

EPISTEMOLOGY

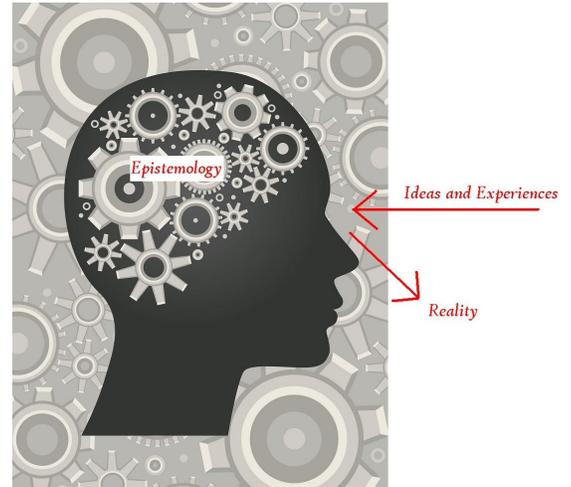
SYLLABUS

Course Description

This course gives students a broad yet detailed introduction to epistemology, the branch of philosophy that studies knowledge and related topics such as belief, justification, perception, and truth. We will consider questions such as:

- What is knowledge?
- What are beliefs?
- What does it mean to say that a belief is true?
- What is justification?
- How are beliefs justified (if they are at all)?
- To what extent do I have control over what I believe?
- Is knowledge possible?
- Is knowledge valuable?
- What is an epistemic virtue?

Students can expect to become familiar with a great many “isms” as we proceed: skepticism, foundationalism, coherentism, reliabilism, evidentialism, internalism, externalism, voluntarism, and more. But we want to try as best we can to pay attention to both the trees *and* the forest. The goal is to develop a sense of the major concerns and positions in contemporary debates in epistemology. We must also, of course, must include meta-questions about the methods of epistemology and the value of knowledge. Students who take this course should be well-prepared to enter into a variety of epistemological conversations about and enabled to pursue their own further study.



Contact:

- **Office Hours:**
M/W 9-11am, SY009
- **Email:**
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This is a writing-intensive class. One course aim is for you to develop a variety of skills related to philosophical writing. You don't need to already have a lot of experience doing philosophical writing; we will work together on developing your writing skills as we proceed throughout the semester. You should, however, expect to be writing often and at a fairly high-level.



The word 'epistemology' comes from the Greek words *episteme* (knowledge) and *logos* (account or reason). Epistemologists reason about knowledge.

Course Texts

- Morton, Adam. *A Guide Through the Theory of Knowledge*, 3rd edition. Oxford, Blackwell Publishers Inc., 2002.
- Zagzebski, Linda. *On Epistemology*. Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2008.
- All other readings will be available on Canvas under “Resources.”

Grading Scheme

Attendance/Participation	15%
Reading Summaries	25%
Essay	30%
Exams	30%



Attendance/Participation (15%)

Students who do not attend class regularly will learn as much as those who attend regularly. Attendance and active participation in the class are, therefore, required.

Attendance (10%): Each student may take up to 2 excused absences for any reason. Absences in excess of 2 will result in a deduction of 10% from your attendance/participation grade per absence. In cases of an emergency, sickness, death in the family, or other unforeseen event, I may grant additional excused absences provided that the student notifies me right away and provides appropriate documentation.

Participation (5%): Participation is more elusive to assess, but it refers to your active involvement in the class through being prepared for class and engaging in classroom discussion. Visits to my office hours will also count toward your participation grade. Distracting behavior (chronic tardiness, surfing the web on a laptop or mobile device, etc.) will result in points off your participation grade.

Classroom Culture Statement

This course will involve thinking deeply about controversial issues, and as we go along you will almost certainly encounter viewpoints that challenge your own beliefs. I encourage you to view these challenges as opportunities to learn about perspectives that may differ widely from your own and to practice the skill of interacting respectfully and sympathetically with someone, despite the fact that you may strongly disagree with their point of view. Although debate and critical analysis are encouraged, it should be clear that we will not discriminate against or criticize members of this classroom community based on gender, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, disability, or religion. Everyone is welcome here.

Writing Assignments (25%)

You will need to complete five writing assignments during the semester.

Writing assignments are short 1-2 page exercises in which you will work on developing your philosophical writing skills.

All assignments should be typed with standard academic-style formatting, and should be submitted online via our course website.

