

PHIL 375 Fall 2025
TTh 11am-12:30pm in **LASR-Floor 1-Room 102**

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PHIL 375: Philosophy and Literature: The Rāmāyaṇa

This course will explore questions surrounding moral obligation, duty, law, love, rulership, identity, and gender by focusing on various tellings of the Rāmāyaṇa, a South Asian epic of love, war, and loss that is one of the most influential narratives in human history. We'll engage the epic with a focus on how communities make meaning through telling and retelling core human stories. This class is **in-person and attendance at all sessions is mandatory**. Each Tuesday class will start with a 10-minute graded handwritten quiz, and then proceed to lecture and discussion. Thursdays will begin with 30 minutes for questions or residual lecture material, and end with graded group work. The term will culminate in a skit written and performed in small groups where you will make a philosophically significant change to the core narrative of the Classical Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki. Finally, you'll write an individual final analysis paper drawing out the philosophical implications of the changes made in the skit.

Assignments and Grading Structure:

THE USE OF CHATGPT, OTHER LLMS, OR AI OF ANY KIND IS ABSOLUTELY PROHIBITED FOR ANY ASPECT OF THIS CLASS. THIS INCLUDES SUMMARIZING THE READINGS, HELPING GENERATE IDEAS, DRAFTING, OUTLINING, FINAL PROSE, OR ANY OTHER USE. ANYONE WHO VIOLATES THIS POLICY WILL BE SUBJECT TO OFFICAL UNIVERSITY DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES.

Our assessment scale follows [UBC's standard grading policy](#). Here is a breakdown of what these grades mean for us:

- 0 (F) - no submission
- 1-49 (F range): submission that is *not* on topic, is *not* accurate, and/or does *not* meet the formal requirements
- 50-54 (D range): submission that's on topic and meets the formal requirements, but contains significant factual, explanatory, and/or logical errors
- 55-67 (C range): submission that's on topic and meets the formal requirements, but with some factual, explanatory, and/or logical errors
- 68-79 (B range): submission that's on topic, meets the formal requirements, and is basically accurate

- 80-89 (A- to A range): submission that's on topic, meets the formal requirements, is accurate, and shows extra care* OR extra insight*
- 90-100 (A+ range): submission that's on topic, meets the formal requirements, is accurate, and shows extra care* AND extra insight*

*Care is shown by how comprehensive your response is, and insight is shown by how clearly you explain what's happening. Care and insight are necessary for any accurate answer, which is why high A or A+ papers are papers that show *extra* care and *extra* insight*

1) Weekly Individual Assignments: 30% (each Tuesday, conducted in-class)

During the first ten minutes of each Tuesday class, you'll handwrite (without notes) a response to a quiz question on the reading for that week. **If you're late for class, you'll have less time to complete this assignment. If you're ten minutes or more late, you will not be allowed to take the quiz.** We will drop the lowest score in this category automatically at the end of the term.

2) Weekly Group Assignments: 20% (each Thursday, conducted in class)

During the last 45 minutes of each Thursday class, you'll break into *random* small groups and each group will complete an assignment. Each member of a given group (who participates) will receive the same mark on the assignment. We will drop the lowest score in this category automatically at the end of the term. ***There is an assignment tab that any student can use to let us know if anyone in their group isn't participating in developing the group's answer. We'll follow up, and someone's grade on this assignment may be impacted if they didn't participate.***

3) Skit: 25% (sign up for a slot during the last two weeks of class)

About half way through the semester, we'll split into small groups. As a group, you'll pick an episode in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and provide an additional telling of it in the form of a short skit. You'll act out your skit during your group's presentation timed during the last two weeks of class. Your new telling should explore some significant philosophical themes that we've discussed during the semester. Everyone in the group will be responsible for presenting a role in the skit. Two people can share one role if needed (i.e., you could have one person be Rāma for the first half of the skit, and another person be Rāma for the second half), One or more of the roles can be narrators. Each group will have 25 minutes to present their skit and guide discussion afterwards. I recommend that you take 15 minutes for the skit itself and leave 10 minutes for discussion. ***Although the skit will be graded as a group, all members of the group individually must submit a copy of the skit via Canvas so that we can give you proper credit. Each student will be given an opportunity to let us know if anyone in their group isn't participating in developing the skit. We'll follow up, and someone's grade on this assignment may be impacted.***

4) Skit Analysis Paper: 25% (due on our exam date at 11:59pm via Canvas)

Each of you will write **your own** 1500 word paper explaining how your group's retelling relates to various themes we've covered in the class. You'll focus on the philosophical implications of the changes your group made.

