



FACULTY OF ARTS  
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

## Philosophy 661.4 Lec 01 Topics in Epistemology: The Norms of Assertion

Winter Term 2014

### Course Outline

**Lectures:** Tuesdays, 3:30 – 6:15pm in SH 278

**Instructor:** Dr. Rachel McKinnon  
**Email:** [rachelvmckinnon@gmail.com](mailto:rachelvmckinnon@gmail.com)  
**Facebook Group:** <http://www.facebook.com/groups/529549997102872/>  
**Office:** SS 1238  
**Office Hours:** Mondays, 2:00 – 3:00pm, and by appointment

### *Course Description*

In this course we'll examine a contemporary topic spanning epistemology, philosophy of language, and metaethics (to name a few!): the norms of assertion. When we make statements to each other, do we need to know what we're talking about? Does an assertion's being false due to bad luck, even when based on epistemically good evidence, make it inappropriate? What's truth's role in what we ought to say? Do the standards for properly asserting shift with changes in conversational context? Are there some instances where lies are warranted? We'll consider a variety of views on what it takes to properly assert. By the end of this course, students will have a solid foundation in this ongoing debate, and will be up to speed on some of the most cutting edge developments on the topic.

### *Evaluation*

1. 20% Participation Questions
2. 25% Research Presentation
3. 5% Detailed Abstract
4. 50% Term Paper

*Participation Questions:* Each class students owe me 2-3 discussion questions based on the readings. Students will be given a prompt question that they must additionally answer. Bring your answers to class, typed, and hand them in at the end of class. Questions must be typed, or they won't count. Questions are graded pass/fail. Each set of participation questions will be graded as a 0, 1, or 2. I will take the best 10 submissions, for a total of 20 possible marks.

*Research Presentation:* Each student will take a topic from Weeks 4-12 and present for 15 minutes on the material, followed by 5 minutes of question and answer (these times may be adjusted depending on class size). Students must perform the readings for that week, and at least one additional relevant reading, as chosen by the student. Presentations will be graded on the accuracy and clarity of the presentation, command of the material during question period, and the relevance

of the supplementary reading. You may use visuals (e.g., PowerPoint if you wish); in fact, I encourage it.

**Detailed Abstract:** Students must prepare a detailed abstract—between 300 and 500 words—and a provisional bibliography for their research paper. The abstracts will be graded and returned so as to help guide students in constructing their term paper projects. Abstracts are due March 25<sup>th</sup>, in class. We will set aside some time for students to explain their projects and to receive feedback from peers.

**Term Paper:** PHIL 661 students owe me a 4000-5000 word (including footnotes, but not works cited) term paper on a topic covered in the course. This is a research project, and students are expected to seek resources in addition to the course materials. The term paper is due April 14<sup>th</sup> by 3:00 p.m. Early submissions will be accepted.

**General Course Policies:**

- All assignments must be handed in in hard-copy form.
- There is no Registrar-scheduled final exam.
- No late assignments will be accepted without a valid excuse.
- If you miss a class, it's your responsibility to find out what was discussed from other students.

**Grading Scale:**

The following table will be used to calculate letter grades from final marks:

A+: 95-100	B+: 80-84	C+: 65-69	D+: 54-56
A: 90-94	B: 75-79	C: 60-64	D: 50-53
A-: 85-89	B-: 70-74	C-: 57-59	F: < 50

**Reading Schedule:**

There's no textbook for this course. Readings will be made available electronically or for photocopy. All of the journal articles (J) can be found through the UCalgary journal database systems. Readings that are chapters in books (B) are accessible through the UCalgary library online system. Online readings (O) are freely available online. Full bibliographical information can be found in Chapter 13 of McKinnon (Works Cited). Chapters from McKinnon are for personal course use only and are the property of the instructor.

