

PHL-Philosophy Courses

Courses

PHL 100. Introduction to Philosophy. 3 Hours.

Introductory course in the nature, methods, and problems of philosophy. Examples of topics that may be covered are philosophical questions about knowledge and reality, right and wrong, freedom and responsibility. This course meets the Blazer Core Curriculum requirement for History and Meaning.

PHL 115. Contemporary Moral Issues. 3 Hours.

Philosophical exploration of contemporary moral controversies using methods and concepts of moral philosophy. Examples of topics that may be covered are the death penalty, drug laws, free speech, immigration, global poverty, treatment of animals, and climate change. Ethics and Civic Responsibility are significant components of this course. This course meets Blazer Core Reasoning.

PHL 116. Bioethics. 3 Hours.

Philosophical exploration of ethical problems and issues in biomedical and health sciences, using methods and concepts of moral philosophy. Examples of topics that may be covered are euthanasia, abortion, assisted reproduction, provision of healthcare, and use of humans and animals in research. Ethics and Civic Responsibility are significant components of this course. This course meets Blazer Core Reasoning.

PHL 120. Practical Reasoning. 3 Hours.

Survey of skills in critical thinking and scientific reasoning, including the ability to identify different kinds of arguments, recognize common fallacies of reasoning, and evaluate analogical, causal, and statistical arguments. Quantitative Literacy is a significant component of this course. This course meets Blazer Core Reasoning.

PHL 125. Introduction to Ethics. 3 Hours.

Elements of moral philosophy. Moral objectivity; connections among morality, rationality, and religion; nature and significance of moral value. This course meets Blazer Core History and Meaning with a Flag in Post-Freshman Writing.

PHL 135. The Rule of Law. 3 Hours.

Critical examination of legal institutions and processes. Role (and history) of legal institutions within political framework. Covers topics such as the duty to obey the law, civil disobedience, theories of punishment, torts, and contracts. Ethics and Civic Responsibility are significant components of this course.

PHL 200. Philosophy and Popular Music. 3 Hours.

This course explores philosophical themes that arise in popular music. Various popular artists and styles may be focused on in order to explicate philosophical questions that arise in popular music and to investigate the answers to these questions that are provided by the artists themselves and by philosophers. Philosophical issues discussed may include the nature of love, the moral status of revenge, and the value of authenticity.

PHL 203. Philosophy of Religion. 3 Hours.

Religion; its nature, justification, and significance. God, evil, religious experience, faith, and reason. This course meets Blazer Core History and Meaning with a Flag in Post-Freshman Writing.

PHL 204. Philosophy and Christianity. 3 Hours.

What Christians believe and why they believe it; foundations of Christian philosophical thought. Christian concepts of God, Christ, salvation, atonement, faith, and ethics.

PHL 205. Existentialism. 3 Hours.

What Existentialists believe and why they believe it; foundations of Existentialist philosophical thought. Existentialist concepts of freedom, commitment, anxiety, and authenticity.

PHL 207. Meaning of Life: Perspectives. 3 Hours.

This course brings the techniques of philosophy to bear on some of life's most important questions. In particular we examine a variety of answers to the following questions: What is the meaning of life? Can humans have meaningful lives? Is meaning just a matter of subjective satisfaction, or is more required? What makes death a bad thing? Is death bad for the person who dies? What would immortality be like? Would immortality be a good thing? This course meets Blazer Core History and Meaning with a flag in Wellness/Well-being.

PHL 209. Philosophy of Art. 3 Hours.

This course is a philosophical exploration of art, aesthetic expression, appreciation and the role of inspiration. We will explore the artistic expressions of various cultures and time periods searching for commonality and difference. We will examine the views about the nature of art not only of philosophers but of artists themselves.

PHL 213. Ethics of Artificial Intelligence. 3 Hours.

Ethical issues that arise with the present and future use of artificial intelligence (AI). Topics may include: algorithmic bias and transparency; threats to privacy; trust and political polarization in an age of deepfakes; transparency and responsibility in the development and training of AI models; the use of robots in the military and in sex work; solution to the potential mass unemployment of humans; moral rights for sophisticated AI systems; the ethical dilemmas that self-driving cars must navigate; and whether AI is a threat to human existence or flourishing. Students will appreciate and evaluate prominent arguments on these topics, which also requires studying some ethical theories and other frameworks for moral reasoning. This course meets Blazer Core Humans and their Societies with Flags in Justice and Post-Freshman Writing.

PHL 215. History of Moral Philosophy. 3 Hours.

