

# PHIL 1370

## Philosophy of Knowledge

### Section 8B-AP5

Fall 2014



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Assistant Professor

#### SYLLABUS

#### UNITS OF STUDY

## *Course Description & Purpose*

Philosophy of Knowledge is a general education course that serves two purposes at Lamar University.

First, it serves as an introduction to university education and “the academy” with particular attention to differences in the search for knowledge across disciplines. In other words, in this course we will study how knowledge is understood differently in different disciplines, such as the sciences, the social sciences and the humanities. We will learn about the conceptions of knowledge that underlie and inform the university, specifically in these three areas.

Second, this course serves as an introduction to epistemology, the branch of philosophy dealing with knowledge, and to philosophy more generally. In fulfilling the second purpose, we will think about knowledge and truth as they are understood in life generally (outside as well as

inside the university). We will also ‘do’ philosophy by improving our reasoning skills. These two purposes are intertwined, as will become clear throughout this course.

One of the organizing principles of this course is to engage with intellectual conflicts: common sense vs. philosophy/critical inquiry, rationalism vs. empiricism, science vs. religion, debates within science over objectivity. As practice in philosophical thinking, we will examine both sides of a debate, studying each to see what is valuable and true, then we will consider the foundational disagreements that underlie the conflict, and will attempt to find our own position within the terms of this conflict.

- We will begin by looking at the standards that make for good and trustworthy knowledge as opposed to mere opinion.
- Then, we will look at two influential theories of knowledge, rationalism and empiricism.
- From there, we will study the physical sciences and social sciences, which develop out of empiricism.
- Finally, we will turn to religion and the arts, discussing their function in our lives.

#### WHAT'S IN THIS SYLLABUS?

Description of Philosophy	2
Learning Objectives, Textbooks	2
Meet Your Teachers	3
Disability Accommodations	3
Course Requirements,	
Grading Policy, Drop Dates	4
Rules & Policies and Resources	5
Course Schedule	6-7

## What is Philosophy and why do I need it?

There are many ways of defining what philosophy is, but one way of thinking about it is to say that [philosophers practice making arguments](#).

For our purposes, making arguments entails:

- understanding what others have said about an issue,
- treating opposing positions respectfully yet critically, and
- making a case for our own position on the issue by engaging critically with these opposing positions.

These skills and the habits of mind that are encouraged by this practice are essential for a healthy, mature citizenry.

As members of a democracy, and as educated members of a democracy especially, we have an obligation to develop the following skills and mental habits:

- rational and critical inquiry,
- fair and balanced treatment of intelligent positions, and
- reasoned support of our own positions.

We have an obligation to sharpen our ability to find what is right and wrong with arguments other people are making (even and especially if we are sympathetic to their conclusions), and to form our own positions on issues in a reasoned, critical and rigorous way that we can defend to other people.

In addition, from a purely selfish standpoint, these skills are helpful in becoming a “leader” in business, politics and the workforce generally. People who can argue for their



position in a reasoned and supported way while treating the opinions of others respectfully are more likely to have their positions listened to by others.

### VIDEO: WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY?

Check out the video “What is Philosophy?” in Module I for more information.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

These are the skills and knowledge that we intend for you to gain from this course:

Students will [demonstrate understanding of various foundations of knowledge](#) and ways of knowing as they exist in the academic disciplines and in life generally.

Students will develop an educational context in which [the core curriculum and their chosen major can be seen as part of the search for knowledge](#).

Students will [understand basic concepts](#) of philosophy, epistemology, rationalism, empiricism, pragmatism, and the scientific method.

Students will [critically examine conflicts](#) between epistemological positions including rationalism and empiricism; scientific objectivity (positivism) and critiques of science; and scientific knowledge and religious knowledge.

Students will be [develop awareness of and ability to employ standards of reasoning and logic](#).

Students will [critically reflect on their own understandings of knowledge and truth](#) through examination of similar and opposing views.

Students will improve [reading comprehension skills](#), practice [reasoned argumentation](#) and increase [written communication skills](#).

### TEXTBOOKS

Dodson, Kevin and Jon Avery, eds. *Ways of Knowing*. Second revised edition. Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt, 2000.

Stewart, Arthur. *Elements of Knowledge: Pragmatism, Logic, and Inquiry*. Revised edition. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt UP, 1997.

