

Philosophy 351 (A01): Epistemology
FALL 2024 [12633]

Scheduled class times

Monday & Thursday, 11:30-12:50 – Clearihue A217

Professor

Patrick Rysiew

Office Hours: Monday, 1:00-2:20, Friday 10:30-11:30, or by appointment; Clearihue B321 E-mail: rysiew@uvic.ca

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Course Description and Intended Learning Outcomes

Epistemology is concerned with such things as knowledge, justification, evidence, rationality, doubt, truth, scepticism, and many other related topics. This course is an examination of current issues and theories in epistemology. Subjects to be addressed include: analyses of knowledge, and whether knowledge admits of an analysis; the debate between foundationalists and coherentists; the internalism-externalism controversy; why we should care about truth; ‘naturalistic’ approaches to knowledge; epistemic normativity; feminist epistemology; approaches to testimony; whether knowledge is somehow context-dependent; and what the proper response to scepticism might be. Students will read both the introductory textbook and original readings from leading figures in the field. Upon successfully completing this course, students will have a very good sense of what is happening in contemporary epistemology.

Texts

- 1) Jack S. Crumley II, *An Introduction to Epistemology*, second edition (Broadview, 2009); ISBN: 9781551119076. Available through the [UVic Bookstore](#) from [the publisher](#), or via online retailers. Be sure to get the correct edition. Two copies have been placed on reserve at the Main Library.
- 2) A number of additional readings will be made available via the course’s Brightspace page.

Evaluation

Students’ grades will be based on:

- (a) Two take-home, open-book midterm exams (30% each).
- (b) A final paper, approximately 8-10 pages long (30%). Some topics will be suggested. Students may write on a topic of their own design, but only if they obtain the instructor’s permission in advance and by the indicated deadline.
- (c) Several short assignments. Approximately 8 of these will be given. Students must complete at least 3, but can do up to 5. (The top 3 will be counted.) Which short assignments a student writes on is up to them. However, it is *strongly* recommended that students get a start on these early in the course. Topic questions will be distributed at start of a given week; students will have until the end of the week to complete them; responses will be a maximum of 250 words (10%).

In order to be eligible to pass the course, students must successfully complete the two midterms and the final paper.

Beyond the student's having adequately addressed the topic question(s) on which they write, evaluation of the short assignments, midterm exams, and final paper will be based on: evidence of comprehension of the materials and issues addressed; evidence of original and critical thought with regard to that material; the extent to which the student stakes out a position and provides good reasons and arguments for it; the extent to which the student communicates his/her ideas clearly (using complete and grammatical sentences, correct terms, a clear essay structure, and so on). For the short assignments, midterm exams, and final paper, any materials used must be properly cited in the standard way. *The use of outside materials, including any readings not assigned for the course, is permitted only if you have received the instructor's permission ahead of time.*

Late assignments unaccompanied by a legitimate excuse will be penalized at the rate of 5% per day or portion thereof, to a maximum of 30%.¹

The standard University grading scheme will be used. Here is an excerpt:²

Grade	Point Value	Percentage	Description
A+	9	90 – 100	An A+, A, or A- is earned by work which is technically superior, shows mastery of the subject matter, and in the case of an A+ offers original insight and/or goes beyond course expectations. Normally achieved by a minority of students.
A	8	85 – 89	
A-	7	80 – 84	
B+	6	77 – 79	A B+, B, or B- is earned by work that indicates a good comprehension of the course material, a good command of the skills needed to work with the course material, and the student's full engagement with the course requirements and activities. A B+ represents a more complex understanding and/or application of the course material. Normally achieved by the largest number of students.
B	5	73 – 76	
B-	4	70 – 72	
C+	3	65 – 69	A C+ or C is earned by work that indicates an adequate comprehension of the course material and the skills needed to work with the course material and that indicates the student has met the basic requirements for completing assigned work and/or participating in class activities.
C	2	60 – 64	
D	1	50 – 59	A D is earned by work that indicates minimal command of the course materials and/or minimal participation in class activities that is worthy of course credit toward the degree.

¹ Examples of legitimate grounds for requesting an academic concession (including a late assignment) are given [here](#).

² The full version is [here](#).