UBC's [Academic Integrity Policies](#) are in effect at all times in this class. AI tools such as Chat GPT or other LLMs are NOT PERMITTED for ANY component of any assignment in this course, *including for summarizing the reading, generating ideas, outlining, drafting, refining prose, or any other use*. I take plagiarism, AI use, or other forms of cheating very seriously and there will be consequences, ranging from failing the assignment to being reported to UBC's Academic Misconduct Committee, if you violate this policy.

Here, for your reference, is UBC's official statement on what constitutes plagiarism:

Plagiarism, which is intellectual theft, occurs where an individual submits or presents the oral or written work of another person as his or her own. Scholarship quite properly rests upon examining and referring to the thoughts and writings of others. However, when another person's words (i.e. phrases, sentences, or paragraphs), ideas, or entire works are used, the author must be acknowledged in the text, in footnotes, in endnotes, or in another accepted form of academic citation. Where direct quotations are made, they must be clearly delineated (for example, within quotation marks or separately indented). Failure to provide proper attribution is plagiarism because it represents someone else's work as one's own. Plagiarism should not occur in submitted drafts or final works. A student who seeks assistance from a tutor or other scholastic aids must ensure that the work submitted is the student's own. Students are responsible for ensuring that any work submitted does not constitute plagiarism. Students who are in any doubt as to what constitutes plagiarism should consult their instructor before handing in any assignments.

From: <https://vancouver.calendar.ubc.ca/campus-wide-policies-and-regulations/student-conduct-and-discipline/discipline-academic-misconduct>

Statement of UBC Values and Resources

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 and cultural 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 of their actions. Details of the policies and how to access support are available at <https://senate.ubc.ca/policiesresources-support-student-success>

Missed Work/Late Policy

The weekly individual oral quizzes and group assignments must be completed in-class. If you are unable to be in class on a particular day, you must file for a formal Academic Concession with the appropriate UBC office.

Here's a link to UBC's guide to Academic Concessions for Arts Students: <https://www.arts.ubc.ca/degree-planning/academic-performance/academic-concession/>, and here's the link for Sciences Students: <https://science.ubc.ca/students/advising/concession>

If the concession is granted, I will arrange for a make-up oral quiz and send you the group prompt for you to complete on your own. Please remember that we will drop the lowest grade from each of these categories (individual oral quiz and in-class group assignment) at the end of the term.

You must be present for your group's skit performance.

If you would like an extension on your final analysis paper, you must file for a formal Academic Concession. Due to the tight timeline for us to submit our grades, it will be very difficult for us to handle extensions. We sincerely request that you complete this assignment on time, and only request a formal Concession in exceptional circumstances.

We will not grant extension requests outside of the process outlined above. You must go through the formal Academic Concession process. In the unlikely event that the office doesn't respond within a week, then contact me and we'll evaluate the situation together. I don't anticipate this happening.

The idea behind this policy is that it matters for your learning to be part of a community that regularly dedicates time to working through unfamiliar ideas. The Academic Concessions office handles small requests for accommodations based on illness, etc., in addition to larger requests. It's important for someone in these offices to know, and for you to have a record, if you end up having to request multiple accommodations. This policy is designed to make sure that you have access to the resources you need if something impacts your class-by-class ability to engage the course.

Required Texts: All readings for this course will be available via Canvas or the UBC library. Please see the "Library Online Course Reserves (LOCR)" tab on our Canvas page for our main text (Goldman&Goldman's translation of Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*). Additional PDFs will be posted to the relevant Assignment tab.

Course Schedule

Week 1: Intro to the *Rāmāyaṇa*, including reading together some sections of the *Bālakāṇḍa* (*The Book of Childhood*). First graded group assignment.

Week 2: finish the *Bālakāṇḍa*; selections from the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* (*The Teachings of Vāsiṣṭha*)

Week 3: The *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* (*The Book of Ayodhyā*)

Week 4: The *Aranyakāṇḍa* (*The Book of the Forest*) and the *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa* (*The Book of Kiṣkindhā*): selected passages from both; small bits from Tulsīdas and Kampan

Week 5: The *Sundarakāṇḍa* (*The Book of Beauty*) and the beginning of the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* (*The Book of the War*)

Week 6: The middle of the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* (*The Book of the War*) and selections from *The Slaying of Meghanāda*

Week 7: The end of the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* (*The Book of the War*) and all of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*

Week 8: Bhavabhūti, *Rāma's Last Act*:

https://sheldonpollock.org/archive/bhavabhuti_ramas_2007.pdf

Week 9: Discussion and extended skit prep time (you'll still have graded assignments this week)

Week 10: Skits

Week 11: Skits / final day of class