

# PHIL 4110 Syllabus

Theories of Knowledge, Section CC

Fall 2026

## Instructor Information

---

**Instructor: Dr. Cayla Clinkenbeard**

**Email: [cclinkenbeard3@gatech.edu](mailto:cclinkenbeard3@gatech.edu)**

## General Course Information

---

### Description

We think we know lots of things—from the fact that I’m looking at my own two hands to how soap works—and yet when we try to explain how we know these things, we often come up empty handed. Epistemology studies the requirements for and limitations of knowledge. This course is divided into two parts. In the first part, we will begin by examining what we can know as individuals. We will think about problems that arise from uncertainty and how we should respond to those problems. Can we prove to skeptics that we have knowledge, and, if so, what counts as proof or evidence? While traditional epistemology focuses on individual knowledge, much of modern knowledge depends on being part of a larger community of knowers. In the second part, we will examine social theories of knowledge. How does our dependence on others make us capable of far more knowledge than we could achieve on our own, and how does it make us vulnerable to deception or ignorance?

**Mode of Instruction:** This course is an in-person seminar, or discussion-based form of instruction. I will only lecture as needed.

### Course Learning Outcomes

After finishing the course, students should be able to:

1. Identify and explain key concepts and themes within epistemology.
2. Read and analyze philosophical texts and arguments.
3. Verbally describe or assess arguments.

4. Write a clear and plausible evaluative essay on the philosophical issues presented in the course.

### **Required Course Materials**

All readings will be available through Canvas (organized by week in the “Modules” tab). No textbooks or other course materials need to be purchased.

### **Grading Policy:**

Letter grades will be assigned according to the following scheme:

- A > 90% Excellent
- B 80-90% Above Average
- C 70-79% Average
- D 60-69% Below Average
- F < 59% Unacceptable

### *Assignments*

- Participation: 10%
- Reflections (10 total): 20% (2% each)
- Presentation: 10%
- Essays (5 total, lowest dropped, 4 graded): 60% (15% each)

### **Description of Graded Components**

There are four kinds of assessments in the course.

*Participation* includes asking and answering questions and engaging in respectful discussion with the class and in groups. Considering other perspectives and possible objections is essential to philosophy. Anyone can read texts on their own, but learning from each other cannot be done alone. Therefore, participation is mandatory and counts for 10% of your grade. I will keep track of your participation in class by taking notes on students who speak. Students will be graded on the following scheme: excellent (3), satisfactory (2), unsatisfactory (1), or absent (0). Excellent scores are achieved by consistently raising questions that contribute to the discussion and responding to others' points. Speaking in most sessions is satisfactory. Rarely speaking—once or twice during the semester—is unsatisfactory. If you never participate, you will receive a 0.

*Presentations* are brief summaries (5 minutes) of a text we're discussing together. On the first day of class, each of you will choose a text to present on. You will then explain the main argument and raise any points you think are important for the class discussion. This can be a question that you found particularly puzzling or a contentious claim that you found problematic.

*Reflections* are short (3-5 sentence) in-class writing assignments in which you may ask a well-developed question; explain a passage in a text that you found particularly helpful or insightful; or criticize an argument that you found unpersuasive. Criticisms must be always supported with reasons—it's not sufficient to merely state that an argument is unpersuasive. These are graded as incomplete (0), complete (1), or sufficient (2). Doing the assignment gets you a point, but the extra point is earned by including your own thoughts about the arguments (as opposed to summarizing the argument). There are 10 reflections in the course. You may choose which texts to write about.

There will be 5 in-class essays, which you will write in blue books that will be provided to you (make sure to always bring a pen or pencil). The goal is for you to practice crafting evaluative essays to become better thinkers and communicators. The grading rubric will be on Canvas, and I will explain in class how to write a good philosophy essay. I look for: clarity, organization, cogent reasoning, nuance, and creatively raising considerations beyond what was discussed in class. I aim to grade essays within one week and give thorough feedback to help you identify exactly how to improve. You will choose one question from a small selection, and the questions will always be relevant to our discussions in class. You will have the entire class period to write. The lowest grade will be dropped, which means that there are 4 graded essays.

## Course Policies

---

### **Attendance**

Participation requires attendance, and both are required. However, I do not take attendance beyond notes on participation.

### **Academic Integrity**

Georgia Tech aims to cultivate a community based on trust, academic integrity, and honor. Students are expected to act according to the highest ethical standards. Review [Georgia Tech's Honor Code](#) and the student [Code of Conduct](#).

Any student suspected of cheating or plagiarism on a quiz, exam, or assignment will be reported to the Office of Student Integrity, who will investigate the incident and identify the appropriate penalty for violations.

### **Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

If you are a student with learning needs that require special accommodation, [contact the Office of Disability Services](#) (404-894-2563) as soon as possible to make an appointment to discuss your special needs and to obtain an accommodations letter. Please also e-mail me as soon as possible in order to set up a time to discuss your learning needs.

### **Student-Faculty Expectations Agreement**

At Georgia Tech, we believe that it is important to strive for an atmosphere of mutual respect, acknowledgement, and responsibility between faculty members and the student body. [The Student-Faculty Expectations](#) articulate some basic expectations that you can have of me and that I have of you. In the end, simple respect for knowledge, hard work, and cordial interactions will help build the environment we seek. Therefore, I encourage you to remain committed to the ideals of Georgia Tech while in this class.

### **Use of Generative AI**

There is no need to use generative AI in this course, and using it defeats the purpose of the assignments. The assignments are all designed to give you the opportunity to practice evaluating philosophical arguments, identifying points of interest for further discussion, and crafting your own arguments. To facilitate this, all assignments besides the presentation will be written in class, and I require you to put away all electronic devices. Any use of electronic devices during essays will be treated as cheating. There are many advantages to this approach, including that you don't have homework or the temptation to rely on online summaries instead of developing your own thoughts without distraction. You may use generative AI for feedback on your presentation before class.

### **Extensions, Late Assignments, & Re-Scheduled/Missed Exams**

Extensions and makeup work will only be given for approved institute activities, documented medical emergencies or illnesses, and religious observances. Students who participate in approved institute activities should get statements from the Office of the Registrar as soon as possible. Students are responsible for contacting the Office of the Dean of Students about medical emergencies or illnesses as soon as possible. Absence due to religious observances should be communicated with me within the first two weeks of class. I will then contact you to discuss deadlines and make-up requirements. These processes help you communicate your needs with me and help me be consistent and fair for all students in the class.

**Student Use of Mobile Devices in the Classroom**

Please do not use mobile devices during class. It's not only disrespectful, but it also distracts you, your classmates, and me.