Course Description
This course explores topics in all of the major areas of philosophy: logic, metaphysics, epistemology, social & political philosophy, and ethics. This course serves as a preparation for more advanced studies in philosophy. In addition, the course provides the opportunity to discuss critically and rationally some of the most fundamental questions of human existence: does a god exist? Can we really know anything with certainty? What is the nature of the mind? What is this self that I think I am? Do we have free will? What is the best kind of society/government? These questions, and the tentative answers to them, are about you and your life.

Course Objectives
There are two main objectives of this course. First, students are expected to develop their critical thinking skills. This means that students should be able to identify arguments and offer intelligent, well articulated criticisms. Students should also be able to make sound arguments of their own; this involves understanding some basic rules of logic. The method of philosophy is rational argumentation; one cannot claim to understand philosophy if one does not know how to argue. Second, students should gain competence with the issues and concepts in the major areas of philosophy. They should also be able to explain how these abstract philosophical problems are relevant to their own lives.

Course Expectations
The minimum expectation is that you will be online at least every other day, and that you will participate by replying to discussion board questions. By ‘participate,’ I mean that you should ask intelligent questions about the reading, respond to other students’ questions and my posted questions, and offer relevant examples, etc.

Philosophy is a difficult subject area because of its conceptual complexity, but also because few people have had prior exposure to philosophical literature. How does one prepare for philosophy class? First, read the assignment at least twice, making note of areas you don’t understand, or areas that you find interesting or helpful. You should then
try to summarize the reading in your own words by writing a paragraph or two in your notebook. One good test of whether you understand the text is whether or not you can explain what you’ve read in your own words. Some helpful questions include: what is the author’s main point? How does the author argue for his or her claims? What problems are there with the author’s arguments?

If you do not understand some portion of the text, it is your responsibility to do whatever is necessary to acquire that understanding. You are responsible for your education.

**Graded Work**
There will be three take-home essay exams; each will be worth 25% of your grade. Responses to posted discussion forum questions will be worth 25% of your grade. Submitted work will be graded based on the level of detail, sophistication, and thoroughness of each answer.

**Plagiarism & Academic Misconduct**
Any form of plagiarism or academic misconduct will result in failure of the course and notification of the university. Claims of ignorance regarding the citation of sources are insufficient justification for academic misconduct. It is your responsibility to know the university’s policies on academic misconduct; you are also responsible for asking questions if you are not sure if you need to cite a source or not.

**Course Grading Criteria**

**The Grade of A:** The essence of A-level work is that it is excellent overall with no major weaknesses. The work at the end of the course is on the whole clear, precise, and well-reasoned. A-level work demonstrates an insightful mind beginning to take charge of its own ideas, assumptions, inferences, and intellectual processes. There is an original argument or interpretation and the work is at an advanced level.

The student can regularly analyze issues clearly, distinguish what is relevant from irrelevant, recognize questionable assumptions, clarify concepts effectively, identify competing points of view, show a general tendency to reason carefully from clearly stated premises, and has excellent reasoning and problem-solving skills.

**The Grade of B:** The essence of B-level work is that demonstrates strengths but is less consistent in high-level performance than A-level work. Nonetheless, it has some distinctive weaknesses, though no major ones. The work at the end of the course is also on the whole clear, precise, and well-reasoned, but with occasional lapses into weak reasoning. The student charitably represents the views of other philosophers, but the work does not make an original contribution. The work is of high-quality.

The student can often analyze issues clearly, distinguish what is relevant from irrelevant, recognize questionable assumptions, clarify concepts effectively, identify competing points of view, show a general tendency to reason carefully from clearly stated premises, and has good reasoning and problem-solving skills.
The Grade of C: The essence of C-level work is that it demonstrates decent mastery of content but it is inconsistent with several weaknesses.
The work at the end of the course shows some emerging skills but also shows some weaknesses in reasoning. While some assignments may be reasonably well done, others may be poorly done, or the assignments are all generally of average quality. The student does not charitably represent the views of other philosophers and/or does not understand the broader implications of the positions he or she is discussing. Effort is made, but the work may lack organization, focus, and/or depth in argument.

The student can occasionally analyze issues clearly, distinguish what is relevant from irrelevant, recognize questionable assumptions, clarify concepts effectively, identify competing points of view, show a general tendency to reason carefully from clearly stated premises, and has fair reasoning and problem-solving skills.

The Grade of D: The essence of D-level work is that it demonstrates only a minimal level of understanding and skills in critical thinking.
The work at the end of the course demonstrates frequent uncritical thinking. Most assignments are poorly done. There is little evidence that the student is reasoning through the assignment. D-level thinking lacks discipline and clarity. The work is vague, confused, and/or irrelevant.

The student can rarely analyze issues clearly, distinguish what is relevant from irrelevant, recognize questionable assumptions, clarify concepts effectively, identify competing points of view, show a general tendency to reason carefully from clearly stated premises, and has poor reasoning and problem-solving skills.

The Grade of F: The essence of F-level work is that the student demonstrated a pattern of uncritical thinking and/or failed to do the required work of the course.
The work at the end of the course is as vague, imprecise, and as unreasoned as it was in the beginning of the course. There is little evidence that the student is genuinely engaged in the task of taking charge of his or her thinking. Many assignments appear to have been simply going through the motions without really putting any significant effort into thinking his or her way through them. The work is unacceptable and demonstrates little to no understanding.

Consequently, the student cannot analyze issues clearly, distinguish what is relevant from irrelevant, recognize questionable assumptions, clarify concepts effectively, identify competing points of view, show a general tendency to reason carefully from clearly stated premises, and has no reasoning and problem-solving skills.

Reading Assignments

Week One (1/23)
Basic Logic, Fallacies and arguments: read all of Weston
[all following readings are in Abel.]
“What is Philosophy” pp. 1-28

Week Two (1/30)
“The Existence of God” readings 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7

“The Problem of Evil” readings 8 & 9

Week Three (2/6)
“Faith and Reason” readings 10 & 11

“Theories of Knowledge” readings 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 & 17

Week Four (2/13)
“The Mind-Body Problem” readings 20, 21, 22 & 23

“The Self” readings 25, 26, & 27

Week Five (2/20)
“Free Will and Determinism” readings 28, 29, 30, 31, 32 & 33

Week Six (2/27)
“Ethics” readings 34, 35, 36, 37, 38 & 39

Week Seven (3/6)
“Ethics” readings 40 & 41
“Political and Social Philosophy” readings 43, 44, 45, 46 & 47

Week Eight (3/13)

Political and Social Philosophy (TBD)