

**PHIL 460: JUNIOR/SENIOR SEMINAR (SPRING 2019)**  
**PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT CONFERENCE ROOM, MONDAY/WEDNESDAY 2:00-3:50**

**Professor Amy Berg**  
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**OFFICE: Gaige 225**  
**OFFICE HOURS: Mondays 12:00-2:00 (or by appointment)**

**COURSE OVERVIEW**

In this year's junior/senior seminar, we will be reading some classic papers from 20<sup>th</sup>- and 21<sup>st</sup>-century ethics and political philosophy: papers that are exceptionally clear, influential, provocative, and/or profound. By reading these papers, we will explore some of the topics and themes that have been central to the recent study of ethics and political philosophy. We will also consider how to do philosophy well: what is it about these papers that has made them so exceptional? This course is divided roughly into thirds:

- **Applied ethics:** We will begin with papers on particular issues: global poverty, abortion, and climate change.
- **Normative ethics:** Our discussion of climate change will lead us into a discussion of three major moral theories: consequentialism, deontology, and virtue ethics.
- **Political philosophy and metaethics:** Next, we will consider political questions about how our society ought to be organized. We will end by taking a step back and looking at some questions in metaethics, the branch of philosophy concerned with questions about the origin and status of ethics.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND POLICIES**

**You will need:**

- The readings. All the readings you will need are collected in a course reader, which is only available at the Bookstore. It is your responsibility to complete the reading for the day before coming to class and to bring a printed copy of the reading with you to class. **If you repeatedly fail to bring the reading with you to class**, you risk losing participation points and may be asked to leave class for the day.
- Access to Blackboard, where I will post the syllabus, assignments, and other information.

**Assignments:** There are nine assignments due in this course.

- Three in-class presentations, in which you will begin our discussion for the day by summarizing the reading and raising some points for us to discuss. For more information, see the assignment sheet I handed out on the first day of class.
- Five short writing assignments, in which you reflect on a question or issue raised by the reading, explain how you think the author of the reading would respond, and state whether you agree or disagree with this response. These assignments are due one week after we discuss the reading you're writing about. For more information, see the assignment sheet I handed out on the first day of class.
- A final research paper on a topic of your choice. Over the course of this semester, we will work together to develop a topic, find sources, write, and revise your final paper. For more information, see the assignment sheet I handed out on the first day of class.

You may complete up to one of each type of assignment on any particular reading; for example, you may do a presentation, a short writing assignment, *and* your final paper on Norcross's arguments in "Puppies, Pigs, and People." All written assignments will be graded anonymously;

you should put your student ID number, *not* your name, on them. Submit all assignments via Blackboard. **You must turn in all assignments in order to pass the course.**

### **Attendance and participation:**

- Participation is part of your final grade in this course; to participate, you need to attend. You are allowed **two absences**, no explanation needed, over the course of the semester. I will deduct one percent from your participation grade for each additional absence, unless you receive prior permission or can provide documentation which I believe justifies excusing an additional absence. You count as absent if you are not present when I take attendance, even if you show up later in the class period; you also count as absent if you leave early without prior permission. If at any point in the semester, you believe you are in a situation for which I should make an exception to this policy, please talk with me outside of class.
- But participation is more than just attendance! In order to receive full participation points, come ready to make active, serious, charitable contributions to class discussion. **I reserve the right to call on students at random if you are not participating actively.** If you are not comfortable participating in class, I will count active, serious, charitable visits to my office hours toward your participation grade. You will receive a midsemester evaluation of your participation. When I grade participation, here's what I'm looking for:
  - A range: Attends all (or almost all) class sessions, does the reading, actively and positively participates in all group activities, asks questions or offers comments at least every other class session, comes to office hours at least a couple of times.
  - B range: Attends most class sessions, does the reading, participates in most group activities, asks questions or offers comments sporadically. Is never a distraction.
  - C range: Attends only occasionally, does not do the reading, does not participate very actively in class (or else is a distraction), never comes to office hours.
  - D or F range: Rarely if ever attends class, either does not participate or is an active distraction in class, never comes to office hours or communicates with me via email.

