Senior Seminar: Philosophy and Current Events

Congratulations! You’re about to graduate with a philosophy degree, after which you’ll spend the rest of your life trying to prove your parents wrong when they called you crazy for majoring in such a useless subject. One way you’ll do this is, I’m sure, is by becoming fabulously wealthy. But you’ll also do this by using your philosophy skills to make the world a better place. I know this, because in this course we’ll practice doing just that by reading and writing philosophy that engages with topical contemporary issues: pandemics, online misinformation, climate change, and whatever 2021 has in store for us. (Alien invasion?). I’ll get us started, after which we’ll work together to select topics. The course is in-person, until it isn’t. Do your yoga, because we’ll need to be flexible.

Objective 1: Have a chance to prove/show off all the skills you’ve gained along the way.
Objective 2: Unlearn how to write in an inaccessible, overly academic style. Learn how to spread philosophical wisdom in ways accessible to normal people.
Objective 3: Leave with a plan for how your philosophy degree will help further your personal and professional goals.

Textbooks are a scam, and you’re not fabulously wealthy (yet). So no required texts.

I can’t do anything about tuition, sorry.
Assignment 1: Participation 25%
This is a seminar. That means you show up and contribute. We only meet once a week, so you get one excused absence, no questions asked, and every other absence affects your grade.

Assignment 2: Weekly Responses 25%
Seminars only work if you all do the readings. Weekly 1 page reading responses are how I make sure you do the readings.

Assignment 3: Small Writing Assignments 25%
Along the way we’ll do small writing assignments on our chosen topics, with an emphasis on public philosophy: blog posts, letters to the editor, and other formats for communicating philosophical ideas to the general public.

Assignment 4: Philosophy Paper 25%
If I don’t assign a traditional term paper in Senior Seminar, they revoke my PhD.
You’ll pick a topic in consultation with me, and get feedback on drafts from your peers.

Bonus Assignment 5: Speak Up
Life kinda sucks right now. If at some point in the semester you’re struggling to keep up, let me know and we can shuffle around deadlines and stuff to make sure that you don’t get left behind. I don’t need to know the details of your trials and tribulations, just that you need some extra attention.
So don’t be afraid to reach out to me. It’s literally my job to make time for you, when it comes to your academic success.
Honesty:
You are encouraged to use any available resources, including your peers, to understand readings and prepare for assignments, but submitted work must be your own, and follow appropriate citation practices.

It is your responsibility to be familiar with university policy on academic honesty: http://regulations.utah.edu/academics/6-400.php

Environment:

I aim to make our classroom a safe, welcoming environment for you, and require that you do the same for your peers. While disagreement and debate is encouraged, hostility and aggression will not be tolerated.

Support:

The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services, and activities for people with disabilities. If you will need accommodations in this class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the Center for Disability Services, 162 Olpin Union Building, (801) 581-5020. CDS will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations. All written information in this course can be made available in an alternative format with prior notification to the Center for Disability Services

Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender (which includes sexual orientation and gender identity/expression) is a civil rights offense subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, color, religion, age, status as a person with a disability, veteran’s status or genetic information. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you are encouraged to report it to the Title IX Coordinator in the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, 135 Park Building, 801-581-8365, or the Office of the Dean of Students, 270 Union Building, 801-581-7066. For support and confidential consultation, contact the Center for Student Wellness, 426 SSB, 801-581-7776. To report to the police, contact the Department of Public Safety, 801-585-2677 (COPS)

This syllabus is subject to change:
Conditions are dynamic right now; we may need to rethink anything on this syllabus. That’s why I made it in InDesign rather than etching it into a bronze plaque.