

PHILOSOPHY

Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies

Website: <https://www.washburn.edu/academics/college-schools/arts-sciences/departments/philosophy-religious-studies/index.html>
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Faculty

Professor Ian Smith, PhD, Chair
Associate Professor Rik Hine, PhD
Lecturer Justin Moss, PhD

Mission

Consistent with the missions of the University and the College of Arts and Sciences, the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies is dedicated to providing high-quality undergraduate courses in philosophy and religious studies, providing the educational foundations for life-long critical thinking, engaging in research and scholarly activities in these and related areas and to serving the University and its various communities. The Department emphasizes excellence in teaching undergraduate students.

Description of Discipline

Philosophy focuses on fundamental questions concerning the nature of reality, knowledge, and values: metaphysics seeks to understand the true nature of reality in general and of humankind in particular; logic and epistemology endeavor to determine valid methods of reasoning and the limits and criteria of knowledge; and ethics attempts to formulate the basic moral norms by which our choices and actions should be governed. Through the study of philosophy, students can improve their understanding of themselves and the world in which they live. They can increase their command of intellectually responsible methods of establishing and evaluating beliefs and theories. They can also develop more effective ways of determining their moral duties.

In general, the study of philosophy helps to develop the ability to think clearly. If one understands how to think clearly, one can apply the techniques of critical and constructive thinking to the study of any discipline or to the concerns of any occupation. The department's philosophy curriculum provides an opportunity for all students, whether majoring in philosophy or not, to be educated in the methods of critical and constructive thought through reflection on the fundamental presuppositions of knowledge in general and of individual disciplines—such as science, mathematics, law, religion, and art—in particular.

Student Learning Outcomes

Philosophy students at Washburn University, upon graduation, are expected to be able to:

- Demonstrate the ability to think critically, using both natural and artificial languages.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the major figures and movements in Ancient, Modern, and Contemporary Philosophy.
- Explain important theories and the views of major figures in Metaphysics and Epistemology.

- Explain important theories and the views of major figures in Value Theory.
- Formulate and evaluate philosophical positions critically and systematically.
- Construct well-reasoned, well-integrated essays based on philosophical research.
- Defend philosophical positions in an oral format.

Pre-Law

An individualized course of study for pre-law students may be designed in cooperation with the Department's pre-law advisor.

Philosophy Program Honors

Honors candidates are those who both have a 3.5 overall GPA at the beginning of the senior year and an intention to finish with Honors by enrolling in PH 398 rather than PH 397.

Programs

- Philosophy, BA (<https://catalog.washburn.edu/undergraduate/college-arts-sciences/philosophy/philosophy-ba/>)
- Philosophy, Minor (<https://catalog.washburn.edu/undergraduate/college-arts-sciences/philosophy/philosophy-minor/>)

Course Offerings

PH 100 Introduction to Philosophy (3)

Philosophy is introduced to students by a survey of major areas of Philosophy (e.g., metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, history of philosophy,) with an emphasis on traditional techniques of philosophical analysis and logical argument. Prerequisite: None.

Course Attributes:

- Gen Ed AY 2024-2025: Arts and Humanities
- Gen Ed AY 2024-2025: Inclusion and Belonging
- Gen Ed Pre-AY 2024-2025: Humanities
- USLO: Global Citizenship, Ethics and Diversity

PH 102 Ethics: Introduction to Moral Problems (3)

Rational decision-making procedures in moral theory and their application to specific moral problems and problem areas; e.g. racism and sexism; the moral status of animals; moral issues in sexual orientation.

Course Attributes:

- Gen Ed AY 2024-2025: Arts and Humanities
- Gen Ed AY 2024-2025: Inclusion and Belonging
- Gen Ed Pre-AY 2024-2025: Humanities
- USLO: Global Citizenship, Ethics and Diversity

PH 103 Introduction to Political Philosophy (3)

Philosophical examination of the central problems and ideas of Politics and the State; e.g., the legitimate nature and extent of the State; justification of political authority; rights of citizens.

PH 104 Introduction to Logic and Critical Thinking (3)

Students are exposed to general principles of thought and reason and to workable guidelines for improving their powers of rational thought.

Prerequisite: None.

