

## PHI 414C: Philosophy Seminar Capstone

**College:** College of Arts & Letters

**Department:** Philosophy

**PHI 414C: Philosophy Seminar; Topic for Spring 2016: Liberty & Liberal Education**

**Term/ Year:** Spring, 2016

**Total Units of Course Credit:** 3 credits

**Mode of Instruction:** In Person

**Instructor's Name:** Christopher Griffin

**Instructor's Contact Information:** Babbitt Academic Annex, Room 106. 928-523-9079

**Instructor's Availability:** Office Hours: Mondays, 2-3:30pm; Thursdays, 12:25-1:45pm, appt.

### Course Purpose & Description:

All sections of the Philosophy Seminar, regardless of specific topic, serve the purpose of providing a **culminating experience in the Philosophy major** or as one option for the Philosophy, Politics & Law major. This capstone course affords Philosophy majors the opportunity to engage in these on-going dialogs about some of the most fundamental questions and concepts that are elsewhere taken for granted. The goal of such debates in general, and the capstone seminar in particular, is the clarification of basic aspects of our existence or our lives lived in social, political, and physical worlds. As a culminating experience in the major, students will be required to draw on the logical tools developed in previous coursework in order to productively participate in inquiries essential to a philosophical education. In addition, all sections of the Philosophy Seminar will emphasize the Liberal Studies essential skills of **Critical Thinking** [learning outcome #1—see below] and **Effective Writing** [learning outcome #2]. Finally, all sections of the Philosophy seminar will emphasize material appropriate to the **Aesthetic & Humanistic Inquiry** distribution block as defined by the Liberal Studies program. In this block, those courses emphasizing humanistic inquiry require students to “study the human condition through philosophical inquiry.” The human condition is front and center in many areas of philosophical inquiry: *what is human nature, what is the good life for humans, what do we owe to others, what is it possible for humans to know and how can we know various things, what is truth, what is existence, what is real, what is possible, what is necessary and why, is meaning discovered or created or illusory, are humans free and if so in what senses, is the mind something distinct from the physical brain, what is explanation, ...* these reflect some basic questions that occur to the reflective human and understanding ourselves, our culture, and condition is advanced by understanding the attempts to answer such questions [learning outcome #3].

The topic for any particular section of the Philosophy Seminar will vary across offerings, but for all sections, the seminar provides for a culminating experience in that it ensures that students demonstrate the developed capacity for reading and analyzing philosophical work (historical, contemporary or both) and to demonstrate the developed capacities for thinking logically and writing effectively, in accordance with the stated missions of the degree programs. The seminar experience requires students to integrate both the skillful intellectual activity characteristic of philosophy and engagement with substantive questions concerning some perennial aspect of the human condition as explored through classical and/or contemporary philosophical texts.

This section of the Philosophy Seminar (Spring 2016) focuses on Conceptions of Liberty &

**Comment [1]:** This capstone is a TOPICS capstone. In this syllabus, the department guarantees that particular elements of the capstone will be COMMON to ALL sections of the course (in this case, the section offered in Spring 2016). The section-specific material is an illustration of how the claims COMMON TO ALL SECTIONS are illustrated in a particular case. The LSC will review course purpose/description, Learning Outcomes, and assessment portions COMMON TO ALL SECTIONS for alignment with the Liberal Studies requirements for capstones (i.e., two LS Essential Skills, one LS Distribution Block, and a culminating experience as defined by the unit).

**Comment [2]:** This paragraph in the course purpose establishes how all iterations of this course will function as a culminating experience within the major and deliver on Degree Program Learning Outcomes. This paragraph explains how students, drawing on previously acquired skills in the major and from within Liberal Studies coursework will “do Philosophy.”

**Comment [3]:** The department has committed to these two particular Liberal Studies essential skills and to the distribution block of AHI in all future versions of this capstone course. This alignment with one Liberal Studies distribution block is a new requirement for capstone courses. Reference to each skill and the distribution block should make use of definitions and purpose statements approved by the Liberal Studies Committee.

**Comment [4]:** These two paragraphs contain information now required of all capstone syllabi. Since the capstone in Philosophy is a topics course, these two paragraphs will be boilerplate for all instructors teaching the capstone, and thus COMMON TO ALL SECTIONS. Notice also that these paragraphs indicate how the Liberal Studies requirements are connected to the Student Learning Outcomes that are also specified as COMMON TO ALL SECTIONS.

