

An underwater photograph showing light rays filtering through the water, creating a serene and ethereal atmosphere. The water is a deep blue-green color, and there are many small bubbles and particles visible. The light rays are most prominent in the center and right side of the frame.

Theories of Knowledge

COURSE SYLLABUS
PHIL 3341
CRN 27886
FALL 2024

Dr. Sharon Mason
Department of Philosophy and
Religious Studies
University of Central Arkansas

Dr. Sharon Mason

Office Hours:

M/W/F:
11am-11:50am
Th 3-4pm

and by
appointment

Office Location:
Irby Hall 118

Contact Me:

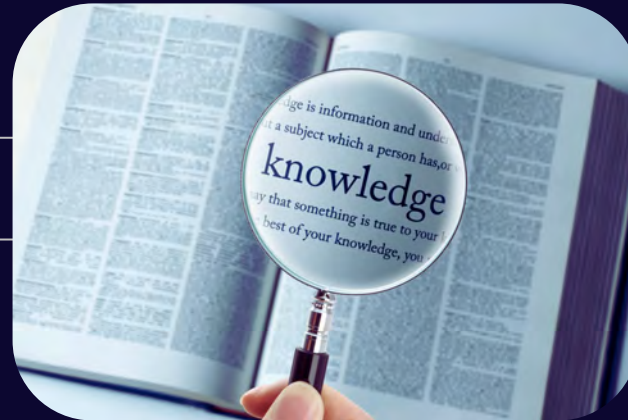
smason@uca.edu

website:
[https://sharonmaso
n.me](https://sharonmason.me)

Research:

Social
Epistemology
Feminist
Epistemology
Modern
Philosophy
Philosophy of
Science

University of Central Arkansas



Dr. Mason

Course Description

M/W/F, 1-2pm
Irby Hall 307

PHIL 3341 THEORIES OF KNOWLEDGE

This course is an introduction to epistemology: the branch of philosophy that studies knowledge and related topics such as belief, truth, evidence, rationality, skepticism, ignorance, credibility, and expertise. Our focus will be distinctly contemporary, as we will aim to get a sense of current conversations in the discipline. Our focus will also be distinctly applied, especially in response to real-world problems related to knowledge, including social influences on knowledge-production and knowledge-sharing. We will also explore epistemic and ethical visions for how to become virtuous epistemic agents in a world that often presses us in other directions.

May serve as a required course in the Logic, Science, and Language category or as an elective course for majors and minors in philosophy, but open to all students with interest. Combines lecture and discussion methods.

Course Objectives



Objective 1

To develop an informed, well-articulated, and well-supported view of central issues in contemporary epistemology



Objective 2

To gain skill in critical reading, writing, and constructive dialogue



Objective 3

To encourage ethical participation and influence in the epistemic situation we encounter in the modern world

Course Requirements

Attendance/Participation (10%)

- Showing up prepared for class
- Participating actively in discussions, including active listening to others

Assignments (20%)

Most assignments will use Perusall. There may be some additional short writing prompts that will be assigned in class.

Exams (30%)

Two in-class written exams @ 15% each
First Exam: October 16
Second Exam: November 25

Discussion Leading (10%)

Thesis-driven, short essays on course topics
Be prepared to discuss with the class
Revisions will be required, as constructive feedback helps develop writing skills

Term Paper (30%)

A term paper on a topic of your choice. This paper requires engagement with current research and the development of a conference-length paper that could be submitted to undergraduate conferences or used as a graduate school writing sample

Grading Scheme:

A ≥ 90%

B ≥ 80%

C ≥ 70%

D ≥ 60%

F = below 60%

Attendance/Participation (10%)

- I assume that you are interested in this subject matter and that your goal is to learn. This assumption is well-supported by the fact that a) this is an elective class, and b) being here is costing you something (time, money, opportunity cost, etc.) I have done my best to prepare content for you that is important, relevant, accessible, and that I hope will blow your mind. I think you will miss out if you don't attend.
- I will be tracking attendance in order to comply with UCA guidelines and to have data for financial aid, etc. In case a student needs cannot attend in person, a virtual class option will be made available by special request. However, this is for emergency use only.
- If you stop actively participating in the course (defined as: no attendance, no assignment submissions, no contact for 1 week), I will send you an email to see if you need support. You will have one week to respond. If you do not respond (2 weeks no contact), I will administratively withdraw you from the course for nonattendance. If you cannot attend class for some reason, it is important to let me know right away so that we can work together on a solution.
- Class participation means showing up for class having read and thought about the material, and interacting with other students in productive, respectful dialogue that furthers understanding. You should prepare to participate in discussion!

