

PHIL/POLI/ECON 698.002 Philosophy, Politics, and Economics: Capstone Course

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Class Hours: Wed 3:35pm - 6:05pm

Class Room: 208 Bingham Hall (BI)

Course Description

The capstone seminar is the final course in the PPE sequence. The course, which is writing- and participation-intensive, focuses on specific topics at the intersection of philosophy, politics, and economics. The course will be structured like a graduate seminar: we will meet once a week to discuss one or two papers (of which you are expected to have read carefully). You will be required to write short responses in advance of each class. The primary assignment (worth 50% of your grade) is a 15- to 20-page research paper on a PPE topic of your choosing. The first part of the course will focus on discussing the topics listed below. The second part of the course focuses on your research paper: you will present your work-in-progress to your peers, and practice giving and receiving constructive feedback to each other. The other assignments in the course are designed to build confidence and skill in your writing.

Pre-Requisites

All other requisite PPE courses. The course requires basic familiarity with methods and fundamental concepts from economics, political science and philosophy. The assignments for the course are writing intensive. If you have concerns about your writing, I strongly recommend the [UNC Writing Center](#). They are useful resource.

Required Readings

All of the readings will be made available on the course website on Sakai.

Because this is a discussion-heavy course, it's very important that you come to class prepared. Please read and/or listen to the course material carefully. Seminars really only work well when there is a quorum of well-prepared participants. Do you really want to be a free-rider? (Which, by the way, is exactly the sort of question that you will not be well-placed to answer if you don't come to class prepared.)

Grading Policy

- **10% for participation**

This will primarily reflect your contributions to the in-class discussion. But, because you cannot participate without attending, it will also reflect your attendance. Please come to class. That said, I understand that sometimes things come up. If you know you will miss class, please let me know.

- **20% for short responses**

Every week you are required to write a 200-300 (max: 350) word response to the readings. You are to post it publicly to the Forum section of the course website on Sakai. The posts can focus on a single reading or a combination of readings for the week, including optional ones. They can initiate new threads or respond to existing threads. (You can skip one of the responses with no penalty. You're welcome.)

Deadlines: Your response should be posted before 10:00am the day our class meets.

- **20% for writing exercises**

Throughout the first part of the course there will be two writing exercises. The first (worth 5%) will be an Argument Analysis: you will be given an argument and asked to reconstruct it while briefly evaluating the plausibility of its premises. It should be about 750 words. The other exercise (worth 15%) will be a short essay in which you argue for a position. It should be about 1500 words. You will have the opportunity (which I hereby heartily encourage you to take!) to rewrite the essay in light of feedback. I will provide more information about these assignments later on in the semester.

- **50% for final research paper**

The final project for the course is a 15-20 pages (excluding bibliography). The paper should look nice. I recommend that you double- or one-point-five-space the paper and that you use an 11- or 12-point font. The structure must include: thesis, core argument, and raising/answering objections. During the semester, you will have three intermediate checkpoints about research on your final paper:

October 9: initial topic submission

October 30: thesis, outline, list of potential sources

November: presentations and Q&A

Each of these deadlines is an opportunity to receive feedback. Each checkpoint is graded for completion and together they represent 10% of the paper grade (which, if you do the math, is 5% of the course grade).

Grading Breakdown Chart

Participation	10%
Weekly short responses	20%
Writing exercises	20%
Final research paper	50%

All grades in the course will be out of 100 points. To the extent it's feasible, I aim to grade your work anonymously.

A	93 - 100	C+	77 - 79
A-	90 - 92	C	73 - 76
B+	87 - 89	C-	70 - 72
B	83 - 86	D+	66 - 69
B-	80 - 82	D	60 - 65
		F	lower than 60

Exciting Extra Credit Opportunities!

Throughout the semester there will be an exciting assortment of PPE-related events that nicely complement the course. You are hereby strongly encouraged to attend these events. (Details about the events can be found on the [PPE events webpage](#). I will also make announcements about these events in class.) Because my encouragement might not be enough, I will offer the following incentive: for each PPE event you attend this semester, if you post a short (200-300 word) reflection about it, I will raise your final grade. (For the first two events, I will raise your grade one percentage point each; for every event after that, you will earn half the number of points as you did on the previous occasion.) Also, for all I know, there'll probably be free pizza or something.

Honor Code

All students are expected to follow the guidelines of the [UNC honor code](#). In particular, students are expected to refrain from "lying, cheating, or stealing" in an academic context (but it's also probably good to avoid doing these things in general). If you are unsure about which actions violate that honor code, please consult honor.unc.edu.

Plagiarism of any kind will not be tolerated. Always cite any resource that you use (including friends with whom you have worked if cooperation is permitted on an assignment). **Do not reuse papers** written for past classes. The internet has made it easier than ever before to catch this sort of thing, so (moral reasons aside) it's not a particularly wise idea.

Accessibility Resources

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability or pregnancy complications resulting in difficulties with accessing learning opportunities.

