

PHIL 4110 Syllabus

Theories of Knowledge, Section CC

Fall 2026

Instructor Information

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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. We meet Mondays and Wednesdays at 2:00-3:15 p.m.

Office Hours: My office hours are 10:00am-12:00pm on Wednesdays. The location is TBD. If you cannot meet with me during these hours, email me to schedule an in-person or Zoom meeting.

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 explain and assess philosophical 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:

Final grades will be determined by the following scale:

- A $\geq$ 89.5% Excellent
- B $\geq$ 79.5-89.49% Above Average
- C $\geq$ 69.5-79.49% Average
- D $\geq$ 59.5-69.49% Below Average
- F < 59.49% Unacceptable

Note: I round up grades that are within a half of a point of the next letter grade. For example, 89.5 will count as 90.

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. Students should feel free to challenge ideas and arguments, but always in a manner that's respectful toward classmates. Considering other perspectives and possible objections is essential to philosophy. 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 participation includes consistently raising questions that contribute to the discussion and responding to others' points. Rarely speaking—once or twice during the semester—is unsatisfactory. If you never participate, you will receive a 0. I will automatically disregard 3 days of no participation to accommodate unexpected absences.

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 reading to summarize. In your presentation, 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. These are graded as incomplete (0), complete (7), or sufficient (10). Doing the assignment gets you 7 points, but answering follow-up questions and actively contributing to the subsequent discussion earns the full 10 points.

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 always be supported by reasons; it's not sufficient to merely state that an argument is unpersuasive. The first 5 minutes of every class will be reserved for writing reflections, and you may choose which 10 readings to write about. If one of your reflections does not receive full credit, you can write another reflection to replace that score. These are graded as incomplete (0), complete (1), or sufficient (2). Completing the assignment gets you a point, and the second point is earned by including your own thoughts about the arguments rather than simply summarizing it.

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, accuracy, 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

Because participation is graded, attendance is required. I do not maintain a separate attendance grade, but absences will affect your participation score beyond the three excused no-participation days described above.

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.

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. AI must not be used at any point during any assignment. To facilitate this, all assignments besides the presentation will be written in class, and I require you to put away all electronic devices. Students may not use phones, laptops, tablets, smart watches, or other electronic devices during in-class essays unless approved through an accommodation. 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.

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.

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

Students who miss an in-class essay for an approved reason will be given an opportunity to complete a makeup essay. However, 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 distracts you, your classmates, and me.

Statement on Student Well-Being

At Georgia Tech, we are concerned about your overall physical, social, and mental well-being. A comprehensive list of wellness related resources has been compiled and maintained by the Office of the Vice President for Student Engagement and Well-being and can be found here: <https://students.gatech.edu/student-resource-guide>[Links to an external site.](#)