PHILOSOPHY

Departmental Guidelines and Goals

To do philosophy is to encounter some of the most fundamental questions that can be asked about human existence. Philosophical investigation leads students to recognize the potentially unnoticed assumptions that underpin even our most ordinary ways of interacting with other persons and engaging in human projects. Such assumptions concern, for example, the nature of human knowledge, action, and value. Philosophy challenges students to move beyond uncritical patterns of thought, to recognize problems, and to exchange a more naive worldview for a more considered and justifiable one. In doing so, students learn to think in ways that are simultaneously disciplined and imaginative. Philosophy Department faculty members cooperatively approach these concerns from diverse perspectives, both in studying the works of major philosophers and in their own creative activity. Students are encouraged to join with the faculty in this inquiry and to philosophize creatively on their own. The courses and seminars in the Department are intended to develop the abilities necessary for these activities.

Typically students without previous experience with philosophy will enroll in PHIL 101 - Introduction to Philosophy, PHIL 121 - Ethics: Philosophical Considerations of Morality or PHIL 126 - Social and Political Philosophy. Students who wish to continue in Philosophy and perhaps to major or minor in it will often take PHIL 231 - Greek and Medieval Philosophy or PHIL 232 - Modern Philosophy as their second course. These are required courses for the major and prerequisites for some of our upper-level courses. However, there are many ways to move through our curriculum depending on a student’s particular interests and departmental offerings in any given semester.

Faculty

Professor Barbara Fultner, Chair

Professors Anthony J. Lisska, Steven Vogel (On leave 2018-19); Associate Professors Sam Cowling, Jonathan Maskit, Mark Moller (Dean of First Year Students); Assistant Professor John McHugh; Visiting Assistant Professor Amy Shuster; Academic Administrative Assistant Kate Tull

View faculty profiles and contact information (https://denison.edu/academics/philosophy/contacts)

Philosophy Major

A major in Philosophy requires ten courses selected in consultation with the major advisor. The ten courses must include

- PHIL 231 - Greek and Medieval Philosophy,
- PHIL 232 - Modern Philosophy,
- and at least three courses numbered 300 or higher, of which at least one must be a PHIL 431 - Seminar in Philosophy (Junior/Senior Seminar). Only one semester of PHIL 451 - Senior Research/PHIL 452 - Senior Research) may count as a 300 or higher level course, and Directed Study (PHIL 361 - Directed Study/PHIL 362 - Directed Study) may only count as a 300-level course with the consent of the Department. No more than three courses numbered below 200 may count toward the major.
- In addition, all majors must participate in and pass the Senior Symposium in their senior year.

The Philosophy Department welcomes double majors and self-designed majors, and is experienced in helping students integrate Philosophy with work in other disciplines. To avoid possible scheduling problems, students considering a major in Philosophy (or one which includes Philosophy) should consult the Department early in their college career.

The Philosophy Department participates in the interdepartmental major in PPE (https://catalog.denison.edu/catalog/courses-of-study/philosophy-politics-economics) and several of our courses are cross-listed with other interdisciplinary programs, including Global Commerce, Environmental Studies, Queer Studies, and Women’s and Gender Studies.

Philosophy Minor

Philosophy, by its very nature, is ideally suited to assist a student in integrating and articulating knowledge gained in other areas. For this reason we attempt to tailor a student’s minor program in Philosophy around the specific course of studies being pursued in the selected major subject. This means that our minor program places a premium upon departmental advising.

Each Philosophy minor is required to choose a department member as a Philosophy advisor. The Philosophy advisor will not replace the student’s primary academic advisor. However, the Philosophy advisor will have responsibility for guiding the student in designing the minor program in Philosophy. A minor in Philosophy requires five courses in the department. Among these courses must be PHIL 231 - Greek and Medieval Philosophy or PHIL 232 - Modern Philosophy and at least one course numbered 300 or higher.

Additional Points of Interest

Additional information about Philosophy courses and a course guide with more detailed descriptions of current courses may be obtained from the Philosophy Department, and is available on the department’s website (https://denison.edu/academics/philosophy).

