Eastern Illinois University
Revised Course Proposal
PHI 3720, Theory of Knowledge

1. Catalog Description
   a) PHI 3720
   b) Theory of Knowledge
   c) (3-0-3)
   d) F of odd-numbered years
   e) Thry Knowledge
   f) This course is an examination of contemporary epistemology: topics include the nature of rationality, truth, an analysis of knowledge, and a study of the sources of human knowledge. WI
   g) Prerequisite: Three semester hours in philosophy or permission of the instructor
   h) Fall 2005

2. Student Learning Objectives and Evaluation
   a) The student learning objectives are:

      • Students will list contemporary theories in epistemology (theories of knowledge).

      • Students will describe the connection between empirical research in cognitive psychology and philosophical theorizing about human knowledge, belief and reasoning.

      • To demonstrate critical thinking ability, students will define the differences between the philosophical concept of truth and knowing

      • Students will write clear and comprehensive essays in the style of analytic philosophy.

      • Students will demonstrate advanced critical thinking ability by constructing logically sound arguments such as dilemmas, reductio ad absurdum arguments, inferences to the best explanation, etc.

   b) Assessment and Grading

      Students will be evaluated on the basis of three in-class essay exams and one 5-7 page argumentative essay.

      Exams are given in class as a series of five to ten essay questions. Students are asked to trace out the arguments and theories that we have been working with and construct their own argumentative critiques.

      Student achievement of the stated objectives will be assessed and grades earned based on the following activities:

      • Students will list contemporary theories in epistemology (theories of knowledge). Exam IV.

      • Students will describe the connection between empirical research in cognitive psychology and philosophical theorizing about human knowledge, belief and reasoning. (Exam III)
• To demonstrate critical thinking ability, students will define the differences between the philosophical concept of truth and knowing. (Exam I.)

• Students will write clear and comprehensive essays in the style of analytic philosophy. (Exam I, Exam II, Paper III and Exam IV.)

• Students will demonstrate advanced critical thinking ability by constructing logically sound arguments such as dilemmas, reductio ad absurdum arguments, inferences to the best explanation, etc. This will be demonstrated in written essays. (Exam I, Exam II, Paper III and Exam IV.)

The last exam will include questions that span the entire course and will be given as a final exam.

Exam I is worth 20%
Exam II is worth 25%
Exam III (The Final Exam) is worth 30%
Paper I is worth 25%

Each exam and paper is given a numeric score.

Grades will be calculated on the scale:

90% or above A
80-89 B
70-79 C
60-69 D
below 60 F

c) This course is technology-enhanced, but not technology-delivered.

d) This is not a 4000-level course.

e) This course is “writing-intensive. The definition of a writing-intensive course is this: In such courses several writing assignments and writing activities are required. These assignments and activities, which are to be spread over the course of the semester, serve the dual purpose of strengthening writing skills and deepening understanding of course content. At least one writing assignment is to be revised by the student after it has been read and commented on by the instructor. In writing-intensive courses the quality of students’ writing should constitute no less than 35% of the final course grade. This course meets these requirements. The exams and paper are spread over the semester. We strengthen writing skills in all assignments. Before exams, we will discuss strategy for constructing an argumentative essay. Students are required to submit a rough draft of their paper. I comment on it in a meeting with each student before the paper is submitted for a grade. All grades are based on student’s ability to write a well-structured argument. In this course at least 50% of the course grade is based on writing quality.

3. Course Outline

Overview: The purpose of this course is to introduce students to contemporary issues in epistemology. The course is subdivided into three sections:
I. Rationality: an analysis of the abstract and objective standards for rationality.

II. Human Knowledge: a close study of the competing theories of what is required for an individual knower’s belief to have the status of knowledge.

III. Sources of Human Knowledge: an examination of the methods of attaining knowledge: perception, intellectual intuition, memory and testimony.

Course Schedule and Readings
(All readings are contained in Knowledge: Readings in Contemporary Epistemology unless otherwise indicated.)

I: Rationality

In Section I, we will discuss the traditional views of rational inquiry and problems with the traditional view. We will cover deduction, induction, with a focus on the contemporary “riddles of induction.” We will also discuss inference to the best explanation and examine the connection between explanation and truth. We will also discuss the method of conceptual, the role of definition in argumentation and reflective equilibrium.

Induction and Deduction: The New Riddle of Induction
Reading: “The New Riddle of Induction” Nelson Goodman
(Week 1 T/R)

Inference to the Best Explanation
(Week 2 T)

Conceptual Analysis and Reflective Equilibrium
Reading: “Why Bother with Reflective Equilibrium” Michael R. DePaul in Rethinking Intuition
(Week 2 R)

II. Human Knowledge

In Section II, We will analyze the concept of knowledge. We will study the seminal “Gettier problem” which illustrates the problem of the element of chance in human knowing. Some responses to the Gettier problem will be considered. We will examine the distinction between “externalist” and “internalist” conceptions of human knowledge. (Externalists hold that whether a cognizer has knowledge depends upon the existence of circumstantial facts in the knower’s environment, some of which the cognizer may not realize are in place. An internalist analysis of human knowledge holds that knowledge is constrained by what the cognizer holds in conscious awareness.) Further we will examine the question of whether human knowledge rests on a priori “given” and/or foundational beliefs. Lastly, we will discuss the “naturalization” of epistemology. Naturalized epistemology is the thesis that we have no basis to make claims about how people ought to reason; there exist only psychological facts about how people in fact reason.

Theories of Truth, Belief and Acceptance
III: Sources of Human Knowledge

In Section III, we will look at the particular methods that human beings use to acquire knowledge, in light of our previous discussion on the alternative theories of knowledge to understand the particular issues and problems associated with each separate source of knowledge. We will look at some research in cognitive psychology in order to understand the factors that shape actual (not always optimal) human reasoning. And we will look at the traditional distinction of “a priori knowledge” as it relates to perception and intuition.

Perception
(Week 12 T/R)

Introspection
Readings: “Individualism and Self-knowledge” Tyler Burge and “Content and Self-Knowledge” Paul A. Boghossian
(Week 13 T/R)

Memory and Testimony
Readings: “How We Remember” The Other Side of Psychology, Denise Cummins; “Testimony and Observation” C.A.J. Coady
(Week 14 T/R)

Intuition and A Priori Knowledge
Reading: “A Priori Knowledge, Necessity and Contingency” Saul Kripke
(Week 15 T/R)

b) This is not a technology-delivered course.

4. Rationale

a) Purpose and Need: Usually, undergraduate curriculum in philosophy includes metaphysics, epistemology and the philosophy of science as course offerings in analytic philosophy. Currently, we do not have an epistemology course. This course will fill that need.

b) This course is appropriate for philosophy students who are familiar with the basics of constructing philosophical arguments. Since any 1000- or 2000-level course would prepare students, this course is appropriate as a 3000-level course. This course would have no other pre-requisites.

c) Similarity to existing courses. This course is not similar to any of our current courses.

d) Impact on Program. This course will be a new choice within the “knowledge” component of the undergraduate major program.

5. Implementation

a) This course will be assigned initially to Teresa Britton.

b) This course entails no additional cost to our students.

c) Texts in use in this course are:


6. Community College Transfer: A community college course will not be judged equivalent to this course.

7. Date Approved by the department: 12/5/03

8. Date approved by the college curriculum committee: 4/7/04

9. Date approved by CAA: 4/22/04 CGS:__________.