The grade breakdown is:

- **Presentations:** 5% per presentation; 15% total
- **Short writing assignments:** 7% per short assignment; 35% total
- **Final paper:** 35%
- **Participation:** 15%

The grade scale is:

	A: 93-100%	A-: 90-92%
B+: 87-89%	B: 83-86%	B-: 80-82%
C+: 77-79%	C: 73-76%	C-: 70-72%
D+: 67-69%	D: 60-63%	D-: 60-62%
F: below 60%		

**Lateness policy:** Assignments must be turned in at the start of class on the day they are due. **There are no exceptions unless you make prior arrangements with me.** I will deduct three percent of your final grade if the paper is turned in the day it's due any time after the start of class and three percent for each day after that that the paper is late (so, for example, a paper that would have gotten 100% if it were turned in on time on Monday would get 91% if turned in on Wednesday).

**On writing:** Your success in this class depends on the ability to express yourself clearly. Here are some writing resources I recommend:

- **The Writing Center** (Craig-Lee 225; <http://www.ric.edu/writingcenter/>) will talk through ideas, work through a draft with you, and generally give advice at all stages of the writing process.
- **Style**, by Joseph M. Williams (University of Chicago Press, 1990) is an excellent guide to clear and forceful writing. It's widely and cheaply available at bookstores and through Amazon.

### Other policies

- **Electronic devices (laptops, tablets, phones, etc.) are not allowed in class**, except by permission. That means that you must put this technology in your bag at the beginning of class and leave it there until the end of class. I am happy to give permission if you need to use an electronic device in order to be successful in this course; please speak with me during the first two weeks of the course. If I give you permission to use technology, please minimize your distractions to other students (by sitting in the back or to the side of the classroom). If you need to use a RIC computer to print, view documents, or upload your assignments to Blackboard, there are computers available at Adams Library.
- **I use email** to send announcements about this course. It is your responsibility to check your RIC email (including your spam folder) every day. (Please note: I use Blackboard when I need to send announcements to the entire class. Replies to emails I send through Blackboard do not go to me, and I have no way to see them. **If you need to contact me over email, please make sure you're emailing my email address, aberg@ric.edu.**) Our emails to each other in this course are professional documents, and it is your responsibility (and mine) to write them professionally. For tips on how to write a professional email, check the email rubric posted to Blackboard. I will respond to your email no later than 5 pm on the next business day; in the rare case I do not, please feel free to follow up with me.
- **Academic honesty is critical to your success in this course.** RIC has policies regarding academic dishonesty such as cheating, plagiarism, and other behaviors. **Cheating** includes receiving unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment. **Plagiarism** involves the theft of "intellectual property." The college policy against plagiarism bans word-for-word plagiarism, patchwork plagiarism, unacknowledged paraphrasing, and unacknowledged facts. I also ban self-plagiarism (that is, you may not turn in work you have written for a previous class). **Other dishonest behaviors** include anything else that provides an unfair advantage over other students or that sabotages another student's efforts. I am happy to talk to you if you have any questions about academic integrity, or you can consult the Academic Standards section of the RIC Student Handbook (<http://www.ric.edu/studentlife/documents/RICStudentHandbook.pdf>). If I find that you have violated academic integrity standards, the minimal consequences will be a zero for the assignment, and you will not be allowed to redo it. Additional consequences may occur, including your failing the class and/or being brought before the Academic Integrity Board. I will also report you to the Vice President of Academic Affairs.
- Rhode Island College, and I, are committed to making reasonable efforts to assist individuals with documented disabilities. If you are seeking reasonable classroom accommodations under the ADA and/or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, you must register with RIC's Disability Services Center (Fogarty 137, 456-2776). To receive accommodations for this class, please obtain the proper Disability Services forms and meet with me during the first two weeks of the course to discuss how we can implement them.
- There are lots of resources at RIC to support you during your time here. OASIS (Adams Library, lower level; <http://www.ric.edu/oasis/>) is here to help you succeed academically. Learning For Life (Adams Library, level 1; <http://www.ric.edu/learningforlife/>) can connect you to resources on- and off-campus to support you with non-academic needs you may have