Socrates to present, focusing on historical development of moral tradition that has shaped Western society. Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Hobbes, Hume, Kant, Mill, Nietzsche, and others.

PHL 216. Intermediate Bioethics. 3 Hours.

An in-depth examination of selected issues in Bioethics. Usually 3-4 topics will be selected from the general areas of Death and Dying, Ethical Issues at the Beginning of Human Life, Research Ethics, Justice and Medical Finance, Genetics, and the Doctor-Patient Relationship.

PHL 220. Introduction to Symbolic Logic. 3 Hours.

The study of logic is about identifying the patterns that reasoning has to follow in order to be correct. This course introduces the tools of symbolic logic and teaches students how to employ them to determine whether arguments are valid or invalid. Students will develop skills in both propositional logic and the beginnings of first-order logic. Informal fallacies, counterfactual reasoning, and the limits of symbolic logic may also be covered in this course. There are no prerequisites. This course meets Blazer Core Reasoning.

PHL 225. Environmental Ethics. 3 Hours.

Environmental ethics examines questions concerning the human impact on nature and looks at the social, historical and political forces which have given rise to environmental problems. We will consider whether we have moral obligations to other animals and whether we have direct or only indirect duties to the natural world. We will look at our relationships to food and consider the rise of genetically modified organisms. We will discuss whether there is such a thing as "optimum pollution" and whether our current practices are socially just. We will address specific problems such as globalization, climate change, sustainability and the loss of biodiversity. In addition we will consider the environmental ethics that other cultures have developed.

PHL 230. Social and Political Philosophy. 3 Hours.

Survey of contemporary debates concerning fundamental principles of political life. Topics typically include justification of political authority, the proper role of government in society, economic justice, freedom and rights, and the free enterprise system. Ethics and Civic Responsibility are significant components of this course. This course meets Blazer Core Humans and their Societies with Flags in Justice and Post-Freshman Writing.

PHL 232. Classical Political Thought. 3 Hours.

Development of western political thought from Plato to Augustine. Theories of major political thinkers.

PHL 233. Modern Political Theory. 3 Hours.

Development of Western political thought from the early modern era to contemporary debates in works of Machiavelli to Mill. Theories of major political thinkers.

PHL 239. Eastern Philosophy. 3 Hours.

Topics in Eastern philosophical traditions, such as Chinese philosophy, Indian philosophy, or Buddhism.

PHL 240. History of Philosophy: Socrates Plato and Aristotle. 3 Hours.

Origins and development of Western philosophic tradition, with emphasis on writings of Plato and Aristotle. Concepts of knowledge, reality, and the good life.

PHL 270. Science, Knowledge, and Reality. 3 Hours.

Science; its nature, scope, and significance. Scientific reasoning; science as social institution; ethical issues in science. This course meets Blazer Core Curriculum Humans & their Societies with a flag in Post-Freshman Writing.

PHL 290. Special Topics in Philosophy. 3 Hours.

In-depth examination of one or more problems, authors, or ideas of historical or current interest.

PHL 291. Special Topics in Philosophy. 3 Hours.

In-depth examination of one or more problems, authors, or ideas of historical or current interest.

PHL 292. Special Topics in Philosophy. 3 Hours.

In-depth examination of one or more problems, authors, or ideas of historical or current interest.

PHL 299. Philosophy Service Learning. 3 Hours.

Philosophy in practice with community partners. For instance, enrolled students might coach high school teams to compete in the Alabama High School Ethics Bowl. This course meets Blazer Core City as a Classroom with flags in Post-Freshman Writing and Service Learning and Community-Based Learning.

PHL 309. Teaching Practicum. 3 Hours.

Teaching experience in philosophy courses, supervised by a faculty member. Student must have previously taken the course for which the student will work within. Permission of Department Chair required. Pass/Fail.

PHL 311. Philosophy of Science. 3 Hours.

Philosophical issues concerning the nature of science. Topics may include philosophical debates about scientific evidence; scientific explanation; empiricism, instrumentalism, and realism; the problems of induction; the demarcation problem; theories and models; laws and mechanisms; reduction; causation and explanation; observables vs. unobservables; ethical issues in science; and the social structure and impact of science.

PHL 312. Philosophy of Biology. 3 Hours.

This course surveys issues in contemporary philosophy of biology and some closely related issues. Much of the focus may be on philosophical issues concerning evolutionary biology, but issues in developmental biology, molecular biology, and immunology may also be considered. No background in biology is required. Philosophical issues involving evolution and ethics, nature vs. nurture, evolution and psychology, biological mechanisms and models, species and human nature, evolution and intelligent design, and natural selection and chance may be discussed.