The Titus-Hepp Lecture Series

Each year the department sponsors a colloquium series, bringing to campus nationally and internationally known philosophers who present their current work and meet with students and faculty. Visitors have included Tyler Burge (UCLA), Bonnie Honig (Brown), Graham Harman (SCI-Arc), Anthony Kenny (Oxford), Linda Martin Alcoff (Hunter College and CUNY Graduate Center), Ruth Millikan (Connecticut), Charles Mills (CUNY Graduate Center), Martha Nussbaum (Chicago), Geoffrey Sayre-McCord (UNC Chapel Hill), Peter Singer (Princeton), and others.

Other Philosophy Activities

The Philosophy Department annually publishes a national undergraduate philosophy journal, Episteme. This journal is edited and produced by philosophy majors and minors in consultation with a faculty advisor. Episteme encourages and receives submissions from undergraduate philosophy students throughout the country and internationally. In addition, philosophy students organize Philosophy Coffees, informal discussions of philosophical topics, about three times each semester. Special coffees are held annually for parents during Big Red Weekend, and during the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Celebration.
Courses

PHIL 101 - Introduction to Philosophy (4 Credit Hours)
This course aims to introduce the student to the nature and concerns of philosophy by confronting fundamental issues in areas of philosophy such as ethics, political and social philosophy, metaphysics, epistemology and others. It is intended that the student develop skills in rigorous thinking and become involved in the process of philosophizing.

PHIL 121 - Ethics: Philosophical Considerations of Morality (4 Credit Hours)
This course explores the fundamental questions of ethical theory, asking how ethical judgments can be made, what justifications they may receive, whether terms like “right” and “wrong” have fixed meanings, whether moral assertions can claim universal validity or whether morality is rather relative to a culture or to an individual’s beliefs. Depending on the semester, issues of applied ethics - having to do with abortion, medical ethics, business and professional ethics, ethics and the environment, war and peace, etc. - will be raised as well.

PHIL 126 - Social and Political Philosophy (4 Credit Hours)
This course is about justice, power, and freedom, as ideals and as realities, and about whether objective or rational justifications of political and social views and actions are practical or even possible. The course includes an exploration of some fundamental philosophical questions regarding the nature of the community, the state, the individual, and the relationships among them. Students will study great texts in Western political thought as well as contemporary discussions and critiques, including works from thinkers such as Plato, Hobbes, Locke, Marx, Rawls, Mills, and Pateman.

PHIL 191 - Introductory Topics Seminar in Philosophy (4 Credit Hours)
Select introductory topics in Philosophy.

PHIL 192 - Introductory Topics Seminar in Philosophy (4 Credit Hours)
Select introductory topics in Philosophy.

PHIL 199 - Introductory Topics in Philosophy (1-4 Credit Hours)
A general category used only in the evaluation of transfer credit. Courses with this number do not count towards the major or minor in Philosophy.

PHIL 200 - Philosophical Studies (4 Credit Hours)
This course offers a careful study of some of the central texts, issues, and ideas in the history of Western philosophy. Among the figures studied will be Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Hume, Kant, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Quine, and others. The course is intended for most students as a second course in philosophy; its goal is to prepare students for further philosophical work by providing them with experience in philosophical study beyond that offered in Philosophy 101. Some students with particular interest in the field, however, may choose to begin their philosophical studies with this course. In either case, the course will give students the opportunity to grapple with fundamental philosophical questions by examining the works of a series of great figures in the history of philosophy.

Prerequisite(s): One previous course in Philosophy or consent.

PHIL 205 - Logic (4 Credit Hours)
This course is an introduction to logic and its philosophy. We will begin by considering the nature and significance of arguments in everyday life as well as the cognitive psychology of human reasoning. We will then examine the fundamental features of arguments with a particular focus on the techniques of formal epistemology, decision theory, and deductive logic. Throughout this course, students will acquire a facility with logical methods, investigate the foundations of quantitative reasoning, apply general logical principles to specific cases, and examine the limitations and advantages of logical and formal methods by exploring theoretical puzzles and paradoxes.

PHIL 210 - Philosophy of Science (4 Credit Hours)
This course considers a range of conceptual issues connected with the understanding and practice of science. Issues to be considered include explanation, theoretical reduction, rationality, methodology and the possibility of scientific progress, etc. Although these questions are raised from the perspective of philosophy, they are intended to provide insight into the actual practice of the sciences - from both contemporary and historical perspectives. This course should prove especially helpful to science majors seeking to achieve a different perspective on the scientific enterprise; however, non-science majors are equally welcome.

Prerequisite(s): One previous course in Philosophy or Science Major with Junior or Senior standing or consent.

