

Professor: Jennifer Rose Carr

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Office Hours: T 4–6 on Zoom

sign up in advance on Canvas

## 1 Overview

This course is an introductory survey of epistemology: the theory of knowledge and rational belief. We'll discuss a wide range of topics, including: whether we can really *know* anything; the possibility that we might be living in a simulation; whether we can rationally hold beliefs about the external world, given the possibility that we might be living in a simulation; whether “knowledge” can be defined or analyzed; what we talk about when we talk about knowledge; what makes a belief rational or justified; whether we're in any position to know whether we're rational; whether beliefs come in degrees and how degrees of belief can be evaluated; and how to reason clearly and rigorously in the face of uncertainty.

**Readings:** All readings will be available on Perusall. The course has no required textbook.

**Advice:** This class will not be an easy A or even an easy B. In order to do well in this class, you will need to attend class consistently, complete all readings before class, and most importantly, *ask questions when you're confused about something*. Even if you think the answer might be obvious to other students. Even if you think it was already answered in class, but you accidentally tuned out the answer. In order to receive a passing grade on your papers, you will need to show a strong understanding of the topics under discussion in this course and to develop your own original philosophical arguments.

## 2 Assignments

- Three short papers: 69% (23% × three papers)
- In-class discussion: 14%
- Perusall annotations twice weekly: 17%

### 2.1 Papers

Paper topics will be circulated for each paper. If you'd like to write on some other topic, you must explain your idea to me and receive permission from me at least two days in advance. Papers must be a minimum of 1200 words (approximately four pages). I strongly suggest you start work on your papers early, and outline your ideas before you begin drafting them in prose.

Extensions will be granted leniently, but must be requested at least 12 hours in advance. Without an extension, late papers will be deducted one third of a letter grade per day (A will become A–, B+ will become B, etc.).

### 2.2 Perusall

Perusall is a collaborative reading/annotating service. You'll be required to submit Perusall comments on each reading **by 4:30pm** on the class when the reading is due. Full credit requires **at least four high-quality comments** per session readings. More details on the course website on how Perusall annotations are graded. You may miss up to two assignments without affecting your grade. Responses to others' comments count for credit.

Late comments can receive credit for up to three days after the deadline, but their value decreases linearly over those three days. You can view your scores in the Perusall gradebook; they won't be synced to Canvas.

### 2.3 In-class discussion

You'll be expected to participate at least a few times weekly. This may include small group discussions, full-class discussions, and low-stakes cold-calling. Because this class is discussion-based, any more than **two** absences from lecture or section will result in a reduction of your in-class grade, except in case of illness or other special circumstances. If you think your circumstances warrant more than two absences, please contact me before each further class that you miss.

## 3 Policies

**Laptop/tablet/phone policy:** Use of laptops, tablets, and phones won't be permitted in class, except in special cases. Contact me for permission if you have specific reasons why you will need to use any of these devices.<sup>1</sup>

**Email policy:** I'm happy to answer logistical questions via email. If you'd like to ask detailed philosophical questions, please come to my office hours or schedule a meeting.

## 4 Academic Integrity

Please familiarize yourself with [university policies](#) on plagiarism, cheating, and academic integrity. Note: "plagiarism," in academic contexts, is defined very broadly. It includes any presentation of others' ideas without proper attribution, even paraphrased, even from informal resources. Proper attribution requires both in-text citation and bibliographic citation.

Note also that plagiarism need not be knowing or intentional to be penalizable. *Always err on the side of citing any sources that have influenced your thinking.*

Any form of cheating or plagiarism will be reported immediately. Penalties for academic integrity infractions may include failing the assignment, failing the course, suspension, and expulsion.

Some behaviors that count as cheating or plagiarism: copying or paraphrasing in your papers other people's ideas without both main text and bibliographic citations—this includes websites (educational websites, blogs, Reddit, you name it), chats with your roommate, info in my slides, the readings, etc.; collaborating on your papers with anyone; having someone translate your paper for the class; and so on. This list is not exhaustive. Use good judgment and ask questions.

## 5 Accommodations

Students requesting accommodations for this course due to a disability must provide a current Authorization for Accommodation (AFA) letter issued by the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) which is located in University Center 202 behind Center Hall. Students are required to present their AFA letters to Faculty (please

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<sup>1</sup> Justification: Undergraduates who use laptops in lecture spend 40% of their time using non-course-related software. Academic performance is inversely correlated with multitasking on laptops. Even controlling for multitasking, students who take notes on laptops show reduced comprehension, in short and medium-term examination, compared with students who take notes by hand. Most importantly: being seated near someone using a screen to multitask impedes academic performance. See Mueller & Oppenheimer (2014), "The Pen Is Mightier Than the Keyboard: Advantages of Longhand Over Laptop Note Taking," *Psychological Science*; Kraushaar & Novak (2010), "Examining the Affects of Student Multitasking with Laptops during the Lecture," *Journal of Information Systems Education*; Sanaa, Weston, Cepedab (2013), "Laptop multitasking hinders classroom learning for both users and nearby peers," *Computers & Education*.

make arrangements to contact me privately) and to the OSD Liaison in the department in advance so that accommodations may be arranged.

(858) 534-4382 (phone) | [osd@ucsd.edu](mailto:osd@ucsd.edu) (email) | <http://disabilities.ucsd.edu> (website)

## 6 Tentative schedule

This schedule is subject to change.

### Week 1 *Skepticism*

- Mon. Sept. 26 Introduction
- Wed. Sept. 28 Descartes, *Meditations* 1 and 2;  
Stroud, "The Problem of the External World"

### Week 2 *Responses to Skepticism*

- Mon. Oct. 3 Moore, "Proof of an External World"; "Four Forms of Scepticism"; "Certainty"
- Wed. Oct. 5 Bostrom, "Are You Living in a Computer Simulation?"

### Week 3 *Skepticism and Language*

- Mon. Oct. 10 Unger, "An Argument for Skepticism"  
DeRose "Solving the Skeptical Problem" (§1-3)
- Wed. Oct. 12 **Class canceled**

### Week 4 *The Structure of Justification: Foundationalism and Coherentism*

- Mon. Oct. 17 Chisholm, "The Myth of the Given"
- Wed. Oct. 19 Bonjour, "Can Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation?" *paper 1 due Sat. 5pm*

### Week 5 *The Analysis of Knowledge*

- Mon. Oct. 24 Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?"  
Feldman, "Modifying the Traditional Analysis of Knowledge"
- Wed. Oct. 26 Williamson, "A State of Mind"

### Week 6 *Epistemic Externalism*

- Mon. Oct. 31 Goldman, "A Causal Theory of Knowing"
- Wed. Nov. 2 Goldman, "What is Justified Belief?"

### Week 7 *Against Externalism*

- Mon. Nov. 7 Conee and Feldman, "The Generality Problem for Reliabilism" (skip §4)
- Wed. Nov. 9 Conee and Feldman, "Evidentialism"

### Week 8 *Truth-Tracking*

- Mon. Nov. 14 Nozick, "Knowledge and Skepticism"
- Wed. Nov. 16 Vogel, "Reliabilism Leveled" *paper 2 due Sat. 5pm*

**Week 9** *Skepticism about Induction*

Mon. Nov. 21 Hume, Excerpts from *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*

Wed. Nov. 23 Nelson Goodman, "The New Riddle of Induction"

**Week 10** *Social Epistemology*

Mon. Nov. 28 Nguyen, "Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles"

Wed. Nov. 30 Rebecca Mason, "Hermeneutical Injustice"

*paper 3 due Mon. Dec. 5 10pm*