

**Independent work by Wright in Summer 2009**

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**Course content:** A capstone course taught in a seminar setting, emphasizing individual research projects on selected themes, presented by students to their peers and to the philosophy and religious studies faculty. This is a reading, research and writing intensive course, so it will require you to read, think about, and write about a considerable amount of material. The most important aspect of the course is that it involves independent research leading up to a publishable quality research paper and a set of presentations during the semester. The class does not involve lecture, rather we will engage in seminar style critique of everyone's oral and written work as you would in a graduate program.

**Requirements:** Class participation; a listing of journals you will research; summary précis of three articles you will use; a written report of secondary literature cited in those articles; a long presentation in class; a short presentation to the faculty; attendance at all presentations; and the final paper.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES:**

Philosophy courses at Valdosta State University contribute to the VSU General Education Outcomes listed at the link below, with special emphasis on numbers 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 8.

<http://www.valdosta.edu/academic/VSUGeneralEducationOutcomes.shtml>

The Learning Outcomes for our PHIL 4910 are:

1. You will be able to understand the distinctions among the various sub-fields of philosophy and religious studies, including epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics as comprising basic branches of the discipline.
2. You will be able to recognize how philosophical inquiry and religious studies scholarship applies to 'real-world' circumstances and to individual reflection on the meaning of life.
3. You will become conversant with the history of philosophy and religious studies as academic disciplines.
4. You will be able to recognize and define different world views, adopting a reasonably viable one and justifying it in a philosophically informed way that emphasizes critical reasoning and argument.
5. You will be able to demonstrate the ability to discuss, in both oral and written discourse, the philosophical and religious issues explored in the course.
6. You will be familiar with what academic philosophy and religious studies is, and you will understand how it can be applied to daily life as well as specific careers.

7. To critically analyze and evaluate the distinctions among the various philosophical and religious studies research approaches, including the historical nature of philosophy and religious studies as an academic field.
8. To analyze how philosophical and religious studies inquiry applies to 'real-world' circumstances and to specific case studies, with special attention to research method as it is used in current scholarship and academic journals, and to understand the research models and how to apply each to real world issues.
9. To become conversant with understand the historical and structural context of philosophy and religion, as well as specific examples of the issues of race, class and gender as they influenced the outcome of specific situations relevant to philosophy and religion.
10. To recognize and define different world views, adopting a reasonably viable one and justifying it in a philosophically informed way that emphasizes critical reasoning and argument, and which shows a careful review of the extant philosophy and religion literature.
11. To demonstrate the ability to analyze, in both oral and written discourse, the current literature in philosophy and religion and offer alternative resolutions to the problem with reference to current journals and research methodologies.
12. To synthesize defensible conclusions on specific issues in philosophy and religion and present them in an orderly fashion using research papers with careful citation and powerpoint.

Members of the faculty in Philosophy and Religious Studies have verified that these outcomes are in line with the outcomes of the course as it is taught at peer institutions in the State System of Georgia.

These course-specific learning outcomes contribute to the departmental learning outcomes of the Philosophy and Religious Studies Major by enabling students better to

1. To encourage an understanding of central issues, topics and philosophers in the history of philosophy, from the ancient to the modern periods.
2. To develop students' abilities to think, write, and speak critically and logically.
3. To enable students to challenge their own ideas and to develop self-understanding in the context of a diverse range of ideas which inform contemporary controversies and social conflict.
4. To enable students to engage in independent philosophical research, and to be responsible for communicating their understanding of the issues researched and developed, including a working familiarity with current research methods.
5. To incorporate philosophical positions in oral and written communications.
6. To critically outline and analyze a philosophical question.

### **Recommended Texts:**

Sample articles from Dialogue, by undergraduates, from the Phi Sigma Tau honor society.

Listing of academic journals to which our library provides full text access. Secondary source material from academic journal articles is always a good idea in any paper. Here are two links where you can begin to look for interesting journal articles:

<http://books.valdosta.edu/gal1.html> (click on "Full Text Journal Title List") and <http://www.libs.uga.edu/ejournals/locators/acadsearchframe.html> (Access to these sites will be free if you use an on-campus computer. To use the sites off-campus, you must enter the current Galileo password, available from the Odum Library website.)