PHIL 231 - Greek and Medieval Philosophy (4 Credit Hours)
An examination of some fundamental problems in Metaphysics (what there is) and Epistemology (how we come to know), in the context of the origin and development of Greek thinking from the pre-Socratics, Sophists and Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, through selected writers in the Medieval period including Plotinus, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, William of Ockham, and Nicholas Cusanus.

Prerequisite(s): One previous course in Philosophy or one Classics course or consent.

PHIL 232 - Modern Philosophy (4 Credit Hours)
Thinkers such as Rene Descartes, David Hume, and Immanuel Kant are currently referred to so often, in so many different contexts, that their names have been transformed into immediately recognizable adjectives (Cartesian, Humean, Kantian). But what did these philosophers actually believe? And why did they believe it? This course is an intermediate-level survey of western philosophy from their period (now known as the “Early Modern” or “Modern” era, which runs roughly from 1600-1800). While these and other thinkers (such as Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, and Berkeley) in this era dealt with a wide variety of subjects, we will focus mostly on their contributions to epistemology, metaphysics, and philosophy of mind. We will address their writings with three different aims: a) to appreciate the sense in which they were, at one time, fresh and radical; b) to understand how, for better or for worse, they set the foundation for much of the modern—western, anyway—worldview; and c) to determine if what they say is either true or false.

Prerequisite(s): One previous course in Philosophy or consent.

PHIL 250 - Philosophy of Law (4 Credit Hours)
Does law have an intrinsic connection with the moral order, or is it whatever a legislature or judge says it is? This course will analyze the concept of law, with particular attention given to the conflict between the natural law tradition and legal positivism. The justification of legal authority and the nature of legal reasoning will be considered. Normative issues, including the relation between law and concepts of justice, equality, liberty, responsibility, and punishment will also be addressed.

Prerequisite(s): One previous course in Philosophy or consent.
PHIL 260 - Environmental Philosophy (4 Credit Hours)
This course investigates the question of our ethical relations and responsibility to objects and systems in the natural world, including animals, other living beings, non-living entities, ecosystems, and "nature" as a whole. It also asks about nature as such: what nature is, what the place in it is of humans, the role of human action in transforming nature, etc. The question of the relation of the natural to the social will receive special attention.
Prerequisite(s): One previous course in Philosophy or Environmental Studies major/minor or consent.
Crosslisting: ENVS 260.

PHIL 269 - Philosophy of the Arts: Aesthetics (4 Credit Hours)
This course addresses issues in philosophical aesthetics both in relationship to the arts as well as to other domains of human life (e.g., nature, food, and design). We will ask what makes something an artwork; how to differentiate between artworks and non-artworks; how to evaluate artworks; what it means to judge something aesthetically; how aesthetic judgment differs for different kinds of objects; and other central issues from the field.
Prerequisite(s): One previous course in Philosophy; ART, AHVC, DANC, CINE, MUS or THTR Major, or consent.

PHIL 275 - Philosophy of Feminism (4 Credit Hours)
Feminism and philosophy both make the invisible visible, the implicit explicit. Both make us aware of assumptions we make in our everyday lives and challenge us to justify them. This course examines ways in which feminist theory enriches philosophy and vice versa. Feminist criticism probes some of the most fundamental philosophical assumptions about our knowledge of and interaction with the world and other people. How does feminism destabilize philosophy and affect philosophical conceptions of knowledge, reality, metaphysics, agency, or morality? How does philosophy enrich feminist understandings of oppression, privilege, or equality? We will consider a range of forms of oppression and privilege, particularly as they affect women, and conceptions of sex, gender, and race in the context of debates about gender violence, work and family, as well as feminist discussions of epistemology, ethics, and science.

PHIL 280 - Philosophy of Mind (4 Credit Hours)
This course addresses fundamental questions regarding the nature of the human mind and thought. Students will be introduced to the leading contemporary theories of mind as well as critical responses to these theories. They will become acquainted with the works of philosophers such as J.J.C. Smart, Gilbert Ryle, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Daniel Dennett, Patricia and Paul Churchland, Jerry Fodor, Fred Dretske, Hillary Putnam, and others. We will address questions such as whether we can know there are others minds, whether mental states are identical or reducible to brain states, how it is that our thoughts can be about anything at all, whether there is a "language of thought", and whether our ordinary talk about mental events genuinely explains human actions.
Prerequisite(s): One previous course in Philosophy, Neuroscience concentrator or consent.

