

General Education Course Information Sheet

Please submit this sheet for each proposed course

Department & Course Number Philosophy, PHILOS 23
 Course Title Meaning and Communication
 Indicate if Seminar and/or Writing II course Writing II course

1 Check the recommended GE foundation area(s) and subgroups(s) for this course

Foundations of the Arts and Humanities

- Literary and Cultural Analysis _____
- Philosophic and Linguistic Analysis X
- Visual and Performance Arts Analysis and Practice _____

Foundations of Society and Culture

- Historical Analysis _____
- Social Analysis _____

Foundations of Scientific Inquiry

- Physical Science _____
With Laboratory or Demonstration Component must be 5 units (or more) _____
- Life Science _____
With Laboratory or Demonstration Component must be 5 units (or more) _____

2. Briefly describe the rationale for assignment to foundation area(s) and subgroup(s) chosen.

The course explores foundational questions about cognition, communication, and culture as they have arisen both in the history of philosophy and in contemporary philosophical reflection on empirical sciences such as psychology, linguistics, and anthropology.

3. "List faculty member(s) who will serve as instructor (give academic rank):

Sam Cumming, Associate Professor & Josh Armstrong, Assistant Professor (Alternating Years)

Do you intend to use graduate student instructors (TAs) in this course? Yes X No _____
 If yes, please indicate the number of TAs 2-4

4. Indicate when do you anticipate teaching this course over the next three years:

2015-16	Fall	_____	Winter	_____	Spring	<u>X</u>
	Enrollment	_____	Enrollment	_____	Enrollment	<u>90--150</u>
2016-17	Fall	_____	Winter	_____	Spring	_____
	Enrollment	_____	Enrollment	_____	Enrollment	_____
2017-18	Fall	_____	Winter	_____	Spring	_____
	Enrollment	_____	Enrollment	_____	Enrollment	_____

5. GE Course Units

Is this an ***existing*** course that has been modified for inclusion in the new GE? Yes ___ No X
 If yes, provide a brief explanation of what has changed. _____

Present Number of Units: 5 Proposed Number of Units: 5

6. Please present concise arguments for the GE principles applicable to this course.

- ❑ General Knowledge

The course will provide an introduction to the philosophy of language and mind to students with no prior background in philosophy. The course will also show how other areas of inquiry—in both the sciences and the humanities—can illuminate the philosophical questions under discussion.
- ❑ Integrative Learning

The course is interdisciplinary to its core, engaging methods and data from a range of other areas of study including cognitive science, linguistics, and anthropology.
- ❑ Ethical Implications

The course is primarily descriptive, rather than normative. However, questions about the moral status of non-human animals and the imperative to preserve marginalized languages and cultures will be considered.
- ❑ Cultural Diversity

Linguistic and cultural variation will be a premise in many of the arguments discussed in the class. Students will be asked to reflect on what widespread linguistic and cultural variation suggests about the nature of meaning and the conditions that enable interpersonal communication to occur.
- ❑ Critical Thinking

Students will be evaluated in the course on the basis of their ability to engage successfully in the arguments and positions discussed in the readings and lecture in their own writing. Although no background in logic will be assumed, students will be introduced to basic logical concepts such as the syllogism and validity.
- ❑ Rhetorical Effectiveness

Humans have unique capacities to engage in cognition, communication, and culture. By exploring philosophical questions about these topics, we are exploring questions about human nature. We aim for students to leave the class with a sense of the deep excitement and responsibility that follows from wrestling with foundational questions about human nature.
- ❑ Problem-solving

Problem-solving is central to philosophical method, and this course will be no different. Students will be asked to wrestle with difficult conceptual problems concerning how soggy gray brains come to represent the technicolor external world, how private thoughts come to be publically accessible in communication, and how ideas and values come to be both stored and spread through culture.
- ❑ Library & Information Literacy

At the end of the course, students will be required to submit a research paper that will require them to engage with books and research articles not featured on the syllabus.

