

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES

UCLA

BERKELEY · DAVIS · IRVINE · LOS ANGELES · MERCED · RIVERSIDE · SAN DIEGO · SAN FRANCISCO



SANTA BARBARA · SANTA CRUZ

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY  
 DODD 321  
 P.O. BOX 951451  
 LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90095-1451  
 (310) 825-4641  
 FAX (310) 825-6040

June 14, 2013

Scott Chandler, Chair  
 General Education Governance Committee  
 A265 Murphy Hall  
 157101  
 Attention: Myrna Dee F. Castillo, Program Representative

Dear Professor Chandler:

Philosophy 21 had been a GE course for very many years, and was delisted as a GE course when it was not changed from 4 to 5 units. We have now completed the change from 4 to 5 units, as of 2012 Winter. There has never been a question as to whether its subject matter is suitable for the General Education requirement.

Philosophy 21 (“Skepticism and Rationality”) explores arguments intended to challenge our knowledge of the world (especially, our knowledge of the existence of an external world), along with various responses that have been offered to those arguments. The course pursues these issues through consideration of the works of major historical figures (especially, Descartes) and contemporary reflection on them. It helps students to begin to think critically about their position as knowers in the world.

If you have further questions about the content or the aim of this course, please let me know.

Sincerely,

Gavin Lawrence  
 Chair & Professor  
 Department of Philosophy

## General Education Course Information Sheet

*Please submit this sheet for each proposed course*

Department & Course Number Philosophy 21  
 Course Title Skepticism and Rationality  
 Indicate if Seminar and/or 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.

This course is on radical skepticism and the challenges it poses, a paradigm philosophical topic. The investigation uses all the tools of philosophical and linguistic analysis.

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

Andrew Hsu, Continuing Lecturer

Do you intend to use graduate student instructors (TAs) in this course? Yes X No \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, please indicate the number of TAs 4

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

2013-2014	Fall	_____	Winter	<u>X</u>	Spring	_____
	Enrollment	_____	Enrollment	<u>160</u>	Enrollment	_____
2014-2015	Fall	_____	Winter	<u>X</u>	Spring	_____
	Enrollment	_____	Enrollment	<u>160</u>	Enrollment	_____
2015-2016	Fall	_____	Winter	<u>X</u>	Spring	_____
	Enrollment	_____	Enrollment	<u>160</u>	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. Philosophy 21 was a GE course

for many years. It was delisted as a GE course when it was not changed from 4 to 5 units. In fact,

It has always been taught if it as a 5 unit course; the change was officially made in 2012 Winter.

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 uses a historically important text—Descartes’ Meditations—and the philosophy of the early modern period as a springboard. It gives students a look at a culturally significant intellectual movement.
❑ Integrative Learning	The skeptical problems studied arose in tandem with the development of the modern system of the sciences. It invites students to think about the epistemic status of the sciences.
❑ Ethical Implications	
❑ Cultural Diversity	The seventeenth century texts with which the course begins help make students aware of the presuppositions of their own thinking and show them an alternative and quite different framework for thinking about the world.
❑ Critical Thinking	The course proceeds by examining arguments and objections. It introduces students to elementary logical concepts.
❑ Rhetorical Effectiveness	Students are asked to write clear, critical and analytic essays.
❑ Problem-solving	Students are invited to construct their own arguments and objections and learn to clarify their own thinking about difficult topics.
❑ Library & Information Literacy	Students learn the skills of close reading from studying both historical texts and contemporary professional, philosophical literature.

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

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

**(A) TOTAL Student Contact Per Week** **5** **(HOURS)**

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

1. General Review & Preparation:	<u>2</u>	(hours)
2. Reading	<u>4</u>	(hours)
3. Group Projects:	<u>NA</u>	(hours)
4. Preparation for Quizzes & Exams:	<u>1</u>	(hours)
5. Information Literacy Exercises:	<u>1</u>	(hours)
6. Written Assignments:	<u>2</u>	(hours)
7. Research Activity:	<u>                    </u>	(hours)

**(B) TOTAL Out-of-class time per week** **10** **(HOURS)**

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



## Skepticism and Rationality

Instructor: Andrew Hsu  
[hsu@humnet.ucla.edu](mailto:hsu@humnet.ucla.edu) (Please put *Philosophy 21* in the subject line.)  
Dodd 359  
5-6047  
Office hours W3-4, F1-2

Assistants: Michael Hansen  
Antti Hiltunen  
Peter Murray  
Lauren Schaeffer

Description: We'll study some problems in epistemology or theory of knowledge. We'll focus on some *radical* forms of skepticism according to which it is impossible to have, e.g., knowledge. Although few if any philosophers embrace radical skepticism, many find it fascinating.