**Week 1 (Jan 14): Introduction**

McKinnon, Chapter 1

**Week 2 (Jan 21): Assertion and Speech Act Theory**

McKinnon, Chapter 2

(B) MacFarlane, "What is Assertion?" (2011)

Recommended: (J) Langton, "Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts" (1993)

**Week 3 (Jan 28): Norms and Normativity**

McKinnon, Chapter 3

(O) Glüer and Wikforss, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry, "The Normativity of Content and Meaning"

**Week 4 (Feb 4): The Knowledge and Truth Norms**

(B) Williamson, Chapter 11 from *Knowledge and Its Limits* (2000)

(J) DeRose, "Assertion, Knowledge, and Context" (2002)

(J) Weiner, "Must We Know What We Say?" (2005)

Week 5 (Feb 11): Reasons-Based Norms

- (J) Lackey, "Norms of Assertion" (2007)
- (J) Douven, "Assertion, Knowledge, and Rational Credibility" (2006)
- (J) Kvanvig, "Assertion, Knowledge, and Lotteries" (2009)

Week 6 (Feb 18): READING WEEK – NO CLASS

Week 7 (Feb 25): The Supportive Reasons Norm

McKinnon, Chapter 4

Week 8 (Mar 4): The Lottery Paradox

McKinnon, Chapter 5

- (B) Hawthorne, Chapter 1 from *Knowledge and Lotteries* (2004)

Week 9 (Mar 11): Moore's Paradox

McKinnon, Chapter 6

- (J) Littlejohn, "Moore's Paradox and Epistemic Norms" (2010)

Week 10 (Mar 18): "How Do You Know?"

McKinnon, Chapter 7

- (J) Turri, "Prompting Challenges" (2010)

Week 11 (Mar 25): Performance Normativity and the Norms of Assertion

McKinnon, Chapter 8

- (B) Sosa, Chapters 1 and 2 from *Knowing Full Well* (2011)

Week 12 (Apr 1): Supporting the Supportive Reasons Norm of Assertion; Isolated Second-Hand Knowledge

McKinnon, Chapter 9

McKinnon, Chapter 10

- (B) Lackey, "Assertion and Isolated Second-Hand Knowledge" (2011)

Week 13 (Apr 8): Gender, Power, and the Norms of Assertion

McKinnon, Chapter 11

- (J) Kukla, "Discursive Injustice" (2012)

- (J) Langton, "Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts" (1993)

**Suggested additional reading:**

Jessica Brown and Herman Cappelen (eds.), *Assertion: New Philosophical Essays*, OUP (2011)

Mark Jary, *Assertion*, Palgrave (2010)

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**Academic Honesty**

Cheating or plagiarism on any assignment or examination is regarded as an extremely serious academic offense, the penalty for which may be an F on the assignment, an F in the course, academic probation, or requirement to withdraw from the University. See the relevant sections on 'Academic Misconduct' in the current University Calendar. Intellectual honesty requires that your work include adequate referencing to sources. Plagiarism occurs when you do not acknowledge or correctly reference your sources. If you have questions about correct referencing, consult your instructor.

**Academic Accommodation**

It is the student's responsibility to request academic accommodation. If you are a student with a permanent disability or temporary impairment who may require academic accommodation, you must first register with the Student Accessibility Resource Office located in MacEwan Student Centre 452; phone 403-220-8237; email [access@ucalgary.ca](mailto:access@ucalgary.ca). Students who have not registered with the Student Accessibility Office are not eligible for academic accommodation. You are also required to discuss your needs with your instructor no later than fourteen (14) days after the start of this course. Go to <http://www.ucalgary.ca/access/> for further information.

**Blackboard Help**

Go to <http://www.ucalgary.ca/computersupport/online-services/blackboard> for Student Help and FAQs about Blackboard. Troubleshooting tips and a tutorial are available at <http://elearn.ucalgary.ca/blackboard/students>.

**Protection of Privacy**

The University of Calgary is under the jurisdiction of the provincial Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act. The Department of Philosophy ensures the student's right to privacy by requiring all graded assignments be returned to the student directly from the instructor.

**Safewalk**

Call 403-220-5333 (24/7/365) for a Safewalk volunteer to accompany you safely to your destination on campus including parking lots, housing, and the LRT station or use a Campus Help Phone.