

Fall 2025

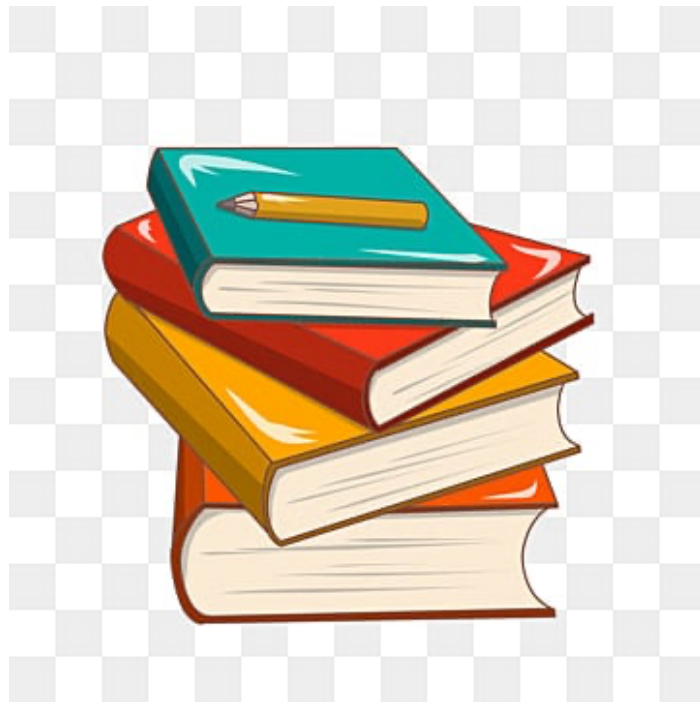
Course Descriptions

Philosophy, Religious Studies, and Humanities

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Is Philosophy a Great Major for YOU?

The WVU Philosophy Department is an intellectually vibrant department, with an energetic faculty devoted to outstanding research, teaching, and service. We offer a BA in Philosophy and minors in Religious Studies (both a regular and an online option), Applied Ethics, and Philosophy. We have a well-earned reputation for outstanding undergraduate teaching and mentoring that is comparable to a top-tier liberal arts college.

We have a long and distinguished tradition of student success and fulfillment. Our graduates include an impressive number of members of Phi Beta Kappa, Truman Scholars, Fulbright Scholars, Eberly Scholars, Neil S. Bucklew Scholars, Mountaineers of Distinction, a Newman Civic Fellow, and a recipient of the Charles B. Rangel International Affairs Graduate Fellowship. Our students are gaining admission, often with generous funding, to top graduate programs, law schools, and medical schools.

If you are a person who wants to live a purposeful and meaningful life, the study of philosophy will be valuable, interesting, and deeply enjoyable for you. Our students have the opportunity to grapple with deep questions and pressing contemporary problems about ourselves, our societies, and our world. How should we live our lives? What are our ethical obligations toward others? What is a just society? Are race and gender social constructs? Is time real? Is consciousness a purely physical phenomenon? Do human beings have free will? Is it possible to know anything? Students practicing philosophy often come up with enlightening answers to those questions and learn to support their answers with sound reasoning.

Beyond the personal satisfaction of engaging in a careful study of life's big questions, the study of philosophy prepares students for employment in fields that demand sophisticated critical thinking skills, clear communication of complex ideas, and the ability to deal effectively with ambiguity. The analytical and communication skills emphasized in philosophy are a valuable asset in many satisfying careers, including law, health care, education, politics, public policy, counseling, and business. As you probably know already, philosophy students consistently score exceptionally well on standardized exams such as the LSAT, GRE, MCAT, and GMAT.

Data collected by PayScale.com and shared by the World Economic Forum compared mid-career salaries among graduates from 20 different undergraduate majors. Philosophy came in 5th place, earning the highest rating among all humanities majors, all social science majors, all business majors (except economics), and several STEM majors. PayScale.com also collected data on starting salaries among 50 different majors and philosophy majors ranked #16. These data demonstrate that philosophy offers a great return on investment that is comparable to engineering.

For more info, contact:

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Philosophy Course Descriptions

Philosophy 100 satisfies area 5 of the GEF

PHIL 100 **Problems of Philosophy** **3 hr**
Devin Curry

This course is an introduction to philosophy by way of a whirlwind tour of problems in ethics and the philosophy of mind. We'll begin by acquiring basic tools of logical thinking, and then use those tools to grapple with puzzles about truth, bullshit, consciousness, appearance and reality, free will, moral partiality, and the meaning of life. All along the way, we will practice having respectful, mutually edifying conversations about these vexed and sometimes controversial issues. By the end of the course, we will have studied many (though not nearly all) of the fundamental questions that make up the subject matter of philosophy. We may not walk away with satisfactory answers to these questions, but we will develop a deeper understanding of both the questions themselves and various possible ways of answering them.

