

Semantics of Natural Language
Philosophy 730:421(Spring 2018)
MW5, Scott 204, Prof. Pietroski

Class Website (Canvas): <https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/7378>

Course Description

This course will focus on the meanings of linguistic expressions—like the words and sentences of spoken English—how these meanings are related (to each other), and how they might be related to some other things that philosophers, linguists, and cognitive scientists have cared about: grammatical structure, logic, truth, concepts, reference, and communication. We'll alternate between thinking about what meanings are, and trying to construct/revise some theories that start to explain some basic facts in this domain. Specific subtopics will include, as time permits: nouns and verbs of various kinds; adjectives and adverbs; quantifiers and relative clauses; tense and negation. Grading will be based on a series of homework assignments, which will include both problem sets and short (half-page) responses to questions about the issues.

Textbook and Supplementary Readings

Knowledge of Meaning (MIT Press) by Richard Larson and Gabriel Segal.

Some additional readings will be made available via the website.

Classes will often be supplemented with handouts, which will also be posted on the website.

Contact Information

My email address: paul.pietroski@rutgers.edu

My office address: 528 Gateway Building (5th floor), 106 Somerset St.

Office Hours: TBA, once I find out what times people could attend; but tentatively,
1:30-2:30 on Mondays, 4:30-5:30 on Wednesdays, or by appointment

Announcements will be made via the course website: <https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/7378>

Course requirements

- Three assignments during the term, each worth 20%.
- A longer and more comprehensive take-home final exam, worth 40%.
- You can redo the first assignment, in light of comments and class discussion

On Wednesdays when no assignment is distributed, I may suggest a problem to think about in preparation for the next assignment. I'll talk about all of this in the first class meeting.

Tentative Schedule (*textbook chapters in italics*), but the assignment dates are fixed:

- Jan 17: first class, introduction
- Jan 22: *The Nature of Semantic Theory*
- Jan 24: *Knowledge of meaning and theories of truth* (1st time)
- Jan 29, 31: *Verbs and predication*
- Feb 5, 7: *Proper nouns and reference*
- Feb 12, 14: pause and review
 - First Assignment distributed on Feb. 12, due Feb. 19
- Feb 19, 21: *Pronouns and demonstratives*
- Feb 26, 28: *Quantification, round one*
 - Second Assignment distributed on Feb. 28, due Mar. 7
- Mar 5, 7: *Quantification, round two*

Spring Break

- Mar 19, 21: Review, followed by *Meaning and structure*
- Mar 26, 28: *Definite descriptions*
 - Apr 2, 6: *Quantifiers and quantifier properties*
 - Third Assignment distributed on Apr 6, due Apr. 13
 - Apr 4, 6: *Anaphora*
- Apr 11, 13: *Events, states, and times*
- Apr 18, 20: Clausal Complements and Attitude Reports
 - first part of the Take-Home Final distributed on April 20
- Apr 25, 27: catch up, and as time permits...
 - Knowledge of meaning and theories of truth* (2nd time), *Meaning and Knowledge*
 - second part of the Take-Home Final distributed on April 27
- Apr 30: Last Class, Review, class discussion of Take-Home Final

Other Links and Information

Rutgers has a detailed policy on Academic Integrity and Code of Student Conduct:

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

Please familiarize yourself with this policy. If you have any questions about what counts as plagiarism (cheating, etc.), talk with before submitting work for grading.

We'll talk explicitly in class about some of the things that are OK, and some that are not-OK, in the context of discussing experimental design and jointly authored work.

Disability Services (848) 445-6800

<https://ods.rutgers.edu>

Rutgers welcomes students with disabilities into all of the educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the office, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation:

<https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>

Student-Wellness Services

Just In Case Web App: <http://codu.co/cee05e>

Access helpful mental health information and resources for yourself or a friend in a mental health crisis on your smartphone or tablet and easily contact CAPS or RUPD.

Counseling, ADAP & Psychiatric Services (CAPS) (848) 932-7884

17 Senior Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901

<http://www.rhscaps.rutgers.edu>

CAPS is a University mental health support service that includes counseling, alcohol and other drug assistance, and psychiatric services staffed by a team of professional within Rutgers Health services to support students efforts to succeed at Rutgers.

Violence Prevention & Victim Assistance (VPVA) (848) 932-1181

3 Bartlett Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901

<http://www.vpva.rutgers.edu>

The Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance provides confidential crisis intervention, counseling and advocacy for victims of sexual and relationship violence and stalking to students, staff and faculty.

Scarlet Listeners (732) 247-5555

<http://www.scarletlisteners.com>

Free and confidential peer counseling and referral hotline, providing a comforting and supportive safe space