

Epistemology

Instructor: Dr. Evan T. Woods
Office: Knapp Hall 205D
Office Hours: MWF 11:00AM–12:00PM, and by appointment
E-mail: woodse@denison.edu
Location of Class: Knapp Hall 202
Time: TR 10:00–11:20

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Epistemology is concerned with the nature of knowledge, its justification, and its limits. This course is primarily a survey of some current, exciting topics in applied epistemology. We'll begin the course by asking what knowledge is, surveying an influential account, and considering some difficulties and subsequent responses. In asking after the nature of knowledge, however, we want to do more than simply *describe* knowledge, we want to know what normative concepts govern knowledge and belief: *what should we believe, and on what basis?* These are practical questions, the answers to which should guide us in everyday life. For instance, we want to know how we should determine what to believe and what to do in the face of disagreement with our peers, and whether, and when, we should believe what experts say. Finally, there are political ramifications of these sorts of questions. For instance, what's wrong—if *anything*—with believing conspiracy theories like flat-Earth-ism, QAnon, and the Seth Rich stuff? In what ways has epistemology systemically disenfranchised some folks' testimony, and what can we do about it? What is implicit bias, and what can epistemology contribute? We conclude with discussion of some potential epistemic problems posed by the internet.

REQUIRED TEXT

What to Believe Now: Applying Epistemology to Contemporary Issues. David Coady.

All other readings will be distributed via Notebowl.

LEARNING GOALS

After completing this course, students will be able to do the following:

- Define, explain, recognize, and use core concepts of epistemology, including justified true belief, evidence, testimony, epistemic injustice, and implicit bias;
- Construct and evaluate arguments and positions in contemporary epistemology; and



- Articulate the importance and role of the topics of this course in autonomous thinking, discerning moral agency, and active citizenship both inside and outside of the classroom.

METHOD OF EVALUATION

Your final grade will be calculated on the following basis:

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|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| • Short Writings: 20% | • Group Presentation 2: 12.5% |
| • Paper 1: 20% | • Participation: 10% |
| • Paper 2: 30% | |
| • Group Presentation 1: 7.5% | |

EXPLANATION OF METHOD OF EVALUATION

Short Writings

Over the course of the semester, you'll be asked to do four short writing assignments either before or after class on the readings for particular classes. This serves two goals. First, it affords students the opportunity to articulate their ideas more clearly and with more care than they might be able to do so in the classroom. Second, it ensures that students come to class with a deeper understanding of the material than they might otherwise have. I will collect these and give you feedback on your work; you'll need to incorporate feedback in the rest of the course. This is part of the four credit hours for this course.

Essays

I want you to do philosophy in this course. Doing philosophy well requires a lot of different competencies. One of them is presenting arguments clearly, concisely, and with care. Another competency necessary for doing philosophy well is putting views in conversation with one another. The first essay will focus primarily on these two skills; you'll be asked to write about two different views we've discussed and come down on one side or the other. The second, longer essay is more open-ended, though it will obviously need to display philosophical competencies; for this essay, you will identify a thesis in consultation with me and write an essay on it, incorporating ideas from the rest of the course. I'll tell you more about these essays in due time.

Group Presentation

Some students dislike group work. I did. I like it now. It's a good way for students to learn to work with other people. It's also a good way for students to learn material; working through and presenting a topic leads to more learning. In addition, it will allow you to work on your presentation skills. You'll be asked to work with a partner to briefly present the reading for the day and lead a short discussion. You'll need to meet with me beforehand so we can figure out what you're going to be doing.

Participation

There are a lot of different ways to participate in this class. Participation in this format includes, but isn't limited to:

- Asking a clarifying question
- Correcting my mistakes
- Assisting a classmate in class
- Answering a question
- Doing your best to work through a problem
- Attending class and being engaged in the discussion and work
- Seeing me in office hours
- Posting on Notebowl

So, everyone has ample opportunity to get full participation credit. Indeed, I expect everyone to put enough into the class to do so.

SCHEDULE

	Class Meeting	Topic	Required Assignment
Skepticism, JTB, and post-Gettier Epistemology			
Week 0	8/29	Introductions	After Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read syllabus
Week 1	9/3	Skepticism about the External World	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descartes, selections from <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i> • Sextus Empiricus, "Five Modes"
	9/5	Skepticism about Other Minds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bertrand Russell, "The Argument from Analogy" • Group Presentation 1 on Russell
Week 2	9/10	Skepticism about the Internal World	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alex Byre, "Skepticism about the Internal World" • Sarah Paul, "John Doe and Richard Roe"

Short writing assignment 1 on any of the papers from 9/5 – 9/19. Each will have the same prompt: What is the argument being made by the author? Be as clear as possible.