PHIL 291 - Intermediate Topics Seminar in Philosophy (4 Credit Hours)
An inquiry into issues and problems that are now at the center of philosophical attention. Topics vary from semester to semester in accordance with current interests of students and faculty.
Prerequisite(s): One previous course in Philosophy, or consent.

PHIL 292 - Intermediate Topics Seminar in Philosophy (4 Credit Hours)
An inquiry into issues and problems that are now at the center of philosophical attention. Topics vary from semester to semester in accordance with current interests of students and faculty.
Prerequisite(s): One previous course in Philosophy or consent.

PHIL 293 - Topics in the History of Philosophy (4 Credit Hours)
This course provides the opportunity for topical seminars on major issues in the history of philosophy.
Prerequisite(s): One previous course in Philosophy, or consent.

PHIL 294 - Topics in Ethics (4 Credit Hours)
This course provides the opportunity for topical seminars on major issues in ethical theory.
Prerequisite(s): One previous course in Philosophy or consent.

PHIL 295 - Topics in Social and Political Philosophy (4 Credit Hours)
This course provides a venue in the curriculum for topical seminars dealing with major issues in social and political theory.
Prerequisite(s): One previous course in Philosophy or consent.

PHIL 296 - Topics in Contemporary Philosophy (4 Credit Hours)
This course provides the opportunity for topical seminars on major issues and debates in contemporary philosophy.
Prerequisite(s): One previous course in Philosophy or consent.

PHIL 297 - Existentialism (4 Credit Hours)
Existentialism asks how we can generate a meaning for our lives without appealing to outside sources. Many existentialists embrace a view characterized with the slogan “existence precedes essence.” This slogan means that any attempt to figure out what one is must begin with the fact that one is. In addition, if existence precedes essence, then there may well be a multiplicity of ways that one can be, making choosing between these ways a difficult task. That one’s existence may well be experienced as constrained by social forces seemingly beyond one’s control complicates matters. We will read from a variety of sources, including philosophical sources such as Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Sartre, de Beauvoir, or Judith Butler as well as literary or biographical sources, e.g., Beckett, James Baldwin, Frantz Fanon, and others.
Prerequisite(s): One previous course in Philosophy, or consent.

PHIL 299 - Intermediate Topics in Philosophy (1-4 Credit Hours)
A general category used only in the evaluation of transfer credit.

PHIL 305 - Metaphysics (4 Credit Hours)
This course is an introduction to the methodology of and various issues within metaphysics. Typically, these questions address certain general features about the nature of reality. Many of these are ontological, concerning whether certain kinds of entities exist—e.g., numbers, holes, fictional characters, gods, and possibilities. Other metaphysical questions concern the nature and interrelations among entities and various features of the world. Among the familiar metaphysical issues are debates regarding the nature of human beings, the reality of space and time, the limits of thought and possibility, and the connection between truth and existence. Readings will be drawn from a mix of contemporary and classical sources.
Prerequisite(s): Two previous courses in Philosophy or consent.

PHIL 306 - Theories of Knowledge (4 Credit Hours)
An inquiry into the meaning, possibility, conditions, criteria, and types of truth and/or knowledge, and a discussion of representative theories of knowledge. The class aims to achieve clarity in respect to both classical and contemporary approaches to the problem of knowledge. The adequacy of those approaches will be assessed.
Prerequisite(s): Two previous courses in Philosophy or consent.
PHIL 321 - Metaphysics (4 Credit Hours)
We spend much of our time trying to answer such questions as: How ought we to act? What should we value? and What type of person should we be? But, it seems right that we can evaluate our answers to these questions and decide among them only if we correctly answer another set of questions first. For instance, how can we know what we should value unless we understand what values are, whether they exist and whether we can know them if they do? How can we know how we ought to act if we do not know what it means for an act to be morally good or why we are even obligated to do what is morally good in the first place? This course pursues answers to this other set of questions. It inquires into the nature of ethical statements, properties, judgments and attitudes. As such, it draws on many other areas of philosophy, including epistemology, metaphysics and the philosophy of language.
Prerequisite(s): Two previous courses in Philosophy or consent.