Imag(in)ing Otherness: Filmic Visions of Living Together (American Academy of Religion Press)

Getting What You Came For (Noonday), a text which includes chapters on writing major research papers, and on how to succeed in graduate school.

Philosophy Made Simple by Richard H. Popkin, Avrum Stroll, Paperback: 336 pages, Publisher: Made Simple; 2nd Rev edition (July 1, 1993), ISBN: 0385425333, or History of Philosophy (Harper Collins College Outline Series)

Be sure to do the reading before the class for which it is assigned. Please bring the relevant book(s) and/or article(s) with you to class, along with a designated notebook and some pens.

In addition, Philosophy and Religious Studies faculty encourage you to use Andrea A. Lunsford, St. Martin's Handbook, 5th ed. (required in ENGL 1101 and 1102). These books are available for purchase at the VSU Bookstore. The St. Martin's Handbook is shelved under ENLG 1101 and 1102.

### How grades will be calculated:

A	= 100 - 90%	Class participation, attendance = 20%
B	= 89 - 80%	2 Research Assignments at 10% each = 20%
C	= 79 - 70%	2 Presentations at 20% each = 40%
D	= 69 - 60%	<u>1 Final Paper Presentation with PPT = 20%</u>
F	= 59 - 0%	Total = 100%

Please note that I am not obligated to accept late work or to allow "make up" work after the date an assignment or exam or paper is completed by the other members of the class.

I also make no promises about extra credit items, although I will routinely announce events on campus that can result in some extra credit points for you.

**Exams and Papers:** The **papers** should be no less than five pages long, double spaced, in a standard 12 point font like Times/ Times New Roman. Expect to use the text and cite it with a consistent citation scheme (refer to the St. Martin's Handbook you use in your English classes). "Use direct quotes!" Don't use plastic paper covers, just a staple is fine. The ability to write and edit well-constructed academic essays is an important skill that will come in handy throughout your college career and beyond. Again, these papers must be typed, double-spaced, in a standard 12-point font (e.g., *Times*) with one-inch margins at the top and bottom of each page and 1.25-inch margins on either side (the default settings in Microsoft Word). More specific topics are given out as we do the readings, and I always mention things that would make a good paper topic during our class meetings and discussions.

<http://teach.valdosta.edu/chjames/papers4800.htm>

**Attendance Policy:** I do care that you attend class regularly. As you know, VSU policy is that missing 20% of class meetings results in an automatic grade of "F". Faculty can also institute added attendance policies in their syllabi. Our class will have a 10% rule for absences. You can miss up to 10% of the class meetings with no grade penalty. 10% of our 30 class meetings is 3. On absence number 4, your final grade for the course will be reduced by one whole letter grade; on absence number 5, your final grade for the course will be reduced by two whole letter grades; on absence number 6, you will automatically fail the course. Be considerate of your fellow students – don't be late, and don't leave your cell phones and pagers on. Note that if you are regularly late to class, or leave class early, I will begin to count each as an absence. Please note that this policy makes no distinction between excused and unexcused absences.

### Special Needs:

Students requiring classroom accommodations or modification because of a documented disability should discuss this need with me at the beginning of the semester. If you are such a student, but you are not registered with the Access Office, you should contact them too. Students

requesting classroom accommodations or modifications because of a documented disability must contact the Access Office for Students with Disabilities located in room 1115 Nevins Hall. The phone numbers are 229-245-2498 (voice) and 229-219-1348 (tty).

### **Participate!**

Once you arrive at class, make an effort to get involved in the conversation. Don't hesitate to ask questions if you need clarification or would like more information: if you are confused, it is likely that others are too! The participation percentage you receive will depend on a variety of factors, including (but not limited to) the frequency and helpfulness of your contributions to class discussions and the care you take when peer editing.

### **Pop Reading Quizzes:**

If I notice that there are many students who are not participating, I may periodically administer reading quizzes in class. These will not be announced in advance. No "make-up" quizzes will be given, and a missed quiz will result in a grade of zero. These quizzes are a solid reward for attending class, participating, and keeping up with the readings.

### **Online Discussions:**

During certain weeks of the semester, you also will be expected to participate regularly in on-line discussions using WebCT Vista. Use this opportunity to comment on the week's readings, ask questions, raise objections, and respond to what others have written or said in class.

