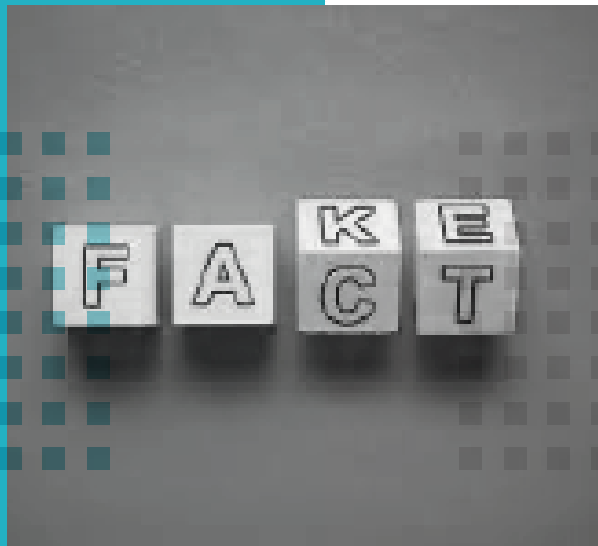


# Phil 140:

## Knowledge and Society

UNC Chapel Hill, Philosophy Department

Spring 2021 - Credit hours: 3



# 2021

### INSTRUCTOR:

Aliosha Barranco Lopez

✉ [aliosha@live.unc.edu](mailto:aliosha@live.unc.edu)

📍 12 B, Caldwell Hall.

📅 OFFICE HOURS:  
Mondays and Fridays  
from 1pm to 2pm  
or by appointment  
(over zoom).

This course is scheduled to meet on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11:00 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. However, given that the mode of instruction for this class is “mostly asynchronous”, we will not meet very often at this time. Nevertheless, you are required to be available for the times when we do meet synchronously. I will let you know in advance when these meetings are.

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## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

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In this course, we will examine some of the societal forces that promote both good and bad epistemic behavior. Some of the questions we will ask are: What is bullshit? How should we combat fake news? How could you know if a conspiracy theory is actually true? What makes a source trustworthy? Which kinds of sources should we expose ourselves to? What counts as a reasonable disagreement?

## **WHO CAN TAKE THIS COURSE?**

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This course is aimed at undergraduate students with no previous background in philosophy. The topics covered will be of interest to any person who uses social media (or the internet more generally). To get a nuanced philosophical understanding of these topics, we will spend much of our time developing basic skills needed to appreciate philosophy papers.

## COURSE GOALS

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This course has two broad aims:

1. To help students acquire the necessary basic skills to identify arguments in philosophy papers.
2. To provide students with key philosophical concepts that relate to knowledge, evidence and rationality so that they can apply them to think more critically and systematically about the way they and others form beliefs about a variety of topics in their daily lives.

## KEY LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

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1. At the end of the course, students will be able to identify both the main conclusion and the supporting premises of that conclusion in philosophy papers.
2. At the end of the course, students will be able to create philosophical content apt for an everyday audience (e.g. Wikipedia pages).
3. At the end of the course, students will be able to assess how well philosophical contributions capture the phenomena they describe, and they will be able to draw connections between the readings and their personal knowledge and experiences.



## READING TOPICS AND READINGS:

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### Introduction(s) (to our course and to philosophy)

**1/19/2021:** Introduction to the class (the syllabus, expectations).

No readings assigned!

**1/21/2021:** Introduction to philosophical reading and introducing epistemology

**Read:** James Pryor, "Guidelines on Reading Philosophy" <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html>

**Read:** Jennifer Nagel, *Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction*, ch. 1

### Bullshit

**1/26/2021**

**Read:** Harry Frankfurt, "On Bullshit"

**1/28/2021**

**Read:** Hans Maes and Katerin Schaubroeck, "Different Kinds and Aspects of Bullshit" in *Bullshit and Philosophy*

**2/2/2021**

**Read:** Kenneth A. Taylor, "Bullshit and the Foibles of the Human Mind, or what the Masters of the Dark Arts Know" in *Bullshit and Philosophy*

# FAKE NEWS

2/4/2021

**Read:** Heather Douglas “Bullshit at the Interface of Science and Policy: Global Warming, Toxic Substances, and Other Pesky Problems” in *Bullshit and Philosophy*

## Writing philosophy summaries

2/9/2021 How to write a philosophy summary

**Read:** <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/philosophy/>

## Fake News

2/11/2021

**Read:** Regina Rini, “Fake News and Partisan Epistemology”

2/16/2021 Wellness Day

No class – No readings assigned!