## Meet Your Teachers

### INSTRUCTOR

*Dr. Amy Smith*

Assistant Professor of English and Modern Languages  
Associate Director, QEP

Office: Maes 37  
[amy.smith@lamar.edu](mailto:amy.smith@lamar.edu)

BA in Philosophy, MA in Philosophy, PhD in Comparative Literature, Binghamton University

For the past twelve years, I have taught college courses in Philosophy, English, Comparative Literature, Engineering Design, and Human Development. As Associate Director of Lamar University's Quality Enhancement Plan I help train other instructors in innovative teaching techniques. My study of philosophy and intellectual history is the foundation of my study of literature and culture. Helping people learn is one of the most exciting things in the world to me.

### ACADEMIC COACHES

*April Riedy*

[april.riedy@iconnect-na.com](mailto:april.riedy@iconnect-na.com)

BA in English Language and Literature, Eastern Michigan University; MA in Literature, Eastern Michigan University

I specialize in English Composition, Critical Thinking, and Film Studies. All my classes have a critical thinking/philosophical focus to them. I believe the ability to think outside the box is the gateway to responsible citizenship. My proudest moment was being nominated for Graduate Research Student of the Year for a paper offering a feminist analysis of *Thelma and Louise*. It has been presented at multiple universities and is soon to be published in an online journal.

*Jorhan Mbonisi*

[jorhan.mbonisi@iconnect-na.com](mailto:jorhan.mbonisi@iconnect-na.com)

BA in Theatre Arts, MA in English Composition and Rhetoric, University of the District of Columbia.

My work experience includes teaching English composition, writing across the curriculum, adult literacy, and reading. I have an essay in an anthology titled *Spirited*, a collection centering on the relationship between spirituality, religion, and self-acceptance, and have two more

works coming out next year. I look forward to working with you for the next eight weeks. I am here to answer your questions and to assist you in mastering Philosophy 1370.

*Serena Richards*

[serena.richards@iconnect-na.com](mailto:serena.richards@iconnect-na.com)

BA in English Literature, University of North Texas; MA in Literature, University of North Texas.

I completed my MA in Literature from the University of North Texas in 2009. My focus is on English Composition, Rhetoric, and British Literature. I have published two short stories and several poems. I look forward to working with each of you this semester!

*Ellie Schamber*

[ellie.schamber@iconnect-na.com](mailto:ellie.schamber@iconnect-na.com)

BA in History, University of Wisconsin in Madison; MA and PhD in European Intellectual History, University of California at Berkeley.

I have taught at face-to-face and online courses for over 10 years; I also mentor graduate students. My first published book is about the politics of the French Romantics. I am currently collaborating on a book about the history of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (a new form of psychology). I love to teach, and am eagerly looking forward to working with all of you.

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### DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION

It is the policy of Lamar University to accommodate students with disabilities, pursuant to federal and state law and to the University's commitment to equal educational opportunities. Students with a documented disability should contact the Director of the Disability Resource Center, which is located in 105 Communication Building. Students may write to P.O. Box 10087, Beaumont, Texas 77710, call 409.880.8347, fax 409.880.2225 or e-mail [SFSWD@lamar.edu](mailto:SFSWD@lamar.edu). Additional information is available at <http://dept.lamar.edu/sfswd>. Please share your accommodation plan with your instructor early in the semester.

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## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

This course involves reading, writing, test-taking, and group discussion. It is fast-paced and dense because it contains the work of a fifteen week semester condensed into eight weeks. There is a lot of material that you will be expected to study and understand on your own. To help you in this process, we have provided introductory videos, audio lectures with power point slides, reading quizzes, discussion boards, short essays, and a longer final essay.

Your work in this course will consist of weekly reading assignments, videos, lectures, and [quizzes](#), [two short essays](#) (that will be revised), [peer review](#) of your peers' short essays, [five discussion boards](#), [two objective exams](#), and a [final paper](#).

These activities are designed to help you build your reading comprehension skills, writing skills, and analytic skills - all of which are skills that employers value.

### CENSUS & DROP DATES

AUGUST 28: MAY DROP WITH A REFUND

SEPTEMBER 02: DROPPED FOR NON-PAYMENT

SEPTEMBER 12: MAY DROP WITH NO ACADEMIC PENALTY

SEPTEMBER 29: MAY DROP WITH ACADEMIC PENALTY

OCTOBER 17: LAST CLASS DAY

## DISCUSSION SECTIONS

Active ongoing participation in the course is required throughout the semester. We know that it is often too easy to become disengaged from online courses and that remaining engaged is crucial to successful completion of the course.

