



# Epistemology

PHIL 430

## Course Details

### Instructor

Professor Josh DiPaolo

### Office Hours

Tu/Th 2:30-4PM  
By Appointment

### Email

[jdipaolo@fullerton.edu](mailto:jdipaolo@fullerton.edu)

### Class

Tu/Th 1-2:15pm  
MH 657

### Course Page

Canvas

### Tech Support

Student Help Desk  
(657) 278-8888

[studentithelpdesk@fullerton.edu](mailto:studentithelpdesk@fullerton.edu)

### Texts

All freely available on Canvas

### Reading Expectations

Expect to read 40-50 pages of  
difficult texts each week.  
Seriously!

## Course Description

Epistemology is the study of knowledge and rational belief. It asks how we should form and manage our beliefs if want to believe the truth and avoid error. This course addresses epistemological issues across five units:

1. Introduction: An overview of the basics.
2. Expertise: Should we trust experts or think for ourselves?
3. Disagreement: If you and I disagree, should I doubt my beliefs?
4. Downsides of Doubt: What happens when self-doubt goes too far?
5. Standpoint Epistemology: How does identity impact knowledge?

### Along the way...

We'll discuss famous thought experiments, echo chambers, testimony, higher-order evidence, no-platforming and free speech, political belief, gaslighting, conspiracy theories, impostor syndrome, marginalization, epistemic injustice, and much more!

**Don't worry! No knowledge of epistemology will be presupposed.**

## Learning Goals

By the end of the semester, you should have a better understanding of:

- Standard epistemological problems and solutions
- Key epistemological concepts and distinctions
- Central arguments related to these notions

Along the way, you will:

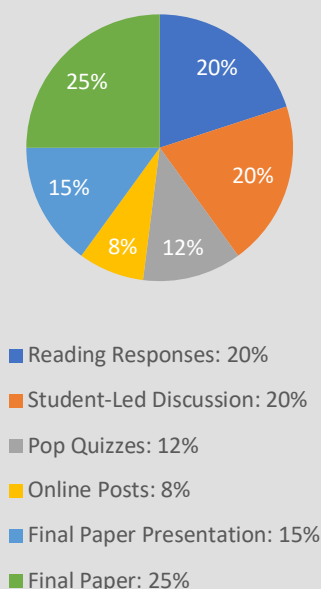
- Improve your analytical skills
- Improve your reading skills
- Develop your own stances on epistemological questions
- Search for and analyze epistemology in your life

## Truth Seeking

You will be a truth-seeker in this class, not a mere information consumer. Rather than just learning what others have thought, you will work on rationally justifying your own answers to course questions.

## Grade Summary

Percentages



## Grade Changers

- Participation: 25 points will be deducted from your final grade if you do not regularly participate or you are distracting in class.
- Attendance: 2 free absences. 4 points will be deducted from your final grade for an unexcused absences, starting Week 2.

## Grading Policy

Reading Responses	100
Student-Led Discussion	100
Pop Quizzes	60
Online Posts	40
Final Paper Presentation	75
<u>Final Paper</u>	<u>125</u>
Total	500 Pts

*Please read coursework descriptions carefully. Please ask questions if you're not sure you understand them.*

A+	98-100%	490-500 Points
A	92-97%	460-489 Points
A-	90-91%	450-459 Points
B+	88-89%	440-449 Points
B	82-87%	410-439 Points
B-	80-81%	400-409 Points
C+	78-79%	390-399 Points
C	72-77%	360-389 Points
C-	70-71%	350-359 Points
D+	68-69%	340-349 Points
D	62-67%	310-339 Points
D-	60-61%	300-309 Points
F	0-59%	0-299 Points

## Coursework Descriptions



You will be assigned to Group 1-5. What assignments you're required to complete each week will depend on which group you're in. **Know your group!** (Every student will be required to complete the same number of assignments.)

**Reading Responses:** 5 responses/25 points each/lowest score dropped. To help you reflect on the readings, you will write reading responses throughout the semester. Submit them on Canvas before the beginning of class on the first day we are scheduled to discuss that reading.

Instructions: Write a single-spaced one-paged paper critically engaging with a component of the assigned reading. Either raise an objection to an author's argument or conclusion, criticize their analysis of a concept, identify important omissions in their discussion, or provide additional argument in favor of their conclusions.

**Student-Led Discussion:** 2 Class Discussions/50 points each. Your group will lead discussion during two class periods. For each period, you will choose/be assigned one of the assigned readings, and you will (1) create a handout, (2) summarize, (3) raise questions about, and (4) lead discussion of the paper during that class period. More details to come.