2/18/2021

**Read:** Chris Blake-Turner, “Fake news, relevant alternatives, and the degradation of our epistemic environment”

## Conspiracy Theories

2/23/2021

**Read:** M. Dentith, “Conspiracy theories on the basis of the evidence”

2/25/2021

**Read:** Susan Feldman, “Counterfactual Conspiracy Theories.”

3/2/2021

**Read:** Katherine Hawley, “Conspiracy theories, impostor syndrome, and distrust”

## Trustworthiness

3/4/2021

**Read:** Karen Frost-Arnold, “Trustworthiness and truth: the epistemic pitfalls of internet accountability”

3/9/2021

**Read:** Nicola Mößner, “Trusting the Media? TV News as a Source of Knowledge”

3/11/2021

Wellness Day

No class – No readings assigned!

3/16/2021

**Read:** P.D. Magnus, “On Trusting Wikipedia”



3/18/2021

**Read:** Deborah Tollefsen, “WIKIPEDIA and the Epistemology of Testimony”

3/23/2021 Team Wikipedia Project Prep Day

Resources:TBD

3/25/2021 Team Wikipedia Project Prep Day

Resources:TBD

### **Echo Chambers, Epistemic Bubbles, and Polarization**

3/30/2021

**Read:** C.Thi Nguyen, “Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles”

4/1/2021

**Read:** Yuval Avnur, “What’s Wrong with the Online Echo Chamber: A Motivated Reasoning Account”

4/6/2021 Catching up Session

4/8/2021

**Read:** Alex Worsnip, “The Obligation to Diversify One’s Sources: Against Epistemic Partisanship in the Consumption of News Media”

### **Irrelevant Influences on Belief**

4/13/2021

**Read:** G.A. Cohen, “Paradoxes of Conviction” in If You’re an Egalitarian, How Come You’re So Rich?

4/15/2021

**Read:** Katia Vavova, “Irrelevant Influences”

### **Disagreement**

4/20/2021

**Read:** Richard Feldman, “Reasonable Religious Disagreements”

4/22/2021

**Read:** Helen de Cruz “Religious Conversion, Transformative Experience, and Disagreement”

4/27/2021

**Read:** Nathan L. King “Disagreement: What’s the Problem? or A Good Peer is Hard to Find”

4/29/2021

Bonus: either a reading on **Expertise** or a reading on **COVID-19 and Misinformation.**

5/4/2021 Final Roundup. No reading assigned!



### **COURSE RESOURCES:**

All the readings, lectures, and discussion forums will be available through Sakai.

### **GRADE DISTRIBUTION**

- 14%** Quizzes
- 30%** Summary and Analysis Papers
- 20%** Final exam
- 10%** Special preparation to participate
- 20%** General participation
- 6%** Team Wikipedia Project

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

#### **Individual Requirements**

**Quizzes (7):** There will be 7 quizzes given over the course of the semester, one at the end of each unit. Each quiz will center on an important aspect of the readings we have covered during that unit. Each quiz is a tool to prepare you for one section of the final exam.



### Summary and Analysis Papers (3):

You will be expected to write 3 papers. Each paper will focus on a different reading that I will assign to you via e-mail on February 2<sup>nd</sup>. Papers should be about 3 pages in length (double-spaced, 12 point font, 1 inch margins).

In these assignments you will:

1. Summarize your assigned article, explicitly stating the thesis the author is defending and including a brief reconstruction of its defense.
2. Briefly talk about how the author's argument or ideas relate to something you have experienced yourself, or recognized in your social relations; something you see in pop culture; or something in film/TV/music/news (as a whole) or a particular film/TV show/piece of music/news article.

The goal of this assignment is to help you (a) develop a good sense of the structure of a philosophy paper, so that you can identify the main conclusion of a paper and the most important premises that support it in one or two pages (I will talk about these issues more during the first week of our class). And (b) this exercise will help you appreciate how philosophy can be relevant in your life, and in the world.



### Final Exam:

The final exam has two parts:

1. A set of questions about some of the main aspects of

the readings we will have studied (these questions will be similar, but not identical, to the ones you will be answering in the Quizzes).

2. An "essay" part, where I will ask you to do a brief summary of one paper and to relate it to some phenomenon in the world you are aware of (something similar to what you will have done in your Summary and Analysis papers).



### Final exam

Date and time: May 7<sup>th</sup>, 12:00 PM.

*Note that it is a requirement to take this exam at this designated time and date which has been posted on the Registrar's website.*

### Team Requirements

At the end of the first week of classes (on January 22<sup>nd</sup>), I will randomly divide you into 5 teams of 8 people each.

**Special Preparation to Participate (2):** Twice in the course each of you will need to read some of the materials of the course more carefully and be ready to "lead discussion" during the week/days when we will be studying your assigned reading. You will be in charge of coming up with a

couple of discussion questions (3 to 5 questions) that you think it will be fun to discuss with your team, and you will be in charge of moderating your team discussion on that day.