Philosophy 130 satisfies area 5 of the GEF

PHIL 130 **Current Moral Problems** **3 hr**
Matthew Talbert

Students will be introduced to different theories about what makes actions right or wrong. These normative ethical theories will then be applied to contemporary debates concerning issues such as abortion, animal rights, the use of torture, responsibility for war crimes, and climate change.

Philosophy 147 area 6 of the GEF

PHIL 147 **Philosophy and Film** **3 hr**
David Carbone

This course provides an introduction to philosophical questions and problems using the medium of film. We will be viewing a variety of films over the course of the semester to consider how they frame, develop, and enact philosophical ideas pertaining to the nature of reality and our knowledge of it, the nature of the self and personal identity, the character of contemporary society and technology, and the meaning and value of life. The films we view will be accompanied by a variety of readings from the Western philosophical tradition.

Philosophy 170 area 5 of the GEF

PHIL 170 **Intro to Critical Reasoning** **3 hr**
Gary Ciocco

An introduction to skills of critical reasoning; the structure of deductive and inductive arguments; recognition of common formal and informal fallacies; application of reasoning skills to textbooks, news articles, editorials, advertisements, political speeches, and other arguments in ordinary language. We will also emphasize the importance of induction and role of language in our acquisition of knowledge and our understanding of arguments and issues.

Philosophy 244 satisfies area 5 of the GEF

PHIL 244 **History of Ancient Philosophy** **3 hr**
David Hoinski

Philosophy as it is practiced in many places around the world today (including here at WVU) originated in ancient Greece. This course introduces students to ancient Greek thought, with an emphasis on how philosophy was understood by those who first took themselves to be doing it. While the majority of the course will focus on Plato and Aristotle, we will also read selections from the pre-Socratic philosophers who influenced them and from the philosophical traditions that developed in Greece after the death of Alexander the Great.

Philosophy 260 area 3 of the GEF

PHIL 260 **Intro to Symbolic Logic** **3hr**
Geoff Georgi

This course is an introduction to contemporary formal (or symbolic) logic. Historically, the study of logic originated with Aristotle and the Stoic philosophers of ancient Greece. Discoveries in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, however, led to a far more sophisticated understanding of logic. Thanks to these developments, formal logic is now central to many disciplines, including computer science, linguistics, mathematics, and philosophy. More generally, an understanding of the basic concepts of formal logic is indispensable for reasoning critically on any topic.

Pre-Requisite: 3 hours of Philosophy

PHIL 302 **Theory of Knowledge** **3 hr**
Sharon Ryan

Theory of knowledge, or epistemology, is an exploration of a wide variety of interesting topics centered around questions about how, or if, human beings can know the true nature of reality. Some of the questions we will consider include: What is knowledge? What is the difference between knowledge and true opinion? Do we really know anything for sure? Are some issues, just by their very nature, beyond the scope of what we can know? For example, could human beings ever know if there is a God? Is the divine something that is simply beyond our reach as mere humans? Are ethical claims knowable? What are the most important epistemic virtues, and how would a virtuous epistemic agent conduct their life? Is expertise real, or do we all have an equal right to believe whatever we want to believe? How should you respond in the face of a disagreement with someone who seems to be just as informed about the facts as you are? In a disagreement with an intellectual peer, should you back off on your original opinion or hold your ground and “agree to disagree?” Do we have an ethical obligation to be rational? Can being epistemically rational conflict with the demands of friendship or social justice? For example, do we owe our friends the benefit of the doubt even when the evidence supports believing something awful about them? And can we harm others by sticking to the evidence at hand, or is it always the best policy to guide your beliefs by the evidence? If you were offered the power of omniscience (being all-knowing), would you take it?

PHIL 306
Devin Curry

Philosophy of Mind

3 hr

This course will survey important historical and contemporary strands in the philosophy of cognition and consciousness. We'll begin by asking whether you're made out of meat, and end by asking whether you're made out of stories. Along the way, via close engagement with philosophical and scientific texts, we'll discuss the relationship between minds and brains, the philosophical foundations of cognitive science, the possibility that your iPhone is literally part of your mind, and the mysteries of consciousness.

Pre-Requisite: 3 hours of Philosophy or Religious Studies interdepartmental major

PHIL 308
Daniel Miller

Philosophy of Religion

3hr

This course explores a number of questions about religious belief and the nature and existence of God as conceived in the major monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). Questions include: Is God the best explanation for the existence and order of the universe? Is it ever rational to accept a miracle claim? Does science threaten the rationality of religious belief? What bearing does the pervasiveness of religious experience have on the rationality of religious belief? Does the existence of evil or of divine hiddenness disprove God? What is the relationship between God and morality? If God exists and has infallible foreknowledge of all future events, can humans nevertheless act freely? Should religious belief be based on reasoned evidence, faith, or both?

