

**Philosophy 320: Knowledge and Assertion**  
**Spring 2019**

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Office hours: Mondays, 3.30 – 4.30

**Overview:** This course will study closely topics in the intersection of epistemology, the study of knowledge and rationality, and philosophy of language. The goal of the class will be to see how studying epistemology can help us understand language use and *vice versa*.

The first half of the class will study communication, broadly speaking. We will study how tools from epistemology can help us understand the practice of making assertions, of how we use background interpretation to interpret each other, of how we can use words to mean more than they say and more. These will be case studies for the more general idea that various communicative practices can be understood as simply arising from the fact that people are rational agents who are trying to share information.

In the second half we will focus on using language to make progress on issues in epistemology. Language plays a central role in acquiring knowledge: we will study how we use testimony to transmit knowledge or justified belief. But we will also see how philosophers have attempted to use our understanding of language to dispel skeptical problems that have plagued epistemology for centuries. We will finish by asking what it is to know *how* to do something and see how modern philosophy of language has been used to motivate certain views of know how; and we will ask whether knowing a *language* is a kind of know how or some other special kind of knowledge.

**Prerequisites:** The material in the class is mostly self-standing: most of the necessary background will explained in the first few introductory lectures. However, students should have some experience in Philosophy, like a 200 level class; and some background in philosophy of language or logic will probably be helpful.

**Website:** The course website can be found on Sakai (<https://sakai.rutgers.edu/portal>). I will use it to make announcements, distribute handouts and readings and to post homework assignments. It is very important that you are able to access the website. If you are not able to, let me know straightaway.

**Reading:** All readings will be posted on the Sakai site.

**Assessment:** Students will write two shorter papers and one longer final paper. In addition, there will be occasional in-class quizzes on the material that will be given in class. There will also be a participation grade based on your contribution to discussion in class.

The grades will be broken down as follows:

Paper 1: 20%  
Paper 2: 25%  
Paper 3: 35%  
Participation: 10%  
Quizzes: 10%

### **Class Policies:**

**Attendance:** Attendance is not mandatory (although persistent absence will have a negative impact on your participation grade). If you will be absent, I expect you to use the university website, <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/>, to report this, indicating the date of and reason for your absence.

**Late Assignments:** Late homework will not be accepted, except in the case of illness, bereavement and other extenuating circumstances. Any extensions must be cleared ahead of time.

**Academic Integrity:** Violations of academic integrity are a very serious matter and the consequences can be extremely severe. Among the most serious violations are cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, denying others access to information or material, and facilitating violations of academic integrity. (For a more thorough overview of what violations are and what their consequences can be, see <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/>.)

Plagiarism can occur unintentionally from ignorance; but ignorance is not an excuse. If you are not sure what counts as plagiarism, consult the following tools:

*The Camden Plagiarism Tutorial (INTERACTIVE):*

<http://library.camden.rutgers.edu/EducationalModules/Plagiarism/>

*Consult Don't Plagiarize: Document Your Research! For tips about how to take notes so that you don't plagiarize by accident.* [http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/avoid\\_plagiarism](http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/avoid_plagiarism)

Further resources are available at <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/resources-for-students/>.

**Laptop Policy:** I strongly encourage you all to take notes *by hand*: it's well-documented that taking notes by hand better facilitates learning. But however you decide to take notes, please refrain from texting, surfing the web and other non-class related activities during lectures.

## Schedule of Readings

### Week 1, Overview and Formal Background

Background on epistemology and epistemic logic

Background on language and formal semantics

### **PART 1: Communication**

### Week 2, Norms of Assertion

Williamson, *Knowledge and Its Limits*, ch. 11

Lackey, "Norms of Assertion"

### Week 3, Language and Rationality

Grice, "Logic and Conversation", §1–3

### Week 4, Assertion and Common Ground

Stalnaker, "Assertion"

### Week 5, Common Ground Again and Presupposition

Stalnaker, "Common Ground"

Simons, "Presupposition and Accommodation"

### Week 6, Implicature 2

Block, "Is the Symmetry Problem Really a Problem?"

Fox, "Cancelling the Maxim of Quantity: Another challenge for a Gricean theory of scalar implicatures"

### Week 7, Implicature 3

Lepore and Stone, *Imagination and Convention*, ch.s 1, 3 and 4

Week 8, Conditionals and Conditional Belief

Stalnaker, "A Theory of Conditionals"

Stalnaker, *Inquiry*, ch. 6

Week 9, Extending Pragmatics

Roberts, "Information Structure: Towards an integrated formal theory of pragmatics"

Portner, "Imperatives"

## **PART 2: Knowledge and Language**

Week 10, Testimony

Lackey, "Testimonial knowledge and transmission"

Fricker, "Against Gullibility"

Week 11, Testimonial Injustice

Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, ch.s 1 and 3

Week 12, Skepticism and Counterfactuals

Nozick, "Knowledge and Scepticism"

Kripke, "Nozick on Knowledge", selections

De Rose, "Solving the Skeptical Problem"

Week 13, Contextualism

DeRose, "Contextualism and Knowledge Attributions,"

Hawthorne, *Knowledge and Lotteries*

Week 14, Know How and Semantic Knowledge

Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, ch. 2

Stanley and Williamson, "Know How"

Hornsby, "Semantic Knowledge and Practical Knowledge"