

HON 210-301: Knowledge and Democracy

Term: Fall 2019	Instructor: Robert Smithson
Time: MW 2:00-3:15pm	Email: smithsonr@uncw.edu
Room: MO 212	Office: Bear 269
	Office Hours: MWF 12-1 or by appointment

Course Description

Our ethical, political, and religious convictions are among our most important and deeply-held beliefs. But these beliefs raise many difficult questions. Do we form these beliefs on the basis of evidence, or do we form these beliefs simply because of our upbringing? What should we do when we encounter people who seem just as reasonable as us, but who disagree with us on religious questions? Should we trust the testimony of experts, or should we view their testimony with critical scrutiny? How are our political and ethical beliefs influenced by factors such as gender or race? How might the mechanisms of knowledge acquisition and transmission be used for political ends (either good or ill)?

Course Goals

1. At the beginning of the course, students will be provided with an overview of the assumptions and questions of traditional epistemology (i.e., the study of knowledge).
2. To challenge the assumptions of traditional epistemology by considering the ways in which knowledge and belief are affected by one's concrete social location
3. To consider how the mechanisms of knowledge acquisition and transmission can be used for political ends, both good and ill.

Course Texts

All texts for the course will be posted to the course's Canvas site.

Grading

Three writing assignments (3 pages each): 40%

Final: 25%

Miscellaneous homework assignments (reading responses, etc.) 20%

Participation/Unannounced quizzes: 15%

Papers

In light of the third listed goal for the course, there will be a series of writing assignments throughout the term, each 3 pages long (double-spaced). There will be a different prompt (or prompts) for each of the course's five units. Students are required to respond to three of those prompts. Students have the option of submitting papers for four units; if four papers are submitted, the instructor will drop the lowest paper score.

To facilitate anonymous grading, only include your identification number (and not your name) at the top of the document. For helpful advice on writing philosophy papers, see

the documents listed in the “Writing Philosophy Papers” folder under the Files tab on Canvas.

Attendance

The participation grade takes into account both attendance and discussion in class. Class attendance is mandatory. Students arriving late will receive reduced credit for attendance that day. Students leaving class early will also receive reduced credit.

The professor will accommodate a reasonable number of excused absences for religious holidays and official off-campus college business such as academic conference presentations and athletic competitions. However, students must discuss with the professor the dates of the anticipated absences no later than the last day of the drop period. Students must present to their professor written evidence of the anticipated absences and discuss with him/her how and when make-up work should be completed prior to missing the class. Students should not expect to receive allowance for excused absences if they do not meet with the professor beforehand and clarify the dates as necessary.

Absences will be addressed by the professor in accordance with his attendance policy. The professor retains the right to determine what would be considered to be a reasonable number of absences (excused or otherwise) for the course. A student will not fail a course because the number of religious observances and/or college business absences exceed the number of absences allowed, except if excessive absences make it impossible to fulfill the expectations of the course. The student’s class participation grade in the course, though, may still be affected.

Honor Code

All students enrolled at UNCW are subject to the UNCW Student Academic Honor Code, which is intended to help every member of the UNCW community appreciate the high value placed on academic integrity and the means that will be employed to ensure its preservation. Students are expected to perpetuate a campus culture in which each student does his or her own work while relying on appropriate resources for assistance. In such a climate, students enjoy a special trust that they are members of a unique community in which one’s thoughts and words are attributed correctly and with proper ownership, and in which there is little need for systems to sanction those who cheat. As such, all UNCW students shall commit to the principles and spirit of the Honor Code by adhering to the following pledge:

As a student at The University of North Carolina Wilmington, I am committed to honesty and truthfulness in academic inquiry and in the pursuit of knowledge. I pledge to uphold and promote the UNCW Student Academic Honor Code.

More information on the Honor Code is available at the following website:

<http://www.uncw.edu/odos/honorcode/>.

Please be especially familiar with UNCW’s position on plagiarism as outlined in the UNCW Student Handbook. Plagiarism is a form of academic dishonesty in which you

take someone else's ideas and represent them as your own. Here are some examples of plagiarism:

1. You write about someone else's work in your paper and do not give them credit for it by referencing them.
2. You give a presentation and use someone else's ideas and do not state that the ideas are the other person's.
3. You get ideas from some other reference material and do not reference that material.

Accessibility Services

It is very important that this classroom be an inclusive environment that meets the learning needs of all of its students. If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of academic accommodations in order to fully participate in your classes, please contact the Office of Disability Services (962-7555). Please give me a copy of the letter you receive from Office of Disability Services detailing class accommodations you may need. If you require accommodation for test-taking, please make sure I have the referral letter no fewer than three days before the test.