Assignments will include:

- 1) Identify an author's thesis and summarize the main argument for that thesis
- 2) Compare & contrast two competing epistemological theories
- 3) Critique an argument from one of the course readings
- 4) Explain and respond to an objection to one of the theories we will cover in class
- 5) Write an introductory paragraph for a sample essay

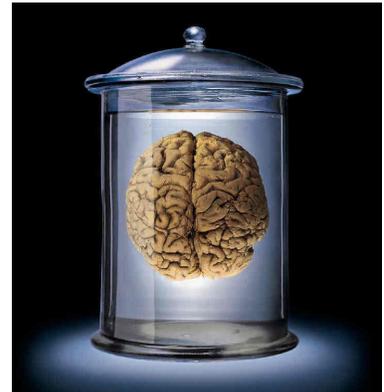
Essay (30%)

In your essay you should critically engage one of the issues we have covered in the lecture or in the course readings. It may be based on one of your writing assignments or you may choose from a list which I will provide. Either way, the goal is for you to interact with a particular issue in more depth. All essays should be 2000 (+/- 250) words and should be submitted electronically.

A rough draft of the essay will be due two weeks before your final draft is due. I will be providing detailed comments on your drafts so that you can benefit from those as you write your final draft. Submitting the rough draft in its entirety and on time counts as 5% of the total essay grade.

Exams (30%)

There will be two written, take-home exams. The exams will ask you to explain important concepts, compare and contrast some of the theories we will discuss, and to critically engage the course material. Exam questions will be given out one week in advance. All exams should be submitted electronically through our online course site.



Plagiarism Statement

In the *Code of Student Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct*, the Indiana University Faculty Council indicates that students may be disciplined for several different kinds of academic misconduct, which include: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, interference, and violation of course rules. The penalty for cheating or plagiarism in this class is automatic failure of the course. Consider yourself warned. For more information about what plagiarism is and how to avoid it, go to <https://www.indiana.edu/~tedfrick/plagiarism/index2.html>

Schedule:

Each reading should be completed before the beginning of class on the date assigned.
Assignments are due at the beginning of class.

Week 1: Introduction

Morton, Ch. 1: "Beliefs and their Qualities"

Zagzebski, Ch. 1: "Epistemic Value and What We Care About"

Additional Resources: Feldman, Ch. 1: "Epistemological Questions" (available online)

Weeks 2 & 3: What is Knowledge?

Morton, Ch. 6: "Defining Knowledge"

Zagzebski, Ch. 5 "What is Knowledge?"

Plato, *Meno*

Feldman, "The Traditional Analysis of Knowledge" in *Epistemology: A contemporary introduction*. Prentice Hall, 2003.

Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?"

Weeks 4–6: Skepticism

Zagzebski, Ch. 2 & 3

Descartes, *Meditations I & II*

Putnam, selection from *Reason, Truth, and History*

Moore, "Proof of an External World"

Weeks 7 & 8: Sources of Knowledge; **First Exam Due**

Morton, Ch. 2: "Perception", Ch. 3: "Apriori Beliefs"

Audi, "The Sources of Knowledge"

Wylie, "Why Standpoint Matters"

Additional Resources: Lackey, Jennifer. *The Epistemology of Testimony*

Weeks 9 & 10: Foundationalism & Coherentism

Morton, Ch. 5: "Middleword: Fallibilism"

Sellars, "Does Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation?"

Bonjour, "Can Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation?"

Additional Resources: See the entries on "Foundationalist Theories of Epistemic Justification" and "Coherentist Theories of Epistemic Justification" in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, available online at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/justep-foundational/>

Weeks 11 & 12: Reliabilism & Externalism, Evidentialism & Internalism

Re-read Zagzebski, Ch. 5 "What is Knowledge?"

Goldman, "What is Justified Belief?"

Feldman & Conee, "Evidentialism"

Additional Resources: Foley, Richard. "What Am I to Believe?"; Bonjour, "Internalism and Externalism"

Week 13: Belief

Re-read Morton, Ch. 1: "Beliefs and their Qualities"

Velleman, (2000) "On the Aim of Belief" In *The Possibility of Practical Reason*. Oxford University Press.

Audi, "Doxastic Voluntarism and the Ethics of Belief" In *Knowledge, Truth, and Duty*, ed. Matthias Steup, 93-111. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001.

Weeks 14 & 15: The Value of Knowledge, Developing Epistemic Virtues; **Final Exam Due**

Zagzebski, Ch. 6: "Epistemic Good and the Good Life"

Greco, "The Value Problem"

Kaplan, "It's Not What You Know that Counts"

Additional Resources: Greco, John. "Virtues in Epistemology"; Wood, W. Jay. *Epistemology: Becoming Intellectually Virtuous*; Zagzebski, Linda. *Virtues of the Mind*.