F	0	0 – 49	F is earned by work, which after the completion of course requirements, is inadequate and unworthy of course credit towards the degree.
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Expectations

This course is in-person only; lectures will not be recorded. Students are expected to come to

class, to come to class having read the assigned readings, and to be ready to talk and ask questions about the material. Students who miss a class are responsible for any material covered therein, as well as for finding out what announcements, if any, were made. In general, this course is reading- and writing-intensive. It is very important to keep up with the readings and assignments as we go along.

Three quick tips for doing well in the course

1. *Come to class* -- when you must miss, try to let the instructor know ahead of time; afterwards, talk to a class-mate about what happened; ask for their lecture notes and/or visit the instructor in office hours.
2. *Do the readings ahead of time, and read ‘actively’* – pay attention to what you’re reading, ask yourself what point(s) the author(s) is trying to make, why this matters, what questions you’d like to ask the author, and so on.
3. *If you’re having trouble with any of the course material, speak to the instructor right away* -- office hours are not just for crises; they are meant to provide you with an additional everyday means of improving your understanding of the course material.

Academic Integrity and Professional Conduct

Chat GPT and similar technologies are not permitted for this course. Plagiarism and other forms of cheating will not be tolerated. It is each student’s responsibility to know the University’s regulations in this regard. The Policy on Academic Integrity is published in [the University Calendar](#). You can also consult the [Libraries’ plagiarism guide](#) or the [Tri-Faculty Standards for Professional Behavior for Students](#), which draws together a number of existing UVic policies in one place for ease of reference. Professionalism is expected from all students enrolled in courses in the Faculty of Humanities. As part of professionalism, students, faculty and staff are expected to be familiar with University policies, including the Tri-Faculty Standards.

Intellectual property of materials on the LMS website

All assignments for this course and all materials posted to the LMS website are the intellectual property of the instructor and the University of Victoria. Do not circulate this material or post it to note-sharing sites without the instructor’s permission. Posting course materials to note-sharing sites or otherwise circulating course materials without the permission of the instructor violates the Policy on Academic Integrity (link above). Any evidence that you are circulating materials without permission will be referred to the Chair of the Philosophy Department for investigation.

Academic Supports

The University has a number of academic support services that may help you in this course, including the [Centre for Academic Communication](#), the [Library's Research Support page](#), and the [Library's "Ask Us" service](#). Information about academic supports can also be found through the [University's Learn Anywhere site](#).

Academic Accommodations

The University of Victoria is committed to creating a learning experience that is as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience any barriers to learning in this course, please feel welcome to discuss your concerns with me. If you believe you will require academic accommodations to address barriers to your education in this course and you have not already registered with the [Centre for Accessible Learning](#), please [do so](#). The Centre for Accessible Learning is the office designated to make arrangements for accommodations. You can find information about academic accommodations through the Centre for Accessible Learning's website.

Schedule of Topics and Readings

What follows is provisional and subject to revision at the instructor's discretion. Any changes to the schedule will be announced in class. As a default, readings for a given subject/week are listed in the order in which you should read them.

Introduction and General Orientation: An overview of the course and some general orientation, including with respect to the type of sceptical claims that help prompt epistemological inquiry.

Week 1 (Sept. 5): Introduction and general orientation

- Crumley: pp. 15-37 (= Introduction, and first part of Chapter 1)

Understanding Knowledge: Historically, knowledge and justification have been the main topics in epistemology. Over three weeks, we'll (re)familiarize ourselves with some basic concepts and distinctions, and look at Gettier's famous argument against the idea that knowledge is justified true belief, as well as some post-Gettier attempts to understand knowledge. We'll also consider some views that pull apart knowledge and justification, and some general reasons to wonder about the prospects for a satisfactory analysis of *knowledge*.

Week 2 (Sept. 9, 12): JTB, Gettier, and JTB+

- Crumley: Chapter 2
- Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" (Brightspace)

Week 3 (Sept. 16, 19): Can the Gettier problem be solved? Is it a good idea to try to analyze *knowledge* in the first place?

- Zagzebski, "The Inescapability of the Gettier Problem" (Brightspace)
- Williamson, excerpt from *Knowledge and Its Limits* (Brightspace)

Week 4 (Sept. 23, 26): Non-justificationist approaches to knowledge

- Nozick, excerpt from *Philosophical Explanations* (Brightspace)

- Dretske, “Epistemic Operators” (Brightspace)

The Structure of Justification - Foundationalism and Coherentism: A long-standing debate within epistemology, it centers on whether any given belief owes its justification to other beliefs.

