

Instructor: Brian Talbot

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Course Website: bigfatgenius.com/1000

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Office hours: Tuesday and Thursday, 1:30-3:15. If you can't make those times, email me and we can set up a special appointment.

Course Overview

This class will teach you how to start asking and answering some of life's most important questions. We'll do this by exploring classical issues in philosophy: knowledge, identity, and the nature of minds. While these are classical issues, this class will focus on aspects of these topics that are on the cutting edge of current thought. We will ask whether corporations have beliefs and intentions; whether you are identical now to the person who will be in your body when you graduate college or retire; whether you can rationally plan for the future; and whether we can have reasonable beliefs about religion or politics.

Course Requirements

Your course grade will be based on:

Homework: 20% of final grade

Quizzes: 15% of final grade

First paper: Percentage of final grade to be determined by student

Final paper: Percentage of final grade to be determined by student

Homework: Homework will be assigned roughly once a week (occasionally more often). It will be listed on the course website, and you should check regularly to see if anything is there. Homework exists for your benefit. It helps you to do the readings by asking questions that direct you towards the most important issues in the texts. It improves class discussion, because we'll all be better prepared. It allows me to assess your understanding and adapt my lessons to your needs. Finally, the feedback you get on the homework helps you to improve how you read and learn.

In order for the homework to accomplish these functions, it has to be done before we talk about it in class. In the past, some students have done the homework during class on their laptop, and then claimed that they forgot to print it out. This defeats the purpose of the homework, and other students felt it was unfair when people got away with this. To avoid this issue, I will only accept homework if you turn in a printed copy in class the day that I collect it. No late homework will be accepted, nor early homework, nor emailed homework, and no one else may turn homework in for you (exceptions can be made for excused absences). So that I can actually read the homework, it may not be handwritten.

Quizzes: At least four quizzes will be given (maybe more); these will not be announced in advance. Most of what is tested on the quizzes will only be covered in class.

Like the homework, the quizzes serve a number of functions. Research shows that frequent, short quizzes greatly help better students to retain what they learn. Further, in order for us to have a mutually beneficial conversation, we all need to be able to use the concepts we've learned in that conversation. Quizzes encourage you to acquire this fluency. They also allow me to assess what people need help with. And they tell you what you need to work more on.

If you miss a quiz, and have a documented good excuse for your absence, you can make the quiz up; otherwise, you cannot.

Papers: We'll have two papers, which will require you to explain and defend your own views on issues we've covered in class. I'll give out detailed instructions and grading standards when the paper assignments are handed out.

Papers exist to give you the opportunity to really engage with some of the hardest questions we've covered, and to work out what *you* think about these as best you can. The topics and structure of the assignments will be chosen accordingly. These will be challenging, but students in the past have reported that they find this challenge extremely rewarding.

Attendance: One of the goals of this course is that you learn to think well about philosophical questions. This is a skill that is developed through interaction with other students. Attendance is thus mandatory. You may miss three classes without an excuse. Every unexcused absence after that lowers your grade by 1/3 of a step (e.g. from an A- to a B+). Lateness may count as an absence. I'm happy to excuse absences if given evidence of a legitimate excuse. If you know in advance that you need to miss class for a good reason, please let me know ahead of time.

Additional Policies

Accommodations for disabilities: If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit your accommodation letter from Disability Services to your faculty member in a timely manner so that your needs can be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities in the academic environment. Information on requesting accommodations is located on the [Disability Services website](#). Contact Disability Services at 303-492-8671 or dsinfo@colorado.edu for further assistance. If you have a temporary medical condition or injury, see [Temporary Medical Conditions](#) under the Students tab on the Disability Services website.

Classroom Behavior: Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, veteran status, political affiliation or political philosophy. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records. For more information, see the policies on [classroom behavior](#) and the [Student Code of Conduct](#).

Honor Code: All students enrolled in a University of Colorado Boulder course are responsible for knowing and adhering to the Honor Code. Violations of the policy may include: plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, lying, bribery, threat, unauthorized access to academic materials, clicker fraud, submitting the same or similar work in more than one course without permission from all course instructors involved, and aiding academic dishonesty. All incidents of academic misconduct will be reported to the Honor Code (honor@colorado.edu; 303-492-5550). Students who are found responsible for violating the academic integrity policy will be subject to nonacademic sanctions from the Honor Code as well as academic sanctions from the faculty member.

Additional information regarding the Honor Code academic integrity policy can be found at the [Honor Code Office website](#).

Students do often learn better by working together. There are ways to pool your resources with other students without plagiarizing. Please talk to me if you are interested in working with other students and want to avoid problems.

Sexual Misconduct, Discrimination, Harassment and/or Related Retaliation: The University of Colorado Boulder (CU Boulder) is committed to fostering a positive and welcoming learning, working, and living environment. CU Boulder will not tolerate acts of sexual misconduct (including sexual assault, exploitation, harassment, dating or domestic violence, and stalking), discrimination, and harassment by members of our community. Individuals who believe they have been subject to misconduct or retaliatory actions for reporting a concern should contact the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance (OIEC) at 303-492-2127 or cureport@colorado.edu. Information about the OIEC, university policies, [anonymous reporting](#), and the campus resources can be found on the [OIEC website](#).

Please know that faculty and instructors have a responsibility to inform OIEC when made aware of incidents of sexual misconduct, discrimination, harassment and/or related retaliation, to ensure that individuals impacted receive information about options for reporting and support resources.

Religious Holidays: Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to deal reasonably and fairly with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. Please notify me in advance if there are any classes you need to miss for religious reasons, and we will work out accommodations. See the [campus policy regarding religious observances](#) for full details.

Schedule

This is subject to change. The most current schedule, all readings, and all assignments will be posted on the course website.

Week One

- Introduction

Week Two: The justification of religious beliefs

- William Alston, Perceiving God

Week Three: Religious disagreement

- Linda Zagzebski, Self-trust and the diversity of religions

Week Four: Faith

- Lara Buchak, When is faith rational?

Week Five: Epistemic problems

- Miranda Fricker, Epistemic injustice

- Elizabeth Anderson, The social epistemology of morality

Week Six: Transformative experiences

- Laurie Paul, What you can't expect when you are expecting

Week Seven

- Review for first paper, how to write a paper

Week Eight

- More on paper writing

Week Nine: Personal identity

- Eric Olson, Was I ever a fetus?
- Paper due

Week Ten: Trauma and the loss of identity

- Susan Brison, Trauma narratives

Week Eleven: Do corporations have minds?

- Deborah Tollefson, Organizations as true believers

Week Twelve: Animal consciousness

- Colin Klein & Andrew Barron, Insects have the capacity for subjective experience

Fall break

Week Thirteen: Attention, consciousness, the self

- Carolyn Jennings, I attend therefore I am

Week Fourteen

- Student selected topic

Week Fifteen

- Final paper due