INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY
DIVISION OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY STUDIES
11661 PHI. 1301-501
ONLINE
FALL 2020

Dr. Paul R. Shockley
Location of class: D2L
Personal pronouns: He/Him/His
Time of class: Weekly:
www.prshockley.org
24 August – 11 Dec. 2020
Office location: Ferguson # G76
Email: shockleypr@sfasu.edu
Virtual Office Hours: 1:00pm-6:00pm
Virtual personal appointments
Mondays; Rotating Zoom Hours TBD
available

“The unexamined life is not worth living.”
~ Socrates

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION:

In addition to a concern with the goals, nature, and methods of philosophy, Introduction to Philosophy (PHI 153) course focuses on issues concerning philosophical theories of knowledge and reality, drawing on ideas from a variety of disciplines. Possible topics: the nature of philosophy, the problem of skepticism and knowledge, mind and personal identity, and the nature and existence of God. Emphasis is on the nature of philosophy and its relation to education, logic, and critical thinking.

PHI 153: Introduction to Philosophy (3 credits) will meet for 2.50 hours for 15 weeks, and also meets for a 2-hour final examination. Students have significant weekly reading assignments, 10 discussion posts and replies, two papers, essay mid-term, and final exam project. These activities average at a minimum 6 hours of work each week to prepare outside of classroom hours. This is a general education core curriculum course with specific core objectives.

II. COGNITIVE AND AFFECTIVE OBJECTIVES:

A. Exemplary Educational Objectives:

- Awareness of the scope and variety of texts dealing with various philosophical issues.

- Understanding of the historical and social contexts of philosophical movements.

- Ability to respond critically to works in philosophy.
 Ability to formulate, express, and support opinions on the philosophical issues covered in this course.

Knowledge of cross-cultural influence of philosophy.

"Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards."
~ Soren Kierkegaard

III. REQUIRED BOOKS:

The following books will stimulate our thoughts regarding ultimate questions like:

A. Where did we come from? (origin)
B. What are we? Who are we? (identity)
C. Why are we here? (meaning)
D. How should we then live? (morality)
E. What's gone wrong with the world? (evil)
F. What can be done to fix the problems of the world? (hope)


1. Both required books are available on Amazon in print and in e-version and SFA bookstore. A free printed copy is available in library reserves. Also, Thinking with Excellence is free with Amazon Unlimited.
2. Will Durant’s Story of Philosophy is also available in both audiobook format and Audio CD.

"Happiness is the highest good."
~ Aristotle

IV. GRADE POLICIES, COURSE REQUIREMENTS, & TESTING INFORMATION:

In this course we are going to adopt a type of contract grading. What this means is that YOU decide what final grade you want to aim for in this course. While this doesn't guarantee that you will earn the grade you contract for in view of grading rubrics that will be applied to each exam, project, short paper, and discussion post, this approach does give you the freedom to decide what you will pursue with excellence. Thus, given your own situational setting, decide what requirements you want to fulfill. Of course, you are welcome to change your contract as long as you don't miss any deadline dates including exams, discussion posts, and short papers. Thus, this approach creates realistic expectations that you set for yourself. Plan ahead and fulfill the contract grade you want to earn. You will notify me last class before final exams what you have contracted for.
• **A Grade:**
  • **90-100 average**
    • Essay Mid-Term Exam (20%)
    • Final Exam Project (20%)
    • 10 discussion posts & completion of weekly content (20%)
    • 5-7 page short paper on epistemology (20%)
    • 5-7 page short paper in philosophy of religion (20%) (Video debate analysis paper)

• **B Grade:**
  • **80-89 average**
    • Essay Mid-Term Exam (25%)
    • Final Exam Project (25%)
    • 10 discussion posts & completion of weekly content (25%)
    • 5-7 short paper on epistemology (25%)

• **C Grade:**
  • **70-79 average**
    • Mid-Term Exam (33.3%)
    • Final Exam Project (33.3%)
    • 10 discussion Posts & completion of weekly content (33.3%)

• **D Grade**
  • **60-69 average**
    • Essay Mid-Term Exam (50%)
    • Final Exam Project (50%)

• **F Grade**
  • **0-59 average**
    • Failure to complete mid-term or/and final exam project with at least a 60.

**Important information:** Given Covid-19 pandemic and other burdens and responsibilities contract grading offers you freedom to do what is most workable for you. But just because you aim for a certain grade by completing the assignments associated with the particular grade you contracting for doesn’t guarantee you will earn it. In other words, just because you do an assignment, paper, exam, or discussion points does not mean you receive the contract grade you want; you must demonstrate exceptional quality. Therefore, I will be using the rubrics given in syllabus to evaluate all your work. You will notify me last class before finals what grade you have contracted for. Lastly, I can’t substitute one exam, paper, or project for another.

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Epistemology paper due by 1 November 11:59 PM
Video Debate Analysis paper due by 29 November 11:59 PM
Final Exam Project due by 6 December 11:59 PM
10 Discussion posts will be announced on Wednesdays, responses due on Sunday by 11:59 PM and replies to students due on Tuesday by 11:59 PM.
**Some Benefits of Contract Grading (CG):**

1. CG values your time, labor, and commitment level;
2. Judgment free zone in that you decide what you want to earn for the class;
3. Sets realistic expectations given what you are experiencing in your particular context;
4. Provides a clear understanding of expectations;
5. Rubrics establishes out the quality of work demanded and you set what you want to do;
6. Circumstances change and contract grading offers flexibility though due dates must be applied in compliance to university mid-term grades and the time sensitive nature of discussion posts.

**A. ASSIGNMENTS:**

1. D2L Discussion Board: 10 Weekly Responses with 3 qualitative replies to other entries. These will be weekly assignments (unless otherwise stated in announcements) with 500-word minimal word count response to prompt or question given. Following each discussion post which will be given by prof on Wednesday- you are to post response by Sunday at 11:59 PM of every week and three replies to other student responses by the next Tuesday of every week by 11:59 PM. Each reply is to specifically advance, clarify, or critique other student posts. **Here are step-by-step directions:**

   1st. Prompt is issued by Wednesday by Professor.
   2nd. Student post: Sunday by 11:59 PM: 500 words minimal
   3rd. Reply to other student posts that advance, clarify, or critique the fellow student (s) position *specifically* by Tuesday by 11:59 PM using the seven types of questions I’ve listed below. Please read the following, “What is a Great Question?” and utilize those questions in your replies.
   (1) Don’t merely agree or disagree with fellow student;
   (2) Make sure your critiques do not attack others (including me) or hinder this safe-place; we all need to support each other, recognizing our differences and similarities.
   (3) But don't merely express yourself in these posts; use tools of philosophy to engage truth-claims made.