PHL 314. Philosophy and Feminism. 3 Hours.

Feminism; conceptual foundations, scope, and applications. Problems typically include, among others, feminist concepts of gender, reasoning, knowledge, and ethics. Prerequisite: One previous PHL course or permission of instructor.

PHL 315. Ethics: Theories of Good and Evil. 3 Hours.

Morality; its nature, principles, and scope. Normative and critical problems in moral philosophy; moral obligation. One previous PHL course or permission of instructor required.

PHL 318. Ethics of War. 3 Hours.

This course examines the just war theory that originated in the early years of Christianity and that has developed into a secular doctrine and the basis of international law. We will discuss the issues facing this doctrine and how it applies to recent wars.

PHL 331. Family and Philosophy. 3 Hours.

This course focuses primarily on key questions about the family: Is family a useful institution? What should it look like in order to make people's lives go better? When should the state interfere with the workings of a particular family, or families in general? Who should be able to rear children? What rights/obligations do those who rear children have? This course examines both philosophical arguments and policy or practice implications of various answers to those questions.

PHL 335. Philosophy of Law. 3 Hours.

Theories of the nature of law (natural law, realism, positivism, critical legal theory); interpretation of precedents, statutes, and Constitution; Constitutional protections such as freedom of speech and religion and the right of privacy; selected issues in criminal and civil law. Ethics and Civic responsibility are significant components of this course.

PHL 341. History of Philosophy: Descartes to Hume. 3 Hours.

Philosophy in modern era, focusing on continental rationalism and British empiricism; emphasis on theories of knowledge and reality; science, religion, and modernism. One previous PHL course or permission of instructor required. Writing is a significant component of this course.

PHL 342. History of Philosophy: From Kant to Nietzsche. 3 Hours.

Western philosophic tradition from Kant through Nietzsche. Kant, Hegel, Marx, Kierkegaard, and Mill, among others.

PHL 343. History of Philosophy: Twentieth Century. 3 Hours.

Major movements and problems of twentieth century philosophy. Moore, Russell, Wittgenstein, and Quine, among others.

PHL 348. American Philosophy. 3 Hours.

Major philosophers of classical American period; Pierce, James, and Dewey. Origins and nature of American pragmatism. One previous PHL course or permission of instructor required.

PHL 350. Philosophy of Language. 3 Hours.

Language; its nature, structure, and uses. Reference, meaning, communication, and interpretation; Russell, Wittgenstein, Chomsky, and Quine, among others. One previous PHL course or permission of instructor required.

PHL 372. Minds and Machines. 3 Hours.

Artificial intelligence; its philosophical foundations and implications. Topics may include mind-body problem, nature of intelligence, machine models of mind, computational processes, and mental representation. One previous PHL course or permission of instructor required.

PHL 375. Philosophy of Mind. 3 Hours.

Mind; its nature, forms, and functions. Topics may include: concepts of mind/body, consciousness, rationality, and personal identity; free will. One previous PHL course or permission of instructor required. Writing is a significant component of this course.

PHL 390. Special Topics in Philosophy. 3 Hours.

This course is a seminar whose content may be different each time it is taught. It provides instructors with the opportunity to deal with topics that may not be considered in any other course or which may be treated in another course but only at an introductory level. Topics may include: special topics in some area of philosophy, interdisciplinary issues, and important work or works by a great philosopher.

PHL 391. Special Topics in Philosophy. 3 Hours.

This course is a seminar whose content may be different each time it is taught. It provides instructors with the opportunity to deal with topics that may not be considered in any other course or which may be treated in another course but only at an introductory level. Topics may include: special topics in some area of philosophy, interdisciplinary issues, and important work or works by a great philosopher. One previous PHL course or permission of instructor required.

PHL 392. Special Topics in Philosophy. 3 Hours.

This course is a seminar whose content may be different each time it is taught. It provides instructors with the opportunity to deal with topics that may not be considered in any other course or which may be treated in another course but only at an introductory level. Topics may include: special topics in some area of philosophy, interdisciplinary issues, and important work or works by a great philosopher. One previous PHL course or permission of instructor required.

PHL 400. Advanced Methods in Philosophy. 3 Hours.