Title IX Statement

UNCW practices a zero tolerance policy for any kind of violent or harassing behavior. If you are experiencing an emergency of this type contact the police at 911 or UNCW CARE at 962- 2273. Resources for individuals concerned with a violent or harassing situation can be located at <http://uncw.edu/noharm/resources/index.html>.

University Learning Center

The University Learning Center's (ULC) mission is to help students become successful, independent learners. Tutoring at the ULC is NOT remediation: the ULC offers a different type of learning opportunity for those students who want to increase the quality of their education. ULC services are free to all UNCW students and include the following:

- Learning Services (University Learning Center) <http://uncw.edu/ulc/learning/>
- Math Services <http://www.uncw.edu/ulc/math/index.html>
- Supplemental Instruction <http://www.uncw.edu/ulc/si/index.html>
- Writing Services <http://www.uncw.edu/ulc/writing/index.html>

Electronic Device Policy

In order to promote classroom discussion, no laptops, tablets, phones, etc. are permitted during class except by instructor permission.

In order to protect the integrity of the classroom experience, the use of recording devices is limited to either the expressed permission of the faculty member or with proper documentation from the Office of Accessibility Services.

Course Schedule

This schedule is subject to change, depending on the progress of the discussion in the class. If there are changes, I will make note of them in class and will send out an email about the changes. Next to each class period, there is an assigned reading. The reading

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for 08/26 should be completed before class on 08/26, etc.

In addition to the listed reading, there is typically a handout summarizing the material discussed in class. This handout will be made available on Canvas. If it is helpful to you, you are able to read the handout prior to class, but this is not required.

Date	Topic
	UNIT 1: TRADITIONAL EPISTEMOLOGY
W 08/21	Introduction, syllabus. <i>Reading:</i> none.
M 08/26	Basic concepts: skepticism, reasons, justification, evidence, prejudice. <i>Reading:</i> none.
W 08/28	Basic concepts: foundationalism, coherentism, internalism, externalism. <i>Reading:</i> Richard Feldman (2012). Reasonable Religious Disagreements. (excerpts) HW: Feldman discusses a variety of possible responses to religious disagreements. What do you think is the most plausible response he considers, and why? (1/2 page)
M 09/02	LABOR DAY: NO CLASSES
	UNIT 2: PEER DISAGREEMENT
W 09/04	Peer disagreement. <i>Reading:</i> Richard Feldman (2012). Reasonable Religious Disagreements.
M 09/09	Peer-disagreement, continued. <i>Reading:</i> None.
W 09/11	Peer-disagreement, continued. <i>Reading:</i> none.
M 09/16	Social determinants of belief. <i>Reading:</i> None.
W 09/18	Writing philosophy papers. <i>Reading:</i> Vida Yao (ms) Intro to Writing Philosophy. PAR Paper Characteristics. Example paper (with sample comments added).
	UNIT 3: OBJECTIVITY AND RELATIVISM
M 09/23	Metaphysical relativism. <i>Reading:</i> none.
W 09/25	Metaphysical relativism <i>Reading:</i> none.
M 09/30	Epistemic relativism. <i>Reading:</i> none.

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W 10/02 Epistemic relativism.
Reading: none.

UNIT 4: PROPAGANDA

M 10/07 Propaganda
Reading: none.

W 10/09 Social science.
Reading:

Khalil Muhammad (2010) Writing Crime Into Race.
Art.

M 10/14 *Reading:*
W.E.B. Du Bois (1926). Criteria of Negro Art.
Alaine Locke (1928) Art or Propaganda?

W 10/16 Controlling images.
Reading:

Patricia Hill Collins (2000). Mammies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling
Images. (ch. 4 of Black Feminist Thought
Education.

M 10/21 *Reading:*
W.E.B. Du Bois (1935) The Propaganda of History.
W 10/23 Stereotypes, self definition.

Reading:
Patricia Hill Collins (2000). The Power of Self Definition. (ch. 5 of Black
Feminist Thought).

**UNIT5: TESTIMONY, EXPERTISE, AND EPISTEMIC
DEMOCRACY**

M 10/28 Testimony and expertise.
Reading: none.

W 10/30 Testimony and expertise.
Reading: none.

Epistemic democracy.
M 11/4 “Fake news” and disinformation.

W 11/6 TBD

M 11/11 TBD

UNIT 6: FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGY

W 11/13 Situated knowers.
Reading:

M 11/18 Feminist empiricism.
Reading:

W 11/20 Feminist standpoint theory.
Reading:

M 11/25 Epistemic injustice.
Reading:

Miranda Fricker (2007). Epistemic Injustice. Ch. 1.

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W 11/27	THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY- NO CLASS
M 12/02	Hermeneutical injustice. <i>Reading:</i> Miranda Fricker (2007). Epistemic Injustice. Ch. 2.
W 12/04	Review session.
F 12/06 (8-11am)	FINAL EXAM