Do you struggle with remembering what you have studied? If given the opportunity, then please read Mortimer J. Adler's *How to Read a Book*. His tactics were life changing for me. Also, consider the following tips developed from well-worn experience:

1. Maintain healthy balance between food, play, & sleep;
2. Avoid high sugary snacks, drinks & processed foods;
3. Don’t allow yourself to be distracted;
4. Keep a clean-conscience & forgive richly;
5. Try to study when you think the best (e.g., morning for morning people);
6. Don’t keep doing the same things and hoping for different results.
7. Help each other out; there is a certain strength found in community whereby we can share our strengths to sharpen each other.

B. Epistemology 5-7 page short paper excluding cover sheet and bibliography.

C. Video debate analysis 5-7 page paper excluding cover sheet and bibliography. Here you will use the sevenfold criterion from *Thinking with Excellence* to evaluate the truth-claims made in the debate you choose to evaluate from an approved list on syllabus.

D. Final exam project: 8-13 minute video file assessing philosophical issues from a list of possible topics (see below) from three different philosophical worldviews mindsets, or historical philosophical movements. This will count as final exam.

E. Notice that all papers and final exam are due on Sundays by 11:59 PM.

F. Each week will begin on Wednesday and will run through Tuesday night. This will give you additional time to re-focus given weekend plans and responsibilities.

G. **Attendance is expected.** A complete attendance report may be filed with the student’s dean and the registrar with the final course grade. *In fact, lack of required engagement online, whether excused or unexcused, means you will receive a final grade of “F” for this course.*

H. **Please do not miss class lectures given, announcements, and weekly content!** *In view of your interests, too much is at stake. Each unit builds upon one another.*

I. If assignments are altered in favor of exams, students are required to be present for announced exams. Any missed exam without a *cogent documented* excuse will be counted numerically as a zero (00). This is considerably lower than an average F.

J. Because of the nature of these exams over assigned readings and lecture material, it is in your *best* interest to engage weekly units and proactively engage material, especially since the course is built around them.

K. There could also be additional required readings as deemed appropriate on D2L discussion assignment. Therefore, do not wait till last moment to read and complete discussion assignments. Some of these prompts demand reading certain articles.

L. Take good notes, visit your professor, and engage each other.

“Since it is so likely that children will meet cruel enemies, let them at least have heard of brave knights and heroic courage.” ~ C. S. Lewis

What is a great question?
Asking questions in class can be very intimidating. We are fearful of being embarrassed or rejected. We don't want to appear "dumb." We push back from the idea of being singled out by the professor whereby we are called upon repeatedly in class; we don't like the spotlight. We don't want to be known as the "teacher's pet."

The situation becomes even more difficult. We come across students who like to argue, who want to be the center of the class, or who redirect your questions in a way that benefits them. Out of arrogance, *hubris* (which means excessive pride), and control, they want to claim "superiority" over fellow classmates.

Sadly, we've met educators who don't like to be asked questions. Some are hot-tempered, cynical, and not easy to talk to or even learn from, and deem themselves "god-like" given their background, degrees, and accomplishments. They make us feel irrelevant, uncomfortable, and worthless.

To be sure, many us don't even know where to begin when it comes to asking good questions. We've never been trained on the science and art of asking good questions. Yet, we want to learn. We want to contribute to class. We want to seize our studies!

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"Do one thing every day that scares you." ~ Eleanor Roosevelt

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What are we to do?

While there are difficult classes, professors, and classmates, thinking with excellence invites you to ask good questions. Success in life demands good questioning. Most professors we encounter love questions and long for rich classroom dialogue. Outstanding professors, and there are many of them, will also protect you from students who seek to disrupt you, try to take advantage of the classroom setting by showing off, or attempt to "put you down." They want you to learn and will do all they can to facilitate those opportunities. If you can learn how to ask good questions, then you will have a dynamic skill set that will last a lifetime, no matter your career, context, or relationships.

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"Before you contradict an old man, my fair friend, you should endeavor to understand him."  
- Jorge Santayana

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We encourage you to think about books, conversations, truth-claims made, and worldviews like a detective by asking clarifying questions like "*What do you mean by that?*" and "*How did you come to that conclusion.*" But here are seven types of questions you should ask when it comes to truth-claims being made by authors, professors, and fellow students (especially in view of the 10 discussion posts):
1. “When you make this truth-claim, are you saying _______?” Here you repeat your understanding of the truth-claim. This is an additional clarification question to the two mentioned above.

2. “When you make this truth-claim, would this be an example of what you are trying to say?” Here you give an example of the truth-claim made. This is an example question.

3. “If I understand you correctly, your understanding of this truth-claim is _________ [repeat interpretation]? Am I right?” I wonder if the claim could be interpreted this way [give alternative interpretation]? These are interpretation questions.

4. “What are the implications of this truth-claim? ” Or would this be an implication of this truth-claim _________?” You can think about the implications of the truth-claim in how it affects or impacts one’s life, community, context, faith, family, other ideas, history, policy, science, or other types of studies. These are implication questions.

5. “Can this truth-claim be true given what we know about _________ [common sense; empirical data; historical facts; philosophical truths; scientific evidence; other realms of studies such as sociology or other inquiries]?” Here we are examining the consistency of the truth-claim with what we already know is true and trustworthy. This is a consistency question.

6. “I agree/ disagree with you. Here’s why. I’ve had this experience [state experience; remember to summarize; don’t be too wordy]… What do you think about this experience?” This is an agreement/disagreement question rooted in personal experience.

7. “What other ways can we think about this truth-claim that may be foreign to our own particular shared assumptions?” “Would _______ [e.g., different age; culture; gender; race; religion; time; place] interpret this truth-claim the same way?” Here we are using lateral type of questioning; we are attempting to think outside of the box.

These seven types of questions, namely, clarification, example, interpretation, implication, consistency, agreement/disagreement, and lateral questions, will benefit you in ways you can never imagine!

“…

“The marvelous thing about a good question is that it shapes our identity as much by the asking as it does by the answering.” ~ David Whyte

V. GETTING INTO THE DETAILS OF OUR ASSIGNMENTS:

A. Epistemology Paper:

After our studies in Epistemology, each student will complete and turn in a written assignment. The stylistic requirements for the assignment will be the completion of a five-seven page short essay essay (excluding cover sheet and works cited page) that is stylistically clean and displays academic citation of all source material. The
work will be typed and will include a works cited page. While the content requirements have been broken down into a series of steps that build upon one another and thus highlight our learning process (see below), this is to be written as a single, cohesive essay. The content steps are:

Step 1. As you have been introduced to a number of epistemological theories during the last several weeks, you are to choose **TWO of those theories and provide a critical evaluation of each theory.** Upon identifying and explaining each theory, you will then critically evaluate each theory.