Course Attributes:

- Gen Ed AY 2024-2025: Arts and Humanities
- Gen Ed Pre-AY 2024-2025: Humanities
- USLO: Critical and Creative Thinking

PH 105 Introductory Topics in Philosophy (1-3)

Topics will vary from semester to semester and will be announced in advance. May be repeated for credit when topics vary.

PH 115 Philosophy of Love & Sex (3)

An introduction to philosophical thinking about human love and sexual relationships. The course will examine fundamental questions such as "What is Love?" and "What is Perversion?" It will also raise moral questions dealing with the proper role and circumstances of sex, and deal with socio-sexual issues such as pornography and the sexist implications of sex.

Course Attributes:

- Gen Ed AY 2024-2025: Arts and Humanities
- Gen Ed AY 2024-2025: Inclusion and Belonging
- Gen Ed Pre-AY 2024-2025: Humanities
- USLO: Global Citizenship, Ethics and Diversity

PH 117 Creation, Evolution, Morality (2-3)

Evolutionary theory appears to hold that human beings are natural products of evolutionary forces, without special moral or religious status. What does this mean for morality? Can notions of right and wrong, good and evil, have a place in an evolutionary world? What are the religious implications of evolution? This course will consider these and other philosophical and moral issues raised by Darwinism.

Course Attributes:

- Gen Ed AY 2024-2025: Arts and Humanities
- Gen Ed AY 2024-2025: Inclusion and Belonging
- Gen Ed Pre-AY 2024-2025: Humanities
- USLO: Global Citizenship, Ethics and Diversity

PH 200 General Topics in Philosophy (1-3)

Topics will vary from semester to semester and will be announced in advance. May be repeated for credit when topics vary.

PH 201 Corrupting the Youth: Ancient Greek Philosophy (3)

It is probably no exaggeration to say that the entire Western intellectual cannon can trace its roots to the first Philosophers in fifth-century BCE Greece. By far the most famous, was Socrates. So, should we be disturbed that he was sentenced to death for 'corrupting the youth'? We will look at the claims he made that resulted in his execution, before focusing on the ways in which his student, Plato, built upon and systematized these ideas. We will close by looking at Plato's student, Aristotle, widely regarded as one of the most influential thinkers in human history, and of whom it has been said, "it is doubtful whether any human being has ever known as much as he did." Prerequisite: EN 101 or EN 102 with a grade of C or better.

Course Attributes:

- Gen Ed AY 2024-2025: Arts and Humanities
- Gen Ed Pre-AY 2024-2025: Humanities
- USLO: Critical and Creative Thinking

PH 203 Introduction to Buddhist Philosophy (3)

An introduction to the basic problems, issues and theories of the Buddhist philosophical tradition, including: the four noble truths, the claim that there is no self as we normally understand it, and the claim that everything is impermanent and illusory. Prerequisite: EN 101 or 102 with grade of C or better.

Course Attributes:

- Gen Ed AY 2024-2025: Arts and Humanities
- Gen Ed Pre-AY 2024-2025: Humanities
- USLO: Critical and Creative Thinking

PH 205 Existentialism (3)

Introduction to both theistic and atheistic existentialism through the study of some of the more prominent existentialists (e.g. Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Sartre, Camus, Buber, Tillich), major existentialist themes (e.g., concrete individuality, freedom of choice, dread, alienation and death), and the influences of existentialist thought on contemporary literature, ethics, social and political theory, psychology and religion. Prerequisite: EN 101 or EN 102 with a grade of C or better.

PH 207 Existence of God (3)

An elementary course in Philosophy and Religion focusing upon the specific rational arguments which have been advanced for and against the existence of a supreme being. Prerequisite: EN 101 or EN 102 with a grade of C or better, or consent of the Instructor.

Course Attributes:

- Gen Ed AY 2024-2025: Arts and Humanities
- Gen Ed Pre-AY 2024-2025: Humanities
- USLO: Critical and Creative Thinking

PH 211 Introduction to Ethical Theory (3)

Introductory survey of problems and positions in ethical theory: moral absolutism and moral relativism; moral decision-making theories, including Utilitarianism and Kant; evidence in moral argument.

Prerequisite: EN 101 or EN 102 with a grade of C or better.

PH 214 Medical Ethics (3)

Philosophical examination of moral problems that arise in health care; e.g., professional-patient relationship; role and rights of the patient; truth-telling and confidentiality; abortion and euthanasia. Prerequisite: EN 101 or EN 102 with a grade of C or better.

