

PHILOSOPHY 489
Senior Seminar

Prof. Sam Asarnow and Prof. Geoff Gorham

Office: Old Main 100 (Sam) and 106 (Geoff)

Office hours: M 3-5 (Sam); T,Th 12:30-1:15 (Geoff); and by appointment

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Slack Channel: <https://philosophysen-sjn1076.slack.com>

Objectives: The main purpose of the senior seminar is to help you write your capstone paper. We aim to facilitate an intellectually engaging, collaborative and supportive context for thinking, reading, writing, sharing, and rewriting. At the end of the semester, on Philosophy Senior Day, (Saturday Dec 7), you will give a formal presentation of this paper.

With a few exceptions, the focus in this class will be entirely on work-in-progress. You will write, write, write, throw out what you wrote, write some more, revise, throw everything out again, write, write, write, revise, revise, and finally be done. You won't develop your work alone: you will discuss your ideas with others, and help your fellow senior philosophy majors to develop their work as well. A secondary goal of the seminar is thus to build a philosophical community among the seminar participants, and to promote philosophical discussion both inside and outside the classroom. To that end, we encourage students to be involved in the philosophy club, and we expect seminar participants to participate in the life of the department, by attending philosophy colloquia and other departmental events.

In *Culture and Value* Wittgenstein wrote that "work on philosophy" was "really more work on oneself.....On how one sees things. (And what one expects from them.)" An informal and implicit purpose of this course is to offer you a space to reflect on how you see your study of philosophy continuing to shape yourself and your future upon your graduation from Macalester College.

The main assignment: You will write a philosophical essay of approximately 4500-6000 words (15-20 pages). The essay may be a little longer if necessary, but probably not much shorter.

The overarching goal of the essay is to contribute something interesting to a philosophical conversation that you care about. You will seek to say something interesting and new, in a way that relates to other interesting things other people have said. The most common way to do this is to clearly state a controversial thesis, explain how that thesis relates to things others have said, and use your paper to try to convince the reader that your thesis is true. Often, an interesting paper is one that shows that something someone else said is wrong, or one that argues that some view looks wrong, confused, etc., but then goes on to defend it in an original way. There are of course many ways to be philosophically interesting; most involve finding and articulating some problem or question, explaining why it is important, and attempting to solve or answer it.

Along the way, we hope that this writing this essay will give you the opportunity to:

- Cultivate your philosophical taste--that is, your sense of what is philosophically interesting (and what counts as original or novel).
- Develop the skill of giving a rigorous argument for your ideas--that is, an argument that can convince a skeptical reader that your ideas are correct.
- Practice putting another philosopher's ideas in your own words, and explaining them to someone else in a way that they can understand.
- Learn to put your own original ideas in conversation with what others have said, thus demonstrating their context and importance.
- Formulate and execute a novel intellectual project. You will set for yourself an intellectual goal (such as defending a theory, or convincing the reader of a controversial thesis), and your essay will seek to accomplish that goal.
- Enjoy participation in a lively, welcoming, and challenging intellectual community.

List of (Some) Important Dates (* = deadline)

Thursday, 9/19: Katia Vavova colloquium

Thursday, 10/9: International roundtable begins

Friday, 10/18: Patricia Blanchette colloquium

Monday, 10/21: No class meeting (spend the time writing)

*Monday, 10/28: First draft due

Thursday, 10/24: Fall break

*Monday, 11/18: Second draft due

Thursday, 11/28: Thanksgiving break

*Saturday, 12/7: Capstone presentations

*Saturday, 12/16: Final capstone due

Provisional Schedule

Week 1 (Sept 9) Pre-writing writing assignment due

Topics: the assignment, helpful technology, looking at previous capstones

Week 2 (Sept 16) "Philosophy practice" assignment due

Topics: summary and paraphrase, student presentations, listening and asking questions.

Week 3 (Sept 23) Topic proposal due

Topics: discussion of Vavova colloquium, topic proposals, small group discussion.

Week 4 (Sept 30) Annotated bibliography due

Topics: individual meetings with instructors, intensive in class writing.

Week 5 (Oct 7) 1000 words of writing + projected paper outline due today.