Step 2: You will transition from a direct analysis of an epistemological theory to an indirect analysis of a third theory. In this case, you are to either design your own cartoon or find a cartoon online that you believe comments on a third epistemological. After providing the cartoon, you will write an analysis of this image in which you identify and explain how the cartoon, in terms of its context and assumptions for a third epistemological theory. You select or create the picture, paste it (no more than 2” x 2”) into paper.

"Art tries, literally, to picture the things which philosophy tries to put into carefully thought-out words." *Dutch art critic & historian*

~Hans Rookmaaker

Step 3: Finally, you will conclude your paper with a personal discussion in which you identify the epistemological theory that you personally find most convincing and then critically explore how your choosing that theory will impact your own ethical self-awareness in different contexts and your cultural self-awareness as it is tied to such issues as civic responsibility or understanding your role in a regional, national, or global community. Make sure your theory is different from the previous three.

1. Here you will need to demonstrate the ability to connect choices, actions, and consequences to ethical decision-making.

2. This work is to be done in your words. All sources must be properly cited. Plagiarism, which is your responsibility to know what it is and how to avoid it, is totally unacceptable. Strict plagiarism policy is upheld. No “cut-in-paste” from internet. This paper is to be uploaded to D2L.

3. You free to choose a number of formats: MLA, APA; Turabian..If you want to follow another format, then please ask. Just be sure to document sources and not exploit margins or font size in a deceptive way.

4. Continuously save your material in multiple ways so that “Murphy’s Law” doesn’t take your work captive.

5. When you complete the assignment mentioned above, you will upload the assignment to D2L.
B. Video Debate:

1. You will watch ONE of the following four video debates and offer a 5-7 page short paper critical review excluding cover sheet and bibliography. Cover sheet is required. 12-size font. If any other sources are consulted, bibliography is required. Welcome to use APA, MLA, or Turabian format.

2. Summarize each major argument from both sides and offer a thoughtful response/critique using the philosophical tools you have gained in this class. Look for logical fallacies as studied in chapter 1 of Thinking with Excellence use the seven-fold criterion for evaluation from the book:

   - Logical Coherence
   - Empirical Adequacy
   - Existential Relevance
   - Viability
   - Workability
   - Explanatory Power
   - Ethical and Aesthetic Values

3. You will also find additional resources from Thinking with Excellence to aid you in doing the analysis.

4. This paper is to be in your own words; plagiarism is not acceptable whatsoever. Whatever choice you make, it is to be uploaded onto D2L by due date. No exceptions, exemptions, or extensions.

5. All four debates are offered on youtube.com. Choose only one! You can use the details below to find the youtube debates. If you have trouble accessing video on links provided, search youtube using title names, and minutes for the following presentations. All are readily available:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OVEuQg_Mglw.

7. The second debate is theist William Lane Craig vs. atheist Paul Kurtz: Is Goodness Without God Good Enough? This debate took place at Franklin & Marshall College. This debate is 1:39 long.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sr_RzS-579o&t=5s.

8. Third debate is Does God Exist between William Lane Craig vs. late antitheist Christopher Hitchens. This 4 April 2009 debate took place
at Biola University in California. This debate is 2.12 hours long. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0tYm41hb48o&t=69s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0tYm41hb48o&t=69s).


10. Plagiarism is not acceptable whatsoever. Your review and critique is to be in your own words.

11. Anticipate computer problems. Don’t wait till last minute to watch video and upload your paper.

12. Save your papers repeatedly. Upload working copies to your electronic email account in case something terrible happens to your computer.

13. Watch presentation early, write summary notes, and reflect upon contrasting views presented.

14. HINT: When doing this paper, don’t make a descriptive paper whereby you are simply re-telling me what they said and how you feel about it. Rather, recast their positions in summary form and evaluate them using the sevenfold criterion I’ve given you.

C. Discussion Board Responses:

1. I will upload lecture material and pertinent questions each and every Sunday on D2L. As a result, you will offer a minimal of 500 word response to 10 of the entries I upload with three thoughtful replies (no minimum word count) that clarify, critique, or advance other student’s posts. No minimal word count in responses but if it is not qualitatively framed by those three factors, then it will not be counted.

2. Each entry with three thoughtful replies to other posts will graded with a potential possibility of earning full credit for each post.

2. Each discussion post will be given by prof on Wednesday- you are to post response by Sunday at 11:59 PM of every week and three replies to other student responses by the next Tuesday of every week by 11:59 PM. Each reply is to specifically advance, clarify, or critique other student posts.

3. Use tools from *Thinking with Excellence* to analyze other prompts.

Step 1: Professor Prompt: Prompt is issued by Wednesday
Step 2: Student post: Sunday by 11:59 PM: 500 words minimal
Step 3: Reply to other student posts that advance, clarify, or critique the fellow student (s) position by Tuesday by 11:59 PM using the seven types of questions given to you.

4. Proper grammar, citation, and punctuation.

5. No plagiarism whatsoever.

6. No extensive quotes.

7. Use skills of analysis and thoughtful reflection.

8. Any qualitative feedback you offer to the other entries (above three required) *within the week they are posted*, might qualitatively contribute to your participation grade for this assignment.

9. Failure to be timely in your posts means zero. No exceptions, extensions, or exemptions. Sometimes I do lengthen the due dates since we are only doing 10 of them. But if I do, please read information. Don't merely assume anything. Look, observe, and study directions.

10. You are not to be impolite or hostile to me or fellow students in any of your responses or replies. If you are, you will receive 0 for the entire discussion board grade University procedures will be followed.

11. Once again: regarding replies: You will receive no credit if you only offer replies but do not give your own post. Only those replies that are qualitatively thoughtful and beneficial, advancing the post philosophically, clarifying the post philosophically, or giving a critique to the post will be counted. Therefore, in addition to the resources found in *Thinking with Excellence*, you are to use the seven types of questions you will need to ask. Consider the following:

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**What is a great question?**

Asking questions in class can be very intimidating. We are fearful of being embarrassed or rejected. We don't want to appear "dumb." We push back from the idea of being singled out by the professor whereby we are called upon repeatedly in class; we don't like the spotlight. We don't want to be known as the "teacher's pet."

The situation becomes even more difficult. We come across students who like to argue, who want to be the center of the class, or who redirect your questions in way that benefits them. Out of arrogance, *hubris* (which means excessive pride), and control, they want to claim "superiority" over fellow classmates.
Sadly, we’ve met educators who don’t like to be asked questions. Some are hot-tempered, cynical, and not easy to talk to or even learn from, and deem themselves “god-like” given their background, degrees, and accomplishments. They make us feel irrelevant, uncomfortable, and worthless.