Course Attributes:

- Gen Ed AY 2024-2025: Arts and Humanities
- Gen Ed AY 2024-2025: Inclusion and Belonging
- Gen Ed Pre-AY 2024-2025: Humanities
- USLO: Global Citizenship, Ethics and Diversity

PH 220 Symbolic Logic (3)

Analysis of argument forms, using symbolic logic as a primary tool.

Prerequisite: None.

Course Attributes:

- Gen Ed AY 2024-2025: Arts and Humanities
- Gen Ed Pre-AY 2024-2025: Humanities
- USLO: Quantitative and Scientific Reasoning and Literacy

PH 300 General Topics in Philosophy (1-3)

Topics will vary from semester to semester and will be announced in advance. May be repeated for credit when topics vary.

PH 301 I think therefore I am? Modern Philosophy 1600-1800 (3)

Contemporary scientific consensus seems to be that the Universe is an infinitely large machine, and that, ultimately, everything in it – including us – can be explained mathematically. But where did these notions come from, and why should we believe them? Is this really how the world is, and how can we find out? We will trace the origin of these claims to the sixteenth century. René Descartes, the ‘father of modern philosophy’, proclaimed, “I think, therefore I am.” As one of the ‘Rationalists’ he argued that the world could be explained, mathematically, and through reason, alone. We will follow by investigating the ‘Empiricists’, who argued instead that the world could be known, if at all, only through experience. We will finish in the eighteenth century with Immanuel Kant, who claimed that the world as we know it is in some sense a product of our own minds. Prerequisites: EN 101 or EN 102 with a grade of C or better AND either PH 100, PH 201, PH 203, or PH 207 with a grade of C or better.

PH 302 Philosophy of Religion (3)

Analyzes basic religious concepts such as God, faith, the problem of evil, etc. and looks closely at the meaning of religious language. Prerequisite: PH 201 or PH 301 with a grade of C or better, or consent of the instructor.

PH 303 Topics-History of Philosophy (3)

Advanced study of a major period, movement, or individual in the History of Philosophy. May be repeated for credit when topics vary. Prerequisite: PH 201 or PH 301 with a grade of C or better, or consent of the instructor.

PH 311 Issues in Ethical Theory (3)

Specific issues in the philosophical study of morality; e.g., the objectivity of moral judgments, the place of reason in moral thinking, proof of basic moral principles, the status of moral language. Prerequisite: At least one of the following: PH 100, PH 102, PH 201, PH 211 or PH 301 with a grade of C or better.

PH 312 Social-Political Philosophy (3)

Current problems in social and political philosophy including but not limited to distributive justice, reparations, liberalism, alienation, radicalism, freedom and natural rights, social decision procedures, the concept of public interest, and the relationship between justice and equality. Prerequisite: At least one of the following: PH 100, PH 102, PH 103, PH 201, PH 211 or PH 301 with a grade of C or better.

PH 313 Professional Ethics (3)

The study of complex ethical issues that arise in professions such as medicine, finance, law, journalism, engineering, and others. Issues examined include, but are not limited to those that are found across many different professions: whistleblowing and loyalty, truth-telling and lying, privacy and confidentiality, and issues of social responsibility for professionals. Prerequisite: 3 credit hours of Philosophy with a grade of C or better, or instructor’s consent.

Course Attributes:

- Gen Ed AY 2024-2025: Arts and Humanities
- Gen Ed AY 2024-2025: Inclusion and Belonging
- Gen Ed Pre-AY 2024-2025: Humanities
- USLO: Global Citizenship, Ethics and Diversity

PH 315 Philosophy of Law (3)

A philosophical examination of such topics as the fundamental concept of law; relations between legal theory and moral theory; the nature of legal reasoning; justification of punishment. Prerequisite: 3 credit hours of Philosophy with a grade of C or better.

Course Attributes:

- Gen Ed AY 2024-2025: Arts and Humanities
- Gen Ed AY 2024-2025: Inclusion and Belonging
- Gen Ed Pre-AY 2024-2025: Humanities
- USLO: Global Citizenship, Ethics and Diversity

PH 317 Ethics of Genetic Technologies (3)

This course investigates ethical issues regarding genetic technologies (or genethics). We will consider the ethics of genetic screening and testing and the ethics of gene therapy and genome (or gene) editing. We will consider ethical issues in these areas both within the human context and outside of the human context.