To use Vista, you will need access to a computer with an internet connection. Your computer and its software will also need to meet certain technical specifications. You are solely responsible for all technical matters. Although you do not need to be on campus in order to access Vista, it is worth remembering that computer labs are available at VSU. For technical help, please contact the VSU Help Desk (located in Odum Library, to the left of the Circulation Desk) at 229-245-4357 or by e-mail at [helpdesk@valdosta.edu](mailto:helpdesk@valdosta.edu)

To log in to Vista and the course "shell," go to the VSU homepage and click on the words *WebCT Vista* in the upper right-hand corner. Your username and password are the same as for your BlazeNet e-mail account. For instructions on getting started, go to: <http://www.valdosta.edu/vista> and the help pages at <http://www.valdosta.edu/vista/guides/start/index.shtml>

When posting in an online bulletin board, like those in the Discussion area of WebCT Vista, you must (1) post at least one original message of your own, (2) read all the messages posted by others, and (3) respond *substantively* to at least one message from another student. Your postings are due the same day as the readings are listed in the schedule below (i.e., no later than 11:59 p.m. on the relevant dates.)

Your first message on a given topic should be about 200 words in length. That is roughly the length of two medium-sized paragraphs (e.g., this one and the next). Your second (response) posting can be about half that length, but it should be *substantive* (i.e., involving serious content). Try not to simply repeat what others have said already. Additional postings can be as long or as short as you desire. Be sure to give the first message an interesting title in the "Subject" line. This will help alert the rest of us as to what it will be about.

When you are ready to respond to someone else, do so by opening their message and hitting the "Reply" button. This will create a "thread" that others can add on to. Keep in mind that although it is fine to disagree with what someone else has said, it is important to do so in a way that is polite and constructive. If someone says something that makes you angry, pause and take a breath before firing off a reply! You can preview your message before you send it, but once you have hit "Post," your message will no longer be editable.

Vista allows me to keep track of how many messages you have read and posted. I will monitor student activity and may from time to time add a message of my own.

**Academic Honesty:**

Members of the Valdosta State University faculty value honesty and integrity extremely highly and do not tolerate cheating of any kind. Anyone caught cheating will automatically fail the course. Cheating includes – but is not limited to – plagiarism, giving or receiving assistance on a quiz, having someone else do work on your behalf, doing work on someone else’s behalf, and working with a partner or in a group on an individual assignment. By enrolling in this course, you are in effect promising to maintain the bond of trust on which the professor-student relationship is based.

**E-Mail:**

VSU policy mandates that all official communication by e-mail take place through VSU e-mail accounts or through the WebCT Vista Mail tool. Please check your VSU (@valdosta.edu) e-mail account regularly.

**Note: This syllabus is not a legal contract; the content of this course is subject to revision by the professor.**

Schedule	
6/10	<p>Introduction to the class            What is Philosophy and Religious Studies? Do Philosophy and Religious Studies majors get jobs related to that major? Here are two pages to answer that:  <a href="http://teach.valdosta.edu/chjames/Philosophymajorjobs.htm">http://teach.valdosta.edu/chjames/Philosophymajorjobs.htm</a>  <a href="http://teach.valdosta.edu/chjames/jobsphilosophyprint.htm">http://teach.valdosta.edu/chjames/jobsphilosophyprint.htm</a>  <a href="http://www.studyreligion.org/why/index.html">http://www.studyreligion.org/why/index.html</a></p>
6/17	<p><b>Due today: Journals</b> (Please note that an academic journal is not a “journal” you might write in a class – it’s like a magazine, with multiple volumes, ie., the Journal of Philosophy, Lingua Franca, etc.) Listing of three academic journals from the links above that you believe you will use for your general topic. On one side of a sheet of paper, provide a short summary of the journal’s emphasis and whether you agree or disagree with the journal’s perspective. Note, this is about the journal itself, in multiple volumes, not the particular article in the journal you want to use. The presentation of articles will begin on 6/24.</p>
6/24	<p><b>Due today: Articles</b> Remember, articles are the items that appear in each issue of a journal. You need to find three articles that you can use for your research paper. On this day, the first six students will provide the whole class with a summary précis of three articles that they believe they can use. All total, this should only take two sides of a sheet of paper, or two pages. Consider the secondary sources cited at the end of the journal articles you have chosen, because locating your own opinion within the academic debate is most important for your long paper. Discuss potential debates between the authors, and where you see your own work located in that debate.</p> <p>FOR GENERAL PAPER TIPS, CHECK THIS HANDOUT PAGE:  <a href="http://teach.valdosta.edu/chjames/papers4920.htm">http://teach.valdosta.edu/chjames/papers4920.htm</a></p> <p>Former student Shaun Galloway suggests this page for help with writing précis:  <a href="http://academic.evergreen.edu/curricular/eduvalues/precis.htm">http://academic.evergreen.edu/curricular/eduvalues/precis.htm</a></p> <p>1, 2, 3, 4, 5</p>
7/1	<p>First half of rough draft with complete outline is due.</p>

