



PHIL 450 01: Open-mindedness

Fall 2025

Meeting Time and Location: MWF 2:00-2:50pm, Anderson-Werkman 250

Credit Hours: 3

Mode of Instruction: in-person

Course Instructor: Julia Smith | juliasmith@hope.edu

Office Hours: By appointment. [Please use this link to book an available time.](#)

Office Location: Lubbers 212

Course Description

From the course catalog:

A topical seminar dealing with significant thinkers, issues and approaches within philosophy. For philosophy majors, the seminar serves as a capstone course within the major. Topics of the seminar vary and have included “Philosophies of Affection and Desire,” “God and Morality,” and “James and Wittgenstein on Religion.” It is the goal of the course to provide appropriate opportunities for students to exercise the skills needed for reading philosophy and for thinking, writing and interacting with others philosophically. Philosophy majors will complete their major portfolios as part of the required work for the course.

Here’s the description for our section:

Open-mindedness is widely valued as an important intellectual trait. This course focuses on the nature and value of open-mindedness. In the first part of the course, we’ll examine recent accounts of open-mindedness. Then, we will turn our attention to the status of open-mindedness as an intellectual virtue. (Is it always good to be open-minded, or is there anything to the advice that we should not open our minds so much “that our brains fall out”?) Along the way, we’ll consider the relationship of open-mindedness to related traits such as curiosity and intellectual humility.

Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for this course.

Required Resources and Materials

There is only one book you need to buy for this course:

How Minds Change: The Surprising Science of Belief, Opinion, and Persuasion
by David McRaney. Penguin, 2022. ISBN: 0593190297

It is not available at the Hope College Bookstore, but there are inexpensive options online new (Amazon) and used (AbeBooks). *Please purchase a physical copy of this text.*

We will also be reading:

The Limitations of the Open Mind by Jeremy Fantl. Oxford University Press,
2018. ISBN: 0198807953

The physical format of this book is expensive, so I'm not going to require you to buy it. It is available in electronic format through Van Wylen Library.

Additional readings will be posted in the folder labeled "READINGS" on the Moodle course page.

Student Learning Outcomes

Philosophy Learning Outcomes

- Students will acquire the fundamental skills needed for reading philosophical texts and for thinking and interacting with others philosophically.
- Students will gain an understanding of the techniques and pursuits characteristic of representative types of philosophical undertaking and will apply and integrate their accumulated philosophical expertise at the advanced undergraduate level.
- Students will discuss issues philosophically in curricular as well as co-curricular contexts.
- Students will demonstrate how the study of philosophy connects with the real-world concerns of their lives.

Evaluation

Your final grade for this course will be determined as follows:

- 10% Homework Assignments (throughout the semester)
- 20% Précis Papers (3 submitted by 10/10)

- 10% Open-minded Dialogue Assignment (due ~~10/27~~ 11/5)
- 60% Final Research Paper Project
 - 5% Project Proposal Brainstorming Exercise (due ~~10/20~~ 10/22)
 - 5% Annotated Bibliography (due 11/10)
 - 10% Research Paper Draft (due 11/25)
 - 5% Research Paper Presentation (in class on 12/1 and 12/3)
 - 5% Peer Review Assignment (in class on 12/5)
 - 30% Final Research Paper (due 12/12)

Attendance

Attendance is expected, but it is not part of your grade in this class. If, for some reason, you cannot attend class, please send me an email to let me know. It is your responsibility to make arrangements for catching up on class material that you miss due to absence. Read more here about Hope's [Excessive Absence Policy](#). **You cannot have 10 or more absences and pass the class.**

Homework Assignments (10%)

Homework assignments are short exercises that I will sometimes provide in class. **Most often, these will be exercises that you can complete within the time frame of the class period** (such as taking notes on a text or responding to a question in written form). But **sometimes, these will be exercises that you will complete at home and turn in during the next class period** (such as annotating a text or preparing discussion questions). Homework assignments are **graded based on completion** (i.e. completion of the assignment = full marks)