Week 5 (Sept. 30, Oct. 3): Foundationalism and coherentism [no class Sept. 30 – National Day for Truth & Reconciliation]

- Crumley: Chapters 4, 5

***FIRST MIDTERM POSTED: MON. SEPT. 30**

Week 6 (Oct. 7, 10): Continued

***FIRST MIDTERM DUE: THURS. OCT. 10**

Reliabilism and the Internalism/Externalism Debate: Reliabilism is a recent competitor to ‘internalist’ theories of justification and knowledge. In recent years, the internalism/externalism debate has been a central dispute in epistemology.

Week 7 (Oct. 14, 17): Reliabilism and the internalism-externalism debate [no class Oct. 14 – Thanksgiving]

- Crumley: Chapter 3
- Goldman, “What is Justified Belief?” (Brightspace) ○ *optional: Bonjour, “Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge” (Brightspace)*

Week 8 (Oct. 21, 24): Continued

- Crumley: Chapter 6
- excerpts from Lehrer (*Theory of Knowledge*, “Discursive Knowledge”) (Brightspace) • Dretske, “Two Conceptions of Knowledge: Rational vs. Reliable Belief” (Brightspace)

***SECOND MIDTERM POSTED: THURS. OCT. 24**

‘Naturalized’ Epistemology: Since Quine’s famous paper, “Epistemology Naturalized” (1969), whether we ought to ‘naturalize’ epistemology – and what, exactly, that would involve – has been a matter of much controversy.

Week 9 (Oct. 28, 31): ‘Naturalism’, pro & con

- Crumley: Chapter 7
- Kornblith, “In Defense of a Naturalized Epistemology” (Brightspace) ○ *optional: Quine, “Epistemology Naturalized” (Brightspace)*

Epistemic Values and Norms: It is standard to assume that truth is the epistemic goal, and that anything that is epistemically valuable owes that value to its contribution to truth. But why would truth have this status? And why should we care about epistemic norms?

Week 10 (Nov. 4, 7): Epistemic normativity

- Kornblith, “Epistemic Normativity” (Brightspace)
- Grimm, “Epistemic Normativity” (Brightspace)

***SECOND MIDTERM DUE: MON. NOV. 4 *SUGGESTED PAPER TOPICS
DISTRIBUTED: THURS. NOV. 7**

Feminist Epistemology: In some ways allied with naturalistic approaches – as well as with themes in social epistemology -- feminist theories challenge various assumptions of traditional epistemological theorizing.

Week 11³ (Nov. 11, 14, 18): Feminist Epistemology [no class Nov. 11 – Reading Break]

- Crumley: Chapter 8
- Grasswick, “Feminist Epistemology” (Brightspace)

***DEADLINE FOR APPROVAL OF NON-SUGGESTED PAPER TOPICS: THURS. NOV. 14**

Testimony across (and within) Traditions: One topic in social epistemology that has gotten a lot of attention is testimony as an epistemic source, as when someone tells me that *p*. We consider some main issues that arise here, as well as similarities and differences in how the topic is treated across (and within) traditions.

Week 12 (Nov. 21, 25): Perspectives on testimony

- excerpt from Matilal and Chakrabarti, “Introduction” to *Knowing from Words* (Brightspace)
- Fraser, “Narrative Testimony” (Brightspace)

Scepticism (again): We return to scepticism, and look at a number of responses to sceptical arguments, including the recent and controversial contextualist response.

Week 13 (Nov. 28, Dec. 2): Why not scepticism? •

- Crumley: Chapter 1, pp. 37-52
- Lewis, “Elusive Knowledge” (Brightspace)

***PAPERS DUE: THURS. DEC. 8**

³ Note that the date groupings for Weeks 11-13 don’t follow the Monday-then-Thursday pattern. ⁴ The full version is [here](#).

Some important administrative dates:⁴

- Tues., Sept. 17: last day for 100% reduction of fees
- Fri., Sept. 20: last day to for adding first-term courses
- Tues., Oct. 8: last day for 50% reduction of tuition fees. 100% of tuition fees will be assessed for courses dropped after this date
- Thurs., Oct. 31: last day for withdrawing from first-term courses without penalty of failure

I acknowledge and respect the lək'wəŋən peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.