All accommodations are coordinated through the Accessibility Resources and Service Office. See the [ARS Website](#) for contact information or email ars@unc.edu.

Counseling and Psychological Services

Counseling and Psychological Services: CAPS is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body through timely access to consultation and connection to

clinically appropriate services, whether for short- or long-term needs. Go to their [website](#) or visit their facilities on the third floor of the Campus Health Service building for a walk-in evaluation to learn more.

Electronics Policy

Laptops, cell phones, tablets, pagers, handheld gaming consoles, etc. can often be very distracting — both to users and bystanders — in classroom contexts. I find that this is especially true in smaller, discussion-based seminar courses. My inclination, then, is to disallow the use of these devices during class. I am open, however, to being convinced otherwise. Let's decide this together.

Note

This syllabus is subject to change. This holds especially true for the class schedule (below). If — realistically it might be better to say “when” — a change is made to the syllabus, I will make sure to inform you.

Class Schedule

Week 1 (8/21): Efficiency and Inequality

First Day of Class: Introductions and Syllabus Review.

No required reading.

Optional:

Alan Gibbard, "[What's Morally Special about Free Exchange?](#)" *Social Philosophy and Policy* 2 (1985): 20-28

Thomas Piketty and Emmanuel Saez, "[Inequality in the Long Run](#)" *Science* 344(6186) (2014): 838-843

Gabriel Wollner, "[Review of Capital in the Twenty-First Century](#)," *Economics and Philosophy* 31(2) (2015): 327-334

Tyler Cowen, "[Public Goods](#)" *The Library of Economics and Liberty*.

Week 2 (8/28): UBI

What if we just gave people money? Universal Basic Income, which was once (not too long ago!) a fairly fringe idea, is becoming increasingly popular. Is it a good idea? We will look at some of the arguments for and against it.

Required:

Philippe Van Parijs, "[Basic Income Capitalism](#)," *Ethics* 102(3) (1992): 465-484.

David H. Freedman, "[Basic Income: A Sellout of the American Dream](#)" *MIT Technology Review* (2016)

Optional:

Andrew Flowers, "[What Would Happen If We Just Gave People Money?](#)" *Five Thirty Eight* (2016)

Dylan Matthews, "[Basic income: the world's simplest plan to end poverty, explained](#)" *Vox* (2016)

Freakonomics: [Is the World Ready for a Guaranteed Basic Income?](#)

Week 3 (9/4): The Ethical Limits of the Market

What, if anything, is wrong with commercial surrogacy? Selling your organs? Prostitution? Vote buying? Debra Satz argues that we shouldn't have markets in everything. Some markets are "noxious" and should not be allowed to operate freely. Brennan and Jaworski disagree.

Debra Satz, "Chapter 4: Noxious Markets," *Why Some Things Should Not Be For Sale* (2010)

Jason Brennan and Peter Martin Jaworski, "[Markets without Symbolic Limits](#)," *Ethics* 125 (2015): 1053-1077

Optional:

Barry Maguire and Brookes Brown, "[Markets, Interpersonal Practices, and Signal Distortion](#)," *Philosophers' Imprint* 19(14) (2019): 1-16

Elizabeth Anderson, "[The Ethical Limitations of the Market](#)," *Economics and Philosophy* 6(2) (1990)

EconTalk: [Debra Satz on Markets](#). (2011)

Week 4 (9/11): The Workplace as Private Government

Elizabeth Anderson worries that employers can exercise too much unaccountable, undemocratic control over the lives of their employees. In the same way we might worry about the tyranny of an oppressive *state*, should we not also worry about the control our employers have over us in the free market? If so, what should we do about it?

Elizabeth Anderson, "Private Government" (chapter 2), *Private Government: How Employers Rule Our Lives (and Why We Don't Talk about It)* (2017)

Tyler Cowen's response, "Work Isn't So Bad After All" (chapter 6), *Private Government: How Employers Rule Our Lives (and Why We Don't Talk about It)* (2017)

Eric Posner and Glen Weyl, "Dismantling the Octopus" (chapter 4), *Radical Markets: Uprooting Capitalism and Democracy for a Just Society* (2018)

ASSIGNMENT ALERT! We will discuss the **Argument Analysis** assignment, which is due in class next week (9/17).

Week 5 (9/18): Climate Change, Part I

Climate change is arguably the greatest challenge your generation will face. (Sorry about that!) What can be done to mitigate the crisis? What sacrifices should we make? And who should have to make them? We will look at the economics of climate change (in particular, the concepts of *externalities* and *efficiency*), we will think through how the burdens of climate change could be distributed justly, and we will ask what moral obligations we as private individuals have in light of the looming climate disaster.

