

Professor: Kevin Patton  
Course: PHIL 1010  
Day: Tues / Thurs  
Time: 10:00-11:15, 11:30-12:45,  
16:00-17:15  
Location: ASH 378 / 210

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# Meaning of Life

“Everything can be taken from a [person] but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.”

— Viktor E. Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*

## Course Overview

We all find ourselves at one point or another wondering what everything adds up to. This sentiment manifests itself as different questions: 'why are we here?', 'what's my purpose?', 'how can I lead a fulfilling life?', or, perhaps most relevantly, 'what is the meaning of life?'. Now that you're in college, these questions are of the essence. Where will you go from here? Which skills should you develop? Which major should you choose? What should you pursue? Love? Family? Friendship? Education? Career? Fame? Fortune? Religious devotion? Service to others? Fulfillment? Happiness? What does it mean to be happy or fulfilled? In this course, we're going to set all else aside and dedicate real effort to coming to grips with these questions. Our focus will be on developing our ability to think about what we're asking and acquiring the tools necessary to assess the responses on offer.

## Required Materials

*All course materials are available on our class website:* <https://phil1010.kevinjpatton.com>

# Course Information

**Preparation:** This course may be very challenging for you if you are not accustomed to reasoning in a rigorous fashion. If this is true of you, then you will only do well in this class if you dedicate much of your outside-of-class-time to practicing and mastering the relevant topics covered. Also, the only dumb questions are the ones you don't ask. If you are confused about something, then there is a high likelihood that someone else is too!

**Attendance:** Attendance is required. There are no make-ups for exams unless your absence is due to a **documented** illness or an emergency.

**Website:** All course material, including the textbook, will be available exclusively on my website. I do **not** use other services. The site URL is: <https://phil1010.kevinjpatton.com>

## Evaluation

### Grading Scale

|    |              |    |              |
|----|--------------|----|--------------|
| A+ | 96.7 - 100%  | C+ | 76.7 - 79.9% |
| A  | 93.3 - 96.6% | C  | 73.3 - 76.6% |
| A- | 90 - 93.2%   | C- | 70 - 73.2%   |
| B+ | 86.7 - 89.9  | D+ | 66.7 - 69.9  |
| B  | 83.3 - 86.6% | D  | 63.3 - 66.6% |
| B- | 80 - 83.2%   | D- | 60 - 63.2%   |

F  
Below 60%

**Exams:** 25%  
**Museum Project:** 10%  
**Bucket List:** 15%  
**Notes:** 20%  
**Final Project:** 30%

**Exams:** The use of books and notes **will not** be permitted. However, certain kinds of information will be provided on an exam should you need it, and you will be told ahead of time what you are and what you are not required to memorize. Exams may not be rescheduled unless you have documentation of a serious illness or an emergency. A make-up exam is not guaranteed to be at the same level of difficulty as the original exam.

**Bucket List:** This assignment invites students to create a "bucket list" of their desired life experiences and accomplishments. The key focus is on reflection: students will analyze each item to uncover the underlying values it represents, revealing what truly matters to them in life. They'll identify common themes and patterns in their values, connecting these to their broader understanding of the meaning of life and the philosophical concepts discussed in class. The assignment culminates in a reflective essay, where students articulate their personal values, their relationship to philosophical ideas, and any shifts in their perspective throughout this process.

**Museum Project:** This project will require that you visit the Samuel Bak museum in Aksarben. Requirements and due date are stated in a handout on the website.

**Notes:** You will upload to Canvas pictures of your notes for **one** of that week's readings. These notes are due every Sunday by 11:50pm. For example, in our first week of class we will have covered only one reading (Viktor Frankl). Hence, your notes on that reading are due by September 1st, by 11:59 pm. Unless you have a special exemption, these notes **must** be handwritten (you will upload pictures of your handwritten notes). There is an associated handout on the website under the "Assignments" tab.

**Final Project:** A final project will be due by the end of the semester. Details to come.

## Policies

- **Academic Integrity:** The penalty for academic dishonesty (e.g., collaborating on problem sets, cheating on exams) will be failure of the course and the case's being forwarded to Student Judicial Affairs for possible disciplinary action. Make yourself familiar with UNO's Student Code of Conduct, available [online](#). **In this course, the normal penalty for any violation of the code is an "F" for the semester.** Violations may have additional consequences including expulsion from the university. Don't plagiarize – it just isn't worth it.

- **University Policies:** I respect and uphold university policies and regulations pertaining to the observation of religious holidays; assistance available to physically handicapped, visually and/or hearing impaired students; plagiarism; sexual harassment; and racial or ethnic discrimination. All students are advised to become familiar with the respective university regulations and are encouraged to bring any questions or concerns to the attention of the instructor.

- **ADA:** In compliance with University policy and equal access laws, I am available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that may be required for students with disabilities.

Students are encouraged to register with Student Disability Services to verify their eligibility for appropriate accommodations.

- **Misc.:** Please turn off cell phones, beeping watches, and other gadgets that make noise before entering our classroom. Absolutely no texting is permitted during class. I will subtract up to five points from your participation grade each and every time your phone rings or I see you texting during class.

## Further Resources

- Jargon: It's important to be on top of the technical terms used by philosophers. Please ask for clarification of terms in class. You can also consult Jim Pryor's online "[Philosophical Terms and Methods](#)." This is less important in this class than in more 'normal' philosophy classes, but it may help.

- Reference: The [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) is an excellent online resource, though entries can be lengthy. The [Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) has shorter entries, but it is not as scholarly.

- I may post some additional readings on my website if the assigned reading does not explain something with sufficient clarity.

# Assignment Calendar

|                              |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| Day 1                        | Introduction  |
| <b>Suffering and Meaning</b> |   |
| Day 2                        | Frankl: 1-15  |
| Day 3                        | Frankl: 16-40   |
| Day 4                        | Frankl: 41-79   |
| Day 5                        | Frankl: 80-115  |
| <b>Objectivist Theories</b>  |   |
| Day 6                        | Wolf  |
| Day 7                        | William Lane Craig  |
| Day 8                        | Cottingham  |
| Day 9                        | <b>Exam 1 - Review Day</b>  |
| Day 10                       | <b>Exam 1 - The Objectivists</b>  |
| Day 11                       | <b>Oct 1 - Meet during class time at <a href="#">Bak Museum</a> in Aksarben</b> |
| <b>Subjectivist Theories</b> |   |
| Day 12                       | Trisel  |
| Day 13                       | Kierkegaard   |
| <b>Absurdist Theories</b>    |   |
| Day 14                       | Camus   |
| Day 15                       | Nagel - Ch2   |
| Day 16                       | Nagel - Ch3   |
| Day 17                       | <b>Oct 29 - Exam 2 Review</b>   |
| Day 18                       | <b>Oct 31 - Exam 2: Nagel vs. Camus</b>   |
| Day 18                       | Conee and Sider - Free Will   |
| Day 20                       | Jackson - Physicalism   |
| <b>Potpourri</b>             |   |
| Day 21                       | Conee and Sider - Personal Identity   |
| Day 22                       | Conee and Sider - Time  |
| Day 23                       | Hedonism  |
| Day 24                       | Critique of Hedonism  |
| Day 25                       | Topic TBD   |
| Day 26                       | Topic TBD   |
| Day 27                       | Topic TBD   |
| Day 28                       | Topic TBD   |
| Day 29                       | Topic TBD   |