

INDS 104 Knowledges

MW 1:30-4:30

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Office Hours MW 12:30-1:30

Course Description

The point of a university education, or indeed any form of education, is to provide you with knowledge. But when is our mission accomplished? What is it to have knowledge? The fundamental discipline, which precedes all other academic disciplines, is *epistemology* or theory of knowledge. Traditionally, knowledge was assumed to be a single phenomenon that could be studied analytically – by attempting to construct universal conditions for what counts as knowledge. More recently scholars have concluded that there is no single phenomenon that can be called “knowledge,” but instead there are different kinds of knowledge and different ways of knowing. This course will trace the history of theory of knowledge, beginning in Greece and the Islamic world, moving through enlightenment era Europe and the scientific revolution that follows. This inquiry ends in a radical form of holism – knowledge is not grounded in indubitable facts but hangs together like a ship on the ocean. Feminist scholars have taken this holistic approach to construct a pluralistic theory of knowledge which makes room for indigenous knowledge, multicultural approaches to knowledge, and embodied, non-cognitive ways of knowing.

Learning Outcomes:

Students should be able to demonstrate their understanding of the history of theories of knowledge by engaging in discussions, completing written exams, and writing and revising an original essay that argues for a specific thesis related to ethical theory.

Textbook:

The texts for this course will be available for free on Moodle.

Assessments:

The assessments in this course are largely designed to keep you engaged with the lectures, readings, discussions, and other students in the course. Your grades for discussion, quizzes, essay proposal, and peer review total 55% of your grade. It should be easy to do well on these components if you stay engaged. The midterm, final exam, and final essay will be graded on quality, and to get top marks on these components you will be required to demonstrate understanding of the material (for the midterm and final exam) and some original philosophical insight (for the final essay). Your grade in the course will be composed of the following:

Discussion Participation – 15%

Each week students will post twice to a discussion board on Moodle. One post will be an original question, objection, or extension of the course material. The other post will be a response to someone else’s post (criticism or questions about others’ posts is encouraged so long as it is done respectfully). The goal of the discussion is not merely to report on what you have read and seen in lecture. The goal is to demonstrate some original thought that goes further. The discussion board is a low-stakes arena for sparking ideas that might develop into a term paper.

Quizzes – 15%

At the end of each week, a short, in-class quiz on that unit will be taken in class. The goal of the quizzes is to assess whether students are keeping up with reading and lectures. They are designed to be quite easy for students who do so.

Midterm – 15%

The midterm will be in class 6/5. It will consist of two short essays (1-2 pages each). Students will be provided four essay prompts ahead of time and may choose to write on any two of them. The essay prompts will be on topics from the first half of the course. The short essays should demonstrate understanding of the claims and arguments from the readings and lectures on the given topic. The essay prompts will be provided 5/29.

Research Proposal – 10%

Students will give a short presentation in class 6/12 in which they explain the thesis they plan to argue for in their essay and outline the argumentative strategy they will employ. Students will comment on each other's proposals, providing constructive feedback. Your thesis and arguments may change over the course of composing the draft and revising it into a final paper. This assignment is designed to get you thinking about your essay early-on and receive feedback on how it may be improved. Students are free to choose any topic that interests them. Specific prompts will also be provided as models for the appropriate scope of the essay, and students may choose to write on those prompts if they wish. Prompts will be provided 6/5 after the midterm.

Essay draft – 15%

One of the most important parts of writing an essay is revision. Students will be required to turn in a rough draft of their essay, due 6/19. The essay should present and develop an original thesis on one of the topics of the course. Prompts will be provided, but students are welcome to develop their own essay topics. The essay should be narrowly focused on a very specific claim, likely a single premise in an argument presented in a lecture or reading. Provide an original argument for your view about that claim and consider objections to your argument. The essay should be 5 pages (1250 words), give or take a page. It should be easy to get full points for your draft so long as it reflects an honest effort to make a cogent argument. I will provide comments on how the draft might be improved.

