

Department: Philosophy

Course No: 104

Credits: 3

Title: Philosophy and Social Ethics

Contact: Donald Baxter

Content Area: CA1-Arts and Humanities

Catalog Copy: 104. Philosophy and Social Ethics

Either semester. Three credits. No student may receive more than 6 credits for PHIL 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 1xx.

Ethical theory and its application to contemporary moral, social, and political issues. Major themes include the nature of the good life, the extent of individual liberty, and the basis of human rights. Issues vary by semester but may include abortion, capital punishment, euthanasia, animal experimentation, affirmative action, censorship, hate speech, just war, terrorism, or world hunger.

Course Information: Goals: The first goal of any introductory philosophy course is to help students develop the ability to think, read, and write critically. Phil 104 focuses in particular on developing the ability to think critically about the important moral and social issues of our day. In the process, students learn general moral principles and how philosophers seek to justify them.

-Requirements: The precise requirements vary by semester, but the norm is to include 2 or 3 in-class essay exams. Students also write a variety of short argumentative essays and take quizzes on the reading.

-Major themes include: (1) moral theory (Utilitarianism, Kantianism, Social Contract Theory, Natural Law Theory, Virtue Ethics, Feminist Ethics); (2) moral issues (e.g., abortion, euthanasia, animal experimentation); (3) social issues (e.g., capital punishment, hate speech, censorship, affirmative action, welfare); and (4) metaethics (Are there facts about right and wrong? Are right and wrong relative to a society or individual? Is morality merely a matter of taste? Is it rational to act morally?)

Meets Goals of Gen Ed: The stated goal of general education is to ensure that students become articulate, that they develop intellectual breadth and versatility, and that they acquire such attributes as critical judgment, moral sensitivity, an awareness of their era and society, an appreciation of diversity, and an understanding of processes by which knowledge is acquired. Philosophy 104 contributes directly to all of these central aims. Like any philosophy course, Phil 104 focuses on analyzing arguments, critiquing assumptions, and identifying problematic inferences-- in short, all skills essential for critical judgment. Since such reasoning plays an indispensable role in the acquisition and use of all sorts of

knowledge_moral, social, scientific_it leads to a better understanding of processes whereby knowledge is gained and employed. By applying critical thinking skills to some of today's most controversial issues, moreover, it develops an understanding of our society and our era. The emphasis on ethics cultivates moral sensitivity by providing students with the means to think about their own responsibilities and about the wellbeing of others. By requiring a careful analysis of difficult texts, it breeds literacy, and by requiring them to articulate difficult ideas in essays and discussions, and it practices skills of written and verbal expression. Finally, Phil 104 requires students to examine difficult issues from other people's points of view and thus contributes to their appreciation of diversity. In general, the course helps students to become the sort of independent, knowledgeable, and conscientious citizen that a functioning democracy requires.

CA1 Criteria: For Group 1 (Arts and Humanities). Courses in the arts and humanities are supposed (among other things) to conduct inquiries into philosophical and/or political theories. Given its content, Phil 104 does both. It also requires critical analyses of current social issues, thus investigating the human experience.

Role of Grad Students: Graduate student assistants will lead discussion sections, grade written work, and assist students in preparing for exams. They are supervised by the faculty member whose twice-weekly lectures the students attend. Regular meetings between faculty and teaching assistants are held to discuss course requirements, teaching techniques, grading, and other issues.