Core 280: Introduction to Philosophy  
Master Syllabus

Catalog Description:

An introduction to the central problems and major figures in the history of philosophical thought. Topics include the meaning and purpose of human existence, the ultimate nature of reality, the foundations and limits of human understanding, and the basic norms of right and wrong.

Introduction:

Philosophy is the attempt to answer, through rational reflection, the deepest and most fundamental questions of human existence. What is the meaning of life? How can people achieve true happiness and fulfillment? Does God exist? Why should we be moral? How should we decide what is ethical? Are people really free, or are our actions all determined by genetics and environment? Do humans have souls, or are we just physically complex organisms? How can we really know anything? Is there life after death? Through the centuries, extraordinarily wise people have wrestled with these questions and have left us the equivalent of a huge bank account of wisdom upon which we can draw. This course invites students to reflect on these perennial issues in critical engagement with the great thinkers of the past.

Specific Learning Objectives:

As a result of taking this course, students should be able to:

1. demonstrate an introductory-level familiarity with the major figures and developments in the history of Western philosophy;

2. demonstrate an introductory-level familiarity with the major subject areas of philosophy (including ethics, metaphysics, epistemology, political philosophy, and philosophy of religion) and the central issues and questions addressed in those subject areas;

3. demonstrate an introductory-level ability to formulate, express, and defend their own views on the philosophical issues discussed in the course;

4. write an argumentative and/or critical essay on a philosophical topic that meets the assessment standards for argumentative and/or critical essays students learned in Core 100 (Critical Thinking) and Core 110 (Effective Writing).
**General Learning Goals:**

As a result of taking this course, students should:

1. come to appreciate the value of philosophical reflection in Western civilization and in the life of every liberally educated person;

2. form the lifelong habit of philosophizing and leading an examined life;

3. form the lifelong habit of reading and rereading classic and contemporary philosophical texts that they find interesting and relevant;

4. begin to develop their own critically reflective philosophy of life;

5. understand the practical value of philosophy in clarifying and contributing to current social and political debates.

**Assessment Measures:**

1. Instructors may, if they choose, administer a pre- and post-test to assess key student learning outcomes.

2. Three or four tests (one scheduled early in the course) to assess students’ mastery of the course material.

3. Periodic quizzes (at the instructor’s discretion) to encourage students to keep up with course readings and to measure their progress in the course;

4. One major writing assignment—either a critical essay or an argumentative essay—to assess students’ ability to analyze and evaluate philosophical texts and to formulate and defend their own philosophical views.

5. A focused assessment of one of the objectives in the Master Syllabus in two or more courses by members of the Core Philosophy Project Team.

6. Teaching and/or course evaluations administered at the conclusion of the course.

**Required Text(s):**

Each instructor may choose a text or texts best suited to his or her pedagogical goals and individual teaching style.