

PHIL 3115 Syllabus

Philosophy of Science Phil 3115, All Sections, 3 Credits

Fall 2026

Instructor Information

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General Course Information

Description

In this course, we will discuss issues that arise from philosophical reflection on the practice of science. In particular, we will develop an understanding of four key questions:

1. What is science, and what separates it from non-science?
2. Is scientific reasoning reliable, and why (not)?
3. Should we believe that our best scientific theories describe the world as it really is?
4. What is the appropriate role for values (such as feminism, justice, equality, etc) in science, if any?

We will connect our answers to these questions with current, relevant issues in public life, wherever possible.

Course Learning Outcomes

Students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate an improved understanding of key issues and schools of thought in the philosophy of science.
2. Understand how issues in the philosophy of science relate to other disciplines, as well as to important debates in politics and daily life.
3. Engage in debate and discussion with peers with greater confidence.

Required Course Materials

Students will need digital or physical access to the following:

Peter Godfrey-Smith, 2003, *Theory and Reality*. University of Chicago Press.

All other readings will be available through Canvas or the library.

Grading Policy:

You will earn letter grades as follows:

- A 90+%
- B 80-89%
- C 70-79%
- D 60-69%
- F Below 60%

You will earn points according to the following distribution:

- Class Work 40%
- Pop Reading Quizzes 20%
- Tests (Midterm and Final) 40%

Description of Graded Components

Class Work: Several class periods will be devoted to class work sessions that will help students assess, critique, and apply concepts from the readings. Grading will reflect the quality of (a) submitted/presented work and (b) participation in class. The format varies, but may involve written components, group work, debates, etc. While some reading or research may need to be completed before class, the grade is based in class activities. The lowest scoring class work grade will be dropped.

Pop Reading Quizzes: No more than 10 times throughout the semester, a short pop quiz will be given. They are meant to be a check on whether or not you completed and understood the readings at a beginner level. They are not cumulative (only material assigned following the previous quiz will be assessed). Usually, they will be multiple choice and/or short answer. They will be handwritten. No notes may be used. The lowest scoring quiz will be dropped.

Tests: There will be two tests administered. One is a midterm, the other is a cumulative final. The midterm will occur during a regular class period. The final will occur during the final exam period. I am looking to determine if you (i) understand core concepts from the course, (ii) can apply concepts from the course to new scenarios, and (iii) can critically assess claims made about science using tools from the course. Both tests will be handwritten. No notes may be used, unless otherwise noted.

Course Policies

Attendance and Participation

Attendance and participation are very important in this course. Almost all graded work is completed in class. Aside from your grade, regular attendance and participation are also vital to a number of course goals. By participating in class, you can gain confidence in expressing your viewpoint and debating philosophical issues. It also allows you to learn from your peers and understand other points of view. The first step towards success in this course is showing up.

Missed class work, quizzes, and tests can be made up with a valid excuse, which will be granted in the case of illness or emergency **documented through OSL**, Institute Approved Absence, official accommodation, or pre-arranged religious obligation. Accommodations, illnesses, or other conflicts must be documented through the appropriate University channels. Make-ups must be arranged promptly.

AI Use

AI, including large language models, may not be used to complete any graded material in this course. Presenting the output of AI as your own work will be counted as a form of plagiarism.

Late Work

No late work is permitted except in the case of illness or emergency documented through OSL, Institute Approved Absence, official accommodation, or pre-arranged religious obligation.

Email

I will make every attempt to respond to emails promptly. However, I cannot guarantee that I will respond outside of 9 AM to 5 PM. Please allow 24 hours for a response, then send a follow-up email if needed. Likewise, I do not expect students to be available to respond to email outside of typical work hours.

How to Get Help

My office hours are your primary way to get help with this course. No appointment is necessary—feel free to show up to discuss readings, assignments, or anything else. If you are unable to attend my office hours, email me with other times that work for you. Depending on my availability, I may suggest working together over Zoom or through email. I will review drafts of work during meetings only. If at any point you are concerned about your grade or a score you received, meet with me to discuss it.

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.