

J. Carr

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Office hours:

F 2-4 & by appt.¹
Arts & Humanities 0466

1 COURSE DESCRIPTION

The topic of this course: what we talk about when we talk about credence, belief, and knowledge. We'll discuss the relation between outright beliefs and subjective probabilities, and between probabilities and knowledge. We'll give special attention to semantic ascent as a methodology in epistemology, which has become popular in recent epistemology and philosophy of language. We'll explore how understanding the language of belief, knowledge, and uncertainty can shed light on first-order epistemological problems, and how theories of epistemic states can inform semantic theorizing. In addition to touching on both foundational and trendy recent literatures in epistemology—with a special emphasis on Sarah Moss's book *Probabilistic Knowledge*—this course will provide a gentle introduction to the (meta)-semantics of modals.

This course has no prerequisites. I will aim to presuppose as little as possible.

2 GRADING

- **15% seminar discussion:** bring a question or two (or three or...) to every session of the class. Our discussion will be mainly organized around working through your questions, which we'll collect toward the beginning.
- **15% presentation:** summarize and provide commentary on a reading (\approx 15 minutes, not including interruptions; including interruptions, may take up to half a session). Provide slides or a handout.
- **70% term paper(s):**
 - ▷ **Option 1:** two separate conference-length papers (2500–4000 words), one submitted mid-term and one submitted as a final paper, each worth 35% of your grade. This is meant to give practice writing short papers for APA submissions and other CFPs.
 - ▷ **Option 2:** one full-length final paper (6000–10,000 words).

3 PARTICIPATION GUIDELINES

I strongly encourage students to ask questions that they worry might be too basic. If you aren't shy about asking questions and risking seeming unimpressive, you will learn much more—and therefore be more impressive in the future.

No using laptops in class without receiving prior permission from me, and only for good reasons. Tablets are okay, but not if they're functionally laptops (i.e. they ought to be flat on the table).

¹ My other course has 400 students, so probably just make an appointment. Zoom and in-person are both fine.

4 TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

All readings are subject to change.

Session 1. *Beliefs and credences*

- Leitgeb, *The Stability Theory of Belief*, 1.1–1.6

Session 2. *Context-sensitivity in epistemology*

- Hawthorne, Rothschild, and Spectre, “Belief is Weak”
- Greco, “How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Probability 1”

Session 3. *Question-sensitivity of belief*

- Leitgeb, *The Stability Theory of Belief*, Ch. 2
- Yalcin, “Belief is question-sensitive”

Session 4. *Probabilistic contents*

- Egan, Hawthorne, and Weatherson, “Epistemic Modals in Context”
- Moss, “The case for probabilistic contents,” “The case for probabilistic assertion”
- *Optional:* Stalnaker, “Assertion”

Session 5. *Epistemic modals*

- Yalcin, “Epistemic Modals”
- Moss, “Epistemic Modals and Probability Operators”
- *Optional:* Swanson, “Modality in Language”

Session 6. *Conditionals*

- Moss, “Indicative Conditionals”
- Hájek, “The Fall of ‘Adams’ Thesis?”
- *Optional:* Swanson, “Probability in Philosophy of Language”

Session 7. *Probabilistic knowledge*

- Williamson, *Knowledge and its Limits*, Ch. 10, “Evidential Probability”
- Moss, “The Case For Probabilistic Knowledge”

Session 8. *Credence and knowledge*

- Williamson, *Knowledge and Its Limits*, 41–48.
- Williamson, “Knowledge, Credence, and the Strength of Belief”
- Goodman, “The Myth of Full Belief”

Session 9. *Beliefs and guessing*

- Holguín, “Thinking, Guessing, and Believing”

- Dorst and Mandelkern, “Good Guesses”
- *Optional:* Mandelkern and Dorst, “Assertion Is Weak”

Session 10. *TBA*