

# Phi 152: Theory of Knowledge

Fall 2013

Mount Saint Mary's College

Paul Green, Instructor

Campus	Office location	Phone number	Office hours
Chalon	#H329	(310) 954-4291	Monday, Wednesday 8:00 – 8:30 p.m. and by appointment. (I will usually be around all day Monday.)
Doheny	Building 2, Room 209	(213) 477-2732	Tuesday, Thursday 1:00 – 2:00 p.m. and by appointment

E-mail: pgreen@msmc.la.edu

Course is also set up on Angel.

## Required textbooks:

None

**Course description:** This course is a philosophical investigation of knowledge (what philosophers call “epistemology.”) We will engage three fundamental questions: What is knowledge? Do we have knowledge? How do we obtain knowledge? Throughout this course we will consider different answers to these questions, along with the reasons that are given in support of these answers.

**Course objectives:** The main objective for this course is for each student to become philosophically reflective about knowledge. This will involve each of the following objectives:

1. To understand some of the fundamental issues, concepts, and arguments which have shaped philosophical inquiry into knowledge.
2. To develop proficiency in the skills and techniques of philosophy, especially:
  1. interpreting a philosophical text
  2. applying a particular philosophical perspective to a case or problem
  3. identifying the context of a philosophical argument
  4. critically analyzing a philosophical argument

**Course prerequisite:** This class requires one previous course in philosophy.

## Evaluative criteria:

Homework/quizzes	10%
Final project	20%
Critical analyses (2)	15%
In-class exams (3)	<u>55%</u>
	100%

**Assessment of student learning outcomes:** Student learning is at the core of the MSMC mission. Mount St. Mary's College has developed a college-wide plan to assess student learning outcomes. These outcomes represent the knowledge, skills and attitudes expected of a college

student. The outcomes have been developed by the faculty of the college. In this class one or more student learning outcomes will be assessed. Some assignments in this class may be used for this purpose. Any data collected will be used by faculty to evaluate overall student learning; however, this data will not be individually identifiable. Ultimately, this review of the collected data will help to improve teaching and learning in this class, and throughout the College.

**Student Credit Hour Policy:** A credit hour is an amount of work represented in intended learning outcomes and verified by evidence of student achievement that reasonably approximates not less than:

- (1) One hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours of out-of-class student work each week for approximately fifteen weeks for one semester, or the equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time; or
- (2) At least an equivalent amount of work as required in paragraph (1) for other academic activities, including laboratory work, internships, practica, studio work, and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours.

**Grading scale:** All graded work in this course uses the following percentage scale:

A	93-100	B-	80-82	D	60-69
A-	90-92	C+	77-79	F	<60
B+	87-89	C	73-76		
B	83-86	C-	70-72		

**\*Note\*** Except in extraordinary circumstances (such as a serious illness that incapacitates the student for the semester), I do not give the grade of “UW”.

### **Class policies:**

My fundamental policy in this class is to have a class environment of mutual respect where we help one another achieve our course objectives. The course policies in this section are designed to help ensure that environment.

**Accommodating your instructor:** I have a mild high-frequency hearing loss. This means that my hearing is normal, except for higher-pitched sounds (like women’s voices). Thus, in class discussion, I may have to ask you to repeat what you say, particularly if there is a lot of background noise. I may ask the class to be quieter even though it might not seem to you as if things are especially noisy. It also helps me a lot if you face me when you talk to me.

**Appropriate classroom behavior:** Your classroom behavior should reflect these three assumptions: [1] You are here to learn. [2] Your classmates are here to learn. [3] Real, meaningful learning is hard work. Thus, the ultimate test of anything you do in our class is: Does it help you and your classmates learn?

Here are some implications of this test:

[1] Any technology or device is welcome in our classroom if you are using it to learn. Conversely, using it for purposes other than learning is inappropriate. I expect that you will

monitor yourself, but if it consistently interferes with learning (your own or others), I will point this out to you. The more I have to point this out to you, the less kind I will be in pointing it out.

[2] Because people cannot multitask effectively, our classroom is not an appropriate place to work on homework for other classes or other outside projects. Spending class time learning for other classes will interfere with your learning for this class.

[3] Here's a good rule to follow: If the instructor wouldn't do it, then a student probably shouldn't do it either.

**Regular attendance and punctuality:** Learning the skills that are required to achieve our course objectives requires active repetition (i.e., practice) and feedback. Thus, we need you here in class, both to develop your own philosophical skills and to help your classmates develop theirs. Therefore, regular attendance is required. Perfect attendance counts for one extra credit assignment. In keeping with our departmental policy, students who miss more than 9 hours of class (not counting excused absences on school business) will automatically fail the course. Three tardies count as one absence.

Note that this policy does not depend at all upon your reason for missing class, unless you miss class on school business. There are many excellent reasons to miss class: illness, court appearances, cars that won't start, a friend who is distraught and needs comfort. The point is that, no matter why you are absent, you will not be mastering the necessary skills if you are absent, nor will you be doing your part to help your classmates master the skills.

**Homework:** On each date for which there is a reading assignment, homework will be due at the beginning of class. Often I will assign a reading exercise. If no reading exercise is assigned, your homework is to write a reading summary. Note that this is a summary of your reading; your goal is to summarize the main points of the reading (rather than, say, criticize or reflect on it). The ideal reading summary is no longer than one page. Summaries may be handwritten if legible.