Pre-Requisite - 3 hrs. philosophy

PHIL 321
Matthew Talbert

Ethical Theory

3 hr

The course will cover topics in metaethics and normative ethics. Metaethics is concerned with the fundamental nature of morality and the significance of moral claims. Metaethical topics addressed in this class will include: "Are values subjective or objective?" and "What is the nature of moral reasons?" Normative ethical theories articulate standards for judging whether an action is right or wrong. Here, we will be concerned with the various advantages and disadvantages of consequentialist and deontological normative perspectives. In the last section of the course, we will take up the question of an agent's moral responsibility for their actions.

Philosophy 331 satisfies area 5 of the GEF

Pre-Requisite – 3 hours of Philosophy or Pre-Med or Health Science Student

PHIL 331

Health Care Ethics

3 hr

Daniel Miller

The course provides a framework for the ethical principles and concepts at work in medical decision-making, including the nature of rights, autonomy, justice, benefit, and harm. It explores difficult and controversial issues that arise in healthcare ethics, including autonomy and informed consent, life-sustaining treatment, reproduction, conscientious objection, justice and health care, and emerging technologies. Questions include: What does consent involve, and to what extent must a patient be informed about what they consent to? How can we balance competing rights among patients, their families, and health care providers? How should we make medical decisions concerning patients who fail to meet the standards of competence but lack an advance directive? To what degree should we prioritize the life of a fetus? Is healthcare a moral right? Would it be permissible for parents to genetically enhance their children?

Pre-Requisite – Prior coursework in Philosophy or a major in the sciences

Phil 332 may be used to satisfy the ethics requirement of the major

PHIL 332

Environmental Ethics

3 hr

Ariane Nomikos

Imagine that you are the last human left on earth and that you will soon die. (Don't worry, you've lived a long, full life and you're actually pretty ready to go at this point.) When you are gone, the only life remaining will be plants, microbes, and invertebrates. For some reason, you find yourself standing next to the last remaining redwood tree and you think to yourself: "It sure would be fun to destroy this tree before I die!" Would it be *wrong* for you to destroy the last remaining redwood?

Perhaps the most fundamental question in environmental ethics concerns our attitude towards the nonhuman world. Thus, in the first part of this course, we ask: *what really matters?* Do beings without experiences, such as redwoods, have moral standing? In other words, are trees the sort of things to which we can have obligations? Are ecosystems? And how about nonhuman animals? Does the ability to suffer imply that an organism should be treated with respect, or is something more required, like the capacity for self-conscious moral agency? In the second part of this course, we will ask: *what really works?* That is, how can we apply our answers to the previous questions to concrete problems like climate change.

**RELG 102 Introduction to World Religions
(Online)**

3 hr

Alyssa Beall

This online, accelerated course is both an introduction to World Religions and a introduction to the academic study of those religions. We will explore the history and development of religions around the world, and examine how those traditions are practiced today in a variety of contexts.

**RELG 102 Introduction to World Religions
Joseph Snow**

3 hr

This course is an introduction to the comparative study of world religions. We hope to explore the ways that religious traditions construct worlds of meaning, analyze the human situation, and speak of power and mystery. We shall address the multi-religious contexts in which Americans and many other people live

today in the 21st century; and consider how people with different religious beliefs and practices can cultivate respect for, and dialogue with, diverse traditions of others. Such inquiries can sometimes be disorienting, for the sense of religion many of us might feel in the United States has been mediated largely through the monotheistic histories contained within Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. Traditions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Shinto, Sikhism, and Jainism, as well as Indigenous religions and New Religious Movements, may have very different sets of assumptions, notwithstanding a multiplicity of divinities, an absence or abundance of scriptural authority, as well as historically and contextually specific ritual practices. With the more recent spread of religious pluralism and the movement toward inter-faith dialogue, many of these traditions will seem very much like an "other" way of being in the world. In order to learn about these other religions in a reflective way, we'll attempt to keep two important perspectives in mind: *Imaginative Sympathy*— Please take seriously the worlds of peoples involved, assume that religious thoughts and/or practices carry real meaning for any person or group under consideration; and *Critical Distance*—Try to raise questions that may not be raised by the participants, such as, what effect does this faith/practice have on the participant? On society? What kinds of values does a given text suggest or implicitly depend upon? What are the conceptions of human nature that texts and practices envision? What does a given dimension of any tradition show to be fundamental to human happiness and welfare?

**RELG 102 Introduction to World Religions
(Online)**

3 hr

Aaron Gale

This course introduces students to five of the most widely recognized religions in the world today: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Despite some commonalities, each religion is unique regarding its history and practice. Therefore, the goals of this course are primarily twofold: 1. to provide students with an understanding of how each religion evolved historically and spiritually, and 2. to explore the contemporary practice of each religion. In addition, we will study some of the interactions that have taken place among the religions.

