

EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
DIVISION OF ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

REQUEST FOR INCLUSION OF A COURSE IN THE
GENERAL EDUCATION PROGRAM:
EDUCATION FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY

DEPARTMENT/SCHOOL: HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY

COLLEGE: A&S

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1. Subject Code, Number, and Title: PHIL 375: Metaphysics

2. Credit Hours 3

3. Course Description

A study of questions concerning the basic structure and ultimate nature of reality. Possible topics include universals and particulars, space and time, determinism and freedom, the self, materialism, idealism, substance and process.

4. This course is (check one):

an existing course with no revisions (need not go through the input system)

an existing course with revisions (attach this form to Request for Course Revision form)

a new course (attach this form to Request for New Course form)

5. Check the General Education requirement this course is intended to meet. If the course is to be proposed for more than one requirement, submit a separate form for each one.

Effective Communication

Quantitative Reasoning (*QR designation*)

Writing Intensive (*WI designation*)

Perspectives on a Diverse World

Global Awareness

U.S. Diversity

Knowledge of the Disciplines

Arts

Humanities

Science

Social Science

Learning Beyond the Classroom (*LBC designation*)

Self and Well Being

- Community Service, Citizenship, and Leadership
- Cultural and Academic Activities and Events
- Career and Professional Development
- International and Multicultural Experience
- Undergraduate Research

6. Rationale. Provide a concise, clear, jargon-free explanation of why this is a General Education course and how it fits into this specific area of the program. (The rationale should explain to students why they are taking the course. It should address both why it is part of the General Education program and why it fits into the particular category.) This rationale should appear on the general course syllabus provided here and should be included in specific course syllabi given to students.

This course is a writing intensive course in the philosophy program. Students will write 2 take-home essay exams and a substantial philosophical paper. The essay exams are devoted to understanding and critiquing arguments put forward by someone else. The substantial paper is a reasoned defense of a thesis. Students will choose an issue within metaphysics, formulate a thesis and defend that thesis.

There are two main kinds of philosophical writing: (1) Critiquing arguments put forward by someone else; and (2) Defending a thesis. Students will do both kinds of writing in this class.

7. Clearly and concisely explain how this course meets each of the General Education outcomes for the requirement checked in number five (all outcomes should be addressed). To do this, (a) list the General Education outcomes for the requirement and explain how the course meets each outcome; and (b) explain, in general terms, the method(s) of evaluation to be used in the course and how these methods assess the degree to which students have met the General Education outcomes for this requirement.

Writing Intensive Outcomes

Students will:

1. Develop and employ successful, flexible writing and reading strategies that support sustained inquiry in a discipline.

Students will learn how to read and write a philosophical paper. Philosophers read with two things in mind: (1) What is the most charitable interpretation of the author's argument? (2) Do the premises of the author's argument support his or her conclusion? Students will be involved in this type of reading throughout the course, as we read the work of philosophers and, in class discussions, reconstruct their arguments and critique their positions. The skills involved are critical reading and critical reasoning, most of which they will have acquired in previous philosophy courses. Students will demonstrate their ability to read and understand complex philosophical arguments by doing an in-class presentation and writing two take-home essay exams. Exam questions require both the exposition of a philosophical position and a critique of that position. Students will also learn to write a substantial philosophical paper, in which they formulate and defend their own thesis. They will turn in a thesis statement approximately three weeks before the rough draft is due. Thesis statements will be assessed for feasibility, clarity, and appropriate breadth and depth. Drafts will be turned in for comments and students will revise their papers in light of those comments.

2. Use writing strategies that achieve the purpose(s) for writing and address the expectations of audience(s) within a discipline.

A philosophical paper is a reasoned defense of a thesis. The purpose of such a paper is to establish the truth of a conclusion. Students will learn the strategies for writing such a paper. Drafts will be turned in for comments and students will revise the paper in light of those comments. Papers will be assessed in light of the expectations of philosophical writing: (1) Is the thesis clearly stated? (2) Do the author's premises support his or her conclusion – is the reasoning sound/cogent? (3) Are controversial premises supported?

3. Formulate research questions and employ strategies for researching and responding to those questions.

Students will formulate a thesis and defend that thesis. They will consider objections to their arguments and respond to those objections.

