

UBC's Point Grey Campus is located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the xwməθkwəyəm (Musqueam) people. The land it is situated on has always been a place of learning for the Musqueam people, who for millennia have passed on in their culture, history, and traditions from one generation to the next on this site.

Course Title, Time, and Location	Course Code Number	Credit Value
Existentialism Tues and Thurs 1-4 pm, BUCH A 203	PHIL 385A 001	3 credits

Course Instructor	Contact Details	Office Location	Office Hours
Dr. Willow Verkerk	willow.verkerk@ubc.ca	BUCH E 158	4-5 pm, Tuesday and Thursday, in person or online by appointment

OTHER INSTRUCTIONAL STAFF

TBA

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Most well-known through Sartre's statement that "existence precedes essence," the existentialist movement flourished during the twentieth century in France with thinkers such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Frantz Fanon. While Heidegger is often assumed to be the father of Existentialism, its legacy can be traced back further to Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. By looking at its foundations and innovations, this course examines the relevance of Existentialism today. We reflect on how existentialist ideas contribute to discourses on identity, the meaning of life, alienation, and interpersonal relationships. By engaging with European philosophy and literature, this course provides a comprehensive introduction to the philosophy of human existence. This is a lecture style course with class discussion. It has no prerequisites.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Students are expected to read the materials before class and come prepared to take part in class and small group discussion.

The textbook is available through the bookstore:

Gordon Marino, *Basic Writings of Existentialism*, New York: Modern Library, 2004, hereafter BW (\$20).

The schedule includes all the readings. Those not found in the textbook will be available through the Library Online Course Reserves (LOCR), through an online link provided, or under Modules on the Canvas course page.

ASSESSMENTS OF LEARNING

Take Home 1 (750 words) 20% posted July 13; *Due July 18*

Take Home 2 (750 words) 20% posted July 20; *Due July 25*

Final Essay (3000 words) 50% posted July 25; *Due August 15*

Participation 10%. There are two ways to receive participation marks. 1. Speak in class; 2. Come to see me during my office hours with a question or comment; 3. Submit a response to one of the discussion questions in the Discussion section on Canvas.

Assignments are submitted on Canvas.

SCHEDULE: TUESDAYS AND THURSDAYS 1-4 PM

Tuesday July 4: Introduction: What is the Meaning of Existentialism?

Thursday July 6: Existentialism According to Jean-Paul Sartre

READ: Sartre, "Existentialism" in *Existentialism and Human Emotions* (BW, pages 337-367).

Tuesday July 11: The Death of God and the Problem of Nihilism

READ: II. Nietzsche, "The Madman," s. 125 in *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, New York: Vintage, 1974 (LOCR).

Thursday July 13: Becoming Human: Friedrich Nietzsche

READ: Nietzsche, "Second Essay. 'Guilt,' 'Bad Conscience' and the Like" in *On the Genealogy of Morals* (BW, pages 107-109; 145-187).

LISTEN: Christopher Janaway on Nietzsche and Morality

<https://philosophybites.com/2008/09/christopher-jan.html>

Take Home 1 posted July 13; Due July 18

Tuesday July 18: The Singularity of Existence: Soren Kierkegaard

READ: Kierkegaard, "Problema I" and "Problema II," in *Fear and Trembling* (BW, pages 3-39).

LISTEN: BBC In Our Times Kierkegaard

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b009fycc>

Optional further listening: Clare Carlisle on Kierkegaard

<https://philosophybites.com/kierkegaard/>

Thursday July 20: The Paradox of Freedom: Fyodor Dostoevsky

READ: Dostoevsky, "Part I: Underground," in *Notes from the Underground* (BW, pages 189-230).

**Take Home 2 posted July 20; Due July 25*

Tuesday July 25: The Question of Being: Martin Heidegger

READ: Heidegger, "The Possible Being-A-Whole of Dasein and Being-Toward-Death" (sections 46-53) in *Being and Time* (BW, pages 295-336).

WATCH: film excerpt of *Heidegger: Only A God Can Save Us* by Jeffrey van Davis

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RuJvwyREoJo&t=11s>

Final Essay Topics posted July 25

Thursday July 27: Being and Nothingness: Jean-Paul Sartre

READ: Sartre Selections from "Self-Negation" and "The Encounter with the Other," in *Being and Nothingness* (BW, pages 369-409).

LISTEN: Sebastian Gardner on Sartre and Bad Faith

<https://philosophybites.com/2009/02/sebastian-gardner-on-jeanpaul-sartre-on-bad-faith.html>

Tuesday August 1: Existence and Sexual Difference: Simone de Beauvoir

READ: I. "Ambiguity and Freedom" in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*

<https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/de-beauvoir/ambiguity/ch01.htm>

II. "Introduction" and "Conclusion," in *The Second Sex*

<http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/de-beauvoir/2nd-sex/index.htm>

LISTEN: Interview with Beauvoir

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SFRTI_9CbFU

Thursday August 3: Psychoanalysis, Sexuality, and the Meaning of Life: Luce Irigaray

READ: Irigaray, "This Sex Which is Not One," in *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter, New York: Cornell Uni Press, pages 23-33 (LOCR).

LISTEN: Interview with Irigaray:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=msyTCN6Yytw>

Tuesday August 8: Being Human First: Frantz Fanon's Critique of Racialized Identity

READ: Fanon, "Introduction" and Chapter 1; Chapter 5; Chapter 7: "The Black Man and Hegel" and Chapter 8: "By Way of Conclusion" in *Black Skin White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox, New York: Grove Press, 2008, pages xi-23; 89-119; 191-206 (LOCR).

WATCH: film *Fanon, yesterday, today* by Mezine, Hassane (LOCR)

Thursday August 10: Living with the Absurd: Albert Camus

READ: Camus, "An Absurd Reasoning," in *The Myth of Sisyphus* (BW, pages 437-492).

WATCH: *Is life meaningless? And other absurd questions* by Nina Medvinskaya

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vPtzpjC7TF4>

Final Essay due August 15

LEARNING OUTCOMES

During the course, students will study key figures and concepts of Existentialism. They will learn how to think critically about the ideas and arguments. The take-home exams provide the

opportunity to demonstrate understanding of the concepts studied to date. The final paper is an exercise in critical thinking to explore and deepen understanding of one or more of the thinkers studied during the course. By the end of the semester, students will be familiar with Existentialism and its central themes.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES AND SUPPORT

UBC provides resources to support student learning and to maintain healthy lifestyles but recognizes that sometimes crises arise and so there are additional resources to access including those for survivors of sexual violence. UBC values respect for the person and ideas of all members of the academic community. Harassment and discrimination are not tolerated nor is suppression of academic freedom. UBC provides appropriate accommodation for students with disabilities and for religious observances. UBC values academic honesty and students are expected to acknowledge the ideas generated by others and to uphold the highest academic standards in all their actions. Details of the policies and how to access support are available on [the UBC Senate website](#).

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<http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/Vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,54,111,959>

The use of *Chat GPT* and similar online resources may fall under “cheating” in the UBC policy if students make unauthorized use of this tool in the creation of assignments or on exams (“use...of unauthorized means to complete an examination or coursework...including, but not limited to, ...accessing websites or other online resources not specifically permitted by the instructor or examiner”).

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Audio recordings of the class are allowed (video recordings and photographs are not permitted).