

# Introduction to Philosophy (730:103:91)\*\*\*

Spring 2020

Instructor: Danny Underwood II

Email: [danny.underwood2@rutgers.edu](mailto:danny.underwood2@rutgers.edu)

Office Hours: (By Appointment)

**About Me:** I am a third year PhD student in the Philosophy department. I have a BA and an MA in Philosophy from the University of Missouri - St. Louis. I primarily work in social and political philosophy, philosophy of race, Africana history and philosophy as well as cognitive science and philosophical methodology.

**Course Description:** This is a writing intensive course, but we will be writing mostly in frequent, small increments. We will be reading, discussing and writing about a few major debates in the discipline of philosophy. Our focus is contemporary philosophical debates; this will not be a History of Western Philosophy course, where we begin with the Presocratics and work our way up to the present. We will be looking at what philosophers are currently discussing, and, when necessary, we will look to the history of the field to provide context.

The readings will be a mixture of original and secondary literature. Since we will not be meeting in a classroom each week, we are at a slight disadvantage; some original texts can be difficult to understand and properly contextualized without years of study. Furthermore, the best way to learn and do philosophy is through conversation. So, I have designed this online course with this fact in mind.

Instead of doing mandatory lectures, I will host a weekly conference (using Canvas) where I will give a brief summary of the week's material and will answer any questions you may have. It is highly important that you participate in these conferences, especially if you have any questions. These conferences are not mandatory; although, regular attendance at these sessions will be noted and included in your participation grade.

Discussion is central to this course and your grade. Since we are an online course, the ways in which we will be discussing the material is through the course website on Canvas (<https://canvas.rutgers.edu/>). Every submission (whether blog, peer-comments, or paper) should be your best writing effort. I will use these submissions to gauge the level of engagement and understanding you have of the material.

At the end of the semester, you are expected to submit a term paper on a pre-approved topic. I will make further announcements about this in the future. There are no prerequisites for this course. As this may be the first philosophy course for many of you, I urge you to contact me if you are having trouble with any of the material. Since this is an online course with no regular meeting time, I will try to respond to emails whenever I have the opportunity.

**Course Goals:** My personal goal as your instructor is to impart you with a few tools and concepts that allow you to better examine, discuss, and shape the world around you. But I hope to learn from you as well. At the end of the course, you will be familiar with a myriad of different topics currently being debated by philosophers. You will also be familiar with a range of different

positions scholars have taken on those issues. You will also have learned and responded to your classmates interpretation on those topics. Finally, you will be able to critically engage with a particular topic in the form of a philosophical essay.

**Core Learning Goals:** This course satisfies 3 credits of the Contemporary Challenges core learning goal. Due to the broad scope of this course, it can satisfy either the Diversity and Social Inequalities requirement or the Our Common Future requirement. For more info see below:

**Diversities and Social Inequalities [CCD] (3 credits)**

Students must take one degree credit-bearing course that meets one or both of these goals.

CCD-1. Analyze the degree to which forms of human differences and stratifications among social groups shape individual and group experiences of, and perspectives on, contemporary issues. Such differences and stratifications may include race, language, religion, ethnicity, country of origin, gender identity, sexual orientation, economic status, abilities, or other social distinctions and their intersections.

CCD-2. Analyze contemporary social justice issues and unbalanced social power systems.

**Our Common Future [CCO] (3 credits)**

Students must take one degree credit-bearing course that meets one or both of these goals.

CCO-1. Analyze a contemporary global issue from a multidisciplinary perspective.

CCO-2. Analyze the relationship that science and technology have to a contemporary social issue.

Here is the link for further information: <https://sasoue.rutgers.edu/core/core-learning-goals>

**Required Texts: N/A; All readings will be posted on the course Sakai site.**

**Assignments:**

- **Blogs:** Each week you will be asked to write a short essay about the topic of the week. These should be roughly 500 words. While you should proof-read for these just like all of your submissions, you should consider these assignments your philosophical journal. These are a significant part of your grade, so take these seriously. I will be grading these based upon engagement with the week's material/topic, the use of sources and perceived effort.
  - **Comments:** Each week you will read and comment on two of your classmates blog posts. These should be respectful, substantive comments that engage the blogs topic of discussion. The quality of commentary you provide to your classmates will determine a large portion of your participation grade as well.
  
- **Discussion Questions:** Each week you will be asked to submit two discussion questions that engage the assigned reading for the week. The questions should be 5-7 sentences in length; you should spend a few sentences giving context to your question. These submissions will also be used to gauge your understanding of the material and the course. You must base your discussion question on a quote from the reading; proper citation is also required.

- **Final Paper:** We will begin early in the semester identifying a philosophical question(s) that will provide the basis of your final paper. A few weeks into the course I will send an announcement with more information on this paper. This paper should be around 3000 words and will be due at the end of the semester.