*Philosophy is not an empirical discipline. Thus, research consists of reading the relevant background literature. Students will be introduced to various databases (e.g., *The Philosopher's Index*) that will help them find the background literature for their paper.*

4. Use discipline-specific genres to communicate information.

The genre of philosophy is that of an argumentative paper. Students will write a substantial argumentative paper, as well as two take-home essay exams in which they demonstrate their ability to understand and critique an argument put forward by someone else.

The substantial paper written in PHIL 375 will be modeled after philosophical journal articles. Although students will be writing primarily for other class members, they will acquire the skills necessary for professional philosophical writing.

5. Understand conventions for communicating, disseminating, and interpreting information within a discipline.

Students will understand, from reading and studying journal articles and texts, how philosophical argument is disseminated and communicated. Interpretation is an essential part of both reading and writing philosophy.

Assessment of Writing Intensive Outcomes

Students will be required to write two essay exams (partially objective and partially critical), do a presentation and write a substantial philosophical paper. The essay exams and presentation will assess whether students have learned how to read and understand a philosophical argument (outcomes 1 and 5). The exams and presentation will also assess whether students have learned appropriate methods for critiquing an argument (outcomes 4 and 5). The final term paper will assess whether students have learned how to formulate and defend a thesis and respond to objections. This paper will be done in a series of drafts. Students will revise their papers in response to comments. (Outcomes 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5)

Philosophy 375: Metaphysics

Course Description: Metaphysics is the study of questions concerning the basic structure and ultimate nature of reality. What kinds of things exist? What are they like? What accounts for change over time? How can something be the *same* thing after it has undergone change? What is the nature of the mind?

I plan to run this course as a seminar. In other words, our sessions will be *discussions*, not lectures. We will work through the problems and issues together.

Rationale for inclusion as a Writing Intensive Course: This course is a writing intensive course in the philosophy program. Students will write 2 take-home essay exams and a substantial philosophical paper. The essay exams are devoted to understanding and critiquing arguments put forward by someone else. The substantial paper is a reasoned defense of a thesis. Students will choose an issue within metaphysics, formulate a thesis and defend that thesis.

There are two main kinds of philosophical writing: (1) Critiquing arguments put forward by someone else; and (2) Defending a thesis. Students will do both kinds of writing in this class.

Writing Intensive Outcomes

Students will:

1. Develop and employ successful, flexible writing and reading strategies that support sustained inquiry in a discipline.

Students will learn how to read and write a philosophical paper. Philosophers read with two things in mind: (1) What is the most charitable interpretation of the author's argument? (2) Do the premises of the author's argument support his or her conclusion? Students will be involved in this type of reading throughout the course, as we read the work of philosophers and, in class discussions, reconstruct their arguments and critique their positions. The skills involved are critical reading and critical reasoning, most of which they will have acquired in previous philosophy courses. Students will demonstrate their ability to read and understand complex philosophical arguments by doing an in-class presentation and writing two take-home essay exams. Exam questions require both the exposition of a philosophical position and a critique of that position. Students will also learn to write a substantial philosophical paper, in which they formulate and defend their own thesis.

2. Use writing strategies that achieve the purpose(s) for writing and address the expectations of audience(s) within a discipline.

A philosophical paper is a reasoned defense of a thesis. The purpose of such a paper is to establish the truth of a conclusion. Students will learn the strategies for writing such a paper. Drafts will be turned in for comments and students will revise the paper in light of those comments. Papers will be assessed in light of the expectations of philosophical writing: (1) Is the thesis clearly stated? (2) Do the author's premises support his or her conclusion – is the reasoning sound/cogent? (3) Are controversial premises supported?

3. Formulate research questions and employ strategies for researching and responding to those questions.

Students will formulate a thesis and defend that thesis. They will consider objections to their arguments and respond to those objections.

Philosophy is not an empirical discipline. Thus, research consists of reading the relevant background literature. Students will be introduced to various databases (e.g., The Philosopher's Index) that will help them find the background literature for their paper.

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The substantial paper written in PHIL 375 will be modeled after philosophical journal articles. Although students will be writing primarily for other class members, they will acquire the skills necessary for professional philosophical writing.

5. Understand conventions for communicating, disseminating, and interpreting information within a discipline.

Students will understand, from reading and studying journal articles and texts, how philosophical argument is disseminated and communicated. Interpretation is an essential part of both reading and writing philosophy.