I will distribute a tentative reading schedule. However, our actual reading assignment will be assigned in class and (usually) posted on Angel. **Thus, if you miss class, it is your responsibility to find out the correct reading assignment.** You will not get credit for doing the wrong assignment. Homework will be graded "credit/no credit." Credit is not based on the correctness of your answers, but will be given for any sincere attempt to do the homework. What is important is that you try, so that we have a basis to start from during our class meetings. (I am the sole judge of what counts as a sincere attempt.)

The bad news: Late homework will not be accepted, except for excused absences on school business (e.g., moot court, conference attendance). Likewise, except for excused absences on school business, homework will not be accepted unless you attend class, so you may not give it to a friend to turn in, or e-mail it to me. My general policy is that you must be here in class when I collect the homework in order to get credit for it. You may submit it in hard copy in class or via an Angel dropbox at the end of the class meeting.

(Note that this policy applies only to our daily homework. Long-term projects, such as the personal philosophical essay, may be submitted late with a penalty. And they will usually be

submitted to an Angel dropbox.)

The good news: You may miss 3 homework assignments without penalty. (To put this in perspective, you have about 25 homework assignments. And, since total homework counts for 10% of your grade, missing 1 homework assignment beyond these 3 freebies will only affect your course grade by about 0.4%. (Note that is 0.4%, not 4%.) However, they add up—if you fail to do any of the homework assignments, the net effect will be to lower your final course grade by one letter (e.g., from a “B” to a “C”).

More good news: There will probably be several occasions for extra credit (so I will be quite strict about my homework policy.)

Why I have this policy: Most of our classwork will involve careful analysis of and reflection upon the reading. This presupposes that you have already engaged the material to the best of your ability BEFORE you come to class. In class we work together to try to understand and apply what we have read, and if you have not done the reading (or you miss class), you are not in a position to contribute to our understanding of the text.

**Quizzes:** We will have a syllabus quiz to make sure you understand the syllabus. (For this quiz you may use your syllabus and any other notes you wish.) There are no other quizzes scheduled, but occasionally I will give a short quiz at the beginning of class on the homework for that class. (Latecomers will not be allowed to take that day’s quiz.) The quizzes will be such that, if you did the homework, you will be able to answer the quiz. Each quiz counts the same as a homework assignment, except for the syllabus quiz which is weighted more heavily.

**Exams:** The exams are the main way for you to demonstrate your understanding of the basic issues we will be considering this semester. There will be three exams. (See the class schedule for the dates of each exam.) I will distribute a study guide at least a week before the exam, and we will have a review session before each exam. Late exams are penalized 1/3 grade (e.g., A to A-) for every day they are late, excluding weekends.

**Critical analysis:** A critical analysis is a short paper in which you will select an argument from our reading to discuss critically. You will write two critical analyses. More information will be distributed on a separate handout.

**Final project:** The final project will be an in-class (during the final exam period) open-book and open-note analysis of some short passages. Your analysis would identify which of the philosophers we have studied would be most likely to have written the passage, and why. More information will be distributed on a separate handout.

**Academic difficulty:** If you are having difficulty mastering the material and skills taught in this course, there are many things you can do. Some of them (such as alternative learning strategies) we will discuss in class. In addition, consider the following: [1] Join a study group to discuss the reading assignments and to prepare for the exams. [2] Talk to me (perhaps during office hours) about material you do not understand. [3] Use campus resources like the Learning Resource Center. [4] Most importantly, do not wait until you feel completely lost or have a

disastrous exam before getting help. Act early and diligently, and you can master this course.

**Academic honesty:** As a member of this class you are also a member of the community of scholars. As a scholar, your fundamental commitment is to truth, and academic integrity is an important part of that commitment. Academic dishonesty undermines the integrity of the educational process and cannot be tolerated. Thus, the college has developed the following “Statement On Academic Integrity” which I fully endorse.

Cheating of any kind is dishonest. This includes copying others’ essays or exams, stealing exams, buying or otherwise procuring new or used exams, paying someone else to take an exam or write an essay for which you take credit, and any other way you might receive credit for work that is not your own.

Using one essay for two different classes is also dishonest. If you have a topic appropriate for two classes, original and separate work must be done for each class.

Plagiarism is also an act of academic dishonesty. It is a serious academic offense. Plagiarism is using anyone else’s ideas and representing them as your own (i.e., not giving appropriate credit). Acts of plagiarism include the following:

- Failure to document and give credit to an original source
- Paraphrasing another person’s ideas without giving credit
- Using direct quotations without proper recognition of the source
- Using statistics, facts, or information from a source other than your own original research (i.e., not your own) without credit.

When in doubt, give credit. Submitting work (even work completed by a team or group) containing material not properly credited is a serious academic offense and a violation of the very principles of academic integrity. Every individual is ultimately responsible for ensuring the honesty and integrity of any academic or scholarly work bearing her name.

**Academic freedom:** As a member of the community of scholars, you not only have the duty of academic integrity, but the right of academic freedom—including the right to reasonably disagree with your instructors without being penalized for this disagreement. For more information on the academic freedom which is yours as a student, see the *Student Handbook*.

**Students with disabilities:** MSMC, in compliance with state and federal laws and regulations, does not discriminate on the basis of disability. If you are a student with a documented disability, please see Michele Lewis, Director of Learning Assistance Programs, to make arrangements for classroom accommodations. Her office is located in room 207 of the Humanities Building. Additional disability related information and policies can be found in the Student Handbook.