

# Belief & Reality

PHIL 100 (S4): Spring 2014

M/W/F 1–1:52PM

Academic West 115

<http://moodle.bucknell.edu/course/view.php?id=11596>

**Instructor** Matthew H. Slater, Associate Professor of Philosophy

office: 221 Vaughan Literature Building | phone: 7-2767

office hours: M/W 2–3PM (and by appointment)

**Course Content** This course will introduce you to some central methods and problems from two important branches of philosophy: metaphysics and epistemology. Metaphysics concerns the nature of existence and the most general categories and features of reality. Under this heading, we'll consider the existence of physical objects and qualities, persons, persistence through time, the problem of free will, and the nature of time. Epistemology addresses questions about how beings like ourselves come to know about the world around us: What is knowledge? How does it differ from belief? From certainty? Can any of our beliefs about the world be justified?

**Learning Goals** By studying these questions, you will learn about some important philosophical principles and theories. You will develop your abilities to analyze and critically evaluate different ideas, becoming a better, more careful thinker in the process. You will also develop an appreciation of the fundamental ambiguities and complexities involved in the human attempt to answer complex questions. In short, you will learn how to think philosophically.

**Readings** Readings for this course will come from a draft textbook by the instructor, chapters of which will be made available on the course Moodle page in PDF. **You are expected to print and bring copies of the readings with you to class.**

**Evaluation** Your final grade will be based the various weighted components described below. Note what the different letter grades represent: according to the Course Catalog (<http://www.bucknell.edu/catalog.xml>), an 'A' rewards 'Superior achievement', a 'B' means 'High pass', a 'C' means 'Pass', a 'D' means 'Low pass', and an 'F', of course, stands for 'Failing work'.

**Participation & Professionalism (10%).** It is helpful to think of the standards for your engagement with the course as analogous to expectations you'd find in most professional contexts. You should show up to each class meeting on time, prepared (having carefully and critically read and annotated assigned materials), and remain present and attentive for the entire time. Computers, phones, tablets, and other electronic marvels should be silenced and put away. I also expect you to be an active participant during discussions.

**Reading Quizzes (10%).** I will occasionally give reading quizzes; these will typically start class and last around five minutes; they should be easy if you read assigned material carefully. They will not be announced in advance; latecomers will get no extra time. Your worst score will be dropped.

**Substantial Quizzes (10%).** We'll have three more substantial (i.e., 20–25 minute) quizzes, scheduled in advance. As with the reading quizzes, your worst score will be dropped.

**Study Guides (10%).** For each topic we cover, you will be responsible for assembling a "Study Guide" that summarizes the main issues, questions, concepts, arguments, and theories. This should be an ongoing process — as some of the content in your study guides will doubtless come from lecture — but they will be typed up and collaboratively vetted for accuracy/quality towards the end of each topic section in the course, often before a quiz or exam.

**Hour Exams (30%).** There will be two hour-long exams. They will resemble the substantial quizzes in format, level of detail, and so on.

**Final Exam (30%).** A final, comprehensive exam will be scheduled by the Registrar (date/time TBA). The format will be similar to the hour exams.

- Policy on Late Work** I will only offer extensions/makeups on quizzes/exams in case I hear about a legitimate reason for needing to miss class *before class*; do not assume that retrospective excuses will be granted (they rarely will). Study guides will be penalized by  $\frac{1}{3}$  of a letter grade per partial day late.
- Office Hours** You are invited and encouraged to supplement your in-class learning by visiting me in my regular office hours or at some other time that suits us both. You don't need an appointment to come to office hours — just drop by. You can also contact me via Skype (my username can be found on our Moodle page); if you see me online, you may assume that I'm happy to chat.
- Academic Honesty** I expect you to abide by Bucknell's Honor Code (<http://www.bucknell.edu/x1324.xml>). I will not hesitate to refer students who are suspected of academic dishonesty to the University Board of Review (<http://www.bucknell.edu/x1337.xml>).
- Reasonable Accommodations** If you have a disability that may affect your performance in this course, please talk to me (either by email or in person) at your earliest convenience and I will make every effort to accommodate your needs. If you have not yet spoken with Director of Disability Services about your disability (<http://www.bucknell.edu/DisabilityServices/>), please do so as soon as possible. Accommodations will need to be sanctioned by that office.

## Tentative Schedule of Topics & Assignments

Note that the below dates are subject to change as our progress dictates; please stay current with the Moodle Site.

Weeks 1–2	Belief	Study Guide 1: 1/23 Quiz 1: 1/27
Weeks 3–4	Knowledge	Study Guide 2: 2/7 Quiz 2: 2/10
Weeks 5–7	Doubt & Skepticism	Study Guide 3: 2/21 First Hour Exam: 2/26 <i>no class on 2/28</i>
Week 8	Causation	Study Guide 4: 3/7
Week 9	<i>Spring Break</i>	
Weeks 10–11	Persistence & Personal Identity	Study Guide 5: 3/28 Quiz 3: 3/31
Weeks 12–14	Freedom of the Will	Quiz 4: 4/7 Study Guide 6: 4/11 Second Hour Exam: 4/16 <i>no class on 4/18</i>
Weeks 15–16	The Nature of Time	Study Guide 7: 4/25  Final Exam: TBD