(A) STUDENT CONTACT PER WEEK (if not applicable write N/A)

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|---|----------|---------|
| 1. Lecture: | <u>3</u> | (hours) |
| 2. Discussion Section: | <u>1</u> | (hours) |
| 3. Labs: | <u>0</u> | (hours) |
| 4. Experiential (service learning, internships, other): | <u>0</u> | (hours) |
| 5. Field Trips: | <u>0</u> | (hours) |

(A) TOTAL Student Contact Per Week 4 **(HOURS)**

(B) OUT-OF-CLASS HOURS PER WEEK (if not applicable write N/A)

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|-------------------------------------|-----------------|---------|
| 1. General Review & Preparation: | <u>4</u> | (hours) |
| 2. Reading | <u>3</u> | (hours) |
| 3. Group Projects: | <u> </u> | (hours) |
| 4. Preparation for Quizzes & Exams: | <u>1</u> | (hours) |

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|------------------------------------|---|---------|
| 5. Information Literacy Exercises: | | (hours) |
| 6. Written Assignments: | 2 | (hours) |
| 7. Research Activity: | 1 | (hours) |

(B) TOTAL Out-of-class time per week

11	(HOURS)
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GRAND TOTAL (A) + (B) must equal at least 15 hours/week

15	(HOURS)
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Course Proposal: Phil 023— Meaning and Communication

Phil 023: Meaning and Communication (5)

Lecture, three hours; discussion, one hour. The theory of meaning and its relationship to philosophy more generally; the nature, origins, and acquisition of language. Additional topics may include: nonlinguistic and nonhuman systems of communication; theories of interpretation in the law, literature and art; the use of theoretical terms in science. P/NP or letter grading.

Justification:

“Meaning and Communication” is designed to fill a gap in the philosophy curriculum. Currently, we do not offer a lower division course in the philosophy of language: the first course in that area is the upper division course C127A, which has 31 (i.e. logic) as an enforced prerequisite. “Meaning and Communication” introduces students to philosophical accounts of meaning and hence the philosophy of language (the issue of the nature of meaning is at the heart of the philosophy of language) by a path that does not first require them to know logic (we accomplish this by skirting the issue of the relationship between meaning and truth, which can wait for the upper division course). It simultaneously introduces them to the field of philosophy more generally, as we plan to trace the influence of a particular view of meaning on other fields of philosophical inquiry (for instance, the positivists argued, from a view about the nature of meaning, to the thesis that discourse in certain areas of philosophy – including ethics and metaphysics – was literally meaningless).

The proposed course fills quite a different role to related courses in other departments. LING 1 introduces students to the different areas of linguistics (phonology, syntax, etc.) from the perspective of contemporary science. It does not cover philosophical accounts of the nature of meaning (a topic foreign to linguistics), nor does it question its own orthodoxy about the nature of language (philosophers offer a different perspective on the nature of language, based on convention and communication rather than cognitive psychology). Nor does LING 1, for obvious reasons, touch on nonlinguistic forms of communication; nor accounts of interpretation outside of standard uses of language.

ANTHRO 33 provides an introduction to the “anthropological perspective” on the study of communication, which complements, rather than overlapping with, the philosophical perspective. Both it and COMM STUDIES 10 focus on communication to the exclusion of the issue of meaning, central to our proposed course. No course in another department introduces students to the field of philosophy by way of the theory of meaning (once thought of as “first” philosophy). Nor do they dwell on philosophical figures central to the theory of meaning, such as Locke, Mill, Carnap and Wittgenstein.

Example Syllabus:*Meaning and Communication (Phil 023)*

...uttering a word is like striking a note on the keyboard of the imagination.
Philosophical Investigations §6

**Course Description**

Words, pictures and thoughts have something in common that rocks, soil, and stars do not: they have *meaning*. In this class, we will explore the nature of meaning, its origins, its acquisition, and its role in interpersonal communication. Readings will be drawn from both historical figures such as John Locke, John Stuart Mill, and Charles Sanders Peirce, as well as contemporary figures such as Noam Chomsky, David Lewis, and Robyn Carston. The course assumes no prior background in logic or philosophy, and is intended to both introduce students to the main themes of contemporary philosophy of language and to prepare students for future classes in the philosophy of language and mind.