We'll begin the quarter by studying some *arguments* for skepticism. Our principal source for such arguments will be a seventeenth century work that influenced—and continues to influence—much reflection on skepticism, *Meditations on First Philosophy* by the French philosopher Rene Descartes. Later on we'll look at how Descartes himself responded to those skeptical arguments. We'll finish the term by considering some modern responses to skepticism.

Although this approach will give you some sense of the history of an important philosophical problem, our principal goal is not historical or scholarly. Our principal goal will be to get a sense of some distinctively philosophical problems and ways of thinking about them. The course is intended to introduce students to the *practice* of philosophy, that is, to doing it in contrast to hearing about it. We'll spend much of our time formulating arguments, considering objections and replies and drawing conceptual distinctions; in short, we'll actually do the sort of work required for philosophical understanding.

Text: There is only one book required for this course:

Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, translated and edited by John Cottingham.  
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Other readings will be made available on the course web page.<sup>1</sup>

Course work: There will be two midterms and a final exam. The exams will consist of short essays on set topics. The second midterm will be done in class; the other exams will be take-home. Each exam will each count for 1/3 of the course grade—but see the next item for a qualification. *Note:* Written work must be submitted to turnitin.com.

Discussion section: Sections are an important part of this course. Your TA may adjust the grade based on written work by up to one third of a letter grade (e.g., from B to B+) in view of *excellent* contributions to discussion in section.

---

<sup>1</sup> You will need a university IP address to access some of the readings. To set up a UCLA proxy server, see <http://www.bol.ucla.edu/services/proxy/>

## Readings

Here is a tentative list of readings for the term.

First reading: Descartes, Meditation I, pp. 12-15 and Objections and Replies, pp. 63-67; “Reading Meditation I” (notes on course website); Michael Shermer, “A Skeptical Manifesto”; Colin McGinn, *Shakespeare’s Philosophy* (selections on the course website)

Although the volume of reading is not great, you may find it hard going. You should plan on doing the readings at least a couple of times: once on your own before lecture and again after discussion in lecture.

Second reading: O. K. Bouwsma, “Descartes’ Evil Genius”

Third reading: Charles Sanders Peirce, “The Scientific Attitude and Fallibilism” in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, O. K. Bouwsma, “Descartes’ Evil Genius”

Fourth reading: Barry Stroud, *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism* (selections)

Fifth reading: David Armstrong, *Belief, Truth and Knowledge* selection; Lawrence Bonjour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*.

Sixth reading: Meditation II, pp. 16-19; (Optional: the rest of Meditation II.); Objections and Replies<sup>2</sup>, pp. 68-77; Synopsis, pp. 9-10; Preface, p. 7, second full paragraph; “Reading Meditation II”

Seventh reading: Meditation III, pp. 24-27; Meditation III, pp. 27-31; (Optional: the rest of Meditation III); Objections and Replies, pp. 78-89; Preface, pp. 7-8; Synopsis, pp. 10-11; “Reading Meditations III-VI”

Eighth reading: Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*; “Reading Putnam”.

Other readings (optional): John Cottingham, the editor and translator of our edition of the *Meditations*, has provided a historical overview of Descartes life and works in the General Introduction (pp. xviii-xxxviii) And the distinguished philosopher Bernard Williams gives an interpretation of Descartes’ project in the *Meditations* in his Introductory Essay (pp. vii-xvii).

Cottingham and Williams have written extensively on Descartes. Cottingham’s *Descartes* [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986] is a readable, historical overview of Descartes’ work that relates it to 17<sup>th</sup> century philosophy and science. William’s *Descartes: the Project of Pure Inquiry* (Hammondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978) gives an interesting and provocative interpretation of Descartes’ methodological skepticism.