PHIL 326 - Theories of Justice (4 Credit Hours)
This course focuses on contemporary work in political philosophy concerned with justice, including that of philosophers such as Rawls, Dworkin, Nozick, Young, MacIntyre, Sandel, Nussbaum, and Habermas. We will examine questions such as: What is justice? Can it be defined independently of consideration of what the "good" is for human beings? Is justice possible in a society marked by significant religious, ethnic, cultural or other sorts of pluralisms? What is the relation between justice and nationhood, and what can be said about justice between nations? How is justice connected to social equality, and to liberty? What is meant by economic justice? What is the relation between justice and democracy? The course will examine contemporary philosophical debates about these questions, in order to help students think critically about the issue of justice in the context of the pressing real world issues in which such questions play a crucial role.
Prerequisite(s): PHIL 126 or PHIL 250, and one other philosophy course or consent.

PHIL 330 - Nineteenth-Century Philosophy (4 Credit Hours)
This course examines some of the most important developments in European philosophy during the nineteenth century. Figures to be read may include Hegel, Marx, Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Mill, Frege, and others.
Prerequisite(s): PHIL 232 and one other Philosophy course or consent.

PHIL 333 - History of Analytic Philosophy (4 Credit Hours)
This course is an introduction to the methods and the history of the analytic tradition. This tradition can be distinguished in a number of ways. Methodologically, it tends to employ careful argumentation and formal tools like logic and mathematics to provide analyses of scientific, psychological, and linguistic data. Historically, it is usually traced back to a group of Anglo-European philosophers—Frege, Russell, Moore, and Wittgenstein—writing around the beginning of the twentieth century. Thematically, it is primarily driven by the ambition of providing a systematic account of the relationship between language, thought, and the world. This course explores early and recent contributions of the analytic tradition to epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of language, philosophy of science, and ethics.
Prerequisite(s): Two previous courses in Philosophy or consent.

PHIL 334 - History of Continental Philosophy (4 Credit Hours)
This course traces the development of Continental Philosophy from 1900 to the present, including the phenomenological movement of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and others; the neo-Marxism of the Frankfurt School and Habermas; the hermeneutics of Gadamer and Ricoeur; and the post-structuralism of Foucault, Derrida, and others.
Prerequisite(s): PHIL 232 and one other course in Philosophy or consent.

PHIL 360 - Philosophy of Language (4 Credit Hours)
The nature of language and meaning has been a pivotal concern of twentieth-century philosophers. This course considers questions such as: What is a language? What is it for a word to have meaning? How is communication possible? Are meanings "in the head"? What is the relation between language and thought? This course will address topics such as reference, the role of speaker intentions, and the indeterminacy of translation. Students will be introduced to several strands of philosophy of language such as formal semantics and ordinary language philosophy, and will become familiar with the writings of philosophers ranging from Frege, Russell, and Wittgenstein to Quine, Austin, Putnam, Searle, Chomsky, Davidson, and others.
Prerequisite(s): Two previous courses in Philosophy or consent.

PHIL 361 - Directed Study (1-4 Credit Hours)
PHIL 362 - Directed Study (1-4 Credit Hours)
PHIL 363 - Independent Study (1-4 Credit Hours)
PHIL 364 - Independent Study (1-4 Credit Hours)
PHIL 391 - Advanced Topics Seminar in Philosophy (4 Credit Hours)
PHIL 392 - Advanced Topics Seminar in Philosophy (4 Credit Hours)
PHIL 399 - Advanced Topics in Philosophy (1-4 Credit Hours)
A general category used only in the evaluation of transfer credit.

PHIL 431 - Seminar in Philosophy (Junior/Senior Seminar) (4 Credit Hours)
An intensive study in a major figure in philosophic thought. The topic varies from semester to semester, depending upon the needs of the students and the interests of the Department. Recent seminars have dealt with Aristotle and Aquinas, Foucault, Deleuze, Wittgenstein, Kant, Putnam and Rorty, Hume, and Heidegger.
Prerequisite(s): PHIL 231 or PHIL 232, and one other Philosophy course, and junior/senior standing, or consent.

PHIL 440 - Senior Symposium (1 Credit Hour)
In the spring semester, senior philosophy majors orally present a paper in a symposium format to their peers and to philosophy faculty. The 12-page paper is the result of a year-long project. Students are also required to act as commentators for one other senior paper and to participate fully in all paper sessions.

PHIL 451 - Senior Research (4 Credit Hours)
PHIL 452 - Senior Research (4 Credit Hours)