**Grades:** Blogs/Discussion Questions: 40%, Participation: 30%, and Final Paper 30%

**A: 90; B+: 85; B: 80; C+: 75; C: 70; D: 60; F: 0**

**Course Guidelines/Etiquette** (Read carefully! This is important!):

Productive intellectual inquiry – the basic purpose of colleges and universities – requires respectful, constructive discussion that enables all parties to participate fully. Philosophy has an especially vital role to play in facilitating such inquiry, because philosophers have been developing and honing practices of critical discussion over many centuries: techniques for uncovering, justifying, and assessing assumptions lurking behind any claim, from the most obvious to the most controversial.

Philosophy is thus a valuable tool for self-reflection and for communal debate. This is especially true at a time when so much is being debated, in such heated terms. But like any tool, in order to work, it must be used well. In our community we expect all participants to observe basic norms of civility and respect. This means stating your own views directly and substantively: focusing on reasons, assumptions and consequences rather than on who is offering them, or how. And it means engaging other's views in the same terms. No topic or claim is too obvious or controversial to be discussed; but claims and opinions have a place in the discussion only when they are presented in a respectful, collegial, and constructive way.

**Policy on Bullying and Harrassing:** Intolerance, bigotry, and bullying are antithetical to the values of the university, and unacceptable within the Rutgers community. One of the ways the university seeks to effect this value is through a policy of nondiscrimination, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, religion, color, sex, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, national origin, ancestry, disability, marital status, civil union status, domestic partnership status, atypical heredity or cellular blood trait, military service or veteran status in university programs. In order to reinforce institutional goals of nondiscrimination, tolerance, and civility, the following policy against verbal assault, harassment, intimidation, bullying, and defamation is intended to inform students that the verbal assault, harassment, intimidation, bullying and defamation of others violates acceptable standards of conduct within the university. (This policy is not intended to supersede the university's policy against sexual harassment.) For more info:

[visiting.rutgers.edu/policies/university-student-life-policy-against-Verbal-assault-harassment-intimidation-bullying-and](http://visiting.rutgers.edu/policies/university-student-life-policy-against-Verbal-assault-harassment-intimidation-bullying-and)

**Academic Integrity:** Principles of academic integrity require that every Rutgers University student:

- properly acknowledge and cite all use of the ideas, results, or words of others
- properly acknowledge all contributors to a given piece of work

- make sure that all work submitted as his or her own in a course or other academic activity is produced without the aid of unsanctioned materials or unsanctioned collaboration
- obtain all data or results by ethical means and report them accurately without suppressing any results inconsistent with his or her interpretation or conclusions
- treat all other students in an ethical manner, respecting their integrity and right to pursue their educational goals without interference. This requires that a student neither facilitate academic dishonesty by others nor obstruct their academic progress
- uphold the canons of the ethical or professional code of the profession for which he or she is preparing.

Adherence to these principles is necessary in order to insure that:

- everyone is given proper credit for his or her ideas, words, results, and other scholarly accomplishments
- all student work is fairly evaluated and no student has an inappropriate advantage over others
- the academic and ethical development of all students is fostered
- the reputation of the University for integrity in its teaching, research, and scholarship is maintained and enhanced.

Failure to uphold these principles of academic integrity threatens both the reputation of the University and the value of the degrees awarded to its students. Every member of the University community therefore bears a responsibility for ensuring that the highest standards of academic integrity are upheld.

– *The Rutgers University Academic Integrity Policy*

<http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-at-rutgers/>

**Accommodations:**

If you have any need for special accommodation, please contact the Office of Disability Services: [ods.rutgers.edu](http://ods.rutgers.edu)

**Sexual Misconduct:** Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, is committed to fostering an environment that is safe and secure and free from sexual and gender-based discrimination and harassment, sexual violence, dating and domestic violence, stalking and other related misconduct. The University recognizes its responsibility to increase awareness of such misconduct, prevent its occurrence, support victims, deal fairly and firmly with offenders, and diligently investigate reports of misconduct. In addressing these issues, all members of the University must come together to respect and care for one another in a manner consistent with our deeply held academic and community values. This Policy sets forth how the University defines and addresses sexual and gender-based harassment, sexual violence, stalking and relationship violence and related misconduct involving University students.

**NOTE:** I am a mandatory reporter. All this means is that if I observe, overhear about or am informed about an instance of sexual misconduct, I am required to report this to the Title IX office. If you do not feel comfortable sharing with me, please contact the Title IX office and speak with a confidential advocate:

<http://compliance.rutgers.edu/resources/resources-for-complainants/> .

**Support Services:** There are also a number of important services that the university offers. **Counseling, ADAP & Psychiatric Services** (CAPS: [rhscaps.rutgers.edu](https://rhscaps.rutgers.edu)); **Violence Prevention & Victim Assistance** ([vpva.rutgers.edu](https://vpva.rutgers.edu)); **Scarlet Listeners** ([scarletlisteners.com](https://scarletlisteners.com)).

\*\*\* [This is a tentative syllabus; it's subject to change at the instructor's discretion.]