

Department: Philosophy

Course No: 101

Credits: 3

Title: Problems of Philosophy

Contact: Donald Baxter

Content Area: CA1-Arts and Humanities

Catalog Copy: PHIL. 101 - Problems of Philosophy:

Either semester. Three credits. No student may receive more than 6 credits for PHIL 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106.

Topics may include skepticism, proofs of God, knowledge of the external world, induction, free-will, the problem of evil, miracles, liberty and equality.

Course Information: 1.a. Problems of Philosophy serves as a general introduction to philosophical theory and technique. Emphasis is placed on clear, objective, and precise thought as well as on standard techniques of philosophical argumentation.

1.b.Exam formats vary with instructor, but include in-class and take home exams. Weekly assignments typically run from 10-20 pages of reading from standard philosophical texts. Writing assignments may include extended philosophical essays, ranging from 3-6 pages as well as occasional, small one page assignments.

1.c. Topics may include skepticism, proofs of God, knowledge of the external world, induction, free-will, the problem of evil, miracles, liberty and equality.

Meets Goals of Gen Ed: Problems of Philosophy meets the following goals of General Education: (1) Acquire intellectual breadth and versatility; (2) Acquire critical judgement; and (3) Acquire a working understanding of the processes by which they can continue to acquire and use knowledge.

(1) Students in Phil. 101 are asked to explore a variety of philosophical questions ranging from the existence of God, to the relation of mind and brain, free will, and how we can have knowledge of the external world. The topics discussed are intentionally broad ranging, with the goal in mind that students learn to develop their own views on the issues, by addressing past opinions on the topics, by presenting them with unfamiliar opinions/options, and by having the students test and explore their own intellectual values. Throughout the course, strategies and techniques for dealing with the issues addressed are stressed so that students can learn how to apply these techniques in new and different circumstances.

(2) Philosophy, in general, concerns the application of critical judgement to a variety of familiar and unfamiliar situations and students in Phil. 101 are asked to exercise their critical faculties in just these ways. A standard section of Phil. 101 concerns how arguments in general work, and students are introduced to the ideas of valid and sound deductive arguments, as well as inductive and abductive arguments. Informal fallacies, due to either to prejudice or mere sloppy thought, are pointed out where they typically occur within certain dialectics, assumptions are never taken for granted but are questioned and tested, and the emphasis is always on helping students to discriminate good from bad arguments. The point of the course, as a whole, is the promotion of clear, critical, sound, precise and objective practices of judgment which the students can take an use throughout their lives in situations that are not obviously "philosophical".

(3) An introduction to the theory of knowledge and its acquisition (epistemology) is a standard element of Phil. 101 and is typically presented either by way of skepticism about the external world or through a discussion of idealism vs. realism. The topic of when we are justified in holding our beliefs is stressed throughout (and is obviously related to (2) above concerning critical judgment). Students learn to understand the role of representation in thought, via discussions concerning the relationships between believing and the way the world is, and are taught skills to allow them to continue to be reflectively critical of both old assumptions and new information. In general, students learn to question their own beliefs so that they may avoid believing in a dogmatic fashion and are presented with problems which are designed to make intellectual contemplation both fascinating and generally useful."

CA1 Criteria: Problems of Philosophy meets the criteria for Group I, Arts and Humanities insofar as it provides "inquires into philosophical and/or political theory". Students not only learn about theories of great philosophers, but through in-class discussion and writing assignments learn also how to engage with and critique those theories. This approach, standard in our philosophy courses, helps students to think for themselves and to appreciate and remember the efforts of others.

Role of Grad Students: Graduate students serve as teaching assistants for large lectures of the course and occasionally serve as the primary teachers of their own sections. They are supervised by the lecturer or by the Director of Graduate Studies in the Philosophy Department.