2014

315-01 Philosophy of Religion

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Philosophy of Religion
Xavier University
Spring 2014

This syllabus is derived from the online versions of the syllabus posted on Canvas. Students use the interactive Canvas version.

Reading assignments are available via the Canvas calendar.

Office

My office is 207 Hinkle Hall.

Scheduled office hours are Monday and Wednesday 2:00-3:00.

I prefer to meet students by appointment. Since I live on campus in the Jesuit Residence, I'm fairly flexible about meeting times.

Students are strongly encouraged to make use of office hours individually and in groups. Participation in office hours counts towards the class participation grade.

Participation

Students are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the text of the day. No credit is given for mere presence in the classroom. Students must be active participants in this course not passive observers.

Participation grade will be assessed on both the quantity and quality of a student's contribution to class discussion. Participation grades are adversely affected by absences. One cannot participate without being present.

A participation grade of "A" is reserved for those students who enhance class discussion through their insight and enthusiasm. Typically students receiving an "A" in participation offer at least one interesting question or comment per class session. Interesting questions and comments are grounded in the reading and broader class discussion.

A participation grade of "B" indicates an acceptable level of class participation. Typical "B" students offer an interesting question or comment on a weekly basis. A "B" may also be assigned for frequent but superficial questions and comments.

A participation grade of "C" indicates that the student rarely offers insightful questions or comments.

Students who fail to participate will receive a failing participation grade.
**Papers**

Students are required to submit three papers during the semester: two discussion papers and a term paper.

**Discussion Papers**

**Term Paper**


Two other guides are particularly helpful for crafting clear philosophical prose and available online:

Jim Pryor's Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper (specific tips for philosophy writing)

The Economist's Style Guide (helpful for any English prose; this is a British Guide so some of the advice on specific word usage doesn't apply on this side of the Atlantic)

Please submit papers via Canvas. Canvas will automatically screen papers through Turnitin.

**Discussion Papers and Presentations:**

Nearly every Friday we will have a discussion session based upon the week's reading.

4-6 students will sign up to lead discussion on a particular Friday.

The assignment has two parts: a paper and a presentation. The presentation is a group effort; the papers are individual.

The paper offers an opportunity to dig deeper into the text of a given week.

The presentation is an opportunity to share the insights developed in your papers with the class and to stimulate class discussion.

**Paper procedure:**

Sign up for two Friday discussions. You may choose the same group for both discussions or may change groups.

Read the relevant text in advance.

At least 5 days prior to the selected discussion day, meet with the instructor during office hours or by appointment to discuss thesis statements.

Formulate a thesis for your paper. The thesis should fit under one of three categories:

Your thesis may agree with an argument found in one of the readings of the week. The thesis should present an argument supporting the argument from the readings that you wish to defend.

Your thesis may disagree with an argument presented in one of the readings of the week. The thesis should present a counter argument to the argument found in the readings.

Your thesis may present an argument that draws non-trivial implications of an argument from the week's readings.
Draft papers.
Review the other papers from your group. Students must comment on every paper in the group.
Revise paper.
Final version of paper is due on Canvas the Monday following the group presentation.

Group Discussion Procedures:

Discuss your paper thesis with members of your presentation group.
Based on the theses of the group, formulate a presentation that incorporates some of the insights of the groups papers. The group presentation should lead to discussion. When developing the presentation, keep the goal of promoting discussion in mind.

Offer a 10 - 15 min presentation as a group. Each group member should have a substantial role in the group presentation.

Discuss the papers as a group in front of the class for 10 mins. Each group member should substantially enter into the discussion. The group discussion should lead into broader class discussion.

Prepare "pump priming" questions to add class discussion.

Grading:

Each discussion paper and presentation is worth 150 points. Students will complete two paper and presentation assignments over the course of the semester.

Papers will be assessed on:

The quality of the philosophical insight presented in the paper.

The accuracy and depth of the interpretation of the course material.

Grammar, style, citation method, and overall clarity of writing will also be considered.

The paper aspect of the assignment is worth 120 points.

Presentations will be assessed on:

Philosophical Content

Organization

Creative Presentation

Ability to engage the class in discussion

Engagement with the group in preparing the presentation.

The presentation aspect of the assignment is worth 30 points.

Automatic Deductions:
Failure to group edit -- minus 15 points

Lateness -- minus 15 points, no papers will be accepted after the final day of class

Non-participation in presentation or discussion -- minus 15 points

**Exams**

There will be two exams in this course. A midterm and a final comprehensive exam.