RELG 219 The History of Christianity 3 hr

Aaron Gale

This course explores the birth and evolution of Christian thought from its inception until approximately the modern era. The emphasis of this course is therefore on the significant events and people that helped to shape Christianity. Some of the individuals we will discuss include Jesus of Nazareth, St. Paul, St. Augustine, and St. Thomas Aquinas. In addition, other topics related to the study of Christian thought will be examined. Examples of such topics include the early relationship between Judaism and Christianity, monasticism, and the Crusades. Ultimately, then, this course will: 1. explore how Christianity developed within the confines of the ancient world, and 2. provide students with the knowledge necessary to identify and explain key Christian events and people integral to the religion's growth.

RELG 303 Studies in Christian Scripture 3 hr

Alex Snow

This course will approach the New Testament from a rigorously historical perspective. We will situate the writings of the New Testament thoroughly within the historical, cultural, social, political, literary, and ideological worlds from which it emerged. We will endeavor to explore beneath the surface to find clues not only about such traditional issues as authorship, sources, and dates, but also about what is a vibrant field of study and social history. We will ask historical questions of the texts and of the events that they either narrated or presupposed. We will maintain an interest in the history of the text and the formation of the canon of the New Testament; in the historical Jesus; in the historical Paul; in the history of the Johannine community; in the historical realities lying behind Matthew, and 2 Corinthians, and Revelation; just to name a few.

We will also strive to be highly comparative, asking potential and perennial questions like: How does John compare with the Synoptics? How do the Synoptics compare with each other? How does the preaching of Jesus compare with the accounts of the Gospels; or even more specifically, the theology of Paul? How does Paul's theology stack up against the letter of James; or even the book of Hebrews? How does the book of Revelation compare with everything else? We will strive to be contextually, inter-textually, and intra-textually critical, engaged in rigorous scholarship around both historical and contemporary constructions of Christian scriptures, so that we can see what the critical questions are and what evidence is typically adduced to answer them.

RELG 410 Apocalypse 3 hr

Alyssa Beall

What is an apocalypse? Who tells apocalyptic stories, who are they intended for, and what exactly do they describe? This course examines the category of Apocalyptic Literature from its beginnings in religious texts, to the uses of the genre in modern religious groups and cultures. We will explore the historical and modern concepts from significant texts, people, and events that have shaped the development of this particular form of expression, and then apply those ideas to films, TV shows, and fiction.

Humanities Courses

HUM 101 Introduction to Western Civilization 1 3 hr

****Staff****

In this course we will examine civilizations across the Western world and their interactions with each other and others from the age of Mesopotamia to the Renaissance. As we read about and discuss these

civilizations, we will consider their trends and shifts over time and how those changes impact social organization, culture, traditions, social value, religions, art, philosophy, and political institutions.

Humanities 102 satisfies area 6 of the GEF
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HUM 102 Introduction to Western Civilization 2 3 hr
****Staff****

This course is an interdisciplinary, historical survey of western culture from the Renaissance to the present. Students will gain an understanding of this period by investigating and critically reflecting on the art, architecture, philosophy, religion, literature, politics, science, and music of this period.

HUM 231 Greek and Roman Civilization and Culture 3 hr
Joseph Snow

Over two and a half thousand years ago, perhaps in the later 700s BCE, a poet told of events which took place during a ten-year siege of the city of Troy. This poem — the *Iliad* — marked the start of one of the world’s greatest and oldest storytelling traditions, still influential today. Like the word ‘story’ itself, this tradition is a gift to us from the ancient Greeks. This class offers the reader a story as well, an ambition to provide an accessible account of the enormous sweep of ancient history which has to be considered not only in order to appreciate the remote ancient society which gave us the poet Homer and so much else, but also the later centuries of antiquity when a new and seemingly unstoppable force — the Romans — embraced and perpetuated the cultural legacy of Classical Greece. For centuries, well into the Christian era, the ancient Greeks, their way of life and their cultural traditions, took shelter behind the booted legionaries guarding the Roman Empire. Thanks to the Romans, all sorts of debris from ancient Greek culture survived into the mediaeval world. Some of it has come down to us. The magnificent civilization created by the ancient Greeks and Romans is the greatest legacy of the classical world. But how well do we truly understand its rich history and extraordinary achievements? This class hopes to tell the remarkable story of the intermingled civilizations of ancient Greece and Rome, which spanned more than six millennia from the late Bronze Age to the seventh century CE.

HUM 231 Greek and Roman Civilization and Culture 3 hr
Aaron Gale

Examination of the numerous ways in which Greek and Roman cultures intersected, coincided, and at times collided. The relationship has no parallel in world history in that their contact created a unique fusion of cultural expression identified as “Greco-Roman.”