**Comment [5]:** In a topics course, the course purpose will also include specific information about a particular semester's focus and its intersections with common aspects of all courses.

Each faculty member teaching the capstone will create this description relative to his or her particular subject matter. For the Liberal Studies Capstone Refresh process, this material is an illustration of how the general claims common to all sections are **instantiated** in a particular case.

Liberal Education. Students will explore the apparent tension between two traditions important in Western thought: the eudaimonist tradition of education deriving from the Ancient Greeks and the more recent liberal political tradition emerging in the wake of European wars of religion. The eudaimonist tradition of education of Plato and Aristotle (inspiring later conceptions of liberal education), champions as essential to education the aim of cultivating the good life, while the liberal political tradition requires the state to be neutral between competing conceptions of the good life, securing the liberty for each individual to develop and pursue that form of life he or she chooses. Are each of these traditions worth defending? Can the tension between the two traditions be resolved coherently? In what ways has your education reflected either (or both) of these traditions?

### Course Learning Outcomes

For all sections of the Philosophy Capstone, students will demonstrate through either a major term paper or a series of papers the capacities for critical thinking and effective writing, capacities central to academic philosophical development. This writing will constitute the culminating experience in the major, requiring students to integrate the logical and analytic skill acquired in coursework required in the major with the substantive examination of the human condition after the study of historical and/or contemporary philosophical work.

The culminating experience of every philosophy capstone seminar, regardless of topic, will require students to demonstrate an ability to:

1. Think critically as conceived within the Liberal Studies Program, articulating clearly the meaning of statements central to the philosophical material at hand, determining the truth of statements, and determining whether conclusions are warranted by evidence. This skill of reasoning soundly is to be manifest in assigned reading, discussion and writing. [LS Essential Skill: Critical Thinking]
2. Write effectively as conceived within the Liberal Studies Program, using appropriate organizational structures, supporting material and language to achieve exegetical accuracy, argumentative cogency or insightful analysis given the assigned topic. [LS Essential Skill: Effective Writing]
3. Explore in depth and appropriate breadth some facet of the human condition as it has developed historically and is debated in contemporary work. This exploration will draw together and integrate both the central philosophical analytic skills developed in the major coursework as well as the appropriate subject matter from other courses in the track. [Culminating Experience in the Major and AHI Distribution Block]

In this section (Spring 2016), the particular student learning outcomes are as follows. Students who successfully complete this course will

- have cultivated their capacities for critical analysis of primary texts in two central philosophical traditions (Platonic eudaimonism; Rawlsian Political Liberalism), reading for arguments and subjecting them to critical scrutiny (#1 & #3 above);
- have developed their capacities for clear and compelling written argumentation (by means of the construction of a final essay that addresses the philosophical tension central to this course) (#2 above);

**Comment [6]:** This preface to the Student Learning Outcomes helps establish how this capstone is a culminating experience in alignment with Degree Program Learning Outcomes.

**Comment [7]:** These outcomes are COMMON TO ALL SECTIONS of the capstone in Philosophy. Every future version of this course must include Learning Outcomes that reflect the two designated essential skills, the AHI distribution block, and be aligned with the Degree Program Learning Outcomes that are on file with the Office of Curriculum, Learning Design & Academic Assessment. In Philosophy's case, all three LO's align with our Degree Program Learning Outcomes.

- have refined their sense of the ways in which their educational experience has been valuable (and might have been valuably different) (#3 above);
- have initiated or advanced the construction of a robust analytic framework for discharging duties as a citizen and for answering their kids when those kids ask why they have to go to school in a way better than, “Because I said so.” [believe it or not, I’m serious about this last **one**]

**Comment [8]:** These are the Course Student Learning Outcomes specific to the particular section of the capstone taught in Spring 2016, and each faculty teaching the capstone in subsequent terms will specify these as he or she sees fit; note how they are aligned with the three general ones listed immediately above.

