

PHIL 591: Research Methods Seminar

CRN# 12691

W 14:30-17:20, CLE B214

Course Description

This course is exclusively for graduate students in philosophy and aims to help students strengthen their research, writing and communication skills. We will do this primarily by discussing a set of influential papers from a variety of different sub-fields, which serves the additional aim of broadening students' reading base. But we will also from time to time shift gears and focus explicitly on the craft of philosophical writing.

Learning Outcomes

This course has three main objectives. By successfully completing this course you will

- (i) develop the writing and argumentation skills required to do graduate-level work in philosophy. Among others, these include giving an exposition of a philosophical position; reconstructing someone else's argument; constructing your own argument; formulating an objection; replying to an objection; designing a research topic; identifying relevant literature; providing constructive feedback; using feedback to improve one's work; and presenting one's research.
- (ii) come to understand the expectations you need to meet to complete the MA degree in philosophy.
- (iii) increase your knowledge of central issues in a variety of sub-fields including action theory, epistemology, metaphysics, social philosophy, political philosophy and philosophy of mind.

Course Website

This course has an associated website on UVic's *Brightspace* tool. This will be used for assignments, communication, and to make available course materials. To access your customized *Brightspace* page, sign in to UVic and click on *Online Tools*. You should see *Brightspace* as an option. If you are unable to access *Brightspace*, please contact me.

Texts

All readings will be made available electronically via Brightspace or the library's course reserves system.

Course Format

Primarily discussion; occasionally short lectures to fill in background. You are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the assigned material in detail. So you need to read it carefully and take good notes. The course has a discussion board on Brightspace where discussion of course material can continue outside of class.

Evaluation

a. Requirements

<i>Assignment</i>	<i>Due Date</i>	<i>Weight</i>
Participation	n/a	20%
Abstracts 1	September 9	4%
Abstracts 2	September 16	6%

Objection 1 Objection 2	September 29 October 7	4% 6%
Proposal	October 21	5%
Bibliography	November 1	10%
Draft	November 22	15%
Referee Report	November 30	10%
Research Paper	December 15	20%

Participation

Prepare for class by doing the assigned readings and noting questions and objections. Participate actively in class discussion (including the discussion board) and capstone workshop.

Abstracts

Each assignment involves writing *two* abstracts, roughly 200 words and 500 words long, for the *same* paper (one of the assigned readings for the week). The function of this assignment is to practice summarizing an argument and deciding how detailed to get. For the second assignment you will be asked, in addition, to respond to feedback you received on the first assignment.

Objection

In 500 words, raise an objection to one of the assigned readings. This includes a brief summary of the argument you are attacking. The function of this assignment is to practice articulating targeted philosophical criticism. For the second assignment you will be asked, in addition, to respond to feedback you received on the first assignment.

Proposal

A 150-300 word proposal for the topic of your research paper (see below), which must be related to one or more class readings. The function of this assignment is to practice identifying a suitable topic for a research paper and to get you started on working towards your final assignment. We will use the collective resources of the class to help you refine your topic.

Bibliography

Write an annotated bibliography containing 5-7 entries related to the topic of your research paper. Your annotations should explain why each paper is one you need to engage with in your research paper. The function of this assignment is to practice finding relevant literature for a particular topic.

Draft

Write a 3000-5000 word draft of your research paper. The function of this assignment is to practice the skills involved in writing philosophical research papers, including revising a paper in response to feedback. The class will read and discuss your draft, and one peer will write a referee report.

Referee report

Write a 500-750 word referee report on another student's draft paper. The function of this assignment is to practice assessing whether, and explaining why or why not, a piece of philosophical work achieves its intended aim and, if it doesn't, articulating what revisions the author needs to make for it to do so. The assignment serves the further function of providing feedback to a peer's work-in-progress. Incorporate feedback given by others in discussion if you think it is important.

Research paper

Prepare a presentation of your research paper for the capstone workshop. Revise your draft in response to feedback from class discussion, referee report and workshop presentation and submit the revised version. The function of this assignment is to practice presenting written work and using feedback as a resource for improving a previous draft.

b. N Grades

If you complete all assignments, you will be considered to have completed the course. Failure to complete any one of them will result in a grade of "N" regardless of the cumulative percentage on other elements of the course. N is a failing grade and factors into GPA as a value of 0.

Academic Concessions

UVic recognizes its responsibility to offer academic concessions to students whose ability to complete course requirements is interrupted by 1) unexpected and unavoidable circumstances or 2) conflicting responsibilities. In general, academic concessions take two forms:

1. during the term when all course requirements can be completed by the student before the instructor must submit the final grades (these are often informally called "extensions"); and
2. after the term has ended or when course requirements cannot be completed before final grades are submitted (including deferrals, extended deferrals, aegrotats, withdrawals under extenuating circumstances and backdated drops).

