PHI107 Spring 2025 Syllabus

As of 01/09/25, this syllabus may be subject to change. Any changes made to the syllabus will be announced on Blackboard.

Instructor Information

Name: Bertram Probyn (please call me 'Bertie')

Email Address: bnprobyn@syr.edu

Office Hours: 9:45am-10:45am Tuesdays and Thursdays in Pages Café, Bird Library. If you can't make either of these times and would like to meet to talk about something related to the course, please email me to arrange an alternative time to meet.

Email Policy: I intend to answer all emails sent to me relating to course matters within 24 hours. If I have not answered your email after 24 hours, please send me a follow-up email to remind me of your message.

Class Meeting Time

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:00am-12:20pm, Maxwell Hall 108

Course Description

This class provides an introduction to epistemology (the philosophical study of knowledge) and metaphysics (the philosophical study of the nature of reality). In this course, we will look at some popular questions that philosophers in these fields concern themselves with. These include: Do you have to be *certain* about something in order to know it? Are you justified in believing anything about what will happen in the future based on what happened in the past? Do you *even exist at all*? And if you do, what exactly *are* you?

In this class, we will consider and critique various arguments that have been put in favor and against certain answers to these (and other related) questions. Students will also develop the skills needed to put forward their own arguments and consider how reasonable people may object to these arguments. As a result of approaching these questions in this way, students will have a chance to develop critical thinking skills that are valuable inside and outside of the classroom. In addition, students will also have the chance to develop essay-writing skills in this class. This class will also provide a solid foundation for higher-level classes in epistemology, metaphysics and philosophy of science.

Course Assessment

This course will be assessed by a mixture of essays and exams. These are as follows:

Epistemology Exam - 25% of overall grade

Epistemology Essay - 25% of overall grade

Metaphysics Exam - 25% of overall grade

Metaphysics Essay - 25% of overall grade

For each graded assignment, you will receive a number grade between 0-100. The grading scale is as follows:

A	94-100
A-	90-93
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D	60-69
F	0-59

Final grades will be an average of all of your numeric grades for all assignments for the course rounded up to the nearest whole number.

Exams

There will be two exams for this class – one exam on epistemology (on 6th March) and one exam on metaphysics (on 24th April). Each exam will consist of two 30-minute essay questions. **Spending less than 30 minutes answering each exam question will significantly increase the risk of failing the exam**. Each exam will be one class session in length, so you can use up to one hour and 20 minutes answering the questions on each exam if you wish.

Study guides for each exam will be posted no later than one week before each exam. We will review the study guide in the class before each exam.

Note that the exams are **non-cumulative** and there **is no final for this class**.

Essays

There will be two essays for this class - one essay on epistemology and one essay on metaphysics. Students will be provided with essay prompts by the instructor, and are expected to write 1,500 words answering the question in the essay prompt. Students will receive feedback on the first draft of their essays that they hand in. They are then permitted to revise and resubmit their essays in light of this feedback in order to achieve a higher grade.

Note that revising and resubmitting is always an option for students, but is not required for students. The due dates for the essays are as follows:

Epistemology Essay - 14th February

Revisions of Epistemology Essay - 7th March

Metaphysics Essay - 11th April

Revisions of Metaphysics Essay - 25th April

You should not use generative AI to assist you in completing your essays. The course instructor reserves the right to meet with any student suspected of using generative AI in completing their essays in order to gather more evidence about the matter. Sufficient evidence of the use of generative AI in completing essays will result in a report of a violation of academic integrity to the relevant university bodies.

Participation and attendance

Students are expected to attend all class sessions and participate actively in class discussions. If you need to miss class for a valid reason (e.g. health-related reason or a family emergency) please either contact your academic advisor and ask them to get in touch with me or get in touch with the Orange SUccess team. **I will only accept as valid those excuses that are sent to me either by Orange SUccess or your academic advisor**. If you email me without a corroborating email from either your academic advisor or Orange SUccess, your absence from class will not be authorised.

Attendance will factor into your grade as follows: if you have three unauthorised absences over the course of the semester, your overall grade will be reduced by one point (out of 100). If you have four unauthorised absences over the course of the semester, your overall grade will be reduced by two points (out of 100). If you have five unauthorised absences over the course of the semester, your overall grade will be reduced by three points (out of 100). If you have six or more unauthorised absences over the course of the semester, your overall grade will be reduced by five points (out of 100). Fewer than three unauthorised absences will not result in any penalty to your overall grade.

Course Readings and Handouts

Where available, course readings will be available on Blackboard no later than one week before the class for which they are required. If a reading can't be uploaded to Blackboard and you are having trouble accessing a reading, please email me and I will help you access a copy.

Classroom handouts are the intellectual property of the course instructor and should not be shared without permission. Sharing these handouts without the permission of the course instructor is a violation of the student code of conduct.

Classroom Etiquette

The use of laptops and tablets is permitted during class for class-related purposes. Please do not use phones during class except to take pictures of the board.

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY STUDENT POLICIES & SERVICES

University Attendance Policy

It is a federal requirement that students who do not attend or cease to attend a class to be reported at the time of determination by the faculty. Faculty should use "ESPR" and "MSPR" in Orange SUccess to alert the Office of the Registrar and the Office of Financial Aid. A grade of NA is posted to any student for whom the Never Attended flag is raised in Orange SUccess. More information regarding Orange SUccess can be found here, at http://orangesuccess.syr.edu/getting-started-2/.

Students should also review the University's religious observance policy and make the required arrangements at the beginning of each semester.