To be sure, many us don’t even know where to begin when it comes to asking good questions. We’ve never been trained on the science and art of asking good questions. Yet, we want to learn. We want to contribute to class. We want to seize our studies!

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What are we to do?

While there are difficult classes, professors, and classmates, thinking with excellence invites you to ask good questions. Success in life demands good questioning. Most professors we encounter love questions and long for rich classroom dialogue. Outstanding professors, and there are many of them, will also protect you from students who seek to disrupt you, try to take advantage of the classroom setting by showing off, or attempt to “put you down.” They want you to learn and will do all they can to facilitate those opportunities. If you can learn how to ask good questions, then you will have a dynamic skill set that will last a lifetime, no matter your career, context, or relationships.

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- Jorge Santayana

We encourage you to think about books, conversations, truth-claims made, and worldviews like a detective by asking clarifying questions like “What do you mean by that?” and “How did you come to that conclusion.” But here are seven types of questions you should ask when it comes to truth-claims being made by authors, professors, and fellow students (especially in view of the 10 discussion posts):

1. “When you make this truth-claim, are you saying ________?” Here you repeat your understanding of the truth-claim. This is an additional clarification question to the two mentioned above.

2. “When you make this truth-claim, would this be an example of what you are trying to say?” Here you give an example of the truth-claim made. This is an example question.

3. “If I understand you correctly, your understanding of this truth-claim is _________ [repeat interpretation]? Am I right?” I wonder if the claim could be interpreted this way [give alternative interpretation]? These are interpretation questions.
4. “What are the implications of this truth-claim?" Or would this be an implication of this truth-claim _________?" You can think about the implications of the truth-claim in how it affects or impacts one's life, community, context, faith, family, other ideas, history, policy, science, or other types of studies. These are implication questions.

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These seven types of questions, namely, clarification, example, interpretation, implication, consistency, agreement/disagreement, and lateral questions, will benefit you in ways you can never imagine!

“________________

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D. Final Exam Video Project: Here you will offer a 8-13 minute video assessing a philosophical problem from a list of topics from three different philosophical worldviews mindsets or historical philosophical movements. This will count as final exam. It will be uploaded to D2L by due date:

1. Here are possible philosophical worldviews. For example:

   a. Agnosticism (soft or hard)
   b. American Pragmatism
   b. Atheism (e.g., Richard Dawkins
   c. Continental Philosophy (e.g., Postmodernism)
   d. Epicureanism
   e. Existentialism
   f. Humanism
   f. Marxism
   g. Stoicism
   h. Theism (e.g., Judaism)
2. Here are some significant questions in philosophy you can choose from:

a. How do we know what is real?
b. How do we know what is true?
c. How do we acquire knowledge?
d. What is beautiful?
e. What counts as art vs non-art?
f. What does it mean to be human?
g. What is morally right from what is wrong?
h. The reality of evil and suffering
i. The existence of consciousness/soul.
j. What is gender?
k. Evolution vs Intelligent Design

3. Outline of video post: Using chapters 3-8, & 11-13 from *Thinking with Excellence* and *Power of Ideas* identify a particular problem, issue, or concern in philosophy from the immediate list above. Once identified, examine the issue from three different worldviews. Show how each philosophical worldview, mindset, or perspective would interpret the problem and perhaps solution given. Once you write this project out, use your video from the camera feature from your smart phone. If this is not possible due to ADA, let me know and we will provide an alternative way of doing this project.

4. 8 minimal minutes (demanded)/13 minutes maximum. Use the following outline as a template:

Step 1: Introduction: What is the problem and identify the three different philosophies you will use to analyze the problem (e.g., What is real?)

Step 2: First philosophical interpretation (e.g., Plato)

Step 3: Second philosophical interpretation (e.g., Aquinas)

Step 4: Third philosophical interpretation (e.g., Nietzsche)

Step 5: What are specific lessons you learned from this video assignment? The more specific you are with the lessons, the better your conclusion will be.

Step 6: Attach a bibliography of any sources used to help you do this project in your discussion post or Powerpoint used.

VI. GENERAL RULES:

A. Any student who has to miss due dates must personally contact me with a cogent documented excuse to submit paper within two class days. Otherwise, you will receive no credit (0%). But it is in your best interest NOT to miss any deadline. Even if I do happen to approve it then there could be a significant grade penalty. Therefore, anticipate the unexpected. To be sure, I will not approve any missed weekly discussion post. Work on your papers early. If you are having trouble with your paper, then contact me. If you live outside of Nacogdoches, we can facetime. If you live in Nacogdoches, then set
up an appointment with me; I want you to succeed. Do not wait till the last moment to contact me. Prepare early.

B. All university rules governing academic dishonesty will apply.

C. Online lectures may not be taped, recorded, or video transcribed unless for DS Compliance.

D. Respect your classmates and professor.

E. No use of profanity or disrespect.

F. Respect and tolerance for all views shared among us all. Let’s learn from each other. We want to create a learning and thriving online environment. If you fail to abide by this policy, not only will university policies be upheld, but you will also receive F for this course. Zero tolerance for character attacks, discrimination, and harassment of any form (e.g., age; body; cultural context/origins; economic background; disabilities; gender; gender identity; race; religion; sexuality; weight). If you have a problem with a student or with me as your professor, please come to me directly. We will follow university policies. Once again, I want our experience together be a safe place and judgment free zone about who we are, what we look like; where we are from, where we are going, and what we do. Instead, let’s study philosophy!

G. Weekly attendance is expected. Otherwise, you will receive an F as final grade for discussion post & weekly assignment participation grade if you do not engage in weekly assignments. If you do not engage in weekly assignments, you will be dropped from the course when I am obligated to register attendance.

H. You may contact me via my email: shockleypr@sfasu.edu; ZOOM (by appointment), facetime, or by phone. I also will be using “GroupMe” for this course and that would be the fastest way to message me (preferred method other than email). I do check my email regularly and receive email notifications on my phone as well. If you are sending me a message for the first time, please start with your full name so that I am aware of whom I am communicating with.

I. Suggested starting text message: “Hello Doc Shock, my name is ___ and I am in Introduction to Philosophy _______ course....”

J. I need to know what class you are in to make sure I give you the right instructions that may be tailored made for your particular course. So, please give me name, course reference, etc.

V. HOW TO DO WELL IN THIS COURSE:

K. Carefully read assigned work. Proactively bombard your assigned readings with the following questions: why, where, what, when, who, and so what?
L. Consider making an outline of the major units of thought in your readings. As you formulate your outline from the reading, ask yourself the following question: “What do I see?” The more observations you make, the better your interpretation of the author’s position or claim may be. Afterwards ask, “What does it mean?”