Topics: possible alumni visit today

Topics: individual meetings with instructors, intensive in class writing, alumni visits: Abigail Rankin (lawyer, MN appellate public defender's office), Martin Blanchard (head scientist for small company), Lily Rogers-Grant (graduate student, public health): 7:45.

Week 6 (Oct 14) 2000 words of writing due today

Topics: possible CDC visit, peer conferencing

Topics: Buddy time, small group discussions/presentations of rough drafts; visit from Kate Larson (CDC) at beginning of class time.

Week 7 (Oct 21)

No class meeting today; spend the time writing!!!

Final rough draft due today! (I.e., the rough draft that will be graded)

Topics: Dinner at Sam's house, discussion of Gabor colloquium, Sam and Janet's stories.

(Fall Break)

Week 8 (Oct 28) First draft due!

Topics: possible dinner meeting?

Topics: in class workshopping. One on one conferences.

Week 9 (Nov 4)

Topics: one-on-one meetings with Sam and Geoff

Bring a copy of your most recent draft to class

Alumni visit: Ami Naff (History Center), Milan Olmon (educator), Lily Rogers-Grant (social work / public health grad student)

Week 10 (Nov 11)

Topics: how to present; presentations by Geoff and Sam

Send written comments to your peer (by Weds 11/7)

Topics: colloquium discussion (Núñez), Janet and Sam presentations; conversation about presentations presentation

Week 11 (Nov 18) Second draft due today

Topics: peer-conferencing most recent drafts; peer-conferencing presentation plans;

Bring presentation plan and most recent draft to class

Topics: peer-conferencing most recent drafts; peer-conferencing presentation plans;

Week 12 (Nov 25) Practice presentations

(Thanksgiving Break)

Week 13 (Dec 2) Practice presentations

December 7 is Capstone Day!!

Week 14 (Dec 9)

Celebration!

Course Policies

Technology policy: Because this class is writing-focused, you will be expected to bring your laptop to class every week. You will also be expected to download and install Mendeley (or another piece of citation management software), and may be expected to use other pieces of technology, such as Google Drive or Slack.

Attendance policy: You are expected to attend every class. If you need to miss a class, please let Geoff or Sam know via email **before** the class meeting, and explain your absence. If you expect to miss many classes this semester, be aware that it may impact your grade. You are also expected to participate when appropriate. What counts as participation? Certainly, asking questions, engaging other students in conversation, and responding to questions that the

professor asks all count. But so does listening thoughtfully to the conversations that develop in class. Conversations in office hours also count as participation. Your attendance and participation together make up a substantial portion of your grade.

Accommodations policy: It is important to us that this course works for everyone. If you need an accommodation for a disability, the best thing to do is work through the Disability Services offices, by emailing disabilityservices@macalester.edu. DS will then contact us to set up an appropriate accommodation. You should do this as close to the beginning of the semester as possible. It is important to set up accommodations as close to the beginning of the semester as possible. You are also more than welcome to contact us at any time (after class, via email, in office hours, etc) to chat about how the course is going and to let us know if there is anything we can do to make the course more accessible for you. However, we are unable to grant requests for accommodations if they are not made officially through DS.

Academic Integrity Policy: We follow Macalester's policy on academic integrity. The policy is super easy to follow: (a) whenever you state something in your paper that wasn't your idea to begin with, include a footnote explaining whose idea it was; and (b) whenever you use more than two words in a row that originated in someone else's book or article, enclose them in quotation marks and include a footnote citing the source and page you borrowed it from. This applies to ideas from our in class readings, ideas from articles you found online, and ideas from a 2:00am conversation with your roommate. You will never be penalized for including an unnecessary citation; failing to cite appropriately can lead to failing the course or even being expelled. Macalester's official policy is that the penalty for a first instance of plagiarism is to receive a grade of zero on the assignment. Note that it is a violation of Macalester's academic integrity policy if your paper contains even a *single sentence* (or a large portion of a long sentence) that you took from another source.

Determination of Final Grades:

First draft: 15%

Second draft: 15%

Final written capstone paper: 30%.

Capstone presentation on Senior Day: 20%.

Attendance, participation, respect for deadlines, helpfulness with others' work, etc.: 20%