	9/12	Escape from Skepticism?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> G.E. Moore, “Proof of an External World” David Lewis, “Elusive Knowledge” Group Presentation 2 on Moore 	
Week 3	9/17	Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Edmund Gettier, “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?” Group Presentation 3 on Gettier Alvin Goldman, “A Causal Theory of Knowing” 	
	9/19		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Timothy Williamson, “Knowledge and Belief” 	

Applied Epistemology				
Week 4	9/24	What's Applied Epistemology?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">James Chase and David Coady "The Return of Applied Epistemology"	
	9/26		<ul style="list-style-type: none">Tim Kenyon, "Disagreement"	
Disagreement				
Week 5	10/1	Religious Disagreement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Richard Feldman, "Reasonable Religious Disagreement"Group Presentation 4 on Feldman	(Possible short writing assignment 2 , depending on topic of colloquium.) Otherwise, write in response to two of the readings: Compare and contrast two approaches to disagreement.
	10/3		<ul style="list-style-type: none">Jennifer Lackey, "Taking Religious Disagreement Seriously"Group Presentation 5 on Lackey	
	10/4	Special Events	Jennifer Lackey Lunch Colloquium @ 4PM More details to follow, but attendance required at the colloquium, at least.	
Week 6	10/8	Disagreement more generally	<ul style="list-style-type: none">David Christensen, "Disagreement as Evidence: The Epistemology of Controversy"	
	10/10		<ul style="list-style-type: none">Thomas Kelly, "The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement"	

Expert Testimony				
Week 7	10/15	Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">David Coady, <i>What to Believe Now</i>, Chapter 2	
	10/17	No Class—Autumn Break		
Week 8	10/22	Climate Change Experts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Alvin Goldman, “Experts: Which Ones Should You Trust?”	
	10/24		<ul style="list-style-type: none">David Coady and Richard Corry, “Experts in the Climate Change Debate”	
	10/25	Paper 1 Due		
Conspiracy Theories				
Week 9	10/29	Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Coady, <i>What to Believe Now</i>, Chapters 4 and 5Watch: TBA, but probably some episode of <i>Unsolved Mysteries</i>	Short writing assignment 3: Compare and contrast Sunstein and Vermeule’s proposal for dealing with conspiracy theories with Dentith and Kelley’s. Which do you think is the more sensible proposal? Why?
	10/31	The Epistemology of Conspiracy Theories	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Cass Sunstein and Adrian Vermeule, “Conspiracy Theories: Causes and Cures”David Coady, “Cass Sunstein and Adrian Vermeule on Conspiracy Theories”M R. X Dentith and Brian Kelley, “The Applied Epistemology of Conspiracy Theories: An overview”	
Week 10	11/5		<ul style="list-style-type: none">Overflow/Group Presentation Planning	
	11/7		<ul style="list-style-type: none">Group Presentation 6	

Implicit Bias				
Week 11	11/12	Introduction	Before Coming to Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Race-Weapon IAT Listen: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Jennifer Saul on Implicit Bias Read: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• B. Payne, “Weapon Bias”	
	11/14	Implicit Bias: Epistemology and Ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Daniel Kelly and Erica Roedder, “Racial Cognition and the Ethics of Implicit Bias”	
Week 12	11/19		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tamar Gendler, “The Epistemic Costs of Implicit Bias”	
	11/21			
Week 13	11/26	No Class—Thanksgiving Break		
	11/28			
Epistemic Injustice				
Week 14	12/3	Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Listen: Miranda Fricker on Epistemic Injustice• Rachel McKinnon, “Epistemic Injustice”	Short writing assignment 4: Discuss Basu’s thesis that racist beliefs can harm people in the context of Fricker’s views of epistemic injustice.
	12/5	Can racist beliefs wrong?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rima Basu, “The Wrongs of Racist Beliefs”	
Blogs				
Week 15	12/10	Epistemology and the Internet	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Alvin Goldman, “The Social Epistemology of Blogging”• David Coady, <i>What to Believe Now</i>, Chapter 6	
	12/12		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Don Fallis, “The Adversarial Epistemology of the Internet”	
	12/17	Final Paper Due @ 8:30PM		

ACADEMIC CREDIT POLICY

This course adheres to Denison's academic credit policy. Though there are only three hours of direct contact time per week, there are indirect forms of instruction. You'll need to meet outside of class with one another and with me to plan group presentations. In addition, there will be extensive written feedback on your work that I expect you to review and implement.—That's how you learn this stuff! Finally, you are required to attend Dr. Lackey's colloquium on October 5th.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY

Proposed and developed by Denison students, passed unanimously by DCGA and Denison's faculty, the Code of Academic Integrity requires that instructors notify the Associate Provost of cases of academic dishonesty. Cases are typically heard by the Academic Integrity Board which determines whether a violation has occurred, and, if so, its severity and the sanctions. In some circumstances the case may be handled through an Administrative Resolution Procedure. Further, the code makes students responsible for promoting a culture of integrity on campus and acting in instances in which integrity is violated.