On February 2<sup>nd</sup>, I will send you an email with the name of the 2 articles you will need to pay special attention to for this activity.

For additional details, please look at the relevant instructions in the 'Resources' folder on Sakai.

The goal of this assignment is for you to have an active role in our virtual classroom. I believe each of you has something important to say and contribute; this assignment is *our* opportunity to hear you.

### General Participation:

For each assigned reading, you and your team will have to engage in virtual discussion. Each session, one of you will be in charge of "leading the discussion"; that person will post some initial discussion questions, and each of you should answer that question and/or engage with other answers at least twice. After the discussion questions have been posted, you have up to 24 hours to engage with the question(s) for the first time, and up to 48 hours to engage with what others in your team have said. You are free to keep the discussion going after your two contributions.

For additional details, please look at the relevant instructions in the 'Resources' folder on Sakai.

The goal of this assignment is to allow you to think more deeply about the readings each day, and to foster our virtual community.

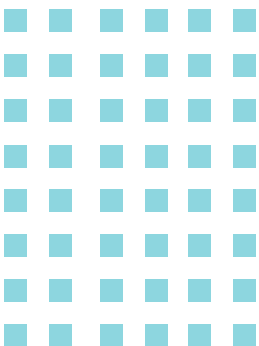
### Team Wikipedia Project:

You and your team will create and submit a Wikipedia sandbox of an article we talked about during class. Roughly 1-2 double spaced pages.

On March 18<sup>th</sup>, I will assign each team an article.

The goal of this assignment is for you to apply your knowledge of the structure of philosophy papers and, with your team, create a summary of a paper that is apt for a Wikipedia section (we will talk more about this during the semester).

*Note: Between the 3 Summary and Analysis papers, and the Team Wikipedia Project, students will have written more than the 10 written pages (outside of class) which are required by the College of Arts and Sciences.*



## GENERAL GRADING GUIDANCE

Some assignments (the quizzes and some sections of the final exam) will be graded in relation to the accuracy of their content. In these cases, higher grades will be assigned to more accurate responses.

For the Summary and Analysis papers (and some sections of the final exam), higher grades will be given to those papers that show attention to detail when highlighting the central points (conclusion and premises) of a given piece, in addition to the quality of the writing (how easy it is to follow and how coherent it is).

Participation is the most important component in this class, and it is divided in General Participation and Special Preparation to Participate. General participation will be graded broadly speaking in the following way:

For every reading, you can get up to 3 points if your participation on the discussion forum is satisfactory. That will usually mean that you have done three things: (1) you have answered the questions of the week, (2) engaged in discussion with your team, (3) you have posted your comments within the time limits specified above in the syllabus in the section General Participation. You will lose one point each time you fail to satisfy either (1), (2) or (3), that is if your answer is not clearly related to the question, if you engage superficially with others by saying things like “I agree!”, or if you are late submitting your first and second responses.

The Special Participation component will be graded by timely submission, and committed moderation of the discussion.

For additional details, please look at the relevant instructions in the ‘Resources’ folder on Sakai.

## Percent Grades:

### A-range

(90-93 = A-, 94-100 = A)

### B-range

(80-83 = B-, 84-86 = B, 87-89 = B+)

### C-range

(70-73 = C-, 74-76 = C, 77-79 = C+)

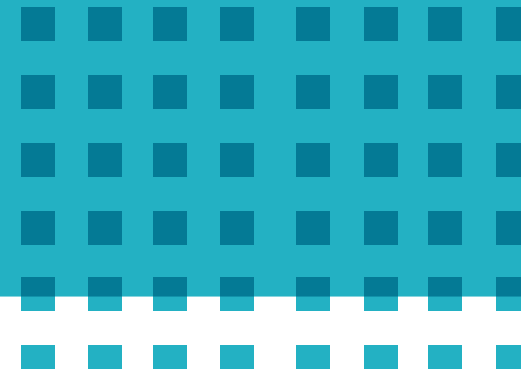
### D-range

(60-66 = D, 67-69 = D+)

## COURSE POLICIES:

Although this class’s mode is asynchronous, we are following deadlines for each of the assignments. You can access the materials (lecture, and resources) when it is convenient for you, but in order to get credit for each assignment you must submit/complete it by the deadline.

**HOWEVER**, I understand that this semester might be more challenging than usual, and because of that I have the following policies about late work:







Policies about  
late work

For Summary and Analysis Papers

### Short 2-day extensions:

If you need a short (up to 2-days) extension for these assignments, you just need to email me a day before they are due and I will grant you the extension (no questions asked).

If you just submit the assignment up to 2 days late, without having emailed beforehand me, then you will receive a penalization of half a letter grade on the final grade of your summary.