John Broome, "[The Ethics of Climate Change](#)," *Scientific American* (2008)

John Broome, *Climate Matters* (2012): Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

ASSIGNMENT ALERT! **Argument Analysis due today.**

Week 6 (9/25): Climate Change, Part II: Risk

By most accounts, climate change is going to be bad. But how bad? We can't say for sure. How should we make important policy decisions when we are uncertain about important matters? How much precaution is it reasonable to take? Lara Buchak weighs in.

Lara Buchak, "[Weighing the Risks of Climate Change](#)," *The Monist* 102(1) (2019): 66-83

Week 7 (10/2): Campaign Finance Reform

What role does money play in politics? What role should it play? In what sense (if any) is money speech? Is it paternalistic to place limits on campaign contributions? Is doing so an objectionable infringement on our rights?

Lawrence Lessig, *Republic, Lost* (2011): Chapters 10 and 16.

Martin Gilens and Benjamin I. Page, "Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens," *Perspectives on Politics*, 12(3) (2014): 564-581

Adam Hosein, "Democracy, Paternalism, and Campaign Finance," *Public Affairs Quarterly*, 27(2) (2013)

ASSIGNMENT ALERT! Proposed Topic for Final Paper due today.

Provide a couple sentences about the topic(s) you're interested in for writing the final research paper. (Recommended: set-up a one-on-one meeting with me to get feedback on your idea!)

Week 8 (10/9): Gerrymandering

Partisan gerrymandering involves redrawing district lines in order to better the electoral outcomes of one political party over another. Recently, the Supreme Court ruled that federal courts can't stop it. Does partisan gerrymandering pose a problem for our representative democracy? Is it unfair? If so, what can be done about it?

Andrew Prokop, "Gerrymandering, explained," *Vox.com*

Try your luck playing [THE ReDISTRICTING GAME](#) (especially the "Partisan Gerrymandering" level).

Charles R. Beitz, "How Is Partisan Gerrymandering Unfair?" *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 46(3) (2018): 323-358

ASSIGNMENT ALERT! We will discuss the prompts for your **Short Essay Assignment**, which is due in class 10/22.

Week 9 (10/16): Reading the (Fake) News

Most Americans say they have lost trust in the media. Some worry that — perhaps because of social media? — we've fragmented into partisan echo chambers or epistemic bubbles. How worried should we be about this? What can be done?

Cass Sunstein, "The Daily Me," *#Republic*, (2017)

Regina Rini, "Fake News and Partisan Epistemology," *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal*, 27(2) (2017)

Alex Worsnip, "The Obligation to Diversify One's Sources: Against Epistemic Partisanship in the Consumption of News Media," Forthcoming in Carl Fox & Joe Saunders (eds.), *Media Ethics: Free Speech and the Requirements of Democracy*, Routledge

Week 10 (10/23): Free Speech

We will take a close look at Mill's classic instrumentalist defense of the freedom of speech. Is he right? What about hate speech?

J.S. Mill, *On Liberty*, [Chapter 2](#).

Susan J. Brison, "[The Autonomy Defense of Free Speech](#)," *Ethics* 108(2) (1998)

ASSIGNMENT ALERT! Short Essay Assignment due today.

Week 11 (10/30): Gun Control

Suppose we were to ban the ownership of guns by private citizens. Would that be an objectionable violation of your freedom? Given that guns can be quite dangerous, should we ban them nonetheless? How far does the right (if there is one) to own guns go? Is it compatible with some forms of "sensible" gun control?

Michael Huemer, "[Is There a Right to Own a Gun?](#)" *Social Theory and Practice* 29(2) (2003): 297-324

Jeff McMahan, "[Why Gun 'Control' Is Not Enough](#)," *The New York Times*, The Stone, December 19.

Andreas T. Schmidt, "[Domination without Inequality? Mutual Domination, Republicanism, and Gun Control](#)," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 46(2): 175-206

ASSIGNMENT ALERT! Thesis, Outline, and Sources. Submit clear statement of your thesis, a brief outline of your central argument, and a couple key sources with which you intend to engage.

Week 12 (11/6): Privacy

Do we have a (fundamental, irreducible) right to privacy? Isn't privacy only important if you have something to hide? (How many paper can be written with the title "The Right to Privacy"?) We shall investigate.

Judith Jarvis Thomson, "[The Right to Privacy](#)," *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 4(4) (1975): 295-314

Richard Posner, "[The Right to Privacy](#)," *Georgia Law Review*, 12(3) (1978): 393-422.

Optional:

Samuel Warren and Louis Brandeis, "[The Right to Privacy](#)," *Harvard Law Review*, 4(5) (1890): 193-220.

Thomas Scanlon, "[Thomson on Privacy](#)," *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 4(4) (1975): 315-322

Week 13 (11/13)

Paper Workshop I

Week 14 (11/20)

Paper Workshop II

Week 15 (11/27)

Thanksgiving Break — no class

Week 16 (12/4)

Paper Workshop IV

Optional Writing Workshop: Saturday, December 7 (12/7) from 4pm to 7pm

Final Paper Due: Sunday, December 8 (12/8) at 11:59pm