The goal of this course is for students to improve their fluency in the primary methodologies of analytic philosophy. These methods include the construction and evaluation of deductive arguments, the presentation and interpretation of evidence, and the recognition and avoidance of fallacious reasoning. To cultivate students' skills in these methods, we will read a series of influential articles from different areas of analytic philosophy and examine the methodologies they employ. Students will complete a series of assignments in which they analyze the deployment of philosophical methods in these articles and construct responses. This course builds upon the training in close reading and careful writing of philosophical texts that students have already had in their other undergraduate courses. Importantly, this course can serve as a bridge to advanced study by preparing students for graduate studies in philosophy.

PHL 401. Advanced Bioethics. 3 Hours.

This course is an in-depth examination of ethical issues related to life, death, and health (for humans and nonhuman organisms). A breadth of areas in bioethics is covered, including some mixture of medical practice, public health, responsible biomedical research, animal care and use, and environmental sustainability. Specific topics might include end of life care, assisted reproduction, healthcare finance, addiction, neurodiversity, human subjects research, and animal experimentation. Students examine real case studies and policy proposals, ethical theories and analysis, principles of scientific literacy, and arguments on both sides of bioethical controversies. In addition to analyzing issues and arguments, students acquire skills in writing and communicating effectively about moral issues.

PHL 402. Neuroethics. 3 Hours.

Ethical issues related to neuroscience and other sciences of the mind. Topics typically include: privacy and side effects of brain technologies; neuroscientific threats to free will; moral responsibility and mental illness; emotion and reason in moral judgment; cognitive enhancement and personality change; ethically sound research practices. A previous course in Philosophy is recommended. Ethics and Civic Responsibility are significant components of this course.

PHL 403. Philosophy of Artificial Intelligence. 3 Hours.

This course employs the tools of philosophy to ask what AI is and how we should engage with it. Making progress in understanding the nature of AI will involve surveying influential philosophical work on intelligence, computation, agency, consciousness, responsibility, and creativity. To consider how we should engage with AI, we will make contact with contemporary philosophical work on the epistemological, ethical, metaphysical, societal, and aesthetic puzzles that AI gives rise to. This course will proceed with a mixture of lecture and discussion as we work together to make sense of what it means to live in the AI era.

PHL 404. Medical Epistemology. 3 Hours.

This course examines epistemological issues arising in medicine. Topics typically include: the nature of evidence-based medicine and controversies surrounding it, debates about evidential hierarchies, placebos and masking, mechanistic reasoning, medical expertise, replicability, effect sizes, and the extent to which money and other factors influence both research and medical practice. Ultimately, the aim of the course is better understanding of the nature and extent of medical knowledge.

PHL 405. Epistemology: Theories of Knowledge. 3 Hours.

Human knowledge; its nature, sources, and limits. Concepts of truth, objectivity, evidence, and belief. Two previous PHL courses or permission of instructor required. Writing is a significant component of this course.

PHL 406. Ethical Theory. 3 Hours.

This course covers some of the central debates in moral theory. Various theories of right and wrong, such as consequentialism, deontology, and virtue ethics, will be considered. Students will understand how these theories differ, examine arguments for and against particular theories, and apply them to real-world scenarios. Other topics covered may include moral responsibility and the role of moral theory in human life.

PHL 407. Philosophical Issues in Research Ethics. 3 Hours.

This course examines the ethical principles and standards governing research as well as the philosophical moral theories undergirding those principles and standards. Students will explore key ethical concepts, philosophical moral theories, relevant laws and regulations, and emerging ethical challenges in scientific inquiry. Common topics include informed consent, respect for vulnerable populations, research misconduct, privacy of information collected, ethical use of animals in research, gene editing, confidentiality, conflicts of interest, publishing ethics and authorship, ethical citations, as well as fraud.

PHL 408. Metaphysics. 3 Hours.

Reality; its basic elements, principles of existence and identity, and appearance and reality. Concepts of cause, matter, mind, realism, and anti-realism. Two previous PHL courses or permission of instructor required.

PHL 415. Metaethics. 3 Hours.

Metaethics is the area of moral philosophy that has to do with the nature of morality. It deals with questions such as: Is morality objective? Is there really such a thing as right and wrong? Does our moral discourse express beliefs or just feelings? Do we necessarily have reasons to be moral? Two prior PHL courses or permission of instructor required. Writing is a significant component of the course.

PHL 435. Advanced Topics in Philosophy of Law. 3 Hours.

An in-depth examination of a single topic in the law. Discussion based course with significant reading and writing requirements. Potential topics include free speech, inchoate crimes, punishment, and legal responsibility.