while you're at RIC. Project ExCEL (Roberts 303; <http://www.ric.edu/esl/>) has a variety of programs and classes for multilingual students. If you'd like information on how to access and use these resources, please don't hesitate to talk with me.

- You are welcome and encouraged to come to my office hours or make an appointment with me whenever you want to talk about the course material, your assignments, or any other philosophy-related concerns you have.

### READING LIST

*Because this course is a capstone seminar, we will prioritize quality of discussion over quantity of reading. The schedule below includes the maximum amount of reading we will discuss this semester, and we are likely to skip some for reasons of time (although we will never move or skip a reading if a presentation is scheduled for that day). When we skip readings, I will post a revised syllabus to Blackboard.*

**Wednesday, January 23:** Course introduction

**Reading:** None

**Monday, January 28:** CLASS CANCELED

**Wednesday, January 30:** Applied ethics

**Reading:** Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"

**Monday, February 4:** Applied ethics

**Reading:** Timmerman, "Sometimes There is Nothing Wrong with Letting a Child Drown"

**Wednesday, February 6:** Applied ethics

**Reading:** Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment"

**Monday, February 11:** Applied ethics

**Reading:** Norcross, "Puppies, Pigs, and People"

**Wednesday, February 13:** Applied ethics

**Reading:** Wallace, "Consider the Lobster"

**Monday, February 18:** Applied ethics

**Reading:** Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion"

**Wednesday, February 20:** Applied ethics

**Reading:** Marquis, "Why Abortion Is Immoral"

**Monday, February 25:** Applied ethics

**Reading:** Sinnott-Armstrong, "It's Not My Fault"

**Wednesday, February 27:** Applied ethics

**Reading:** Kagan, "Do I Make A Difference?"

**Monday, March 4:** Normative ethics

**Reading:** Williams, "Against Utilitarianism"

**Wednesday, March 6:** Normative ethics

**Reading:** Railton, "Alienation, Consequentialism, and Morality"

**Monday, March 11:** SPRING BREAK

**Wednesday, March 13:** SPRING BREAK

**Monday, March 18:** Normative ethics

**Reading:** Frankfurt, "On Bullshit"

**Wednesday, March 20:** Normative ethics  
**Reading:** Korsgaard, "The Right to Lie: Kant on Dealing with Evil"

**Monday, March 25:** Normative ethics  
**Reading:** Hursthouse, "Virtue Theory and Abortion"

**Wednesday, March 27:** Normative ethics  
**Reading:** Nagel, "The Absurd"

**Monday, April 1:** Political philosophy  
**Reading:** Anderson, "What Is the Point of Equality?" (pp. 287-312)

**Wednesday, April 3:** Political philosophy  
**Reading:** Anderson, "What Is the Point of Equality?" (pp. 312-337)

**Monday, April 8:** Political philosophy  
**Reading:** Card, "Against Marriage and Motherhood"

**Wednesday, April 10:** Political philosophy  
**Reading:** Brake, "Minimal Marriage"

**Monday, April 15:** Political philosophy  
**Reading:** Shelby, "Justice, Deviance, and the Dark Ghetto"

**Wednesday, April 17:** Metaethics  
**Reading:** Midgley, "Trying Out One's New Sword"

**Monday, April 22:** Metaethics  
**Reading:** Wolf, "Moral Saints"

**Wednesday, April 24:** Metaethics  
**Reading:** Bennett, "The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn"

**Monday, April 29:** Peer-review sessions for final papers  
**Reading:** None

**Finals week**  
**Final paper due Monday, May 6**