For additional details, please see the [regulations](#) and [guidelines](#) on academic concessions.

If you foresee or experience circumstances that prevent you from completing course requirements, please be proactive and contact me right away. The sooner you do, the easier it typically is to address the situation.

Course Schedule (preliminary)

Wk.	Date	Reading	Due
1	Sep 3	Introduction Philosophical Writing	
2	Sep 10	<i>Social and Political Philosophy: Collective Agency</i> Christian List and Philip Pettit, "The Conditions of Agency" Holly Lawford-Smith, "Is the Citizen-Inclusive State and Agent?" Cindy Holder visit	Abstracts 1
3	Sep 17	<i>History of Philosophy</i> Kant, <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i> , B-Introduction Saul Kripke, <i>Naming and Necessity</i> (excerpts) Andrew Stephenson, "Kant and Kripke: Rethinking Necessity and the Apriori"	Abstracts 2

4	Sep 24	<i>Philosophy of Action I: Reason, Cause, and Causal Explanation</i> Donald Davidson, "Actions, Reasons, and Causes" Jennifer Hornsby, "Agency and Causal Explanation"	
5	Oct 1	<i>Philosophy of Action II: More on Reasons and Causes</i> Michael Thompson, "Naïve Action Theory"	Objection 1
6	Oct 8	<i>Practical Reason: The Slave of the Passions?</i> Bernard Williams, "Internal and External Reasons" Christine Korsgaard, "Skepticism about Practical Reason" Tim Scanlon, [Appendix] Or Colin Macleod visit instead	Objection 2
7	Oct 15	<i>Philosophy of Science</i> Readings TBD Eric Hochstein visit	
8	Oct 22	<i>Social Epistemology</i> Miranda Fricker, "Hermeneutical Injustice" Charles Mills, "White Ignorance" Proposal discussion	Proposal
9	Oct 29	<i>Epistemology: Perception and Justification</i> John McDowell, <i>Perception as a Capacity for Knowledge</i> Peter Graham & Nikolaj Pedersen, "Dretske and McDowell on perceptual knowledge, conclusive reasons, and epistemological disjunctivism" Patrick Rysiew visit	Bibliography
10	Nov 5	<i>Social Ontology</i> Asta, "The Social Construction of Human Kinds" Sally Haslanger, "Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them To Be?" Scott Woodcock visit	
11	Nov 19	TBD (Student selection) TBD (Student selection)	
12	Nov 26	Research paper drafts	Draft
13	Dec 3	TBD (Student selection) Buffer	Referee report

Capstone Workshop December 8

Attendance and Participation

You are expected to attend class and come prepared to discuss the assigned readings. Typically, the more prepared you are, the better our seminar discussion will be and the more you will learn. The success of a seminar depends in large part on active student participation. This is reflected in the relative weight of the participation grade for this course.

Office Hours

I hold regular office hours. I encourage you to make use of these. No sign-up needed; just drop in. I especially encourage you to come to office hours if there is something you don't understand or if you are struggling in the course. The sooner you do, the better I will likely be able to help you. The default mode for office hours is in-person, but I would be happy to meet on Zoom. If you prefer Zoom, please email me, so I can set up a meeting.

Announcements and Email

I will regularly communicate course-related information to you using the 'Announcements' function in *Brightspace*. Please ensure that you read these announcements. You can configure your *Brightspace* page so that you get notified (by email or text) when a new announcement is posted. Occasionally, I will also email you. Emails will be sent to the address listed in UVic's system as your contact information. It is your responsibility to make sure that this information is current and to check this email address at least once a day. If you contact me via email, I will make every effort to respond in a timely manner, which generally will be within 48 hours (longer on weekends). To make sure your email does not end up in my spam folder, I encourage you to put the course number in the subject line (i.e. PHIL 591) and use your UVic email address. If you have a question about assignments, due dates, or other course policies, the syllabus should be your first resource. *I will not respond to any emails that ask questions which are answered in the syllabus.*

Student Conduct

The University of Victoria is committed to providing a respectful and productive learning environment. All members of our community, including students, have both the right to experience and the responsibility to help create such an environment. For details on the rights and responsibilities this involves please read through the applicable [university policies](#) as well as the Student Code of Conduct available for download [here](#). This document also contains links to applicable university policies. It is part of your responsibility as a student in this course to know your responsibilities as outlined in the code of conduct (which covers, among other things, attendance and classroom behavior, online conduct in university learning systems, and academic integrity).