**Online Posts:** 4 Online Posts/10 points each. At the end of Units 2-5, we will devote a day to reflecting on what we have learned up to that point in class, by highlighting connections, discussing lingering questions, and drawing conclusions. For each of these days, you will submit an Online Post before that class period to prepare for the discussion.

## **Scoring Reading Responses**

>**17 Points:** Your memo clearly shows you've made a good-faith effort to carefully read and understand the article.

>**19 Points:** Your explanation of the key point you discuss is fully accurate.

>**22 Points:** Reserved for memos offering significant critical reflection on the reading.

## **Scoring Student-Led Discussions**

These will be scored based on accuracy, clarity, and depth and thoughtfulness of discussion questions raised.

## **Online Posts**

These will be scored on a credit/no-credit basis. If I can tell you took the assignment seriously and put careful thought into the assignment, you will get full credit.

## **Scoring Paper Presentation**

You will earn points for submitting a high-quality draft of your final paper and then be scored based on the quality of your presentation, including clarity and organization.

## **Scoring Papers**

A rubric will be provided. Key factors include:

- Accuracy
- Clarity
- Depth
- Strength of Argument
- Intellectual Virtue

**Pop Quizzes:** # of Pop Quizzes = ????. 60 points total. Occasional, unannounced pop quizzes will be administered at the start of some class meetings. Quizzes are designed to check that you completed and thought about the assigned reading.

**Paper:** 1 Final Paper/150 Points. An argumentative research paper on a course topic. You will articulate and defend your own stance on issues raised in the course. You'll write an approx. 3000-word paper in which you do the following: (1) Briefly describe the topic on which you're writing. (2) State your thesis very clearly and carefully. (3) Briefly summarize arguments/ideas/debates related to our readings. (4) Carefully and fully defend your thesis in relation to this argument. This paper will likely expand upon your reading responses.

**Paper Presentation:** During the last two weeks of class, we will have paper workshops in which you present the ideas of your final paper. By the day you're scheduled to present, you will submit a draft of your paper on Canvas. Then you will present your paper to the class. We will give you feedback on your ideas/arguments. Then you will revise your paper in light of that feedback, and submit your final paper.

**Note:** The paper you submit before your presentation should **not** be a **rough** draft. It should be your very best attempt to write your paper up to that point.

**Participation:** Participating in class benefits you and others. We learn while we express our thoughts. Since you have a unique perspective, everyone else in the class learns when you share that perspective. Here are some ways to participate:

1. Ask questions about the readings or lectures.
2. Answer questions when asked.
3. Contribute your perspective to a discussion.
4. Raise objections to arguments.
5. Mention a relevant life experience at an appropriate time.
6. Participate during small group activities.
7. Complete in-class assignments.
8. Talk with me about the class during office hours.
9. Engaging in discussion when classmates are leading.
10. We'll participation more in class...

### Scheduling Script

Want to schedule a meeting outside of office hours, but not sure what to say? Feel free to use this script:

*"Hi Josh/Professor DiPaolo,  
I'm in your [CLASS NAME & TIME]. I'd like to schedule an appointment with you outside of your scheduled office hours. Do any of these times work for you [LIST THREE DIFFERENT TIMES YOU CAN MEET]?"*

*Thanks,  
[NAME]"*

### Disability Support Services

Phone: (657) 278-3112

Website: [www.fullerton.edu/dss](http://www.fullerton.edu/dss)

### Academic Integrity & Plagiarism

Please only submit work that is your own. Doing otherwise is one of the worst mistakes you can make in your academic career. If plagiarism is found in your work, you will be subject to prosecution to the fullest extent of university code, which will result in a failure of the assignment and will probably result in your failure of the course. Confirmation of plagiarism precludes you from being eligible to repeat the course under the university's course repeat and grade forgiveness policy.

## Communication



**Office Hours:** I will have Office Hours at the times listed above, and by appointment. You can just drop in to my scheduled office hours. If those times don't work, you should ABSOLUTELY feel free to set an appointment with me. You can use the Scheduling Script to schedule a time to meet. **I want to help you succeed!**

**Contact:** Emailing me is best! Check the syllabus first if asking about the course.

**You:** I expect you to regularly check your email and Canvas for announcements.

- Regularly check your junk email folder too!

**Ask a Question Boards:** On Canvas, there will be two "Ask a Question" discussion boards: (1) "Ask Josh a Question" and (2) "Ask Peers a Question." I will regularly check (1) and rarely check (2). You should check both often.