---

<sup>2</sup> Descartes sent the manuscript of the *Meditations* to philosophers and theologians for their comments, questions and criticisms. He published their remarks and his responses under the heading “Objections and Replies” together with the *Meditations*. Selections from the “Objections and Replies” appear on pp. 63ff in your edition. They are often illuminating and interesting. Be sure to keep track of whether you are reading an objection or one of Descartes’ replies!

Descartes prepared a brief Synopsis which is printed on pp. 9-11 in your edition. It gives you a sense what Descartes thought he was doing in each of the *Meditations*. His Preface is also useful in this way.

The following articles in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* online may also be useful, although they are not easy to read:

Kurt Smith, “Descartes’ Life and Works” contains biographical and historical background: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/descartes-works/>

Lex Newman, “Descartes’ Epistemology” gives a brief overview of Descartes’ epistemology: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/descartes-epistemology/>

Peter Klein, “Skepticism” gives a broad treatment of skepticism from a contemporary point of view: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/skepticism/>

Finally (perhaps best for later in the term), you might find the following survey article about contemporary literature on skepticism interesting:

Duncan Pritchard, “Recent Work on Radical Skepticism”  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20010072>



## Course Revision Proposal

Philosophy 21 Skepticism and Rationality	
<b>Requested revisions that apply:</b>	
	Renumbering    Title    Format    Requisites    Units    Grading    Description
	Multiple Listing:    Add New    Change Number    Delete
	Concurrent Listing:    Add New    Change Number    Delete
CURRENT	PROPOSED
<a href="#">Course Number</a>	Philosophy 21
<a href="#">Title</a>	Skepticism and Rationality
<a href="#">Short Title</a>	SKEPTICSM&RATNALTY
<a href="#">Units</a>	Fixed: 4
<a href="#">Grading Basis</a>	Letter grade or Passed/Not Passed
<a href="#">Instructional Format</a>	Primary Format Lecture
	Secondary Format Discussion
<a href="#">TIE Code</a>	LECS - Lecture (Plus Supplementary Activity) [T]
<a href="#">GE</a>	No
<a href="#">Requisites</a>	None
<a href="#">Description</a>	Lecture, three hours; discussion, one hour. Can we know anything with certainty? How can we justify any of our beliefs? Introduction to study of these and related questions through works of some great philosophers of modern period, such as Descartes, Hume, Leibniz, or Berkeley. P/NP or letter grading.
<a href="#">Justification</a>	Lecture, four hours; discussion, one hour. Can we know anything with certainty? How can we justify any of our beliefs? Introduction to study of these and related questions through works of some great philosophers of modern period, such as Descartes, Hume, Leibniz, or Berkeley. P/NP or letter grading.
<a href="#">Syllabus</a>	Per department chairs John Carriero and Barbara Herman the unit number should increase so students can take this course toward the five unit Philosophic and Linguistic Analysis GE requirement for The College.
<a href="#">Supplemental Information</a>	File <a href="#">Phil 21 Syllabus.pdf</a> was previously uploaded. You may view the file by clicking on the file name.
<a href="#">Effective Date</a>	Fall 1973
<a href="#">Department</a>	Philosophy
<a href="#">Contact</a>	Name



<a href="#">Routing Help</a>	<b>KRISTIN OLSON</b>
	E-mail <b>kolson@humnet.ucla.edu</b>