M. After you outline the author’s position/claim go back and see what arguments are being provided to support that position or claim. Keep asking yourself, “What is the issue?” Then consider what objections can be raised against that issue, position, or claim. Lastly, what replies can be given to defend the position or claim?

N. You should consult with me as often as possible to make sure you are understanding the material. Do not wait until the day before a test to begin studying. This is not the kind of course for which you can cram and expect to do well. Take advantage of the office hours.

O. Consider forming study groups to prepare for exams.

P. Those who sit front and central statistically do better on their exams.

Q. Make sure you are able to contact another student for lecture material in case you happen to miss a class (es).

R. Eight Strategies for First-Rate Studying:
   - Read Thoughtfully
   - Read Repeatedly
   - Read Patiently
   - Read Selectively
   - Read Imaginatively
   - Read Purposefully
   - Read Acquisitively
   - Read Telescopically

S. If you want to improve your reading comprehension skills I would encourage you to purchase Mortimer J. Adler’s informative work, How to Read a Book.

Please regularly visit with me. Don’t ever hesitate to contact me; I want each of you to succeed with a passion for excellence!

Q. 10 maxims for academic excellence:

1. Be focused! Your energy, time, and discipline need to be bent on becoming the very best. Focus on what really counts. Do not allow yourself to become diverted by the trivial and unimportant.
2. Be holistic! Pro-actively make decisions and pursue interests in your daily life that will assist you in obtaining success. Your resources must always be redirected to your goal.

3. Be undivided! Do not separate one area of your life from another. Pursuing opposing interests may marginalize your success because it divides up your energy, time, resources, and attention.

4. Be determined! Academic progress is rough, ever so time-consuming, and ever so demanding. Meet every demand with a determination for excellence. Learn from your mistakes. Pick yourself up when you fail and press on!

5. Be resilient! Do not give up. You will perhaps fail some time or another during your program. You may even become depressed from the critical feedback you receive from your professors and peers. When those times come, and they do for most if not all, you must pick yourself up again for accomplishing the goal is worth facing seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

6. Be sacrificial! Purposefully let go of those things that will hinder your success. Willfully discard every hindrance and degenerative influence that will keep you from achieving your goal with a passion for excellence. Routinely examine your life and see what is encouraging or discouraging you from reaching excellence.

7. Be healthy! Realize, as Aristotle states, that one area of your life impacts all other areas, whether intellectual, physical, or moral. Take very tender care of your mind, soul, and body. You need to strive to be holistically healthy—i.e., if you are not mentally, physically, and spiritually healthy, then you may easily become fatigued, develop inner angst, regret, disappointment, and waiver in the completion of your goals. Remember, a good night sleep is one of the best things you can do for yourself.

8. Be supported! Cultivate a network of people who will exhort you to succeed! Develop relationships with peers who are also bent on achieving success.

9. Be excellent! Successful students realize the importance of cultivating a disposition, i.e., an inner character, which desires intellectual and moral excellence. Seek to desire excellence. Aristotle encourages us to do deeds of excellence until excellence becomes habitual in our personhood.

10. Be balanced! Learn how to balance “having fun” with “hard work.” Don’t ignore those opportunities to relax or play hard. In fact, pursue them! But do not allow those opportunities to displace your study opportunities. Remember, learning is pleasurable!

One of the dangers for those who do achieve success is the problem of malnourishment. Successful people may reach their long-term goals, but so many of them starve themselves in the process. Do not so focus on your goals that you miss out on dynamic opportunities that can nourish your person, inform your circumstance, grow your character, and enlarge your world. In other words, do not so focus on the future that you neglect the blessings that are right in front of you.
“Since we cannot know all that there is to be known about everything, we ought to know a little about everything.”
~ Blaise Pascal

VII. STUDENT SERVICES: WE ARE HERE FOR YOU!

A. Student Support

If you have experienced any of the following in the past, or are experiencing any of the following currently, then please know that you are not alone:

- Sexual assault
- Intimate partner violence
- Stalking
- Sexual harassment
- Other traumatic experience

B. We are a family here at SFA and it is my responsibility as your professor to do my best to get you connected with the services you might need. It doesn’t matter if it is something that occurred many years ago or is recent there are resources available to you at no cost or significantly reduced cost. Services can be provided in person and also through ZOOM.

C. If you are having a crisis and need assistance, please call:

1. 911 or local hospital
2. National Suicide Prevention Hotline: 800-273-8255; 800-273-TALK or 800-SUICIDE
3. Burke 24-hour Crisis Line (Local Mental Health Authority): 800-392-8343
4. The Trevor Project (LGBTQ+ sensitive) 24/7 Hotline: 1-866-488-7386 and/or TrevorText (text START) to 678678
5. Crisis Text Line by texting HELLO to 741-741
7. Trans-Hotline: 1-877-565-8860

D. Human Services Counseling Clinic (HSCC)
http://www.sfasu.edu/humanservices/

The SFASU Counseling Clinic is a service provided by the Department of Human Services Counselor Education Programs located on the SFASU Campus in Human Services Building, Room 202. If you have questions or concerns, the HSCC can be reached by phone between the hours of 8am and
6pm Monday-Thursday at 936-468-1041. In response to the COVID-19 viral pandemic, the HSCC has temporarily waived all clinic fees.

E. **Veterans Resource Center** [http://www.sfasu.edu/vrc/](http://www.sfasu.edu/vrc/)
Located on the first floor of the Student Center cafeteria: 936-468-6494. They are open Monday through Friday, 8am to 5pm and provide a comprehensive list of services, which include counseling services. Email: SFAVeterans@sfasu.edu

F. **Family Crisis Center**
The Family Crisis Center of East Texas has partnered with SFASU for an on-campus outreach office - Located on the third floor of the McKibben Education Building, Suite 304: 936-468-SAFE (7233). They provide confidential services and support for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. Includes services for personal advocacy, safety planning, legal advocacy, sexual assault advocacy, counseling, child advocacy, self-sufficient advocacy.

G. **Rusk Counseling** [http://www.sfasu.edu/counselingservices/](http://www.sfasu.edu/counselingservices/)
Counseling services for all students – offers distance counseling. Located on the 3rd floor of the Rusk Building: 936-468-2401; email: counseling@sfasu.edu. Office hours are Monday through Friday from 8am to 5pm. Includes all counseling services (bilingual English-Spanish services also available).

H. As your professor, I am here for you and want you to get the help you need. If you would like to contact me and discuss anything, please do not hesitate to do so. If you tell me of an incident or situation whether past or present that falls under circumstances related to physical, sexual, emotional violence, I may be required (dependent on incident) to report it to Title IX office on campus. It does not go against you, it’s confidential, and your protection is of utmost importance. They simply reach out to you in an email to see if you need any support and you decide whether to take it from there.

