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PHIL 215.01: Philosophical Reasoning

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PHILOSOPHICAL REASONING

PHIL. 215 - Fall, 2002

MWF 9:10

Prof. Burke Townsend

This course will focus on developing basic skills essential to success in philosophy: careful reading, critical analysis, and well-structured writing. The approach will be primarily through classical philosophical material, but we will be somewhat opportunistic in selecting sources. The emphasis will be on repeated practice in reading, analyzing, and writing about passages or articles intended to make a point.

The class will be small in size, and we will share in critical evaluations of our efforts. While the central goal will be to strengthen capacities to recognize, to understand, and to give cogent expression to philosophical arguments, attention will also be given as may be required to basic language skills. Each student will also meet regularly with the instructor outside class to review and discuss written work submitted.

The course is intended to help prepare a philosophy major for more advanced work by making basic skills the primary focus, a focus freed from any diverting pressure to cover specific figures or issues. As further relief from diverting pressure, grading will be entirely on a Pass/No Pass basis. We will criticize and praise one another's efforts as is appropriate, expect serious work and improvement, but will not attempt to rank each effort, or the final outcome, on a traditional grade scale. The development of reading, thinking, and writing skills is a lifelong process, and assessing short-term progress on a traditional grading scale is too often frustrating and unproductive for both student and teacher.

Course outcome: appreciable improvement in mastery of the basic skills outlined above.

Outcome measures: regular writing assignments and their revisions, class discussions, individual meetings with the instructor.

Texts: • *Introduction to Philosophy: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, 3rd ed., Perry & Bratman
• *Thinking and Writing About Philosophy*, 2nd ed., Bedau
• *How to Get the Most Out of Philosophy*, Soccio

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POLICIES

Grading policies are to be made explicit in a syllabus, and, though I do not anticipate a need to employ them, below are the criteria that would be employed to assign a “No Pass” for the course.

The class will be entirely on a Pass/No Pass basis. Your writing assignments and class contributions will be assessed, but not formally graded. Since the purpose of the class is improvement in basic skills, there is no well-defined minimum level of accomplishment that will be set for a “Pass;” to fail to pass while meeting the attendance and assignment-completion standards below will require failure to improve, failure to work in a serious way on the tasks at hand. While I do not expect to see one, any assignment that is judged to be of a sort threatening the possibility of a course “No Pass” will be so marked. I will meet individually with anyone receiving a “No Pass” on an assignment to discuss the situation; more than four such “No Pass” assignment marks will result in a “No Pass” for the course.

Because class attendance is an important part of virtually every philosophy class, and because this class, with its emphasis on the discussion of our efforts in analytic writing, is no exception, attendance will be required. More than four unexcused absences from class will result in a “No Pass” for the course. Read the campus catalog, p.20, for a general statement about class attendance, performance expectations, and the grounds for excused absences and assignments. Timely notice of a legitimate need to miss class both will be appreciated and will facilitate approval.

There will be regular writing assignments for the course; timely completion of such assignments will be expected. For a “Pass” for the course, *all* such assignments must be completed. More than four late assignments will result in a “No Pass.” Assignments late because of an unexcused absence will be considered late under this policy. Extension of an assignment deadline will be given for assignments made during an excused absence from class; a new deadline will be set upon a student’s return to class.

My hope, indeed my expectation, is that we will all work collegially on reading, writing, and reasoning without occasion to worry about the formalities above, but, for the record, the formalities are stated.