Assignments (20%)

There are two main types of assignments: assignments that will be completed in Perusall, and short writing assignments that should be written or printed out and submitted in class.

- Perusall assignments can be accessed through Blackboard, and include points for engaged reading, quality comments, and asking and answering questions.
- Email me a picture of an animal I have never heard of before for three bonus points (this is what is known as an easter egg, lol. Congrats on reading through the syllabus this far!)
- All other assignments will be announced in class and posted on Blackboard one class period prior to being due. If you miss class, you should check Blackboard so you can still submit the assignment when it is due.

Exams (30%)

There will be two in-class exams. The format will be short essays. Prompts will be given out a week in advance, and you will be permitted to bring a notecard with you.



Discussion Leading (10%)

You will be responsible for leading discussion once during the course of the semester. We will use a sign-up sheet for topics and dates. Detailed instructions will be posted on Blackboard.

Term Paper (30%)

Your term paper provides the opportunity for you to do in-depth research on one of the course topics. Required Length: 4000-5000 words. All essays should be typed, 11 or 12 point font (Arial, Calibri, or Times New Roman), 1-inch margins. You should use APA, MLA, or Chicago for citations. All essays must be submitted electronically on Blackboard (email and hard copies will not be accepted).

Expect your rough draft to undergo several rounds of revision, including peer reviews and feedback from your instructor. Stages of the writing process will include:

- Topic proposal and research plan (5 points)
- Complete rough draft (25 points)
- Two peer reviews (10 points total)
- Instructor conference with peer review groups (10 points)
- Final draft (100 points)

Textbook/Readings

Many of the required readings are available online through the Torreyson Library, philpapers.org, or are accessible from author websites. I have collected these readings into Perusall, which we will be using this semester as our home for accessing all the readings. You can access Perusall through Blackboard, and we will go over how to use this tool in class, as interactive reading will be a graded component of the class.

Additional Classroom Policies

Good dialogue is essential to productive philosophical inquiry. This semester we will work on developing constructive conversation norms in the classroom. Everyone should expect to participate, and everyone should also make space for others to participate.

Cell phones and other devices (laptops, tablets) are distraction-generators. They keep you from being present in the classroom and from fully engaging with others. There should be no cell phones or other devices out in class, unless it is being actively used to take notes, find a passage in a reading, or in some other way directly aid learning. Students who do not follow this policy will be asked to put their devices away and may be asked to leave class for the day. Exceptions will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis; in particular, all OARS requests will be accommodated.

In general, please use good judgment; respect your classmates and do your part to create a classroom environment that aids learning.

Use of AI

In order to accomplish the learning objective of gaining skill in critical reading and writing, it is essential that students write their own work. AI is a moderately reliable research tool at best, and although its text generation can mimic an academic style, the content tends to be formulaic and shallow. Furthermore, students who use AI to replace their own critical thinking and writing are, in essence, cheating themselves out of their own education. It is impossible for me to assess your knowledge if you use AI tools to write for you (this also applies to plagiarism).

I do not recommend using AI for research or for writing. If you do use AI tools, you must disclose this in an additional statement attached to your writing, indicating what you used it for and describing exactly how using it influenced your work. Students who use AI tools without attaching an AI disclosure should expect to lose points for authenticity & originality. Extensive use of AI in the writing process, to the extent that I cannot assess your own thinking, may result in a 0 for the assignment. Plagiarism will always result in a 0 for the assignment, and may result in an F in the course and the submission of an official report.