The exams will consist of definition, short essay, and long essay questions.

Exams are given in class. No blue books are needed.

Possible exam questions will be posted to Canvas one week prior to each exam.

**Digital Responsibility**

This class will rely heavily on digital resources such as Canvas and Turnitin. Students should subscribe to Canvas for schedule updates.

Two common excuses are not acceptable in this class:

"My computer crashed"

"I didn't check my email"

“My computer crashed” is not an acceptable excuse for late work. A single computer’s failure should not result in data loss if proper safeguards are in place. I recommend using a cloud based backup to keep your data secure. These include: Sugarsync, Dropbox, Amazon Cloud Drive, Carbonite, iCloud, and various Google services. The functionality of each is similar but slightly different. All these services and many others like them will help keep your data safe. For maximum security you can sync your most important data across multiple clouds.

Bottom line: 99% of data loss because of PC failure is avoidable. It is your responsibility to adequately back up your work.

Digital Accountability:

Canvas and Turnitin both log student activities on their sites. For example, Turnitin tracks when students review professor comments. I have set up Canvas and Turnitin to collect student use data and reserve the right to use this data in determining paper and participation grades.

The timestamp given by Turnitin will be used to determine whether a paper is on time.

I will only accept “internet problems” as a legitimate excuse for late papers under two circumstances. One, the campus network is down for a significant amount of time the day
before an assignment is due. Two, Canvas or Turnitin is down. These two excuses are independently verifiable.

Given the wide variety of electronic communications devices available, failing to check for messages is not an acceptable excuse.

Messages from the instructor will be sent via Canvas Message. These messages can be forwarded to your Xavier email or other accounts. Set up the forwarding system in whatever way is most convenient. Canvas messages are also available via the Canvas app for Android or iOS as well as the Canvas browser interface.

Students are urged to check for messages daily. Problems arising from failing to check for messages are entirely the responsibility of the student.

**Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is a serious academic transgression and will not be tolerated in this class! Those I catch plagiarizing or otherwise cheating on any assignment will fail the course and be reported to the Dean. All non-handwritten assignments will be run through Turnitin (and may receive further evaluation) to rule out plagiarism.

Despite my warnings, every semester of my teaching career I've failed at least two students for plagiarism, often more. Please think twice before copying another's work. The consequences are serious.

For advice on what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it see: [http://www.xavier.edu/library/xututor/plagiarism/index.cfm](http://www.xavier.edu/library/xututor/plagiarism/index.cfm)

A good rule of thumb: when in doubt, cite. If you are having trouble contact the writing center or come to office hours for help.

This University policy on plagiarism is as follows:

**Academic Honesty**

The pursuit of truth demands high standards of personal honesty. Academic and professional life requires a trust based upon integrity of the written and spoken word. Accordingly, violations of certain standards of ethical behavior will not be tolerated at Xavier University. These include theft, cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized assistance in assignments and tests, unauthorized copying of computer software, the falsification of results and material submitted in reports or admission and registration documents, and the falsification of any academic record including letters of recommendation. All work submitted for academic evaluation must be the student's own. Certainly, the activities of other scholars will influence all students. However, the direct and unattributed use of another's efforts is prohibited as is the use of any work untruthfully submitted as one's own. Penalties for violations of this policy may include one or more of the following: a zero for that assignment or test, an "F" in the course, and expulsion from the University. The dean of the college in which the student is enrolled is to be informed in writing of all such incidents, though the teacher has full authority to assign the grade for the assignment, test, or course. If disputes of interpretation arise, the student, faculty member, and chair should attempt to resolve the difficulty. If this is unsatisfactory, the dean will rule in the matter. As a final appeal,
the academic vice president will call a committee of tenured faculty for the purpose of making a final determination.

**Accommodations**

Students requiring special accommodations for medical, athletic, or other approved reasons should contact me by email as soon as possible so we can discuss the necessary steps to be taken.

Disability accommodations are facilitated by the Xavier Learning Assistance Center.

**Attendance**

Bodily attendance is necessary but not sufficient to be successful in this class. No credit is given for mere bodily attendance. Students must demonstrate mental as well as physical attendance.

Students will be marked mentally absent if found:

Texting

Checking Social Media

Using computers in a manner unrelated to class

Sleeping

Missing course materials (i.e. books, notes, etc...)

Or otherwise demonstrating a lack of attentiveness to the class

Student may have four unexcused absences (mental or physical). 5 points are deducted from the participation grade for each absence in excess of four. Students will receive a zero in participation after 9 absences.