Intellectual property of materials on D2L Brightspace

Please note that all assignments for this course and all materials posted to the course's *Brightspace* site or distributed in class are the intellectual property of myself and the University of Victoria. Do not circulate this material or post it to note-sharing sites without my permission. Posting course materials to note-sharing sites or otherwise circulating course materials without the permission of your instructor violates the [Policy on Academic Integrity](#). Any evidence you are circulating materials without permission will be referred to the Chair of the Philosophy Department for investigation.

Academic Integrity (Plagiarism etc.)

Violations of academic integrity, such as plagiarism, cheating on exams etc., constitute breaches of university policy and carry serious penalties (e.g. failing the class, being put on disciplinary probation).

Note that it is *your responsibility* to be aware of what constitutes plagiarism and other violations of academic integrity, and that *ignorance of this is not an acceptable excuse*. For information, please consult [UVic's Policy on Academic Integrity](#) or contact me. To learn more about academic integrity, I encourage you to self-enrol in the [Integrity Matters](#) course in Brightspace. Search for this course under the [Discover](#) tab on your Brightspace homepage.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Generative AI tools (such as ChatGPT, Dall-E or Google Bard) constitute sources just like books and articles. This means that, if you use such tools for completing assignments, you must acknowledge this just as you would other sources. For example, text generated using ChatGPT-3 should include a citation such as: “ChatGPT-3. (YYYY, MM, DD of query). “Text of your query.” Generated using OpenAI.

<https://chat.openai.com/>”. Using AI without proper acknowledgment constitutes a violation of academic integrity. *Note that this applies also to the use of AI tools for brainstorming or drafting work.*

Accessibility

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you anticipate or experience any barriers to learning in this course, please feel welcome to discuss your concerns with me. If you require academic accommodations you need to register with the Centre for Accessible Learning (<https://www.uvic.ca/services/cal>). Please do so as early as possible. You can find information about academic accommodations through the Centre for Accessible Learning’s website (<https://www.uvic.ca/services/cal/programs/academic/index.php>).

Land Acknowledgment

We acknowledge and respect the Ləkʷəŋən (Songhees and Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Ləkʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

Significant Dates (<https://www.uvic.ca/calendar/dates/>)

- Tue, Sep 16: last day for 100% reduction of fees
- Fri, Sep 19: last day to for adding first-term courses
- Tue, Sep 30: University closed for National Day for Truth and Reconciliation
- Tue, Oct 7: last day for 50% reduction of tuition fees. 100% of tuition fees will be assessed for courses dropped after this date.
- Fri, Oct 31: last day for withdrawing from first term courses without penalty of failure

Grading Scheme

Percentage	Letter Grade	Grade Point	Grade Definition
90-100	A+	9	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.
85-89	A	8	
80-84	A-	7	
77-79	B+	6	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.
73-76	B	5	
70-72	B-	4	
65-69	C+	3	A C+ or C is earned by work that indicates an adequate comprehension

60-64	C	2	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
50-59	D	1	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.
0-49	F	0	F is earned by work which, after the completion of course requirements, is inadequate and unworthy of course credit towards the degree.

Interpretation of these grade definitions is at the discretion of the instructor. If you receive a grade that you believe is unfair, please begin by discussing the matter with the instructor in a respectful, open-minded manner. If you still believe the grade you received is unfair you can appeal the matter to the chair of the department.

For additional information regarding grades, please see the most recent edition of the UVic Calendar. All evaluations of tests and assignments will be calculated according to percentage scores. Letter grades and grade point scores are listed purely for reference.

Student Wellness

Your mental health is as important as your physical health. During the semester, you might feel overwhelmed, lonely, or stressed about your academic performance. You might experience a personal or family tragedy. The University provides free counselling services, and I encourage you to make use of these in this type of situation. (See [Student Wellness](#) for more information).

Student Resources

The following university resources are available to support you. I encourage you to use them as needed:

- [UVic Learn](#). This is UVic's primary learning resource for students. It offers many workshops and resources to help with academics and learning strategies.
- [Office of Indigenous Academic and Community Engagement \(IACE\)](#)
- [Student groups and resources](#)

Student Experience of Learning Survey (SEL)

I value your feedback on this course. Towards the end of term, as in all other courses at UVic, you will have the opportunity to complete an anonymous survey regarding your learning experience (SEL). The survey is vital to providing feedback to me regarding the course and my teaching, as well as to help the Philosophy Department improve the overall program for students in the future. When the survey is available, you will receive an email with a link. If you do not receive an email invitation, you can go directly to your [SEL dashboard](#). You will need to use your UVic NetLink ID to access the survey, which can be done on your laptop, tablet or mobile device. Please think of this important activity as a part of the course.