PHL 436. Bioethics and the Law. 3 Hours.

This course will cover a range of questions in bioethics—both persistent and new/post-Covid—and explore both ethical and legal approaches to addressing those problems. We will consider patient autonomy, privacy, parents' rights to make medical decisions for their children, access to healthcare, public health, and research, among other topics. Each week, we will read both philosophical arguments and legal cases to identify and evaluate the differences in their approaches, as well as to better understand the current legal landscape in the healthcare environment.

PHL 441. History of Philosophy: Descartes to Hume. 3 Hours.

Philosophy in modern era, focusing on continental rationalism and British empiricism; emphasis on theories of knowledge and reality; science, religion, and modernism. Writing is a significant component of this course.

PHL 442. History of Philosophy: From Kant to Nietzsche. 3 Hours.

Western philosophic tradition from Kant to Nietzsche. Kant, Hegel, Marx, Kierkegaard, and Mill, among others. One previous PHL course or permission of instructor required.

PHL 443. History of Philosophy: Twentieth Century. 3 Hours.

Major movements and problems of twentieth century philosophy. Moore, Russell, Wittgenstein, and Quine, among others. Two previous PHL courses or permission of instructor required.

PHL 470. Philosophical Problems in the Natural and Social Sciences. 3 Hours.

Nature and uses of science. Topics may include: concepts of explanation, confirmation, scientific law, and theory; special problems in sciences. Two previous PHL courses or permission of instructor required.

PHL 471. The Scientific Enterprise. 3 Hours.

This course examines the nature, methods, and implications of scientific inquiry. Students delve into foundational questions about empirical theories, scientific explanation, and the demarcation between science and non-science. Topics may include: the role of observation, experiment, and modeling, the nature of scientific laws, the problem of induction, the philosophy of scientific realism, and other more specialized topics such as, e.g., model usage in pandemics or conceptualizing particular diseases. Students will develop critical thinking skills and a deeper understanding of the philosophical underpinnings of scientific knowledge.

PHL 475. Philosophy of Mind. 3 Hours.

The course concerns the nature, form, and functions of the mind. Topics covered may include consciousness, the mind-body problem, intentionality and mental content, artificial intelligence, and the nature of mental states such as perception, belief, pleasure, and desire.

PHL 480. Advanced Topics in the Ethics of AI. 3 Hours.

This course is a philosophical examination of some of the most pressing ethical questions raised by the emergence of powerful AI. We will consider what sort of reliance on AI is morally permissible, under what circumstances the development of AI is itself morally permissible, and how humans should respond to the ethical dilemmas imposed upon us by AI. We will explore ethical dimensions of algorithmic bias, autonomous systems, trust and transparency, intellectual property, privacy, existential risk, and the prospects for morally responsible AI.

PHL 490. Philosophy Seminar. 3 Hours.

In-depth survey of either a topic or individual author of current interest. A systematic survey using previous course work in the main areas of philosophy to produce a substantial paper. Emphasis on detailed analysis of the structure of arguments and standards for empirical evidence where relevant. Proper standards for citation and attribution. Course fulfills capstone requirement for Seniors.

PHL 491. Philosophy Seminar. 3 Hours.

In-depth survey of either a topic or individual author of current interest. A systematic survey using previous course work in the main areas of philosophy to produce a substantial paper. Emphasis on detailed analysis of the structure of arguments and standards for empirical evidence where relevant. Proper standards for citation and attribution. This course fulfills the capstone requirement for seniors.

PHL 492. Philosophy Seminar. 3 Hours.

In-depth survey of either a topic or individual author of current interest. A systematic survey using previous course work in the main areas of philosophy to produce a substantial paper. Emphasis on detailed analysis of the structure of arguments and standards for empirical evidence where relevant. Proper standards for citation and attribution. This course fulfills the capstone requirement for seniors.

PHL 493. Philosophy Seminar. 3 Hours.

In-depth survey of either a topic or individual author of current interest. A systematic survey in the main areas of philosophy to produce a substantial paper. Emphasis on detailed analysis of the structure of arguments and standards for empirical evidence where relevant. Proper standards for citation and attribution.

PHL 498. Philosophy Internship. 1-3 Hour.

On-campus and off-campus training positions in fields utilizing critical language and writing skills. Students should contact the Department Chair to discuss available positions and application procedures. Student must be a Philosophy major or minor.

PHL 499. Directed Studies. 1-3 Hour.

Special arrangement opportunity for in-depth study. Permission of Instructor Only.