Late Work Policy

It is helpful to have strict deadlines for assignments so that everyone can plan accordingly. I will provide due dates in the course schedule. Please note them carefully, as you are expected to turn in work at those times.

You also have 2 late passes that can be used at any time for any reason (you don't even need to tell me what it is). A late pass gives you an extra 72 hours to submit your work without penalty. In order to use a late pass, you must tell me that you are using one before the assignment is due.

Additional extensions are possible, depending on the details of the case, but in general, any late work will receive a 10% deduction per calendar day that it is late.

Personal Care/Family Care Policy

To undertake a semester course of study together is to undertake a particular commitment. As your professor, I come to class prepared to make ideas come alive, to guide you through difficult concepts, to facilitate discussions, to give you regular and constructive feedback about your work, and to create an effective learning environment that allows you to gain knowledge and grow in intellectual virtue.

Students are responsible for what they do with this opportunity, and a student will (likely) get the most out of this course when they adopt an attitude of charitable critical inquiry, engage the material deeply on their own both before and after class, work to make connections between it and their own experiences, and give careful attention to what they can learn from peers.

One central commitment in my pedagogy is the belief that the relationship between a teacher and a student is a relationship between one complex, multi-dimensional person and another. As a student, I recognize that you are also a complex individual. You probably have a variety of commitments, which include competing demands on your energy, attention, and time. The same is also true about me. My goal is to do what I can to hold you to high standards of excellence in your work while at the same time welcoming you to enter my class as the multi-dimensional person that you are.

If you have care-giving obligations, this dimension of who you are is welcome in my classroom.

I understand that care-giving can present unique challenges, especially with scheduling. I have taken several steps to make your schedules easier by, for instance, posting due dates and instructions for all coursework in advance. However, if there are other adjustments that would help you succeed in this class, please let me know so that we work on this together. I am happy to problem solve with you in a way that makes you feel supported as you strive for balance.



A dynamic course schedule is available in the class Google Drive folder. The schedule will be updated frequently. You should check it regularly to see the upcoming reading assignments and instructions for how to prepare for class.

Google Drive Folder



Classroom Conduct Statement

This course is designed to encourage you to think 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.

Required Syllabus Language

Please read the following information carefully. The UCA administration requires these notifications to appear on all UCA course syllabi.

Mask Policy: Students are expected to follow all university requirements regarding face coverings. Up-to-date information is posted at <https://uca.edu/coronavirus/>.

Academic Integrity Statement: The University of Central Arkansas affirms its commitment to academic integrity and expects all members of the university community to accept shared responsibility for maintaining academic integrity. Students in this course are subject to the provisions of the university's Academic Integrity Policy, approved by the Board of Trustees as Board Policy No. 709 on February 10, 2010, and published in the Student Handbook. Penalties for academic misconduct in this course may include a failing grade on an assignment, a failing grade in the course, or any other course-related sanction the instructor determines to be appropriate. Continued enrollment in this course affirms a student's acceptance of this university policy.

Americans with Disabilities Act: The University of Central Arkansas adheres to the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. If you need an accommodation under this Act due to a disability, please contact the Office of Accessibility Resources and Services (OARS), 501-450-3613.

Building Emergency Plan: An Emergency Procedures Summary (EPS) for the building in which this class is held will be discussed during the first week of this course. EPS documents for most buildings on campus are available at <https://uca.edu/go/bep-library>. Every student should be familiar with emergency procedures for any campus building in which he/she spends time for classes or other purposes.

Title IX Disclosure: In furtherance of its core values— academic vitality, integrity, and diversity—UCA is dedicated to promoting a campus community free from discrimination. Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972 requires all educational institutions to address gender-based discrimination on campus, and UCA implements these Federal requirements through a fair, consistent, and appropriate process of investigation and adjudication. Please see UCA's Title IX website (<https://uca.edu/titleix/>) for the university's policy, relevant forms, training opportunities, and related information.

Student Handbook: Students are strongly encouraged to familiarize themselves with all policies in the Student Handbook, especially the Academic Policies and the Sexual Harassment Policy.



C. Barrett:

"CLOSE ENOUGH, LET'S GO."