### Assignments/Assessments of Course Student Learning Outcomes

For all sections of the Philosophy Seminar Capstone, students will be assessed in large part on the basis of their extended prose writing on subject matters that subject some facet of the human condition to sustained critical thought. This extended prose writing may be done in some combination of a cumulative term argumentative essay (10-20 pages), briefer exegetical and or critical response papers of varying length (3-7 pages in length), and multiple shorter reading response or discussion initiation papers (up to 2 pages in length). These papers will be assessed for both presentation and content. Presentation will be assessed on the basis of writing (mechanics, style and clarity) while content will be assessed on the basis of accuracy, insight, originality, logical analysis, cogent argumentation, appropriateness of focus, responsiveness to prompt, etc). The extended prose writing assignments will be the primary basis on which students are, in all sections of the Philosophy Capstone Seminar, assessed for critical thinking and effective writing. The topic specific to any given section of the Philosophy Capstone Seminar will determine the facet(s) of the human condition with which students will engage, bringing to bear both the range of critical thinking skills and substance of the coursework in the major. Students may also be expected to complete other types of assignment: annotation of texts, formulation of critical reading/discussion questions, reading quizzes (on-line or in-class), review of peer writing, oral presentations, among others.

**Comment [9]:** Here, the syllabus demonstrates how assignments will assess and deliver on the Course Student Learning Outcomes. These assessments will be COMMON TO ALL SECTIONS of the PHI capstone. The two identified essential skills and the outcomes linked to the distribution blocks must be assessed in the assignments. (The page number estimations are merely guidelines). Assignments that assess Liberal Studies skills and distribution block outcomes (in this case, alongside Degree Program Learning Outcomes) should compose a significant portion of the course grade.

In this section (Spring 2016), students will be assessed on the basis of three essays cumulatively worth 80% of course, and 20% being composed of reading quizzes and discussion question responses. The first essay will focus on reconstruction and critique of the eudaimonist educational tradition, the second essay being a revision of the first essay and then extended to reconstruct and critique the liberal political tradition’s emphasis on individual liberty and state neutrality with respect to conceptions of the good, and the final essay being an argumentative essay examining the potential, or lack thereof, for reconciling the two traditions. Virtually every reading assignment will be subject to either a reading quiz or a discussion question response.

Essays for this section will be evaluated on the basis of their substantive engagement with the two featured traditions, each of which reflects a concern central to the human experience, how education and political institutions provide the context within which individuals aspire to exercise freely their liberty to formulate meaningful lives. This engagement requires critical thought and is to be made evident by means of effective writing, a second basis on which student work will be assessed.

### Grading System:

*The course grade for this section will be computed on the basis of the following assignments:*

**Comment [10]:** The rest of this syllabus offers one “embodiment” of the generic and agreed-to common elements in all versions of this capstone course. Syllabi with more extensive information will indicate how specific instructors will “actualize” aspects COMMON TO ALL SECTIONS.

<i>Preliminary Essay</i> .....	20%
<i>Revised Essay</i> .....	25%
<i>Final Essay</i> .....	35%
<i>Discussion Questions/Short Reading Assignments</i> .....	20%

*A grade of A will be awarded for those earning 90% of the available points, a grade of B for those earning 80-89.9%, a grade of C for those earning 70-79.9%, a grade of D for those earning 60-69.9% and a grade of F for those earning less than 60% of the available points.*

**Readings and Materials**

Excerpts for this section will be posted in BBLearn, including substantial excerpts from Plato’s *Republic* (Grube translation), John Stuart Mill’s *On Liberty*, John Rawls’ *Political Liberalism*, and a variety of more recent works on the two traditions.

**Class Outline or Tentative Schedule**

- Week One: Course Introduction and Preliminary Discussion of pre-theoretical thoughts on education and individual liberty.
- Weeks Two through Six: Plato’s *Republic* and essays on the eudaimonist tradition of education
- Weeks Seven through Twelve: Political Liberalism, Individual Liberty and State Neutrality
- Weeks Thirteen-Fifteen: The Great Debate: Can the two traditions be reconciled?

**Class Policies:**

Attendance will be taken on a routine basis. There are no make-up assignments, including reading quizzes in BBLearn, without documented excuse. Late assignments may not be accepted without excuse or prior arrangement with instructor; if unexcused assignments are accepted, they are likely to be subject to substantial penalty.

**University Policies:** This course, as are all NAU courses, is subject to a variety of policies as can be found here: <https://nau.edu/OCLDAA/Forms/UCC/SyllabusPolicyStmts2-2014/>