



**UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY**  
FACULTY OF ARTS  
Department of Philosophy

**PHIL 661.8**

**“Topics in Epistemology – Epistemology in the Internet Age”**

Fall Term 2019

M 3:30-6:15 SS1253

**COURSE OUTLINE**

**Instructor:** Jeremy Fantl

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**Office:** SS 1238

**Office Hours:** M, 1-2

**Office Phone:** 403-220-5022

**COURSE INFORMATION:**

The great promise of the internet is that it provides easier communication of and exposure to a wide range of arguments, perspectives, interests, and information. It also seems to endanger that promise by encouraging group-think, echo chambers, filter bubbles, and belief polarization, as well as by allowing easier communication of so-called “fake news” and fringe or repugnant arguments that otherwise might never have gained a hearing or any respectability. In this class we will investigate these challenges and ask just how costly they are to our knowledge. If they are costly, what potential solutions might be adopted? Should we rely on individual responsibility to mitigate the difficulties? Are there regulative solutions that might have more promise? Or, in the end, are some of the challenges insurmountable, and the great promise of the internet ultimately unattainable in its full idealization?

**COURSE OBJECTIVES/LEARNING OUTCOMES**

This course will provide the opportunity to learn

- the outlines of current debate on the epistemological consequences of the internet.
- how to write an extended argumentative paper that takes adequate account of the other side
- how to develop a paper through a draft stage into polished form
- how to take constructive feedback on written work presented in a public setting
- how to engage in respectful dialogue with peers with whom you disagree
- how to present a project in a professional way in an interview setting

**REQUIRED/RECOMMENDED TEXTS:**

- Various philosophical articles, as indicated on the syllabus, below, available via public links or links through the University of Calgary library. Links are listed on D2L.

## COURSE ASSESSMENT

- 6 **précis** (worth 30%) – detailed analyses of single arguments or passages in the assigned reading – of 1 (single-spaced) page max. Précis may be handed in only at the beginning of the class devoted to the relevant reading and you may hand in no more than one per week. Missing précis receive a zero. If it’s clear you spent two minutes on it, the précis gets a C. Otherwise, all précis get an A.
- A Fake News **project** (worth 10%). This one is easy. Find one example of genuine news and one example of fake news. Print them out. Bring them to class on September 23<sup>rd</sup>, along with a list of characteristics that you think help distinguish fake news stories from real news stories. Missing projects receive a zero. If it’s clear you spent two minutes on this, the project gets a C. Otherwise, all projects get an A.
- A 20 minute oral **mock interview** (worth 25%) outside of class. You will defend a “project,” as well as your knowledge of the material. Your interview will be held during the week beginning October 21<sup>st</sup>, at a mutually agreed upon time.
- A final term **paper** (worth 35%) of 15-25 pages. All term papers are preceded by a rough draft to be workshopped publicly in class (schedule to be determined). Drafts are due on Friday, November 8<sup>th</sup>. Final papers are due December 9<sup>th</sup>. Late papers are marked down 1/3 of a grade for each day late, up to 4 letter grades. Papers not turned in receive a zero. Late drafts reduce the grade of the final paper by 1/3 of a grade for each day late.

Letter Grades translate to numerical values according to the following scheme. Final Grades are computed by rounding to the nearest recognized letter grade.

|             |             |             |             |       |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------|
| A+: 98.33   | B+: 88.33   | C+: 78.33   | D+: 68.33   | F: 55 |
| A+/A: 96.67 | B+/B: 86.67 | C+/C: 76.67 | D+/D: 66.67 |       |
| A: 95       | B: 85       | C: 75       | D: 65       |       |
| A/A-: 93.33 | B/B-: 83.33 | C/C-: 73.33 | D/D-: 63.33 |       |
| A-: 91.67   | B-: 81.67   | C-: 71.67   | D-: 61.67   |       |
| A-/B+: 90   | B-/C+: 80   | C-/D+: 70   |             |       |

## SYLLABUS

| Date and Topic   | Class Activity  |
|--|---|
| 9/9, Mon: Intro  |   |
| 9/16, Mon: The Epistemic Impact of the Internet            | Michael Lynch, "Google Knowing," Ch. 2 of <i>The Internet of Us</i> .<br>Regina Rini, "Deepfakes and the Epistemic Backstop"<br>Zeynep Tufekci, "It's the (Democracy-Poisoning) Golden Age of Free Speech"  |
| 9/23, Mon: Fake News                                       | <b>FAKE NEWS PROJECT DUE</b><br>Regina Rini, "Fake News and Partisan Epistemology"<br>Joshua Habgood-Coote "Stop talking about fake news!"  |
| 9/30, Mon: Echo Chambers, Filter Bubbles, and Polarization | Cass Sunstein, "Polarization," Ch. 3 of <i>#Republic</i><br>C. Thi Nguyen, "Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles"  |
| 10/7, Mon: The Obligation to Diversify Sources             | Alex Worsnip, "The Obligation to Diversify One's Sources: Against Epistemic Partisanship in the Consumption of News Media"<br>Jennifer Lackey, "Echo Chambers are Not the Problem"<br>Eric Mandelbaum and Jake Quilty-Dunn, "Believing without Reason, or: Why Liberals Shouldn't Watch Fox News" |
| 10/14, Mon:  | THANKSGIVING  |
| 10/21, Mon: The Obligation to Dissent Publicly             | Casey Rebecca Johnson "Just Say 'No': Obligations to Voice Disagreement"<br>Jennifer Lackey, "Silence and Objecting"  |
| 10/28, Mon: The Uses of Shaming                            | Jennifer Jacquet, "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Shaming," Ch. 6 of <i>Is shame necessary? New uses for an old tool</i><br>Karen Adkins "When Shaming Is Shameful: Double Standards in Online Shame Backlashes"  |
| 11/4, Mon: The Necessity and Value of Trust                | Karen Frost-Arnold, "Trustworthiness and Truth: The Epistemic Pitfalls of Internet Accountability"<br>Karen Frost-Arnold, "Social Media, Trust, and the Epistemology of Prejudice"  |
| 11/11, Mon:  | TERM BREAK  |
| 11/18, Mon:  | Draft Workshops   |
| 11/25, Mon:  | Draft Workshops   |
| 12/2, Mon: LAST DAY OF CLASS                               | Draft Workshops   |
| 12/9, Mon:   | <b>TERM PAPER DUE</b>   |