*There will be **no make-up opportunities for homework**, unless a student misses a homework on a date where they can provide evidence that their absence was due to (i) a Hope College trip or athletic event, (ii) **serious** illness requiring a period of **extended** absence, or (iii) funeral attendance. There are no exceptions to this rule.*

Précis Papers (20%)

A précis is a short paper that summarizes a text. You will write three précis papers for this class. You can choose to write your précis paper as a summarization of any paper that is on the syllabus. The précis paper will be due before class on the date that the paper you summarized is discussed in class. Your lowest précis paper grade will be dropped. You must turn in your three précis papers before class on 10/10. More detailed instructions will be posted on Moodle.

Open-minded Dialogue Assignment (10%)

You will have a 30 minute conversation with someone not in this class on a controversial topic of your choosing, in which you attempt to apply the conversational principles of “street epistemology” discussed by McRaney in Chapter 9 of *How Minds Change*. We will have a practice session in class on 10/13. You will complete the outside-of-class conversation before 10/27, and turn in a 2-page document describing the conversation and reflecting on how it went on 10/27.

Final Research Paper Project (60%)

Over the course of the semester, you will engage in a writing process that will produce a philosophical research paper on a topic of your choice. The final research paper will be in the 3000 - 4000 word range (12-16 pages standard font double spaced). The writing process will include the following elements, each of which will be evaluated separately:

- **5% Project Proposal Brainstorming Exercise** (due 10/20): A 1-2 page document which suggests at least three possible topics for your final research paper.
- **5% Annotated Bibliography** (due 11/10): A 2-3 page annotated bibliography in which you locate at least 5 relevant papers for your research paper not already on the syllabus and briefly explain their expected relevance to your project.
- **10% Research Paper Draft** (due 11/25): A complete draft of your research paper of at least 2800 words.
- **5% Research Paper Presentation** (in class on 12/1 and 12/3): A short (3-5 minute) presentation accompanied by a 1-page handout on the topic of your research paper.
- **5% Peer Review Assignment** (in class on 12/5)
- **30% Final Research Paper** (due 12/12)

Late Policy

Late assignments that have not received an extension will be penalized at a rate of 3% per day.

Grading Scale

In this course, grades will be calculated according to the following scale:

Grade	Percentage	Significance
A	93-100%	Superior

A-	90-92%	Superior
B+	87-89%	Good
B	83-86%	Good
B-	80-82%	Good
C+	77-79%	Adequate
C	73-76%	Adequate
C-	70-72%	Adequate
D+	67-69%	Weak but passing
D	63-66%	Weak but passing
D-	60-62%	Weak but passing
F	0-59%	Failure

More information about Hope College's grading system can be found here:
<https://hope.edu/offices/registrar/policies-resources/grades.html>

Schedule of Readings and Important Dates and Deadlines

- Readings are linked in the READINGS folder on the Moodle course page. When readings are available through the Hope College Library, you will be directed to log in with your Hope College credentials to access them.
- Always do the reading before the date associated with the reading in the table below, as that is the date that we will be discussing the reading in class.
- This schedule is tentative! It is subject to change based on student needs and interests. You will be notified of any changes in advance of the relevant date via announcement on Moodle.
- I strongly encourage you to bring a printed copy of the day's reading with you to class.
- Each reading assignment is accompanied by some instructions (linked on the Moodle course page under the heading READING INSTRUCTIONS). This document provides context for the readings and will help you know what I would like you to focus on as you are doing them.