- Questions on these boards should be general. Think: "Could someone else benefit from knowing the answer to this question?"
  - If Yes, post.
  - If No, email me.
  - **If you have a question about the course, please check these boards before emailing.**

**Accommodations:** I will do my very best to help students with disabilities, special needs, or learning challenges succeed in this course. Students with disabilities who need accommodations, access to technology, or information about emergency building/campus evacuation processes should contact Disability Support Services. Services are available to students with a wide range of disabilities and conditions.

**Make a Good Impression:** Education is a **professional environment**. One day you may want a letter of recommendation from me. You may want your peers to recommend you for some professional position. Assume you will want these things, and behave accordingly.

## Tentative Schedule

Date	Topics	Readings	Learning Outcomes & Assignments
<b>Week 1: Unit 1: Epistemology Introduction</b>			
T 8/23	Course Overview	Instructor Introduction Video	1. Become familiar with course structure, assignments, etc. 2. Introduce yourself
Th 8/25	What is epistemology?	Feldman “Epistemological Questions” (7 pgs) Feldman “The Traditional Analysis of Knowledge” (16 pgs)	1. Basic understanding of epistemology 2. Basic understanding of epistemological starting points
<b>Week 2: Unit 1: Epistemology Introduction</b>			
T 8/30	The Gettier Problem	Nagel “The Analysis of Knowledge” (14 pgs)	1. Understand the Gettier Problem 2. Understand standard responses to the Gettier Problem
Th 9/1	Evidentialism	Feldman “Evidentialism” (10 pgs)	1. Understand epistemic evaluations 2. Understand the evidentialist theory of justification 3. Understand challenges to evidentialism
<b>Week 3: Unit 1: Epistemology Introduction</b>			
T 9/6	Testimony	Nagel “Testimony” (15 pgs)	1. Understand what testimony is and is not 2. Understand the basics of the reductionism/non-reductionism debate
Th 9/8	Catch-Up/Discussion	No Reading	1. Reflect on Intro unit: Connections, Questions, Conclusions
<b>Week 4: Unit 2: Expertise</b>			
T 9/13	Expertise & Thinking for Ourselves	Huemer “Is Critical Thinking Epistemically Responsible?” (10 pgs)	1. Understand the argument against “thinking for yourself” 2. Critically engage this argument
Th 9/15	NO CLASS	NO CLASS	NO CLASS
			<b>Week 4 Assignments</b> <b>All Groups:</b> Reading Response Student-Led Discussion
<b>Week 5: Unit 2: Expertise</b>			
T 9/20	Epistemic Trespassing	Ballantyne “Epistemic Trespassing” (25 pgs)	1. Understand what epistemic trespassing is 2. Begin to articulate what, if anything, is wrong with epistemic trespassing 3. Consider potential upsides of trespassing 4. Reflect on the relation between the argument against thinking for yourself and epistemic trespassing
Th 9/22	Echo Chambers	Nguyen “Cognitive Islands and Runaway Echo Chambers: Problems for Epistemic Dependence on Experts” (18 pgs)	1. Understand what cognitive islands and echo chambers are 2. Reflect on the relation between these and the argument against thinking for yourself 3. Consider solutions to the problems posed by relying on experts
			<b>Week 5 Assignments</b> <b>Groups 1-3:</b> Reading Response Student-Led Discussion
<b>Week 6: Unit 2: Expertise</b>			
T 9/27	Value of Thinking for Ourselves	Matheson “Why Think for Yourself?” (17 pgs)	1. Understand the argument for value of autonomous deliberation 2. Understand the argument that autonomy is an intellectual virtue
Th 9/29	Discussion	No Reading	1. Reflect on expertise unit: Connections, Questions, Conclusions
			<b>Week 6 Assignments</b> <b>Groups 4-5:</b> Reading Response Student-Led Discussion Online Post Due 9/28 by 10pm
<b>Week 7: Unit 3: Disagreement &amp; Polarization</b>			
T 10/4	Peer Disagreement & Right Reason	Kelly “The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement” (28 pgs)	1. Understand the problem of peer disagreement 2. Understand the arguments for the “right reason” response to peer disagreement 3. Critically examine this argument 4. Begin to understand the notion of higher-order evidence
Th 10/6	Conciliationism & Independence	Christensen “The Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News” (30 pgs)	1. Understand the argument for conciliationism 2. Understand the responses to the arguments for right reason