7/8	Whole rough draft is due.
7/15	Shortened edit of rough draft for presentation is due.
7/22	Powerpoint is due.
7/29	Presentation Day, final versions of Long Paper, Short Edit for Presentation and Powerpoint are all due.

**If you are not sure about how the final exam times are assigned for your other courses, use this link, and check the Final Exam Schedule on the Registration website:**  
<http://www.valdosta.edu>

**Tips for doing well in Philosophy classes, adapted from a handout by Robert Scott**

1. Read text with a pencil, underline the important ideas and key concepts. Write down technical ideas, key terms, key distinctions between two terms, definitions, diagrams, etc. to help you remember them.
2. Write questions or reactions you have to the text in the margin of the book. Ask about these questions in class, and keep them in mind, since they may provide good points to make about that author in papers you will write for class.
3. Read ahead to see the ultimate objectives of the chapter and of the individual readings. Keep in mind the overall picture of the chapters given in the introductory sections to each chapter in the book.
4. Work with the new terminology frequently, and try to apply it to situations outside of class. I would recommend flash cards to help you memorize the meanings of new terms quickly.
5. For longer readings, be sure to review the reading as a whole after you have read it section-by-section. What was the main question the author wanted to address? What were the answers? What concepts were used to make the points?
6. When confronted with a difficult reading or question, break it down into parts, and into individual ideas. This will at least help to clarify the question, even if it might not give the answer. And for philosophy, clarifying the question is really half the battle!
7. Ponder an unsolved problem and return to it every so often to see if it will give. Inspiration may happen at an unexpected time, and the subconscious mind does work on problems even when we aren't consciously aware of it.
8. Begin work on all the class tasks early, and spread out your work over time so as to maximize your chances for comprehending the readings accurately, memorizing the information, and grappling with the questions for papers.
9. If you do need to meet with an instructor outside of class, be sure to have your questions for the instructor planned out ahead of time, to make the meeting as productive as possible.
10. Always think about the philosophical issues for yourself, rather than waiting to be told what to think or believe.
11. Study for all exams on a daily basis, for at least a week before the exam date. You will need to know who said what, from memory.

12. Try to anticipate the questions that will be asked on an examination beforehand. Questions may come from the readings or from lectures and class discussions, but in either case, certain terms and concepts will be emphasized more than others.

13. Listen carefully to different points of view, and actively respond (when you read, when you are in class, and when you write your philosophy papers)!

14. Philosophy involves skills, like learning to appreciate a good debate, learning to imagine the world differently than we assume it to be, and appreciating the world with a sense of wonder.

**Richard Amesbury's tips about writing in Philosophy and Religious Studies:**

(1) A really great website for students about how to write academic papers is maintained by the Dartmouth Writing Program:

<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/student/toc.shtml>

In addition to lots of helpful general information, it has special pages on "Writing the Religion Paper" and "Writing the Philosophy Paper."

(2) A great website that explains the importance of critically evaluating web resources -- always a problem area for students -- is maintained by Robert Harris:

<http://www.virtualsalt.com/evalu8it.htm>

(3) A third thing I'm planning to do this semester is to require students to own a copy of the St. Martin's Handbook, Fifth Edition. This is the writing manual used in ENGL 1101 and 1102, which all VSU students are required to take. In other words, they should all already own a copy. It explains all the basics -- e.g., how to cite sources, etc. By requiring students to own a copy, I'm hoping to emphasize the continuity between their writing courses and the rest of their education, in the hope that they don't just sell the book back and forget the basics. Just a few ideas . . .

Dr. Richard Amesbury