Final Essay – 15%

Students will revise their essay, taking into account the comments they receive. You are almost certainly expected to make significant changes to your essay in order to get top marks. The final draft will be graded on quality, not merely on effort. The final essay will be due 6/26.

Final Exam – 15%

The final exam will be similar in format to the midterm exam. It will consist of two short essays (1-2 pages each). Students will be provided four essay prompts ahead of time and may choose to write on any two of them. The essay prompts will be on topics from units 4-6. The short essays should demonstrate understanding of the claims and arguments from the readings and lectures on the given topic. The essay prompts will be posted 6/19. The final exam will be in class 6/26.

Course Schedule

5/20 Course Intro/ Ancient and Medieval Epistemology - Readings: Plato, *Theaetetus*; Ibn Sina, "The Flying Man"

5/22 Foundationalism – Readings: Renee Descartes, *Meditations 1-3*; G. E. Moore, "Proof of an External World"; Lewis Carroll, "What the Tortoise Said to Achilles."

5/27 Memorial Day Holiday

5/29 Analytic Epistemology – Readings: Edmund Gettier, “Is Justified, True Belief Knowledge?”; Alvin Goldman, “A Causal Theory of Knowing”; Alvin Goldman, “Discrimination and Perceptual Knowledge.”

6/3 Scientific Knowledge – Readings: David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Ch. 4; Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, Ch. 1; Pierre Duhem, “An Experiment in Physics Can Never Condemn an Isolated Hypothesis but Only a Whole Theoretical Group.”

6/5 Chinese Epistemology – Reading: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “Epistemology in Chinese Philosophy”; Review and Midterm

6/10 Embodied Knowledge – Readings: Tamar Gendler, “Alief and Belief”; J. J. Gibson, “The Theory of Affordances”; Alva Noe, “Precis of *Action in Perception*”

6/12 Presentations

6/17 Feminist Epistemology – Readings: Karen Barbour, “Embodied Ways of Knowing”; Elizabeth Anderson, “Feminist Epistemology: An Interpretation and Defense”; Rachel MacKinnon, “Epistemic Injustice.”

6/19 Juneteenth Holiday; Essay Draft Due

6/24 Indigenous Knowledge – Readings: Susan Materer et al., “Indigenous Knowledge Systems: Characteristics and Importance to Climatic Uncertainty”; Deborah McGregor, “Indigenous Knowledge, Environment, and Our Future.”

6/26 Review and Final Exam; Final Draft Due

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Woodbury University is committed to building a university that values student, staff and faculty engagement in addressing issues of diversity, equity and inclusiveness because this is an essential part of an experience-centered education. We create an inclusive climate because we know that the richness of different experiences and perspectives is intrinsically valuable and vital to advancing innovation, critical thinking, solving complex problems, and creating a vibrant academic community. We seek to create a campus culture with this wide range of perspectives and experiences by recruiting and encouraging diverse candidates to apply as students, staff and faculty, including people of any race, color, creed, national origin, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, socioeconomic status, disability, religion or military status.

OSD Accommodation:

Woodbury University is committed to making reasonable accommodations to assist individuals with disabilities in reaching their academic potential. Students desiring accommodations due to a physical, learning or psychological disability must first complete an Accommodations Request Form, which can be downloaded from <http://go.woodbury.edu>, and found under “Academic Resources.” Accommodations cannot be granted prior to the instructor’s receipt of a Notification of Special Needs Release Form from the Disabilities Coordinator. Accommodations are never provided

retroactively. (For more information, contact Dr. Teresa Young, Disabilities Coordinator in the Whitten Center (818) 394-3345.)

Religious Accommodation:

If you require any accommodation on religious grounds, please alert me in writing as soon as possible.

Academic Integrity:

All instances of academic offences including plagiarism, cheating on exams, and multiple submission of work, will be handled in accordance with official Woodbury University policy, which can be found in the Student Handbook on the University website Please read the policy and ensure that you understand it.