			3. Critically examine these responses 4. Understand the “good news” about disagreement 5. Reflect on upsides and downsides of higher-order doubt
			<b>Week 7 Assignments</b> <b>Groups 1-2:</b> Reading Response Student Led-Discussion
<b>Week 8: Unit 3: Disagreement &amp; Polarization</b>			
T 10/11	No-Platforming	Levy “No-Platforming and Higher-Order Evidence” (14 pgs)	1. Understand the notion of no-platforming 2. Understand arguments against no-platforming 3. Understand the higher-order evidence argument for no-platforming 4. Critically examine this argument
Th 10/13	Polarization	Joshi “What are the Chances You’re Right about Everything?” (20 pgs)	1. Understand the problem of polarization 2. Understand the polarization argument for moderation 3. Critically examine this argument
			<b>Week 8 Assignments</b> <b>Groups 3-5:</b> Reading Response Student Led-Discussion
<b>Week 9: Unit 4: Downsides of Doubt</b>			
T 10/18	Discussion	No Reading	
Th 10/20	Gaslighting & Disagreement	Abramson “Turning Up the Lights on Gaslighting” (23 pgs)	1. Understand the notions of epistemic and testimonial injustice 2. Grasp the phenomenon of gaslighting 3. Understand the disagreement account of gaslighting 4. Critically examine this account and arguments for it
			<b>Week 9 Assignments</b> Online Post Due 10/17 by 10pm <b>Groups 1-2:</b> Reading Response Student Led-Discussion
<b>Week 10: Unit 4: Downsides of Doubt</b>			
T 10/25	Gaslighting & Language	Catapang Podosky “Gaslighting, First- and Second-Order” (17 pgs)	1. Understand the linguistic conceptions of gaslighting 2. Critically examine these conceptions and arguments for them
Th 10/27	Self-Gaslighting?	Dandelet “Epistemic Coercion” (22 pgs)	1. Understand the notion of epistemic coercion 2. Consider and examine the possibility of self-gaslighting 3. Critically examine an account of epistemic coercion
			<b>Week 10 Assignments</b> <b>Groups 3-5:</b> Reading Response Student-Led Discussion
<b>Week 11: Unit 4: Downsides of Doubt</b>			
T 11/1	Conspiracy Theories & Impostor Syndrome	Hawley “Conspiracy Theories, Impostor Syndrome, and Distrust” (11 pgs)	1. Learn basic ideas about conspiracy theories 2. Understand the notion of impostor syndrome 3. Critically examine the relation between these
Th 11/3	Discussion	No Reading	1. Reflect on Downsides of Doubt Unit: Connections, Questions, Conclusions
			<b>Week 11 Assignments</b> <b>Groups 1-2:</b> Reading Response Student-Led Discussion Online Post Due 11/2 by 10pm
<b>Week 12: Unit 5: Standpoint Epistemology</b>			
T 11/8	Standpoint Theory	Toole “Demarginalizing Standpoint Theory” (16 pgs)	1. Understand ins and outs of standpoint epistemology 2. Critically examine an analysis of standpoint epistemology 3. Critically examine arguments for/against standpoint epistemology
Th 11/10	Epistemic Advantages of Oppression	Dror “Is There an Epistemic Advantage to Being Oppressed?” (19pgs)	1. Understand arguments for and against standpoint epistemology 2. Critically examine arguments
			<b>Week 12 Assignments</b>

			<b>Groups 3-5:</b> Reading Response Student-Led Discussion
<b>Week 13: Unit 5: Standpoint Epistemology</b>			
T 11/15	Elite Capture	Táíwò “Elite Capture and Epistemic Deference” (11 pgs)	1. Understand the limitations of the deference model of standpoint epistemology 2. Understand alternative models 3. Critically examine arguments for those limitations
Th 11/17	Discussion	No Reading	1. Reflect on Standpoint Epistemology Unit: Connections, Questions, and Conclusions
			<b>Week 13 Assignments</b> Student-Led Discussion Online Post Due 11/16 by 10pm
<b>Week 14:</b>	<b>FALL BREAK!!</b>	<b>FALL BREAK!!</b>	<b>FALL BREAK!!</b>
<b>Week 15: Final Paper Workshops</b>			
T 11/29	Presentation Prep	No Reading	Presentation Prep
Th 12/1	Presentations	No Reading	<b>Paper Presentations Due TBA</b> <b>Paper Draft 1 Due 11pm before presentation day</b>
<b>Week 16: Final Paper Workshops</b>			
T 12/6	Presentations	No Reading	<b>Paper Presentations Due TBA</b> <b>Paper Draft 1 Due 11pm before presentation day</b>
Th 12/8	Presentations	No Reading	<b>Paper Presentations Due TBA</b> <b>Paper Draft 1 Due 11pm before presentation day</b>
<b>Week 17</b>			
<b>FINALS WEEK: Final Paper Due 12/13 3pm</b>			