PH 319 Midwestern Environmental Ethics (3)

When people think about environmental ethics in the US, they think about coasts or mountains. The Middle Western plains have been largely forgotten as an area of interest for environmental ethics since the dust bowl. In fact, most environmental issues and values that get traction in the American national media, in anthologies on environmental ethics, in movies focused on environmental issues, etc. focus on issues in the West and East Coast (think of all the ink that has been spilled on water rights in the West, for example). Bucking this history, we will focus on environmental issues that are manifest in the American Midwest (though of course can be manifest in other regions of America and in other parts of the world). Prerequisites: 3 credit hours of Philosophy with grade of C or better, or instructor’s consent.

PH 320 Advanced Logic (3)

Advanced study of logical theory and language calculi. Prerequisite: PH 220 with a grade of C or better.

PH 323 Philosophy of Race (3)

This course explores metaphysical and epistemological issues surrounding the concept of race, including but not limited to: historical development of the modern concept of race; the ontological status of race; how race and racism function within lived bodily experience; how race affects one’s status as a knower. Prerequisites: 3 credit hours of Philosophy with grade of C or better, or instructor’s consent.

PH 325 Philosophy of Mathematics (3)

Philosophical aspects of mathematics, including the foundation of mathematics, the nature of mathematical truth, and the ontological status of mathematical objects. Prerequisite: PH 220 or MA 307 with a grade of C or better.

PH 327 Philosophy of Science (3)

Philosophical aspects of the physical and social sciences, including the nature and problems of theory construction and concept formation, empirical testability, explanation and prediction, and problems of induction and confirmation. When the topics studied differ significantly, this course may be repeated for credit. Prerequisite: PH 104 or PH 200 with a grade of C or better.

PH 330 Philosophy of Mind (3)

Classical and contemporary treatments of the traditional problems of mind-body, other minds, mental acts, self, persons, perception etc. Prerequisite: PH 100, PH 201 or PH 301 with a grade of C or better, or consent of the instructor.

PH 335 Metaphysics (3)

Alternative theories of the nature of ultimate reality, including concepts such as cause, substance, time, etc. Prerequisite: PH 201 or PH 301 with a grade of C or better, or consent of the instructor.

PH 340 Aesthetics (3)

A philosophical approach to such questions as the nature of art, aesthetic value, and art criticism. Prerequisite: PH 201 or PH 301 with a grade of C or better, or consent of the instructor.

PH 386 Special Studies (1-3)

Individual study in the thought of a particular philosopher or on a particular philosophical problem. Regular conferences to be scheduled with the professor directing the study. May be repeated for credit. Prerequisites: 9 hours of Philosophy, and permission in advance by the professor with whom the student desires to work.

PH 397 Senior Capstone for Majors (3)

Students will complete a portfolio project which asks them to submit a folder containing philosophy papers from previous courses along with their reflection upon their development over time in writing such papers. The students will also need to take a paper written for a previous 200 or 300 level philosophy course and rewrite it to a standard that would be considered sufficient for presentation at a public event like Apeiron, a Philosophy Club presentation, or an undergraduate philosophy conference. The student will then be required to present their paper at such a public event. Prerequisites: Senior Philosophy Major

PH 398 Senior Philosophy Honors Thesis Preparation (3)

Independent research in preparation for a senior thesis. Students will complete preliminary research in the area of their senior thesis and prepare a thesis proposal. In addition, students will complete the portfolio project which asks them to submit a folder containing philosophy papers from previous courses along with their reflection upon their development over time in writing such papers. The proposal completed in PH 398 may not be or have been submitted for credit in any other course. Prerequisite: Senior Honors Philosophy Major. Honors candidates are those who both have a 3.5 overall GPA at the beginning of the senior year and an intention to finish with Philosophy Program Honors by enrolling in PH 398 rather than PH 397.

PH 399 Senior Philosophy Honors Thesis (3)

Independent research, writing and defense of a substantial paper, under faculty supervision. Work completed in PH 398 and PH 399 may not be or have been submitted for course credit in any other course. Prerequisite: PH 398 with a grade of C or better.