## IMPORTANT DEPARTMENTAL, FACULTY AND UNIVERSITY INFORMATION

### Academic Accommodations

It is the student's responsibility to request academic accommodations according to the University policies and procedures. The student accommodation policy can be found at [ucalgary.ca/access/accommodations/policy](http://ucalgary.ca/access/accommodations/policy).

Students needing an Accommodation because of a disability or medical condition should communicate this need to Student Accessibility Services in accordance with the Procedure for Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: [ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/procedure-for-accommodations-for-students-with-disabilities.pdf](http://ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/procedure-for-accommodations-for-students-with-disabilities.pdf). Students needing an Accommodation in relation to their coursework or to fulfil requirements for a graduate degree, based on a protected ground other than disability, should communicate this need, preferably in writing, to their instructor.

### Absence or Missed Course Assessments

Students who are absent from class assessments (tests, participation activities, or other assignments) should inform their instructors as soon as possible. Instructors may request that evidence in the form of documentation be provided. If the reason provided for the absence is acceptable, instructors may decide that any arrangements made can take forms other than make-up tests or assignments. For example, the weight of a missed grade may be added to another assignment or test. For information on possible forms of documentation, including statutory declarations, please see [ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/m-1.html](http://ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/m-1.html)

### Student Support and Resources

Full details and information about the following resources can be found at [ucalgary.ca/Registrar/registration/course-outlines](http://ucalgary.ca/Registrar/registration/course-outlines)

- Wellness and Mental Health Resources
- Student Success Centre
- Student Ombuds Office
- Student Union (SU) Information
- Graduate Students' Association (GSA) Information
- Emergency Evacuation/Assembly Points
- Safewalk

### Academic Advising

If you are a student in the Faculty of Arts, you can speak to an academic advisor in the Arts Students' Centre about course planning, course selection, registration, program progression and more. Visit the Faculty of Arts website at [arts.ucalgary.ca/advising](http://arts.ucalgary.ca/advising) for contact details and information regarding common academic concerns.

For questions specific to the philosophy program, please visit [phil.ucalgary.ca](http://phil.ucalgary.ca). Further academic guidance is available by contacting David Dick (Undergraduate Program Director [dgdick@ucalgary.ca](mailto:dgdick@ucalgary.ca)) or Jeremy Fantl (Honours Advisor [jfantl@ucalgary.ca](mailto:jfantl@ucalgary.ca)). If you have questions regarding registration, please email Rebecca Lesser (Undergraduate Program Administrator [phildept@ucalgary.ca](mailto:phildept@ucalgary.ca)).

### Writing Assessment and Support

The assessment of all written assignments—and, to a lesser extent, written exam responses—is based in part on writing skills. This includes correctness (grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, etc.), as well as general clarity and organization. Research papers must include a thorough and accurate citation of sources. Students are also encouraged to use Writing Support Services for assistance (one-on-one appointments, drop-in support and writing workshops). For more information, and other services offered by the Student Success Centre, please visit [ucalgary.ca/ssc](http://ucalgary.ca/ssc).

### **Online Resources and Electronic Devices**

Important information and communication about this course may be posted on D2L (Desire2Learn), UCalgary's online learning management system. Visit [ucalgary.service-now.com/it](http://ucalgary.service-now.com/it) for how-to information and technical assistance.

The instructor reserves the right to establish specific course policies regarding the use of electronic devices. If permitted, the use of devices must be exclusively for instructional purposes, and without disruption to the instructor or fellow students. Devices should be set to silent mode during lectures. Audio or video recording of lectures is not permitted without the written permission of the instructor. Students violating this policy are subject to discipline under the University of Calgary's Non-Academic Misconduct policy.

### **Academic Misconduct/Honesty**

Cheating or plagiarism on any assignment or examination is as an extremely serious academic offense, the penalty for which will be an F on the assignment or an F in the course, and possibly a disciplinary sanction such as probation, suspension, or expulsion. For information on academic misconduct and its consequences, please see the University of Calgary Calendar at [ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k.html](http://ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k.html).

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 referencing, please consult your instructor.

### **University Policies**

The Instructor Intellectual Property Policy is available at [ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/Intellectual%20Property%20Policy.pdf](http://ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/Intellectual%20Property%20Policy.pdf)

The University of Calgary is under the jurisdiction of the provincial Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act, as outlined at [ucalgary.ca/legalservices/foip](http://ucalgary.ca/legalservices/foip). The instructor (or TA) must return graded assignments *directly* to the student UNLESS written permission to do otherwise has been provided.

All students are required to read the University of Calgary policy on Acceptable Use of Material Protected by Copyright ([ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/acceptable-use-of-material-protected-by-copyright.pdf](http://ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/acceptable-use-of-material-protected-by-copyright.pdf)) and requirements of the copyright act ([laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-42/index.html](http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-42/index.html)).