Text: *Metaphysics: Classic and Contemporary Readings* 2nd Edition. Ed. Hoy and Oaklander. Wadsworth (2005).

Requirements:

Take home midterm:	25%
Take home final:	25%
Paper:	35%
Presentation:	15%

Exams

The exams will be partially objective and partially your original work. I will ask you to explain an issue or someone's position and then critique it. The critique is at least as important (if not more important) than the objective explanation.

I will give you a list of questions and ask you to pick a proper subset of them to answer. You will have one full week to complete each exam.

Presentation

I will ask you to lead the class discussion on a given day. What this means is that you will present the important points from the paper we are talking about and raise questions for discussion. Since *everyone* will have read the paper carefully, you won't be discussing this by yourself. I will give you a handout to help you prepare your presentation.

Paper

You are to pick a thesis and defend it. Your paper must deal with a metaphysical issue, but it need not be one that we are covering in class. All paper topics must be approved by me. Everyone must turn in at least one rough draft. I will comment on your draft and return it to you. I expect you to take my comments into consideration when you revise your paper. You can turn in as many rough drafts as you want to turn in, up until the day the draft is due. A detailed assignment sheet will be passed out in class.

Assessment of Writing Intensive Outcomes

The essay exams and presentation will assess whether students have learned how to read and understand a philosophical argument (outcomes 1 and 5). The exams and presentation will also assess whether students have learned appropriate methods for critiquing an argument (outcomes 4 and 5). The final term paper will assess whether students have learned how to formulate and defend a thesis and respond to objections. This paper will be done in a series of drafts. Students will revise their papers in response to comments. (Outcomes 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5)

NOTICES: (1) Academic dishonesty will be penalized.
(2) All cell phones **MUST** be turned off before coming to class.

Okay, so that's what I expect of you. What do you expect of me? Feel free to let me know, both now and throughout the semester. You have to tell me if and when you are having problems and if and when the class isn't going as well as it should be.

Schedule (This is tentative.)

I. Time (Weeks 1 – 2)

Reading:

Parmenides, "Being is Not Temporal"
Salmon, "A Contemporary Exposition of Zeno's Paradoxes"
Aristotle, "Time is a Measure of Change"
Augustine, "What is Time?"
Newton, "Time is Absolute"
(possibly others)

II. Identity (Weeks 3 – 5)

Reading:

Hobbes, "Of Identity and Diversity"

Locke, "Of Identity and Diversity"
Reid, "Of Identity and on Mr. Locke's Theory of Personal Identity"
Chisholm, "Problems of Identity"
Armstrong, "Identity Through Time"
Perry, "The Bodily Theory of Identity..."
Parfit, "Personal Identity"

III. Mind (Weeks 6 – 8)

Reading:

Descartes, "Meditations on First Philosophy"
Armstrong, "The Nature of Mind"
Putnam, "Philosophy and Our Mental Life"
Nagel, "What is it Like to Be a Bat?"
Jackson, "Epiphenomenal Qualia"
Paul Churchland, "Reduction, Qualia, and the Direct Introspection of the Brain"
Searle, "Reductionism and the Irreducibility of Consciousness"
Patricia Churchland, "Dualism and the Arguments against Neuroscientific Progress"

MIDTERM EXAM

THESIS STATEMENT DUE

IV. Freedom (Weeks 9 – 11)

Reading:

Aristotle, "Fatalism, Voluntary Action, and Choice"
Oaklander, "Freedom and the New Theory of Time"
Aquinas, "Whether There is Anything Voluntary in Human Acts?"
Augustine, "God's Foreknowledge and Human Freedom"
Rowe, "Predestination, Divine Foreknowledge, and Human Freedom"
(additional readings to be added later)

ROUGH DRAFT DUE

V. God (Weeks 12 – 13)

Reading:

Aquinas, "Five Ways"
Descartes, "Meditations on First Philosophy"
Rowe, "The Cosmological Argument"
Russell and Wykstra, "The 'Inductive' Argument From Evil: A Dialogue"
Quinn, "Creation, Conservation and the Big Bang"
Grunbaum, "Theological Misinterpretations of Current Physical Cosmology"

VI. Modality (Weeks 14 – 15)

Reading:

David Lewis, "Possible Worlds" (coursepack)
Robert Stalnaker, "Possible Worlds" (coursepack)
Nicholas Rescher, "The Ontology of the Possible" (coursepack)