Date	Readings	Important Dates & Deadlines
M 8/25	Course syllabus	first class

PART I: The Nature of Open-mindedness What is open-mindedness? What is closed-mindedness?		
W 8/27	Carver, "Cathedral"	
F 8/29	Hope College's Virtues of Public Discourse Bailey, "But How Do I Participate?"	
M 9/1	Battaly, "Virtue Epistemology"	
W 9/3	Baehr, "The Structure of Intellectual Vices"	last day to drop or enroll for credit
F 9/5	Adler, "Reconciling Open-mindedness and Belief"	
M 9/8	Riggs, "Open-Mindedness"	
W 9/10	Baehr, "The Structure of Open-Mindedness"	
F 9/12	Catch up - no reading Please complete this catch-up day survey by the end of the day on Thursday 9/11	
M 9/15	Kwong, "Open-mindedness as Engagement"	
W 9/17	Fantl, <i>The Limitations of the Open Mind</i> , Chapter 1	No class: Prof Smith away
F 9/19	No reading	Visit by Dale Austin, Associate Dean, Boerigter Center for Calling and Career
M 9/22	Bronzini-Vender, " Elite Colleges Have Found a New Virtue for Applicants to Fake " (NYT Opinion)	Open-mindedness Exercise: Doubters and Believers
W 9/24	The complete schedule for the Critical Issues Symposium is available here . You are strongly encouraged to choose a talk to attend.	No class: Critical Issues Symposium

F 9/26	Battaly, "Closed-Mindedness and Dogmatism"	
PART II: Open-mindedness and Belief Change When does open-minded engagement lead to belief change?		
M 9/29	McRaney, <i>How Minds Change</i> , Chs 1-2 Optional: "How Do You Change Voters' Minds? Have a Conversation" , NYT	
W 10/1	McRaney, <i>How Minds Change</i> , Chapter 3	
F 10/3	McRaney, <i>How Minds Change</i>, Chs 5-6 McRaney, <i>How Minds Change</i> , Chapter 4: skip pages 89-100; read pages 100-122 & McRaney, <i>How Minds Change</i> , Chapter 5	
M 10/6		No Class: Fall Break
W 10/8	McRaney, <i>How Minds Change</i>, Chs 7-8 McRaney, <i>How Minds Change</i> , Chs 6, 7, & 8 (Chapters 7 & 8 are shorter than others, and Chapter 6 isn't too dense)	
F 10/10	McRaney, <i>How Minds Change</i> , Chs 9-10 Optional: McRaney, "Coda" (7 pages at the end of the book) Optional: Anthony Magnabosco practices street epistemology with a woman who believes spirits are real [video]	All three of your précis papers should be submitted by today
M 10/13	Catch up - no reading Please complete this brief Catch-up Day Survey by the end of the day on 10/11	
W 10/15	None Here are the open-minded Dialogue Assignment Instructions	Open-minded Dialogue Assignment in-class practice
PART III: Open-Mindedness and Virtue Is open-mindedness an intellectual virtue?		
F 10/17	Arpaly, "Open-mindedness as a Moral Virtue"	

	We will take some class time today to get started on brainstorming some possible topics for your final research paper Here is a document with more guidance on coming up with some possible research topics, including examples.	
M 10/20	Roberts and Wood, "Firmness"	Project Proposal due
W 10/22	Fantl, <i>The Limitations of the Open Mind</i>, Chapter 1 Optional: Optional: <i>The Limitations of the Open Mind</i>, Preface *note: This should be familiar to you; we read it earlier in the semester as an example of an account of open-mindedness. I'm having us revisit it here because it's important to understand to set us up well for profitable engagement with the rest of Fantl's book By the end of the day today, please submit your Project Proposal Brainstorming Exercise: A 1-page document which suggests <i>at least three possible research questions</i> you could choose to pursue for your final research paper. Each research question should be accompanied by a short paragraph detailing your existing thoughts/hunches about what the answer to is (if we're being fancy, we can call this your "provisional thesis statement"). Here is a document with more guidance on coming up with some possible research topics, including examples.	Project Proposal due
F 10/24	Fantl, <i>The Limitations of the Open Mind</i> , Chapter 2	
M 10/27	Fantl, <i>The Limitations of the Open Mind</i> , Chapter 3	Open-minded Dialogue Assignment due
W 10/29	Fantl, <i>The Limitations of the Open Mind</i> , Chapter 4	
F 10/31	Fantl, <i>The Limitations of the Open Mind</i> , Chapter 5	Complete your practice interview with Dr. Dale Austin by today