For that reason we have divided you into small discussion sections of approximately ten students. Your interactions in the course will primarily be within these discussion sections. It is our hope that this smaller setting will allow you to feel more supported in meeting the challenges of this course. Members of your discussion section are a resource when you are confused by reading or writing assignments, have had problems with an exam or quiz, or are falling behind. You will also review one another's essay drafts before submission for a grade.

## ONLINE ETIQUETTE

In this course, you will explore a variety of thought-provoking material in the readings, assignments, and classroom discussions. Some of this material may present new and challenging terms, ideas, and perspectives. While you are encouraged to explore these ideas, you should never be intentionally offensive or direct your online comments towards a single individual, social class, ethnicity, gender, religion, race, or sexual orientation. If you ever come across terms, phrases, or comments that you find questionable, please bring these



to the instructors' attention at the earliest convenient time.

With the above observations in mind, remember that we live in a free and democratic society, one in which all individuals have the right to think, believe, and speak what they will without fear of governmental sanctions. In the United States, individuals have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Let us balance these inalienable rights with the need to get along with one another in our classroom community, so we may all successfully achieve our course objectives.

For further information about online etiquette, please see my document called "[online etiquette](#)."

## GRADING POLICY

**Midterm exam.....50 pts.**  
**Cumulative final exam.....50 pts.**  
**Weekly quizzes (6).....30 pts.**  
**Discussion Boards (5).....60 pts.**  
**Essay 1 w/peer review.....50 pts.**  
**Essay 2 w/peer review.....50 pts.**  
**Final paper.....100 pts.**  
**390 points total**

**A=351-390**

**B=310-350**

**C=265-309**

**D=220-264**

**F=219-zero**

## RULES & POLICIES

Now we come to the most unpleasant part of a syllabus, the rules.

You must complete all work on time. **If you do not hand in an assignment, you may not pass the course, even if your average would result in a passing grade without that assignment.**

We know that sometimes students make bad decisions that result in plagiarism or cheating, intentional or not. University policy does not tolerate cheating or plagiarism of any kind and these actions will result in failure of the course.

The university's policy regarding cheating and plagiarism is:

Students are specifically warned against all forms of cheating and plagiarism. The *Lamar University Student Handbook* clearly reads: "Any student found guilty of academic dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subjected to disciplinary action. Punishable

offenses include, but are not limited to, cheating on an examination or academic work which is to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion, and the abuse of source materials." One aspect of the *Handbook's* definition of cheating includes "purchasing or otherwise acquiring and submitting as one's own work any research paper or other writing assignment prepared by an individual or firm." Plagiarism is defined as "the appropriation and the unacknowledged incorporation of another's work or ideas into one's own and submitted for credit." Faculty members in the College of arts and Sciences investigate all cases of suspected plagiarism.

Any student who is found guilty of academic dishonesty in this course may *receive a grade of "F" in the course, a zero or F on the assignments, and/or will be reported to his College Dean and the Dean of Students.*

If you are unsure what constitutes plagiarism, please see my announcement "[What is plagiarism?](#)"

and reference the following websites:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/01/>

<http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamp/lets/plagiarism.shtml>

If you have any questions about whether or not you are plagiarizing, please contact your instructor at [amy.smith@lamar.edu](mailto:amy.smith@lamar.edu). I will be kind, patient, and 'non-judgey' of you when you ask me questions about plagiarism (or anything else, for that matter). If you come to us before you cross the line, you will find us to be extremely generous. If you are caught crossing the line, you will find us to be...well, not so generous.



## RESOURCES AND STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

This is an Online Course available through Blackboard. You need basic computer skills to perform the course including constructing word documents, use browsers to access web pages and how to navigate the Blackboard course materials.

Logging in: Go to [www.lamar.edu](http://www.lamar.edu), click on top left menu bar "my.lamar" Click on "LU Online"; click on Blackboard login. Login using your (LEA) username and password. The LEA username and password are the same as those used to log in to your Lamar University email account. Login to Blackboard.

Login and perform the tutorial before starting to ensure you know how to access the information. Once you login, all materials are available on Blackboard and in the two required textbooks. Read the course schedule and the syllabus thoroughly. Check all assignments and tests and due dates. All assignments must be saved and uploaded through Blackboard, not emailed to your instructors.