Academic honesty, the cornerstone of teaching and learning, lays the foundation for lifelong integrity. Academic dishonesty is intellectual theft. It includes, but is not limited to, providing or receiving assistance in a manner not authorized by the instructor in the creation of work to be submitted for evaluation. This standard applies to all work ranging from daily homework assignments to major exams. Students must clearly cite any sources consulted—not only for quoted phrases but also for ideas and information that are not common knowledge. Neither ignorance nor carelessness is an acceptable defense in cases of plagiarism. It is the student's responsibility to follow the appropriate format for citations. Students should ask their instructors for assistance in determining what sorts of materials and assistance are appropriate for assignments and for guidance in citing such materials clearly. *For further information about the Code of Academic Integrity, see <http://denison.edu/academics/curriculum/integrity>.*

ELECTRONICS POLICY

To ensure a learning environment with minimal distractions, no electronic devices (e.g., laptops and smartphones) are to be used in class except in the accommodation of documented learning issues or when otherwise indicated (e.g., during course evaluations or to access an online resource at my direction).

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Class attendance and participation are required. Absences will be recorded. Students with more than three unexcused absences will receive no marks for participation in the course. Constructive participation will positively impact your grade. For those who are disinclined to speak in class,

discussion during office hours constitutes constructive participation. Participation grades will be determined by the extent to which your constructive participation contributes to the aims and environment of the course. Any reading quizzes count toward participation.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Students with a documented disability who wish to request reasonable academic accommodations based on the impact of a disability should complete a Request for Academic Accommodations/Faculty Notification form with the Academic Resource Center (ARC) located in 020 Higley Hall and contact me privately as soon as possible to discuss specific needs and arrangements. I rely on the Academic Resource Center (ARC) to verify the need for reasonable accommodations based on the documentation on file in that office. Reasonable accommodations cannot be applied retroactively and therefore ideally should be enacted early in the semester as they are not automatically carried forward from a previous term and must be requested every semester.

APPROPRIATE USE OF COURSE MATERIALS

As an institution which strives to inspire and educate our students to become discerning moral agents and active citizens of a democratic society, we are committed to complying with all laws regarding copyright throughout the University. This syllabus and all course materials used in this course may be copyrighted and accordingly will be governed by the provisions of the U.S. copyright law (for an overview see <http://copyright.gov/circs/circ01.pdf> and for fair use guidelines see <http://copyright.gov/fair-use/more-info.html>). In particular, posting any course materials on commercial sites or creating a bank of materials for distribution to other students may be considered a violation of the University's Code of Academic Integrity as well as a breach of copyright law. If you have any questions about these guidelines, please speak with your instructor.

REPORTING SEXUAL ASSAULT

Essays, journals, and other coursework submitted for this class are generally considered confidential pursuant to the University's student record policies. However, students should be aware that University employees are required by University policy and Title IX guidance to report allegations of discrimination based on sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression or sexual orientation, including sexual misconduct, sexual assault and suspected abuse/neglect of a minor, occurring on campus and / or involving current students at Denison University when they become aware of possible incidents in the course of their employment, including via coursework or advising conversations. There are others on campus to whom you may speak in confidence, including counselors at the Whisler Center for Student Wellness, and clergy. More information on Title IX and University policy guidance on gender identity / expression bias and sexual misconduct / assault, including support resources, how to report, and prevention and education efforts, can be found at denison.edu/titleix; students may also contact Steve Gauger, Campus Title IX Coordinator, in Doane Administration 001, by email at gaugers@denison.edu, or by phone at 740-587-8660.

L2 OR MULTILINGUAL SUPPORT

In addition to the academic support services available to all Denison students, students who use English in addition to other languages can meet with Denison's Coordinator of Multilingual Learning, Kalynda Thayer. If English is not your first or only language, please consider utilizing this resource, which is available to ALL Denison students. Ms. Thayer offers a variety of support for L2 students, including consulting with you about your written language (grammar, syntax, word-choices), strategies to manage your reading assignments, assistance with class conversation and presentations, and to help devising ways to develop and effectively use all your skills in English. You can email her at thayerk@denison.edu to schedule an appointment.