Course Materials

All readings will be available digitally via the course website.

Course Requirements

Attendance (10%): Weekly attendance is required. You are allowed two unexcused absences, after which absences will negatively impact your grade.

Weekly writing and class discussion (15%): Understanding flourishes in the context of discussion. For this reason, it is important that each of you take part in our discussions together. In addition to class discussion, you will be required to post on our online discussion board once each week. Your post should raise a question or make a critical observation about the reading to be discussed for the upcoming class; you may also respond to a post made by someone else in the class. Posts must be at least one paragraph (200-300 words) long, and are due by 6:00 am each Monday.

Two discussion papers (25% each): In these five to seven-page papers, you will be asked to engage critically with a topic of your choice. A list of paper topics as well as detailed instructions will be made available two weeks before the due date of each paper.

Final project (25%): Students, either individually or in pairs, will create a “research wiki” entry on one crucial term we’ve discussed during the course (e.g. ‘language-faculty,’ ‘discourse-register,’ ‘convention,’ ‘social network’). Each entry should provide an informed description of the term—including its history and its current theoretical importance—in three to five pages, and include at least six research sources. Projects will be presented in class on the final meeting of the semester. Students should schedule a meeting with me to discuss their final projects no later than November 15th.

Schedule

Week 1: Conceptions of Meaning

Tuesday: Meaning as Mental Idea

- John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Volume 2, Book 3, Chapters 1 and 3,
- Suggested: Ray Jackendoff, “Conceptual Semantics”

Thursday: Meanings as External Reference

- John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic*, Chapters 1-2.
- Suggested: James Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*
- (Selections)

Week 2: Conceptions of Meaning (cont.)

Tuesday: Meaning as Conditions of Verification

- Rudolf Carnap, "Testability and Meaning"
- W.V.O Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism"

Thursday: Meaning as Use

- Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Selections)

Week 3: Signs

Tuesday: The Nature of Signs

- Charles Sanders Peirce, "What Is A Sign?"

Thursday: Signs as Modality Independent

- Harlan Lane, Robert Hoffmeister, and Benjamin Baha, *Journey Into the Deaf-World*, Chapter 4.
- Susan Goldin-Meadow, *The Resilience of Language*, Chapters 6 and 17.

Week 4: Pairing Signs and Meanings

Tuesday: Language and Plato's Problem

- Noam Chomsky, *Knowledge of Language*, Chapter 2.

Thursday: The Human Language Faculty

- Mark Baker, *The Atoms of Language*, Chapter 2

Week 5: Communication

Tuesday: Communication as Reduction of Uncertainty

- K. Stenning, J. Calder, and A. Lascarides, *Introduction to Cognition and Communication*, Chap. 1 and 2.

Thursday: Intention and Communication

- H.P. Grice, "Meaning"
- John Seale, *Speech Acts*, (pp. 225—235).

Week 6: Convention and Communication

Tuesday: Coordination Problems

- David Lewis, *Convention*, Chapter 1.

Thursday: Conventionality of Language

- David Lewis, "Languages and Language"

Week 7: Animal Communication

Tuesday: The Origins of Conventions

- Brian Skyrms, "The Evolution of Meaning."

Thursday: Case Study

- Dorothy Cheney and Robert Seyfarth, *How Monkeys See the World*, Chapters 4-5.

Week 8: Innovation

Tuesday: Lexical Innovation

- Herb Clark and Richard Gerrig, "Understanding Old Words with New Meanings."
- Donald Davidson, "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs."

Thursday: Metaphor

- Elizabeth Camp, "Metaphor in the Mind: The Cognition of Metaphor."

Week 9: Pragmatics

Tuesday: Implicature

- H.P. Grice, "Logic and Conversation."

Thursday: Explicature

- Robyn Carston, "Explicature and Semantics."

Week 10: Literary Meaning

Tuesday: Fact and Fiction

- Louis Mink, "History and Fiction as Modes of Comprehension."

Thursday: Depiction

- Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics*. (Selections)