		Open-minded Dialogue Assignment due
M 11/3	Fantl, <i>The Limitations of the Open Mind</i> , Chapter 6	Tues 11/4 is the last day to withdraw for a "W" grade or opt for a pass/fail grade
W 11/5	Fantl, <i>The Limitations of the Open Mind</i> , Chapter 7	Open-minded Dialogue Assignment due
F 11/7	Fantl, <i>The Limitations of the Open Mind</i> , Chapter 8	
M 11/10	Commentaries by Ballantyne and McCormick (Ballantyne's is titled "Let Me Think About it More" and McCormick's "Comments on Jeremy Fantl's The Limitations of the Open Mind")	Annotated Bibliography due
W 11/12	Fantl, replies to Ballantyne and McCormick	
F 11/14	Spiegel, "Open-mindedness and Religious Devotion"	
M 11/17	Baehr, "Open-mindedness as a Christian Virtue"	
W 11/19	In-class writing exercises: Research Paper Draft	
F 11/21	In-class writing exercises: Research Paper Draft	
M 11/24	In-class writing exercises: Research Paper Draft	Research Paper Draft due on 11/25
W 11/26 & F 11/28		No Class: Thanksgiving Break
M 12/1	Final Research Paper Presentations	
W 12/3	Final Research Paper Presentations	
F 12/5	Peer Feedback Workshop	

M 12/8- F 12/12	Exams week. Our exam time is Th 12/11 3:00-5:00pm. We will meet during this time.	Final Research Paper due on 12/12
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Course Policies

Academic Assistance Statement

The Academic Success Center (ASC) offers a variety of free services (e.g., tutoring, testing strategies, time management resources) for all students. The [ASC](#) is located in Van Zoeren Hall — immediately adjacent to the Van Wylen Library second-floor entrance. To contact the ASC send an email to asc@hope.edu or call 616.395.7830.

Academic Integrity Policy

Academic Integrity is based on the principles of honesty and individual responsibility for actions. The [Student Handbook](#) includes information about Hope College's expectations and policies relating to academic integrity (under Section IV, "Academic Policies"). It is your responsibility to know and understand these policies in full.

Here are the most important highlights for our purposes in this course:

A student may not:

- Give, offer, or receive aid on examination other than that specifically allowed by the professor
- Engage in conduct that destroys another person's work or hinders another in their academic endeavors
- Knowingly represent the work of others as one's own
- Submit the same assignment for multiple classes

Hope College defines plagiarism as "the dishonest presentation of the work of others as if it were one's own." This applies to the output of Large Language Models like ChatGPT. Here are Hope's guidelines on Generative AI:

Absent a clear statement from a course instructor, use of or consultation with generative AI shall be treated analogously to assistance from another person. In particular, using generative AI tools to substantially complete an assignment or exam (e.g., by entering exam or assignment questions) is not permitted. Students should acknowledge the use of generative AI (other than incidental use) and default to disclosing such assistance when in doubt.

Individual course instructors are free to set policies regulating the use of generative AI tools in their courses. Course instructors should set such policies in their course syllabi and clearly communicate them to students. Students unsure of policies regarding generative AI tools are encouraged to ask their instructors for clarification.

Hope College requires faculty to report instances of academic dishonesty to the office of the Provost. The penalty for plagiarism is usually failure of the plagiarized assignment or failure of the course.