## ROUTING STATUS

<b>Role:</b>	Registrar's Office
<b>Status:</b>	Processing Completed
<b>Role:</b>	Registrar's Publications Office - Hennig, Leann Jean (LHENNIG@REGISTRAR.UCLA.EDU) - 56704
<b>Status:</b>	Added to SRS on 8/29/2011 3:15:36 PM
<b>Changes:</b>	TIE Code, Description
<b>Comments:</b>	Edited course description into official version.
<b>Role:</b>	Registrar's Scheduling Office - Thomson, Douglas N (DTHOMSON@REGISTRAR.UCLA.EDU) - 51441
<b>Status:</b>	Added to SRS on 8/10/2011 8:46:01 AM
<b>Changes:</b>	TIE Code
<b>Comments:</b>	No Comments
<b>Role:</b>	FEC School Coordinator - Soh, Michael Young () - 3107945040
<b>Status:</b>	Returned for Additional Info on 8/5/2011 12:17:20 PM
<b>Changes:</b>	TIE Code
<b>Comments:</b>	Routing to Registrar's Office
<b>Role:</b>	FEC Chair or Designee - McClendon, Muriel C (MCCLENDO@HISTORY.UCLA.EDU) - 53918
<b>Status:</b>	Approved on 8/4/2011 2:57:06 PM
<b>Changes:</b>	TIE Code
<b>Comments:</b>	No Comments
<b>Role:</b>	L&S FEC Coordinator - Soh, Michael Young () - 3107945040
<b>Status:</b>	Returned for Additional Info on 8/4/2011 2:50:49 PM
<b>Changes:</b>	TIE Code
<b>Comments:</b>	Routing to Vice Chair Muriel McClendon for FEC approval
<b>Role:</b>	Registrar's Office - Hennig, Leann Jean (LHENNIG@REGISTRAR.UCLA.EDU) - 56704
<b>Status:</b>	Returned for Additional Info on 7/19/2011 3:14:48 PM
<b>Changes:</b>	TIE Code
<b>Comments:</b>	Reroute to Michael!
<b>Role:</b>	Department/School Coordinator - Olson, Kristin Anne (KRISTIN@MATH.UCLA.EDU) - 3102061356
<b>Status:</b>	Returned for Additional Info on 7/19/2011 12:20:04 PM
<b>Changes:</b>	TIE Code, GE
<b>Comments:</b>	Per Michael Soh's request--this course is routed to Prof. Scott Chandler for GE consideration.
<b>Role:</b>	L&S FEC Coordinator - Soh, Michael Young () - 3107945040
<b>Status:</b>	Returned for Additional Info on 7/5/2011 2:39:11 PM
<b>Changes:</b>	TIE Code, Effective Date
<b>Comments:</b>	Per email, routing back to dept

<b>Role:</b>	Department Chair or Designee - Carriero, John P. (CARRIERO@HUMNET.UCLA.EDU) - 63475, 54641
<b>Status:</b>	Approved on 6/24/2011 4:24:44 PM
<b>Changes:</b>	TIE Code
<b>Comments:</b>	No Comments

<b>Role:</b>	Department/School Coordinator - Olson, Kristin Anne (KRISTIN@MATH.UCLA.EDU) - 3102061356
<b>Status:</b>	Returned for Additional Info on 6/24/2011 4:07:58 PM
<b>Changes:</b>	TIE Code
<b>Comments:</b>	Hi John--here is the initial request I sent a few days ago for Phil 21--please feel free to add anything and potentially route it back to me or directly to Judi Smith (as we chatted about)--please let me know how I ca help--thanks! K

<b>Role:</b>	FEC School Coordinator - Soh, Michael Young () - 3107945040
<b>Status:</b>	Returned for Additional Info on 6/24/2011 3:54:50 PM
<b>Changes:</b>	TIE Code
<b>Comments:</b>	Kristin - changes to unit cannot be made once the schedule has been released since students have either already enrolled or mapped out their study lists. Also, GE credit would not be granted until after Fall 2011 (after the first GE Governance meeting). Would you like to change effective term to Winter 2012?

<b>Role:</b>	Initiator/Submitter - Olson, Kristin Anne (KRISTIN@MATH.UCLA.EDU) - 3102061356
<b>Status:</b>	Submitted on 6/23/2011 1:52:54 PM
<b>Comments:</b>	Initiated a Course Revision Proposal

[Back to Course List](#)

[Main Menu](#) [Inventory](#) [Reports](#) [Help](#) [Exit](#)  
[Registrar's Office](#) [MyUCLA](#) [SRWeb](#)

Comments or questions? Contact the Registrar's Office at  
[cims@registrar.ucla.edu](mailto:cims@registrar.ucla.edu) or (310) 206-7045