I. **Bottom line**... Talk to someone. Get the help that you need! And, there is no shame in getting help!

J. **The Problem of Perfectionism:**

>“Perfectionism is self-destructive simply because there’s no such thing as perfect. Perfection is an unattainable goal.” ~ Brené Brown, The Gifts of Imperfection

For some of us we feel like we are failures because we didn't achieve a perfect score, a perfect GPA, or be perfect ourselves. The problem of perfectionism is a painful vice, unattainable, and an empty promise.

Here are 10 alternative goals you could consider instead:
1. Bring yourself, exactly as you are, to everything you do as a philosopher. Start now as a student. No one will be able to be a philosopher the exact way that you are.

2. Ask questions when you don’t know something. We all know you’re here to learn and that the information is new, complex, and sometimes overwhelming. The best philosophers ask questions and never stop. Being open to feedback will be a key to success here.

3. Fully invest in being a lifelong learner. View this academic journey as the beginning of your learning journey. Things will change, new research will emerge, new policies will be adopted, you will move, meet new people, be presented you with new challenges, new settings, and new experiences. Your life structure will change - and you will be much better prepared to handle these things if you are a life-long learner.

4. Be okay with not knowing. Everybody feels this way about certain ways and at certain times. No one is immune. See #2 and #3 above for strategies to deal with this.

5. Adopt a philosophy akin to Maya Angelou’s “do the best you can. Then when you know better, do better”.

6. Anticipate, meet, and exceed the needs of others in your spheres of influence.

7. Accept that your best work won’t always result in the outcome that you’re looking for. That doesn’t mean it wasn’t your best work and that doesn’t mean you should stop pushing to improve.

8. Work on becoming a really good listener; it pays dividends.


~ Adapted from Brené Brown, The Gifts of Imperfection

K. Caregivers Note:

1. Parents and caregivers deserve access to education. Especially now, in our virtual learning space, with many children learning from home and schools facing sudden closures, I expect children to be present in class from time to time (Adapted from Heather Olson Beal)

2. Breastfeeding babies and children of all ages are welcome and may be visible on screen during class sessions. Alternatively, parents and caregivers may turn the camera off when more privacy is required.

3. Stepping away momentarily for childcare reasons is completely understandable and expected. Simply mute and/or turn off your camera as necessary and rejoin us when you are able.
4. Do not take any photos, audio, or video of any children on screen. Students who do so are subject to censure.

5. All students are encouraged to support and respect caregivers as they mute and/or turn off their video and use the chat function as needed.

6. Please consider disclosing your student-caregiver status to me. This is the first step in my being able to accommodate any special needs that arise. While I maintain the same high expectations for all students in my classes, I am happy to problem-solve with you in a way that makes you feel supported as you strive for school-caregiver balance.

M. Virtual Educational Instructions:

1. Please be present when zoom live stream begins according to email sent you and stay till lecture has ended. It counts towards participation grade.

1. Anticipate the zoom meeting; don’t wait till the last moment to sign in;

2. Let professor know if you are having poor internet connectivity.

3. Perhaps turning off the video feed will improve the stability of your connection if it weak.

4. YOU ARE NOT ALLOWED TO RECORD ZOOM SESSIONS OR TAKE PHOTOS DURING THEM.

5. You are not allowed to share passwords with people outside of this class. Protect passwords.

6. Zoombombing or Zoom raiding will not be tolerated and I will comply with the university to the fullest extent in its investigation. University policies will strictly be followed.

7. Feel free to turn off camera if in need of restroom, drink, food, etc.

8. Feel free to close video feed for sake of privacy, we completely understand. But if given opportunity, it would be a joy to see eye contact made and be able to actively interact with you all.

9. Engage professor and others, ask questions, and allow this virtual teaching interaction be the best it can be. Be courteous, respectful, and caring.

10. No discrimination of any sort will be tolerated.

“Life’s most persistent and urgent question is, ‘What are you doing for others?’” ~ Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
N. Instructional Strategies:

1. **Units and Steps:** In order to give you greater flexibility in your learning, I’ve not only integrated a contract grading system, but I’ve also incorporated a weekly schedule that uses “Units” and “Steps” instead of “weeks.” Consequently, you can go about studying philosophy in a self-pace that better accommodates your demands, schedules, pressures, and responsibilities. In other words, I’m using steps instead of weeks in order that you might pace yourself given your varied circumstances. We all learn at different speeds, carry differing responsibilities, and find ourselves experiencing some cool, rad, and hip opportunities that we can’t pass up. Freedom and flexibility is designed in this course to better help you.

2. Unit One begins on August 24th; Unit two will be on Monday, October 18th. Your goal is to finish all of unit 1 by October 11th. There are 8 steps in Unit 1 and Unit 2 has 6 steps.

3. To be sure, for some of us, philosophy is not new. But for others, it is like a tidal wave and we have no idea what we signed up for, and why???? (lol; a little philosophical humor!). So, while I will be treating each week as a step, you can jump ahead or go at a slower pace. BUT, you will need to complete the first unit by 17 October (Sunday) since we will begin Unit 2 on 18 October.

4. A word of caution. This course is designed in such a way that it builds upon one another. Moreover, it takes time and repeated exposure to the material to not only understand it, the ideas and even the people who advocated them and argued against others, but also because the ideas are so foreign to many of us in a "formal" educational way. I say "formal" because just about every idea we examine has been integrated into movies, TV series, songs, and visual images. We even see some of the ideas incorporated into the architecture, fashion, and furnishings that surround us. Moreover, you also have thought philosophically because each of you possesses certain philosophical assumptions by which you perceive everything else in your daily living. Like a pair of glasses, you see through those philosophical beliefs or "philosophical filters," and react or respond accordingly as you interact with others, labor, study, party, prepare for the future, and pursue or embrace what it means to have a "good life."

3. For livestreaming & online courses each ZOOM synchronous class period will consist of either a lecture or discussion format, with some sessions culminating in group activities and/or practice of course
components. Open discussion of topic materials and questions are greatly encouraged. Please be an active consumer of this course. Read required chapters ahead of time and come prepared to discuss them in class. Ask questions, be willing to share experiences, and express concerns. Audiovisual stimuli and other electronic media will be utilized to foster knowledge acquisition of the study area. This course will employ aspects of distance learning technology which may video presentations and correspondence online.

a. For livestream/online courses, a link will be provided in D2L announcements for our course at the beginning of the semester with the meeting ID and password for the whole semester (unless we discover we need to change it).

b. For those specifically in online philosophy course, I will set up opportunities for Zoom gatherings to interact with me over topics, etc. Each gathering will be optional (unless otherwise noted) and specific meeting ID and password will be given in D2L announcements.

