Fall 2017 Syllabus for Philosophy 4713.68381 & PHIL 5910.70067

Philosophy of Science

M/W: 4:00-5:15, NCLB 313

Professor: Shannon Spaulding

Contact Information

Office: 256 Murray Hall
Office Phone: (405) 744-0437
Office Hours: M/W 1:00-2:00

Email: shannon.spaulding@okstate.edu

Course Description

This course will be a semester long discussion of the philosophy of science. As a group, we will try to come to the most reasonable answers that we can to the following questions: What are scientific theories, and what distinguishes them from pseudo-scientific theories? How should we understand scientific revolutions, like the shift from the earth-centered Ptolemaic model of the universe to the sun-centered Copernican model of the universe? Is science objective? If it’s not, does that undermine its legitimacy? How should the Problem of Induction inform scientific theorizing? What are scientific laws, and how do they explain phenomena? Does science aim to make true claims about the world? Do electrons and quarks really exist, or are they merely convenient fictions?

Required Texts (available at the University Store)

• Godfrey-Smith, P. Theory and Reality: An introduction to the Philosophy of Science University of Chicago Press. (GS below)

Graded Assignments

You will have to write six reaction papers. A reaction paper should be no longer than a page and a half, and preferably just a page. In this paper you should:

1. Interpret an argument from the text, being clear about its premises and conclusions
2. Defend or criticize the argument with an argument of your own.

These papers will be due every other week. You should submit your papers through D2L. Go to our course page on D2L and select “Dropbox” and upload your paper to the appropriate folder. Papers are due by the time class starts. The six papers are worth 8% each, totaling 48% of your final grade. You must turn in all 6 reaction papers to get credit for any of them.

There will be a midterm take-home exam worth 26% of your final grade, and it will cover material from the first half of the course. The exam will consist of 7 to 10 short essay questions. There will be a final paper (5-7 pages) worth 26% of your final grade, and it can be on any topic covered in the semester.
A Few Guidelines
• Do not play on your cell phone in class. I’m serious about this.
• Do not read the newspaper, do Sudokus or crosswords, or listen to music in class.
• No laptops. If for some reason you must use a laptop, do not surf the internet during class. It is rude, and it is distracts you and the students around you.

Late Work Policy
Late work will be accepted with a penalty a letter grade (10 points) per day. Extensions will be granted on a case-by-case basis and only for a sufficiently good reason. (I reserve the right to judge whether a given reason is sufficiently good.)

Attendance Policy
Every day at the beginning of class I will send around a sign-in sheet that you must sign. You are responsible for signing this sheet. Attendance and participation are basic requirements for succeeding in this class. Your participation in class benefits you and other students, and it makes class interesting. You are allowed 4 absences. Each subsequent absence results in a 1-point deduction from your final grade.

Disabilities
I urge any student who has physical or learning disabilities that will affect class attendance or performance to speak with me during the first week of class. We will work with the Student Disabilities Services to accommodate your needs.

Contact Policy
My office hours are for your benefit, so please use them. I am always willing to make appointments to meet if my office hours are not conducive to your schedule. E-mail is the best way to contact me. Usually, you can expect a speedy response. As a rule, however, you should always allow 24 hours for a response to an email. If I have not responded within 24 hours, feel free to send me a “friendly” reminder.

Should you feel uncomfortable discussing the content or the teaching of this course with me, please feel free to contact Scott Gelfand, the chair of the Philosophy department. His email address is scott.gelfand@okstate.edu.

Policy on Written Work
All written work must be typed and double-spaced with one-inch margins on all sides using Times New Roman, 12-point font or a similar font and type size. Please number your pages.

Plagiarism consists of using the words or ideas of others and passing them off as your own. If you copy others’ words, you must put them in quotations marks and cite them. If you paraphrase others’ words or ideas, you must cite them. Plagiarism is a very serious offense and will not be tolerated. If I catch you plagiarizing, you will receive a zero on the assignment and an F in the course. Furthermore, for any case of plagiarism, I will push for the severest penalty allowed by the university. Consult the Statement of Academic Integrity and the Office of Academic Affairs if you have any questions about what counts as plagiarism.