**Blackboard Tutorial** available at: <http://dept.lamar.edu/cde/cdepages/documents/BlackboardStudentTutorial2010.pdf>

**Computer Browser Tune Up** available at: <http://kb.blackboard.com/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=45581177>

It is recommended that you use **Mozilla Firefox** (free download) as your Internet browser. Available at: <http://www.mozilla.org/en-US/>

**Blackboard Mobile App** for your phone available at: <https://luonline.blackboard.com/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp>

**Technical Support** available at: 409-880-2222 or John Gray Center, Building B, Room 125, 8 a.m.-5 p.m., Monday-Friday. You may also email [cde@lamar.edu](mailto:cde@lamar.edu) or visit the website <http://dept.lamar.edu/cde/>.

**Smart Thinking Online Tutorial** There is a free tutorial service for students needing assistance in being successful in online courses. Access it at: <http://dept.lamar.edu/cde/cdepages/students.html>

**Lamar University Policies for Students** available at: <http://dept.lamar.edu/advancement/policies/universitypolicies.html>

# COURSE SCHEDULE

## Week 1 *Introduction to Philosophy*

- Watch the introductory video and the "What is Philosophy?" presentation.
- Complete the assigned readings:
  - *Elements of Knowledge*.
  - *Ways of Knowing*.
- View the Week 1 presentations:
  - Russell
  - Plato
  - Stewart, Chapter 2
- Watch the video, Dan Ariely's TED Lecture on Irrational Choice.
- Complete the Week 1 Quiz.
- Complete the discussion within your discussion section, including posting your own answers and responding to your group mates'.

## Week 2 *Rationalism and Empiricism*

- Watch the introductory video.
- Complete the assigned readings:
  - *Elements of Knowledge*.
  - *Ways of Knowing*.
- View the Week 2 presentations:
  - Hume
  - Descartes
  - Stewart, Chapter 3
- Watch the video, "The Matrix: A Clip."
- Complete the Week 2 Quiz.
- Post your first short paper within the discussion board in your discussion section.
- Complete the peer review of one group mate's short paper draft within the discussion board.

## Week 3 *The Scientific Method*

- Watch the introductory video.
- Complete the assigned readings:
  - *Elements of Knowledge*.
  - *Ways of Knowing*.
- View the Week 3 presentations:
  - Bacon
  - Peirce
  - Stewart, Chapter 5
- Complete the Week 3 Quiz.
- Complete the discussion within your discussion section, including posting your own answers and responding to your group mates'.
- Post a revised, final version of your first short paper to the discussion board within your discussion section, drawing on the advice from your peer review.

## Week 4 *The Scientific Method (Continued)*

- Watch the introductory video.
- Complete the assigned readings:
  - *Ways of Knowing*.
- View the Week 4 presentations:
  - Aristotle

- Darwin
- Complete the discussion within your discussion section, including posting your own answers and responding to your group mates’.
- Complete the Midterm Exam.

### **Week 5** *Theorizing Science*

- Watch the introductory video.
- Complete the assigned reading:
  - *Ways of Knowing*.
- View the Week 5 presentation:
  - Kuhn/Polkinghorne
- Complete the Week 5 Quiz.
- Post your second short paper to the discussion board within your discussion section.
- Complete a peer review of one group mate’s short paper draft within the discussion board.

### **Week 6** *The Human and Social Sciences*

- Watch the introductory video.
- Complete the assigned reading:
  - *Ways of Knowing*
- View the Week 6 presentations:
  - Durkheim
  - Watson
  - Gilligan
- Complete the Week 6 Quiz.
- Complete the discussion within your discussion section, including posting your own answers and responding to your group mates’.
- Post a revised, final version of your second short paper to the discussion board, drawing on the advice in your peer review.

### **Week 7** *The Epistemology of Religion*

- Watch the introductory video.
- Complete the assigned reading:
  - *Ways of Knowing*.
- View the Week 7 presentations:
  - Galileo
  - Hick
  - Hume
- Complete the Week 7 Quiz.
- Complete the final paper, drawing on the skills you have learned in your first and second short papers

### **Week 8** *The Epistemology of Religion (continued)*

- Video: Week 8 Introduction.
- Complete the assigned reading:
  - *Ways of Knowing*.
- View the presentation, “McFague.”
- Complete the discussion within your discussion section, including posting your own answer and responding to your group mates’.
- Complete the Final Exam.