4. As an instructor, I have the utmost respect for my students and expect the same in return. I value an open-door policy. I will be available to discuss any issues/concerns via email, phone, and ZOOM. If you are in need of help with subject material, please do not hesitate to contact me as soon as possible so we can discuss strategies to help you succeed in the course.

### VIII. CLASS SCHEDULE, WEEKLY TOPICS, & ASSIGNED READING:
#### August 24-December 11, 2020

Depending upon class context, I may alter our readings and topics. Notwithstanding, follow this outline unless otherwise directed by professor. Sometimes I may ask you to re-read certain chapters or portions from required readings or articles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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D2L is capable of assessing whether you engage your online work. I will be monitoring your progress each week on Brightspace D2L. Thus, failure to qualitatively engage your weekly content, not meeting the objectives for each week could result in an overall zero for participation grade for 10 weekly assignments. Therefore, it behooves you to make sure you take the opportunity to engage the weekly material on D2L if contracting for C and above.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>meeting</th>
<th>Central questions &amp; key themes in units 1 &amp; 2 content</th>
<th>Reading Assignment:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unit 1:</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Welcome to Philosophy</td>
<td>What is Philosophy?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Unit 1:</strong> Step 1:</td>
<td>Welcome to Your Worldview</td>
<td>Know yourself</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Unit 1:</strong> Step 2</td>
<td>Metaphysics &amp; Epistemology: Logical Reasoning, Plato, and Reality</td>
<td><em>Think Logically!</em> <em>What is real? What is true?</em></td>
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<td><strong>Unit 1:</strong> Step 3</td>
<td>Pre-Socratic Philosophy, Socrates, Plato, &amp; Aristotle</td>
<td>The origins of Greek Philosophy</td>
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<td><strong>Unit 1:</strong> Step 4:</td>
<td>Post-Aristotelian &amp; Medieval Philosophy: Focus on St. Augustine &amp; St. Thomas Aquinas</td>
<td>The integration of Philosophy &amp; Theology</td>
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<td><strong>Unit 1:</strong> Step 5:</td>
<td>Two areas of focus: We conclude our examination into Medieval philosophy by considering</td>
<td>“<em>I Think, therefore I am.</em>”</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNIT 1: Step 7:</td>
<td>Modern Philosophy Continues</td>
<td>Skepticism vs. Scottish Common Sense Realism</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNIT 1: Step 8</td>
<td>American Philosophy, Continental Philosophy, &amp; Introduction to Ethics:</td>
<td>If something works, does it make it true? What if we do not possess personal freedom but are products formed by social forces?</td>
</tr>
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<td>UNIT 2:</td>
<td>CONGRATULATIONS!!!!</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Unit 2: Step 1:</td>
<td>Introduction to Normative Ethics</td>
<td>Nicomachean Ethics</td>
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<td>Unit 2: Step 2:</td>
<td>Ethics Continues</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unit 2: Step 3:</td>
<td>Welcome to Existentialism!</td>
<td>Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we</td>
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<td>Unit 2: Step 4:</td>
<td>Introduction to Philosophy of Religion</td>
<td>The question of God</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unit 2: Step 5:</td>
<td>Two Major Topics: Philosophy of Religion continues</td>
<td>Is beauty related to morality?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Introduction to Philosophical Aesthetics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unit 2: Step 6:</td>
<td>Philosophical Aesthetics?</td>
<td><em>What is art vs. non-art? If there is a difference, how?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONGRATS!</td>
<td>You finished both Units!</td>
<td>#Golumbiajacks!</td>
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</table>

“When you look into an abyss, the abyss also looks into you.”
IX. STUDENT ETHICS AND OTHER POLICY INFORMATION:

A. **Attendance Policy:** Students should consider class attendance to be similar to attendance in a professional setting. It is mandatory. If, for some reason, you are unable to attend class, it is expected that you will notify the instructor *PRIOR TO THE MISSED* class session. Phone text, email, and voicemail are acceptable forms of communicating a missed class period.

B. **Class Attendance and Excused Absence: Policy 6.7**

Regular, punctual attendance, documented participation, and, if indicated in the syllabus, submission of completed assignments are expected at all classes, laboratories, and other activities for which the student is registered. Based on university policy, failure of students to adhere to these requirements shall influence the course grade, financial assistance, and/or enrollment status. The instructor shall maintain an accurate record of each student’s attendance and participation as well as note this information in required reports (including the first 12-day attendance report) and in determining final grades. Students may be excused from attendance for reasons such as health, family emergencies, or student participation in approved university-sponsored events. However, students are responsible for notifying their instructors in advance, when possible, for excusable absences. Whether absences are excused or unexcused, a student is still responsible for all course content and assignments. Students with accepted excuses may be permitted to make up work for up to three weeks of absences during a semester or one week of a summer term, depending on the nature of the missed work. Make-up work must be completed as soon as possible after returning from an absence.

C. **Academic Integrity:**

Academic integrity is a responsibility of all university faculty and students. Faculty members promote academic integrity in multiple ways including instruction on the components of academic honesty, as well as abiding by university policy on penalties for cheating and plagiarism.

D. **Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities: Policy 6.1 and 6.6**

To obtain disability related accommodations, alternate formats and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities must contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), Human Services Building, and Room 325, 936-468-3004 as
early as possible in the semester. Once verified, ODS will notify the course instructor and outline the accommodation and/or auxiliary aids to be provided. Failure to request services in a timely manner may delay your accommodations. For additional information, go to
http://www.sfasu.edu/disabilityservices/

E. Student Academic Dishonesty: Policy 4.1

Abiding by university policy on academic integrity is a responsibility of all university faculty and students. Faculty members promote the components of academic integrity in their instruction, and course syllabi are required to provide information about penalties for cheating and plagiarism, as well as the appeal process.

F. Definition of Academic Dishonesty:

Academic dishonesty includes both cheating and plagiarism. Cheating includes but is not limited to (1) using or attempting to use unauthorized materials to aid in achieving a better grade on a component of a class; (2) the falsification or invention of any information, including citations, on an assigned exercise; and/or (3) helping or attempting to help another in an act of cheating or plagiarism. Plagiarism is presenting the words or ideas of another person as if they were your own. Examples of plagiarism are (1) submitting an assignment as if it were one's own work when, in fact, it is at least partly the work of another; (2) submitting a work that has been purchased or otherwise obtained from an Internet source or another source; and (3) incorporating the words or ideas of an author into one's paper without giving the author due credit. Please read the complete policy at:
http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/academic_integrity.asp

G. Penalties for Academic Dishonesty:

Penalties may include, but are not limited to, reprimand, no credit for the assignment or exam, re-submission of the work, make-up exam, failure of the course, or expulsion from the university.

H. Student Appeals:

A student who wishes to appeal decisions related to academic dishonesty should follow procedures outlined in Academic Appeals by Students (6.3).

