalism”
Tues 11/25	Discussion/Catchup	



Thurs 11/27 No Class – Thanksgiving Break

Tues 12/2 Final Review

Tues 12/9, **Final Exam on Part Three**
12-3pm



Policy Statements

Academic Policies

University Class Attendance Policy

As stated in the University's [Class 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: [University Approved Absence Office \(UAAO\)](#) website provides information and [FAQs for students](#) and [FAQs for faculty](#) related to University Approved Absences
2. Disability/religious observance/pregnancy/short-term military service, as required by law and approved by the [University Compliance Office](#), or in the case of short-term military service, the Dean of Students
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 [University Compliance Office](#).

Electronic Devices Policy

Use of electronic devices (including laptops, tablets, phones, etc.) in class is prohibited unless either (a) they are required for class participation due to a special accommodation or (b) we are doing an activity that specifically requires them, as stated by me.

Code of Conduct

All students are expected to adhere to University policy and follow the guidelines of the UNC Student Code of Conduct. Additional information can be found at <https://studentconduct.unc.edu/>.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use Policy

As mentioned under 'Assignment Descriptions' above, the exams for this class will be conducted using the Respondus lockdown browser. This browser is designed to prevent usage of AI tools for these exams. The exams will be proctored; any attempt to use AI tools on the exams is forbidden and will be considered an instance of academic dishonesty and referred to Student Conduct.

For other assignments for the class (e.g. written reflections):

- You may not use generative AI tools to write or revise assignments for you (either in whole or in part). Nor are you permitted to use AI to generate ideas for assignments that you then merely rephrase. Any such use of AI tools will be considered an instance of academic dishonesty and will be referred to Student Conduct.
- You may use generative AI in certain other ways in the process of researching for and working on assignments. Specifically, you may use it to perform the same sorts of tasks that a more traditional web search might. For



example, you might be looking for an example of something, and AI might help you find an example, much as a more traditional web search might. Or, you might ask an AI chatbot for the answer to a factual question—for example, what the law says about something—again, much as a traditional web search might help you find the answer to this question. Or, you might ask an AI bot for suggestions of items to read to help you with an assignment. *However:*

1. If you use AI in any such way, you must disclose this, along with the details of the role AI played in your work, on the assignment (if the assignment is written) or in an email to me (if the assignment is oral). Failure to disclose use of AI will also be considered an instance of academic dishonesty.
2. You should be aware that AI chatbots can still often make mistakes or give you incorrect information. Ultimately, you are responsible for the accuracy of the factual claims made in your written and oral assignments, and inaccuracies may affect your grade. As such, it is highly advisable to cross-check any information received from AI against other sources.

If in any doubt about whether a particular use of AI is permitted, consult with me.

Syllabus Changes

I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus including project due dates and test dates. These changes will be announced as early as possible.

Grade Appeal Process

If you want to understand a grade you have received, and the reasons for it, you are welcome to meet with me. If I make any arithmetical errors in calculating your grade, please let me know and I will adjust it as appropriate. I hope we can resolve any grade-related issues to your satisfaction informally, but if not, you are entitled to contact the Philosophy Department's Director of Undergraduate Studies (mkohl17@email.unc.edu) or to appeal the grade through a formal university process that is described [here](#).

Services & Student Support Policies

University Compliance Office (formerly Equal Opportunity and Compliance) - Accommodations

University Compliance Office (UCO) Accommodations Team ([Accommodations - UNC Equal Opportunity and Compliance](#)) receives requests for accommodations for disability, pregnancy and related conditions, and sincerely held religious beliefs and practices through the University's Policy on Accommodations. UCO Accommodations team determines eligibility and reasonable accommodations consistent with state and federal laws.

Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS)

UNC-Chapel Hill is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body. The [Heels Care Network](#) website is a place to access the many mental health resources at Carolina. CAPS is the primary mental health provider for students, offering timely access to consultation and connection to clinically appropriate services. Go to the [CAPS website](#) or visit their facilities on the third floor of the Campus Health building for an initial evaluation to learn more. Students can also call CAPS 24/7 at 919-966-3658 for immediate assistance.

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 UCO](#) or by contacting the [University's Title IX Coordinator](#), Elizabeth Hall, or the [Report and Response Managers](#) in the



University Compliance Office (UCO) (formerly the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office). Please note that I am designated as a Responsible Employee, which means I must report to the UCO any information I receive about the forms of misconduct listed in this paragraph. If you'd like to speak with a confidential resource, those include Counseling and Psychological Services, the University's Ombuds Office, and the [Gender Violence Services Coordinators](#). Additional resources are available at safe.unc.edu.

My Commitments on Accessibility and 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 the UCO Accommodations team (see above) contact me on your behalf.
- I am also committed to making the classroom an inclusive place that feels welcoming for everyone irrespective of gender, race, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, religion, national origin, or other individual or group identity. Please let me know if I can do anything to improve; I appreciate suggestions.
- I am a Safe Zone Ally, trained and certified by the university LGBTQ center. I am available to meet during office hours or by appointment to offer support.

Other Resources

- The [Undergraduate Testing Center](#) provides a secure, proctored environment in which exams can be taken by students who are unable to take an exam at the normally scheduled time (by pre-arrangement with me. For more information, visit the [testing center website](#)).
- [UNC's Learning Center](#) offers free programs to help you optimize your academic performance, including academic coaching, peer tutoring, and more.
- [UNC's Writing Center](#) offers assistance with and feedback on course writing projects.