PHILOSOPHY 445: PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE
Fall, 2008 / Professor McIntyre / Course Information

Time and Place .... Tuesday & Thursday, 12:30-1:45; Sierra Hall 224
Instructor...Ronald McIntyre
Office.. 532 Sierra Tower
Office Hours.................Tue 11:00-11:30, 2:00-3:00; Thu 11:00-12:00; other times by appointment
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Course Website (WebCT) ....https://webteach.csun.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will focus on theories of meaning – i.e., systematic accounts of how linguistic expressions are meaningful and of what meaning itself is.   Our study will require us to address a number of problems in the three traditional areas of philosophy of language: (1) How does linguistic structure contribute to linguistic meaning?   What are the meaningful parts of sentences, and how do the meanings of these parts contribute to the meaningfulness of the whole?   These are questions of *syntax*. (2) How does language relate to the world that we use language to talk about?   How, for example, do names succeed in naming something?   Can the meaning of a name be identified with the thing it names?   Sentences also bear a relation to the world: some of them are true and some are false. How does the truth or falsity of a sentence depend on the behavior of its linguistic parts?   These are questions of *semantics*.   (3) Language is not simply a complex system of signs that somehow "represents" the world: it is a medium that we use to communicate with others in various ways. How does the meaning of what we say depend on what our *intentions* are when we say what we do? For what purposes do we use language, in addition to asserting the beliefs that we take to be true? Can meaning itself be understood in terms of linguistic use?   These are questions of *pragmatics*.

Our approach will be to study in some depth a few of the classical 20th century writings on these issues (rather than reading a lot of things superficially).   These will include Gottlob Frege's theory of sense and reference, Bertrand Russell's theory of descriptions, Saul Kripke's possible-worlds semantics, Paul Grice's notion of speaker-meaning, J. L. Austin on performative utterances, and John Searle's theory of speech acts.

PREREQUISITES

6 units of Philosophy, including Phil 350 or 355.

TEXTS

Required: Robert J. Stainton, ed., *Perspectives in the Philosophy of Language: A Concise Anthology* (available at Matador Bookstore).

Recommended: William G. Lycan, *Philosophy of Language: A Contemporary Introduction*. Excerpts will be made available on WebCT; the full text is available from amazon.com and other sources.

Additional required and recommended readings will be made available on WebCT.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Class Attendance and Participation.   I consider class preparation, attendance, and informed participation to be essential components of the learning experience in this course.

Summary Essays.   There will be 6 "summary essay" assignments, 2-3 pages each, spaced throughout the semester.   Each essay will be due on a Tuesday and will be based on the readings and class discussions included in the preceding 4 or 5 class sessions.   The purpose of each essay is to give you an opportunity to show your understanding of the issues and arguments covered in those sessions.   Your best 5 grades on these essays will count toward your course grade.

Term Paper. A term paper, of about 5 pages, is required at the end of the course.

The summary essays will substitute for exams.   No additional examinations will be required.

GRADING

Summary Essays.   The average of your 5 best grades on the summary essays will count for 82% of your course grade.

Term Paper.   Your grade on the term paper will count for 18% of your course grade.

Class Attendance and Participation.   Consistent attendance and positive contributions to discussion can add up to two points to your course grade.   Excessive absences will negatively impact your course grade.   (Students who attend fewer than half the classes will be deemed "non-participants" and will receive a grade of F or WU.)

Grading System.   All grading will be on the plus/minus system.

COURSE WEBSITE

Many essential course materials will be accessible only through the course website on WebCT.   I'll use WebCT to post announcements, reminders of work due, notes, and study guides.   If you have to miss class, check the website for the latest course information.   The url for the WebCT course website is: https://webteach.csun.edu.   (Be sure to bookmark this page!)   To login, use your CSUN email ID and password, then select our class (PHIL 445: Philosophy of Language) and click it.

You must have an active CSUN email address to use WebCT.   Also, I'll use your CSUN address when I communicate with the class by email.   If you would rather receive email at a non-campus address, such as Yahoo or Hotmail, please configure mail forwarding via the CSUN account maintenance website: https://www.csun.edu/account.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

If you have a disability that may call for accommodation, please let me know.   You must register with the CSUN Center on Disabilities, which will approve accommodations and provide you with any forms that I may need to sign.   The Center on Disabilities is located in Bayramian Hall, Room 110; phone is 677-2684.

UNIVERSITY DEADLINES FOR WITHDRAWING FROM COURSES

The deadline for dropping a course without a petition is Friday, September 12.   **Except in extraordinary circumstances, the University does not permit withdrawals after Friday, September 19.**   For details on University policy, see http://www.csun.edu/anr/soc/adjsched.html.

POLICY ON LATE OR MISSED ASSIGNMENTS

Late summary essays and term papers will usually ***not*** be accepted unless prior permission for a later deadline has been granted.   If, due to *verifiable* circumstances beyond your control, you wish to submit late work without prior approval, you must notify me (either directly or through the Department Office) before the next class meeting following the missed deadline.   I will be under no obligation to accept any work that is more than one week late.

POLICY ON ACADEMIC HONESTY AND WORKING WITH OTHERS

The University's policies on academic honesty (http://www.csun.edu/~vcoao087/honesty.pdf) will be strictly enforced.   The written assignments will not require you to consult any materials that were not specifically assigned or recommended, but you may use any sources that you find helpful.   If you do consult other sources – including web sources, other students, friends, etc. – you must explicitly document them and clearly indicate the extent of your dependence on them.   (If you are unsure about how to do this, ask me.)   Submitting any other person's work as if it were your own constitutes plagiarism.   Detected plagiarism or cheating will result in a grade of zero on the work involved (and usually in the course), and further penalties (including suspension or expulsion) may be levied by the University.

I encourage you to work with your classmates throughout the semester for the purpose of collaborative *learning*, including preparation for the essays and term paper.   However, ***any work you ultimately submit for grading must be yours alone.***

CAVEAT

The course specifics – including course requirements, grading, and the schedule of assignments – are subject to change at my discretion.   All changes will be announced in class and by email. Unless due to circumstances beyond my control, changes in the schedule will be announced at least one week in advance.