

PHIL101 (Introduction to Philosophy), Winter 2025
University of British Columbia
Professor Eric Margolis

This document contains a general overview of the course; it isn't a complete syllabus. For FAQ's, see my website: <https://www.margolisphilosophy.com/101-faq.html>

For students who are enrolled in the course, detailed course information (dates, reading list, assignments, etc.) can be found on Canvas once classes begin.

Philosophy challenges us with questions that are directed to our most basic intellectual assumptions and forces us to think hard about ourselves and our position in the world. With its focus on arguments, philosophy also brings clarity and rigour to matters that may otherwise seem inherently obscure and perplexing. Different instructors teach PHIL 101 in different ways. The approach I take doesn't emphasize historical analysis and won't touch on the many philosophical systems that are associated with the great philosophers of the past. Instead, the course will focus on a small number of philosophical problems and some important ways of thinking about them. Your job is to adopt a critical stance to the readings and to the lectures, and to develop your own views based on the arguments we work through. Topics include: Does God exist? Do people have souls? Is there free will?

Course Objectives

This course has four major objectives: (1) to help you begin to think philosophically, (2) to improve your critical thinking skills, (3) to develop your oral presentation and communication skills, and (4) to provide you with a general introduction to philosophy by exposing you to a number of important philosophical arguments and theories.

Section 001 (Friday discussions) vs. 002 (Lecture only)

There are two versions of this course. The main difference between these is that 002 always meets as one large class, whereas 001 has a regular Friday discussion session that is capped at 20-25 students so that you can have the benefits of a small class experience in context of the course. If you sign up for 001, make sure you sign up for one of the designated discussion sessions: L01-L05.

Method of Delivery

This course employs a hybrid method of delivery in which prerecorded videos are substituted for one of the scheduled class meetings and then we meet in person for the other day(s). The synchronous meetings will be flexible and eclectic—a mix of Q&A, small group discussion, large group discussion, workshops, as well as lectures that expand on the material in the videos.

Grading Scheme (tentative)

- 5% greeting video
- 15% video exercise #1
- 20% video exercise #2
- 25% video exercise #3
- 35% video final project (= final exam)

Attendance and Participation

This is a hybrid course, not an asynchronous course. If you don't plan on attending the in person classes or are systematically unable to do so, you shouldn't take this course. In addition, you are strongly encouraged to fully participate in the class discussion. To learn philosophy, you have "do philosophy"—and that means getting involved in the discussion.

Video assignments

All assignments will take the form of video exercises which you will upload to Canvas. These will be short videos (5-10 minutes long) in which you explain and/or critically discuss various philosophical arguments and views. These are meant to deepen your understanding of a philosophical issue and to help you work on your oral presentation and communication skills. These will be marked for clarity, accuracy regarding the relevant philosophical material, depth of understanding, and originality.