If you submit any work later than 2 days after its due date, you will not get any credit for that assignment.

### Longer extensions:

There will be no longer extensions in general.

However, if you realize that you will not be able to finish **one** of your summary and analysis papers even with a 2-day extension, then you should email me at least a day before it's due, and I will assign you a different reading in the future (this is possible as long as there are future readings!).

Only in very special circumstances can I assign you a different reading more than once. However, you will need to ask the Office of the Dean of Students to contact me on your behalf and explain the situation.



### For Quizzes:

I will grant short 2-day extensions (with same specifications as for the Summary and Analysis papers).

Longer extensions will be granted only in special circumstances and if I am contacted by the Office of the Dean of Students on your behalf.

### For Team Wikipedia Project

I will grant short 2-day extensions (with same specifications as for the Summary and Analysis papers).

Longer extensions will be granted only in special circumstances, and only if I am contacted by the Office of the Dean of Students on your behalf.

### For Special Preparation to Participate:

The deadlines for these assignments are crucial for the discussion of the readings during the week. If the person in charge of "leading discussion" is late, there will be no discussion whatsoever! So, for these assignments, there are no short extensions. However, you can ask one of your teammates in advance if they would change dates with you. If they accept, and you both notify me by the day before, I am perfectly ok with this type of arrangement.



Policies about  
late work

### For General Participation:

There are no extensions for general participation. HOWEVER, you will have two free passes throughout the semester if anything comes up and you cannot make your general participation of that week.

### Final Exam:

The final exam must be taken on the date and time specified by the UNC Final Exam Calendar, and is given in compliance with UNC final exam regulations.

## IMPORTANT DATES TO REMEMBER

### Quizzes

Thursday, February 4th, 2021,  
Thursday, February 18th, 2021,  
Tuesday, March 2nd, 2021,  
Tuesday, March 18th, 2021,  
Thursday, April 8th, 2021,  
Thursday, April 15th, 2021,  
Tuesday, April 27th, 2021.

### Team Assignment Day

You will be randomly assigned to your team Friday, January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2021

### Summary and Analysis Papers

You will receive your assigned reading and date on Tuesday, February 2nd, 2021

### Special Participation

You will receive your assigned date on Tuesday, February 2nd, 2021

### General Participation

Each class session, after the discussion questions have been posted, you have up to 24 hours to engage with the question(s) for the first time, and up to 48 hours to engage with what others in your team have said.

### Final Exam

The final exam will take place on Friday, May 7th, 2021. At 12:00 PM.



## HONOR CODE:

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Students are expected to abide by the UNC Honor Code at all times. You are responsible for understanding the terms of the Honor Code, and for understanding what constitutes plagiarism (see <http://studentconduct.unc.edu> for more information).

Common honor code violations in a class like ours:

- \* Submitting work for this class that has previously been submitted for another class.
- \* Include as a part of a summary textual phrasing from the relevant reading (i.e., copying word by word or almost word by word the author's words without quotation marks).
- \* Submitting as discussion questions the exact same question that you found on the internet about the topic (without quoting, or indicating that you took it from somewhere else)
- \* Copying the work of another student and submitting it as one's own
- \* Working with other students and submitting almost identical assignments

If you are ever unsure whether your work complies with ethical standards of academic integrity, please come see me or visit <http://studentconduct.unc.edu> for more information.

## SYLLABUS CHANGES:

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The professor reserves the right to make changes to this syllabus, including project due dates and exam dates, when unforeseen circumstances occur. These changes will be announced as early as possible so that students can adjust their schedules accordingly.



## CAPS

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These days, more than usual, can be challenging for our mental health. UNC's 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: [www.caps.unc.edu](http://www.caps.unc.edu) to learn more.

## ARS

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UNC-Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations for students with learning disabilities, physical disabilities, mental health struggles, chronic medical conditions, temporary disability, or pregnancy complications, all of which can impair student success. See the ARS website for contact and registration information: <https://ars.unc.edu/about-ars/contact-us>

## TITLE IX RESOURCES:

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Any student who is impacted by discrimination, harassment, interpersonal (relationship) violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, or stalking is encouraged to seek resources on campus or in the community. Please contact the Director of Title IX Compliance (Adrienne Allison – [Adrienne.allison@unc.edu](mailto:Adrienne.allison@unc.edu)), Report and Response Coordinators in the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office ([reportandresponse@unc.edu](mailto:reportandresponse@unc.edu)), Counseling and Psychological Services (confidential), or the Gender Violence Services Coordinators ([gvs@unc.edu](mailto:gvs@unc.edu); confidential) to discuss your specific needs. Additional resources are available at [safe.unc.edu](http://safe.unc.edu).

2021

