

# PHIL 100: **Belief & Reality**

Fall 2017

Coleman 119: M/W 8:30–9:52 PM

Course Website: <http://moodle.bucknell.edu/course/view.php?id=26366>

**Instructor** Matthew H. Slater, Associate Professor of Philosophy  
office: 221 Vaughan Literature Building | phone: 7-2767  
office hours: Mondays 10–11:30 AM & Tuesdays 1:30–3 PM (or by appointment)

**Course Content** This course will introduce you to some central methods and problems from two important branches of philosophy: metaphysics and epistemology. Epistemology addresses questions about our beliefs about the world around us. When are our beliefs justified? At what point do they constitute knowledge? How does knowledge differ from understanding? Metaphysics concerns the nature of existence and the most general features of reality. Under this heading, we'll consider such topics as the nature of time, causation, and our personal identity through time.

**Learning Goals** By studying the course questions, you will learn about some important philosophical principles and theories. Apart from learning how to think philosophically about these rather abstract issues, you will also develop your abilities to analyze and critically evaluate ideas and arguments — becoming a better, more careful thinker in the process. Moreover, as we will discuss in class, philosophy often involves a kind of “disciplined creativity” that you may find useful in many other contexts. If all goes well, and you are open to it, you will also develop an appreciation of some of the fundamental ambiguities and complexities involved in the human attempt to answer complex questions.

**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 assigned readings with you to class. This is part of being prepared for class.**

**Evaluation** Your final grade will be based on 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’ stands for ‘Failing work’.

**Preparation & Professionalism (15%).** 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 (in the expansive sense), attentive, and engaged in our discussion for the entire time. Computers, phones, tablets, and other electronic marvels should be silenced and put away unless you have prior permission from me. I've noticed a growing trend of students wandering in and out of the room during class periods. This is not okay; practice PPP (Proactive Potty Planning). If an actual bodily emergency forces you to leave, please be quick.

**Reading Quizzes (10%).** I will occasionally give short (i.e., 5 minute) unannounced reading quizzes to provide you with some extrinsic motivation to keep up with the reading. They will typically be held in the first few minutes of class (latecomers will get no extra time; reading quizzes may not be made up). Reading quizzes will be *open note but not open book*, thus also providing you with some incentive to keep a reading journal as you read in addition to taking notes in class. The quizzes should be pretty straightforward if you read assigned material carefully. Your worst score will be dropped.

**Substantial Quizzes (15%).** There will be three more substantial (i.e., 20–25 minute) quizzes, scheduled in advance. As with the reading quizzes, your worst score will be dropped.

**Weekly Assignments (15%).** Each week, I will post a few questions for you to consider as you read; you will be asked to choose one question (or set of questions) to respond to in writing (in Moodle, in approximately 400–500 words). In many cases (depending on our schedule), you may choose whether you respond before class on Monday or on Wednesday (these will be due by 7AM on the day of class so that I can read them in advance). This need not be polished writing, but I will ask you to strive for clarity and precision in your answers while also engaging specifically with the assigned text. Weekly assignments will be

graded on a simple numerical basis, where 0="not done/past deadline", 1="Getting There", 2="Good; Meets my Expectations", 3="Exceeds My Expectations". No extensions will be granted; deadlines will be sharp out of fairness considerations. Because Moodle sometimes encounters technical issues, you should compose your responses in a word processor, saving often, and then copy-and-paste the finished product into Moodle. At the end of the term, I will drop your worst three submissions, average the rest, and curve things so that an average of 2.0 lands on a B/B+. In my experience, a -2.2 average is usually sufficient to get one into A-range on this portion of the course.

**Midterm (20%).** The midterm exam (Wednesday, October 4<sup>th</sup> during class) will resemble the substantial quizzes in format, level of detail, and so on, but will be an hour long.

**Final Exam (25%).** A comprehensive final exam will be scheduled by the Registrar (date/time TBA). The format will be similar to the midterm.

**Office Hours** You are invited and encouraged to supplement your in-class learning by visiting me in my regular office hours (see above) or at some other time that suits us both. You don't need an appointment to come to office hours — just drop by. You may 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. You may need to request that I add you as a contact (I will) — this cuts down on spam calls for me.

**Policy on Late Work** I will only offer extensions/makeups on quizzes or exams in case I hear about a legitimate, documented reason for needing to miss class *before class*; do not assume that retrospective excuses will be granted (they rarely will). As noted above, no extensions/makeups will be granted for either reading quizzes or weekly writing assignments. Good work if you've read this far and this carefully. As a bonus, I'll give you one full-credit reading quiz grade if you email me a favorite photo of William Shatner (or equivalent) with the subject-line 'I read the syllabus!' before class on Wednesday 8/23. Late Shatner photos will not be accepted.

**Academic Honesty** I expect you to abide by Bucknell's Honor Code <bucknell.edu/x1324.xml>. I will not hesitate to refer students who are suspected of academic dishonesty to the University Board of Review.

**Reasonable Accommodations** Any student who may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact Heather Fowler, Director of the Office of Accessibility Resources at 570-577-1188 or hf007@bucknell.edu who will help coordinate reasonable accommodations for those students with documented disabilities. See also <<http://bucknell.edu/Accessibility>>.