

## PHILOSOPHY 220: Theory of Knowledge

Location: Murray Hall 213

Time: 2:50 – 4:10 MW

Course Number: 0118779

Instructor: Dr. Matthew McGrath

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**Note: Credit not given if student has already taken 01:730:412.**

### Description:

This course introduces students to several key issues in the theory of knowledge, including the question of what differentiates knowledge from merely true belief, whether and how knowledge is possible, and in what ways knowledge is valuable or important. The course also considers sources for knowledge, including perception, memory and testimony.

### Core Curriculum Goal:

- Examine critically philosophical and other theoretical issues concerning the nature of reality, human experience, knowledge, value, and/or cultural production.

### Learning goals:

- Gain an understanding of the basic issues in the theory of knowledge and apply this understanding to ordinary experience.
- Gain familiarity with and practice in the art of philosophical argumentation, orally and in writing.
- Practice close reading of philosophical texts, aiming at distilling the main conclusions and lines of argument.
- Develop or enhance skill in philosophical writing, both expository (explaining one or more authors' positions and arguments) and argumentative (presenting one's own position and supplying argument for it).

### Work for the Course

Three short writing assignments: 1-2p each. 5% each.

Paper (4-5p): 25%.

Midterm: 25%

Final exam: 25%

Peer work for paper: 5%.

Attendance and participation: 10% (5% for each)

**Required book: Goldman, A. and M. McGrath *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction* (OUP). Available at the Rutgers U bookstore. Other readings will be provided.**

### Policies:

1. Use of electronic devices is strongly discouraged. You may not use cell phones or tablets in class. You may use laptops only for course-related purposes. If you are distracting those around you, you will have one warning. After this, you will be asked not to bring a laptop to class.
2. Be courteous and respectful to other student and to the professor. I encourage discussion but only constructive discussion. We want all students to feel welcome to contribute.
3. If you will miss a test and have an approved excuse (with relevant proof), please let me know in advance.
4. I will grant extensions on papers and assignments only for university approved excuses (with relevant proof) and only when the request is made at least one day before the paper or assignment is due.
5. Late papers and assignments.
  - two thirds of a letter grade value will be subtracted for each day late, up to a C after three days.
  - However, you may turn your paper or assignment at any time even after seven days (up to the end of the semester) and be eligible to receive a grade up to a D+ (which is much better than a 0).
6. Writing assignments and papers: use 1" margins all around and double-spaced 12 point font. Do not use an excessively large font.
7. Students with disabilities, please get in touch with me the first week of class to discuss your accommodations. (See syllabus statement.)
8. Do not make plans to miss class during the week before spring break. Sorry, but I will not accommodate your travel plans.
9. Plagiarism issues. Fully cite all sources you use. Do not paraphrase sources, except when the information is common factual information (such as names, dates). Do not show your paper to other students in the class. You are welcome to discuss the issues with them, of course. Please see my syllabus statement on Turnitin.

### **Tentative Schedule of Readings:**

Part I: *What is Knowledge?*

Wk 1: W 1/23: Introduction.

Wk 2: 1/28 – 1/30: Justification and the regress problem  
Reading: GM ch. 1, Sextus Empiricus excerpt.

Wk 3: 2/4: Plato on Knowledge

Reading: *The Theatetus* (excerpts)

2/6: The Traditional Theory of Knowledge and the Gettier Problem

Readings: GM ch. 3 (up to but not including 3.3), E. Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?"

*Assignment #1: Short writing due Friday 2/8*

Wk 4: 2/11-2/13: Some attempts at a solution of the Gettier Problem

Readings: GM ch. 3 (3.3-3.4.1), A. Goldman, "A Causal Theory of Knowledge."

Wk 5: 2/18: Reading: Goldman, "A Causal Theory," cont'd.

Part 2: *What is the Value of Knowledge?*

Wks 5-6: 2/20, 2/25-2/27:

Readings: J. Greco, "The Value Problem," L. Zagzebski, "The Search for the Source of Epistemic Goodness, GM ch. 3 (3.6).

*Assignment #2 due Friday 3/1*

Wk 7: 3/4: Finish value section & review for midterm

3/6: Midterm

Part 3: *How is Knowledge Possible?*

Wk 8 Skepticism about Knowledge

3/11: Readings: GM ch. 4, Descartes, Meditation 1.

3/13: Readings: GM ch. 4, Nozick, "Knowledge and Skepticism"

***Spring Break***

Wk 9: Responses to Skepticism

3/25: Reading: Nozick cont'd,

3/27: Readings: GM, ch. 4, G. E. Moore excerpt, "Proof of an External World", "Four Forms of Skepticism"

Wk 10: 4/1-4/3: Pragmatic Skepticism

Reading: Rinard, "Pragmatic Skepticism"

Wk 11: Contextualism

4/8: Reading: GM, ch. 6

4/10: Reading: DeRose, "Contextualism: An Explanation and Defense."

*Assignment #3 due Friday 4/12*

Part 4: *Special Issues in the Theory of Knowledge*

Wk 12: Pragmatic Encroachment

4/15: Reading: GM, ch. 6

4/17: Reading, Brown

Wk 13: 4/22-4/24: Testimony

Readings: GM, ch. 9; Hume, "Of Miracles"

*Final paper drafts due to peer reviewers 4/26 Friday*

*Final paper comments from peers due 5/1 Wednesday*

Wk 14: 4/29-5/1: Fake News

Reading: Rini, "Fake News and Partisan Epistemology."

Wk 15: 5/6: Review for final

*Final Paper due 5/6 Monday*

**Disability Statement:** Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus's disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form>.

**Statement as a Responsible Employee:** Rutgers faculty are committed to helping create a safe learning environment for all students and for the university as a whole. If you have experienced any form of gender or sex-based discrimination or harassment, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, relationship violence, or stalking, know that help and support are available. Rutgers has staff members trained to support survivors in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, and more. The University strongly encourages all students to report any such incidents to the University. Please be aware that all Rutgers employees (other than those designated as

confidential resources such as advocates, counselors, clergy and healthcare providers as listed in Appendix A to [Policy 10.3.12](#)) are required to report information about such discrimination and harassment to the University. This means that if you tell a faculty member about a situation of sexual harassment or sexual violence, or other related misconduct, the faculty member must share that information with the University's Title IX Coordinator. If you wish to speak to a confidential employee who does not have this reporting responsibility, you can find a list of resources in Appendix A to University Policy 10.3.12. For more information about your options at Rutgers, please visit [endsexualviolence.rutgers.edu](http://endsexualviolence.rutgers.edu)

**Turnitin:** Students agree that by taking this course all required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com (directly or via learning management system, i.e. Sakai, Blackboard, Canvas, Moodle) for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Use of the Turnitin.com service is subject to the Usage Policy posted on the Turnitin.com site.

Students who do not agree should contact the course instructor immediately.

