

SYLLABUS

PHIL 4500, CAPSTONE SEMINAR IN RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY, Spring 2013

Description: A seminar for senior Religion and Philosophy majors that integrates knowledge learned in the major and in the student's experience, emphasizing reading, writing and speaking skills.

a) THE TOPIC -- By the end of the first week, each student will choose a contemporary issue/problem/topic of interest to approach productively from a religious perspective and/or a philosophical perspective. A student might need the help of the class to make this choice. Each topic should address in some way at least one of the four values listed on the Catawba seal.

b) THE PORTFOLIO – By the end of the second week, each student will consult with the instructor to assess his/her progress in the department portfolios (written, oral, and reading) and to specify semester goals.

c) THE PROJECT -- By the end of the third or fourth week, each student will work out with the instructor and classmates how to approach that topic: What is s/he trying to learn? How can that best be learned? What (kinds of) resources are needed? How should the student demonstrate to the class his/her learning? At this point, the student will generate a written prospectus detailing the issue and the plan for learning.

d) THE GOAL – The rest of the course will take the form of each student accomplishing what is in his/her prospectus, with the help of the instructor and classmates. Each student will also be responsible for providing ongoing help to the other students in their projects. When needed, we will meet together or individually; otherwise, students will do work independently. By the end of the semester, the student will show his/her level of accomplishment of the project in both written form and in the form of a presentation to the class.

Course Format: The format blends seminar and independent study. The emphasis on each depends on the interests and skills of the students in that year. We will agree on specific days and times for meetings.

Learning Outcomes: *(The nature of each outcome will be significantly affected by a student's concentration.)*

Knowledge: Students will demonstrate a significant understanding of the following:

- * The role of religion in human experience, i.e., the ways religion impacts human experience/culture.
- * The role of philosophy in human experience, i.e., the ways our ordinary commitments carry assumptions about knowledge and reality, and which impact human experience/culture.
- * How knowledge acquired in the major, and in their broader Catawba experience, helps them better understand a contemporary topic/issue of their choice.

Skills: Through reading, writing, and speaking, students will demonstrate appropriate mastery of skills:

- * Group collaboration: appropriate preparation, respect for others, and participation in discussion
- * Conceptual analysis: analyze abstract and concrete concepts for structure, context, and relevance.
- * Flexible perspective: consider viewpoints different from yours
- * Problem solving: the ability to describe a felt problem, consider possible solutions and restrictions, formulate and apply a working solution, and assess the results.
- * Writing ability: effective and responsible expression of ideas in written form.
- * Analytical reading ability: critical grasp of an author's purpose, argumentation, and viewpoint
- * Speaking ability: effective and responsible expression of ideas in spoken form

Learning Assessment: *(The tools employed will be shaped by each student's concentration.)*

- Culmination of writing portfolio via essays and course papers
- Culmination of speaking portfolio via collaboration, discussion and/or presentation
- Culmination of reading portfolio via writing and perhaps also speaking assignments

Other possible tools include research papers, powerpoint presentations, and journals

Criteria for Evaluating Writing Ability:

1. Content: Writing should reflect a sufficient understanding of the relevant subject. It should make good use of the relevant concepts, distinctions, positions, and reasons included in course readings or brought out in lecture or discussion. Writing should use precise words and well-constructed sentences that clearly represent the writer's reasoning. Your work should be clearly written, its claims precise, its structure clear, with an explicit overall direction. It should be intelligible to an interested student.

2. Argumentation: It should be organized so ideas are arranged logically and clearly. Main points should be backed by substantial and relevant details. Your work should be backed by good reasons. Your claims and reasons should be consistent. Anticipate and respond to any reasonable objections.

3. Mechanics & Style: It should adhere to conventions of grammar, capitalization, spelling, and usage. Writing style should be appropriate to the academy.

4. Citations and Documentation: Writers must clearly differentiate their own material from source material. When writers use material that is not their own or not common knowledge, they must document the source of the information using a standardized (i.e., either MLA or APA) method.

Complete assignments on time. Other expectations about your writing: typed, paginated, tidy (bound if needed), standard margins/fonts, & dark print. Failure to meet these will hurt your assignment grades. Your paper (not the essays) should have a cover page with name, course name/number, date, my name, and a title.

Criteria for Evaluating Oral Presentation Communication Ability:

- 1. Content:** Mastery of relevant subject matter
- 2. Structure:** Clear and meaningful order within the assigned time frame
- 3. Style:** Clear and appropriate; good use of language
- 4. Delivery:** Speed; Diction; Volume; Expressions; Eye Contact

Criteria for Evaluating Discussion Facilitation Communication Ability:

- 1. Knowledge:** Your level of understanding of material & resources is enough to prompt class with meaningful discussion questions.
- 2. Structure:** Discussion should proceed on topic in organized fashion.
- 3. Participation:** Encourage & value everyone's contribution.
- 4. Time:** Discussion should stay within allotted time & neither rush nor drag.

Criteria for Evaluating Analytical Reading Ability:

- 1. Clear understanding of the author's thesis**
- 2. Clear understanding of the author's argumentation**
- 3. Determination of the author's viewpoint**

"A"	Superior mastery	A+ 97-100	A 93-96	A- 90-92
"B"	Good mastery	B+ 87-89	B 83-86	B- 80-82
"C"	Satisfactory achievement	C+ 77-79	C 73-76	C- 70-72
"D"	Less than satisfactory achievement	D+ 67-69	D 63-66	D- 60-62
"F"	Unsatisfactory achievement			

A+ is not a possible final course grade. Grades can and should measure achievement only, not effort.

Summary of Grade Distribution

- Collaborative Participation (20%)
- One-page critical reading/reflection essays: (15%)
- Written work on your individual project: (20%)
- Oral presentation of your individual project: (20%)
- Final Examination (might be combination of written and oral) (25%)

Attendance Policy

The number of allowable absences will be determined by the number of actual meetings. Since attendance is part of your participation grade, your absences will directly affect it. In any case, **any student missing more than one fourth of the sessions will automatically be given an F or an I for the course, depending on the circumstances.** Please remember that you must pass this course in order to graduate with a Religion & Philosophy major. Papers turned in late without a justifiable and verifiable excuse will be penalized 10 points for each day they are late. If you miss our meeting on a day you are responsible for leading discussion or giving a presentation, you will earn a zero unless you provide me with a justifiable and verifiable excuse.