I. Withheld Grades: Policy 5.5

At the discretion of the instructor of record and with the approval of the academic unit head, a grade of WH will be assigned only if the student cannot complete the course work because of unavoidable circumstances. Students must complete the work within one calendar year from the end of the semester in which they receive a WH, or the grade automatically becomes an F, except as allowed through policy [i.e., Active Military Service (6.14)]. If students register for the same course in future
semesters, the WH will automatically become an F and will be counted as a repeated course for the purpose of computing the grade point average.

J. **Student Code of Conduct: Policy 10.4**

Disruptive Behavior--Interference or disruption of students, faculty, administration, staff, the educational mission, or routine operations of the university is prohibited. Such activity includes, but is not limited to, behavior in a classroom or instructional program that interferes with the instructor or presenter's ability to conduct the class or program, or the ability of others to profit from the class or program. To remain in the vicinity of activity that is disrupting normal university functions when requested to leave by a university official is prohibited. The instructor shall have full discretion over what behavior is appropriate/inappropriate in the classroom. Students who do not attend class regularly or who perform poorly on class projects/exams may be referred to the Early Alert Program at SFA.

K. Masks (cloth face coverings) must be worn over the nose and mouth at all times in face-to-face classes and appropriate physical distancing must be observed. Students not wearing a mask and/or not observing appropriate physical distancing will be asked to leave the class. All incidents of not wearing a mask and/or not observing appropriate physical distancing will be reported to the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities. Students who are reported for multiple infractions of not wearing a mask and/or not observing appropriate physical distancing may be subject to disciplinary actions.


L. **Respect for Diversity:**

We serve all diverse backgrounds and perspectives; Diversity is a resource, strength and benefit to us all. It is my intent to present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity: gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, religion, and culture. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated. Please let me know ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally or for other students or student groups. In addition, if any of our class meetings conflict with religious events, please let me know so that we can make arrangements for you.

M. Topics, assignments, tests, reading materials, and office hours are subject to change per professor’s discretion.

N. PHIL: 153: Typically meets three times each week (Monday/Wednesday/Friday) in 50-minute segments for 15 weeks, and also meets for a 2.5-hour final examination. Students have significant weekly reading assignments, and typically complete multiple exams, a final exam, and epistemology essay and discussion work. These
activities average a minimum of 6 hours of work per week to prepare outside of classroom hours. Online (and hybrid) version of Introduction to Philosophy contains extensive reading and written content which includes the same information students in a face-to-face lecture course receive. Students engage in online modules for at least three hours per week. Students typically complete four discussion posts, multiple quizzes, four essays in addition to regular homework assignments. For every hour engaging with content, students spend at least two hours completing associated activities and assessments.

“Sometimes the questions are complicated and the answers are simple.”
~ Dr. Seuss

X. GRADING RUBRICS:

Here’s the rubric I use to book reports, discussion posts, essays, analyses, and research papers...

1. An excellent book report, essay, research paper, discussion post, or any other assignment (A) meets or exceeds all of these criteria for both content and writing:

Content
- Demonstrates originality of thought, creativity, and particular insight into the subject
- Demonstrates excellent and thorough understanding of the material
- Uses primary and secondary sources in a way that demonstrates high level of intellectual engagement with the text
- Uses primary and secondary sources in such a way that demonstrates the ability to independently research, read, and assimilate material relevant to the topic and to include it in the paper in a useful and insightful way
- Demonstrates the ability to read texts from different perspectives, traditions, cultures, and time periods with nuance and sensitivity, understanding how context affects interpretation.
- Logical fallacies are completely avoided.
- Truth claims are cogently justified (e.g., logical reasoning; empirical evidence)

Writing
- Includes excellent writing that is interesting to read, clear, correct, polished, varied, and appropriate to the nature of the audience and goal
- Demonstrates completely correct handling of the mechanics of citation, attribution, and integration of quoted and paraphrased material
- Is well organized, with a choice of writing and paragraph structure that guides readers through the work in a way that is well suited to the particular aims, audience, and tone of the goals of assignment.
- Is copy-edited and polished at the sentence level to within an inch of its life

A good paper (B) meets or exceeds all of these criteria for both content and writing:

Content
● Demonstrates a good understanding of the material
● Uses primary and secondary sources in a way that demonstrates a high level of intellectual engagement with the text
● Demonstrates the ability to read texts from different perspectives, traditions, cultures, and time periods, with an understanding of how context affects interpretation
● Logical fallacies are avoided.
● Truth claims are justified with good argumentation.

Writing
● Includes good-quality paper that is interesting to read, clear, correct, and appropriate to the nature of the assignment’s goal
● Demonstrates correct handling of the mechanics of citation, attribution, and integration of quoted and paraphrased material
● Is well organized at the outline and paragraph level
● Is carefully copy-edited and almost entirely error-free

An average quality paper (C) meets all of these criteria for both content and writing:

Content
● Demonstrates solid understanding of the material; may sometimes not show full understanding of how sources relate to other material in the course
● Uses primary and secondary sources in a way that demonstrates intellectual engagement with the text at a level appropriate to undergraduate students
● May not demonstrate initiative in research; may sometimes show a superficial understanding of the texts
● Demonstrates the ability to read texts from different perspectives, traditions, cultures, and time periods with comprehension, but may have difficulty in not reading the text from an exclusively modern- or culture-specific position
● Logical fallacies are slightly evidenced.
● Truth claims are insufficiently justified (not argued very well)

Writing
● Includes average-quality writing that is correct and appropriate to the nature of the assignment’s audience and goal
● Demonstrates an average handling of the mechanics of citation, attribution, and integration of quoted and paraphrased material; may be awkward in integration and attribution of sources
● Somewhat organized at the outline and paragraph level; may be unfocused or somewhat not organized in the most effective order
● Is satisfactorily copy-edited, although some problems of language may remain

An average (D or below):

Includes any one of these problems to a noticeable extent:

Content
  o ● Demonstrates a deficient understanding of the material
  o ● Does not engage with primary and secondary sources, or does so in a superficial, proof-texting way
• Includes difficulty in comprehending or engaging with texts from different perspectives, traditions, cultures, and time periods
• Logical fallacies are discovered.
• Truth-claims are not justified or are poorly justified.

Writing
• Includes writing that is not appropriate to the nature of the assignment’s audience and goal (e.g., too casual or too jargonistic)
• Includes persistent problems with the mechanics of citation, attribution, and integration of quoted and paraphrased material
• Lacks organization at the outline and paragraph level
• Includes persistent and/or systemic problems at the sentence level (structure of sentences; appropriate word choice; spelling and punctuation; other grammar issues; general clarity)

“It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it.” — Aristotle, *Metaphysics*