Syracuse University Policies:

Syracuse University has a variety of other policies designed to guarantee that students live and study in a community respectful of their needs and those of fellow students. Some of the most important of these concern:

Diversity and Disability (ensuring that students are aware of their rights and responsibilities in a diverse, inclusive, accessible, bias-free campus community) can be found here, at: https://www.syracuse.edu/life/accessibilitydiversity/.

Religious Observances Notification and Policy (steps to follow to request accommodations for the observance of religious holidays) can be found here, at: http://supolicies.syr.edu/studs/religious_observance.htm

Orange SUccess (tools to access a variety of SU resources, including ways to communicate with advisors and faculty members) can be found here, at: http://orangesuccess.syr.edu/getting-started-2/

Disability-Related Accommodations: Syracuse University values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. There may be aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion and full participation in this course. I invite any student to meet with me to discuss strategies and/or accommodations (academic adjustments) that may be essential to your success and to collaborate with the Center for Disability Resources (CDR) in this process.

If you would like to discuss disability-accommodations or register with CDR, please visit Center for Disability Resources. Please call (315) 443-4498 or email disabilityresources@syr.edu for more detailed information.

CDR is responsible for coordinating disability-related academic accommodations and will work with the student to develop an access plan. Since academic accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact CDR as soon as possible to begin this process. https://disabilityresources.syr.edu/

Academic Integrity Policy:

Syracuse University's Academic Integrity Policy reflects the high value that we, as a university community, place on honesty in academic work. The policy defines our expectations for academic honesty and holds students accountable for the integrity of all work they submit. Students should understand that it is their responsibility to learn about course-specific expectations, as well as about university-wide academic integrity expectations. The policy governs appropriate citation and use of sources, the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments, and the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verification of participation in class activities. The policy also prohibits students from submitting the same work in more than one class without receiving written authorization in advance from both instructors. Under the policy, students found in violation are subject to grade sanctions determined by the course instructor and non-grade sanctions determined by the School or College where the course is offered as described in the Violation and Sanction Classification Rubric. SU students are required to read an online summary of the University's academic integrity expectations and provide an electronic signature agreeing to abide by them twice a year during pre-term check-in on MySlice.

AI policy

Do not use AI to help you complete any assignments for this course. Any use of AI to complete assignments will be seen as an instance of plagiarism and be reported as a violation of academic integrity. If you have any questions about this policy, please contact me so that they can be addressed.

Class Schedule

Week	**Date**	**Topic of Class**	**Reading**
Week 1	Tuesday 14th January	Introduction	Class Syllabus
Week 1	Thursday 16th January	Crash Course: How to argue in philosophy	None
Week 2	Tuesday 21st January	Introduction to Epistemology	None
Week 2	Thursday 23rd January	The Justified True Belief Account of Knowledge	Section 1 of 'The Analysis of Knowledge' by J.J. Ichikawa and Matthias Steup, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*
Week 3	Tuesday 28th January	The Gettier Problem	'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?' by Edmund Gettier
Week 3	Thursday 30th January	Proposed solutions to the Gettier Problem	'A Causal Theory of Knowing' by Alvin Goldman
Week 4	Tuesday 4th February	Proposed solutions to the Gettier Problem	(Continued from previous class)
Week 4	Thursday 6th February	How to write a philosophy essay	None
Week 5	Tuesday 11th February	Does knowledge require certainty?	*Meditation I* by René Descartes
Week 5	Thursday 13th February	Does knowledge require certainty?	'An Argument for Skepticism' by Peter Unger
	Friday 14th February	**EPISTEMOLOGY ESSAY DUE**	
Week 6	Tuesday 18th February	Does knowledge require certainty?	(Continued from previous class)
Week 6	Thursday 20th February	The Problem of Induction	'The Problem of Induction' by Kenneth Blake Vernon (1000 Word Philosophy)

Week 7	Tuesday 25th February	Proposed solutions to the Problem of Induction	None
Week 7	Thursday 27th February	The Paradox of the Ravens	None
Week 8	Tuesday 4th March	Epistemology exam review	Epistemology exam study guide
Week 8	Thursday 6th March	**EPISTEMOLOGY EXAM**	N/A
	Friday 7th March	**REVISIONS TO EPISTEMOLOGY ESSAY DUE**	
SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS	Sunday 9th March - Sunday 16th March		
Week 9	Tuesday 18th March	Introduction to Metaphysics	None
Week 9	Thursday 20th March	Personal Identity and Personal Ontology	Sections 1-5 of 'Personal Identity', by Eric T. Olson, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*
Week 10	Tuesday 25th March	Personal Identity and Personal Ontology	(Continued from previous class)
Week 10	Thursday 27th March	Personal Identity and Personal Ontology	'Materialism and the psychological-continuity account of personal identity' by Peter van Inwagen
Week 11	Tuesday 1st April	Personal Identity and Personal Ontology	'An argument for animalism' by Eric T. Olson
Week 11	Thursday 3rd April	Personal Identity and Personal Ontology	(Continued from previous class)
Week 12	Tuesday 8th April	Parts and Wholes: The Ship of Theseus	None
Week 12	Thursday 10th April	Parts and Wholes: The Statue and the Clay	None
	Friday 11th April	**METAPHYSICS ESSAY DUE**	
Week 13	Tuesday 15th April	Parts and Wholes: Thinkers and Their Parts	'Why I have no hands' by Eric T. Olson

Week 13	Thursday 17th April	Parts and Wholes: The Problem of the Many	None
Week 14	Tuesday 22nd April	Metaphysics exam review	Metaphysics exam study guide
Week 14	Thursday 24th April	**METAPHYSICS EXAM**	N/A
	Friday 25th April	**REVISIONS TO METAPHYSICS ESSAY DUE**	