Accommodations

Hope College is committed to providing equitable learning environments to all students. If you have a temporary or permanent condition that requires accommodation(s) (including but not limited to: mental health, attention-related, learning, vision, hearing, physical, or health-related), you may call Disability and Accessibility Resources (DAR) at 616-395-7925 to schedule a meeting with a specialist or visit the [DAR website](#) to request accommodations. Reasonable accommodations are established through an interactive process among you, your instructor(s) and DAR. You may request accommodations at any point in the semester, but DAR encourages you to initiate the process early, as accommodations are not granted retroactively. Your course instructors will receive an email from DAR verifying the approved accommodations.

Communication

Here are the best ways to get in contact with me:

- **For something quick:** in person before or after class, or an email (*Examples:* you need to let me know you'll miss class or ask a quick question about an assignment or course content)
- **For something longer or for a conversation you'd like to have in private:** [Book an office hours appointment using this link](#) (*Examples:* you need to talk about your accommodations for the class, discuss something of a personal nature, have a longer conversation about course content, or ask questions about your grade on a particular assignment)

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)

Students may experience stressors that can impact both their academic experience and their personal wellbeing. These may include academic pressures, relationship challenges, alcohol or other drugs, financial concerns, identity development, body image, etc. If you are experiencing similar concerns, we encourage you to seek support. Hope College [Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#) is a free and confidential

resource. Call 616.395.7945, or visit the top floor of the Bultman Student Center to find the right form of support for you. If the source of your stressors is academic, please contact us or academic advising so we can find solutions together.

Emmaus Scholars Program

This class may be taken as an Emmaus Scholars class. If you've never heard of the Emmaus Scholars Program before, you can read more about it [here](#). It is open to all students. Emmaus classes like this one are an optional component of the program, whose main event is a Monday evening dinner and discussion led by Emmaus faculty members. If you would like to learn more about Emmaus, or think you might be interested in taking this class as an Emmaus class, please let me know within the first few weeks of the semester.

Explanation of Expected Hours Working on Class Assignments

This is a 3-credit hour course, with three hours (well, technically, three 50-minute blocks) of instructional time per week. For each hour of instructional time, you should plan to do two hours of preparation. Therefore, you should budget nine hours per week (including time spent in class) for each course for which you are enrolled.

Inclement Weather

Campus Safety sends emergency notification texts, including notice of weather-related closures, via the HOPE ALERT system. A decision to close campus offices and cancel classes is typically announced prior to 6:30 a.m. [Find more information regarding inclement weather notifications.](#)

Safety & Emergency Preparedness

Students should dial 911 (the United States' primary emergency response system) from any phone if they or someone else experiences a medical or mental health emergency. Students can also contact Hope College's Campus Safety Office (616.395.7770) in any kind of emergency situation, and Campus Safety will contact the necessary emergency response service. [View instructions for specific emergency situations.](#) Students can sign up for emergency text message alerts at plus.hope.edu.

Student Complaint

Hope College is committed to the appropriate resolution of complaints as efficiently and effectively as possible. We believe that providing a mechanism for complaints to be heard gives us the opportunity to improve our services. Students are encouraged to speak directly to other members of the Hope community in an effort to resolve conflict and/or seek an informal resolution of the dispute directly with the other community

member(s) whenever possible. Please use this [form](#) in circumstances where such resolution is not possible.

Technology in the Classroom

Learning happens best in a distraction free environment. I have found that adopting a no-screens policy in my classrooms creates a better learning experience for students. Therefore, in this class, the use of phones, earbuds, and laptops will not be permitted. The use of tablets for note-taking only is permitted, but please let me know if you plan on doing this. Students who require the use of a computer as part of their accommodations are exempt from this policy.

Van Wylen Library

The [library](#) connects students to information in all forms through books, articles, multimedia, special collections, and both lendable and lab-based [technology](#). In addition to offering in-class instructional sessions, librarians are available to provide one-on-one personalized research support—simply visit the Research Help Desk on the first floor or email askalibrarian@hope.edu. Numerous [study spaces](#) throughout the library are designed for both individual and group work.