

Knowledge and Truth

University of Houston, Spring 2023
ILAS 2350-12771, Knowledge and Methods

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Course Description

The course surveys the cognitive methods pertaining to our understanding of diverse disciplines (including natural sciences, mathematics, philosophical logic, social sciences, cultural studies, and the arts). It aims to raise students' awareness of the distinctive research methods of the diverse disciplines associated with their chosen majors and minors.

In Spring 2023, the course will focus on *epistemic externalism*, *truth as correspondence* and *a priori knowledge*. It will also examine *skepticism*, the *nature of knowledge*, including *justification*.

Time and Place

Weekly lectures take place on Tuesday (11:30 am - 1 pm) in the Classroom and Business Building (CBB), room 108. Relevant information and materials (including syllabus, readings, links for submissions) are available on *Blackboard Learn*. Weekly, the teaching fellow (Dr. Tierney) organizes virtual or in-person office hours (by appointment) to clarify the class subjects.

Requirements and Assessments

The course consists of understanding and writing about the assigned readings. Each lecture pertains to some readings, which students should complete before class as lectures presuppose familiarity with them. Readings are complex and require close study. Also, lectures can introduce material not included in the readings, so attendance at every lecture is crucial if you want to do well. Check the class's schedule regularly since the readings can change a week before class. Below is the breakdown of your final grade.

- 30% *Attendance and Participation*. Students must be timely in class on Tuesday between 10am-12 pm (excused absences require doctoral notes).
- 10% *Weekly Class Reviews*. On Monday, students must submit a brief paper (around 700 words) on the arguments discussed in class. Links for submissions are available on *Blackboard Learn*.
- 60% *Two Papers* (2000 words each). The teaching assistant will suggest modifications for resubmission if needed. Late submissions are accepted within one week but penalized. Detailed guidelines are available on *Blackboard Learn*.

Writing Support

The UH Writing Center works with undergraduates enrolled in any course who want help with their writing. Whether you need support with any part of your paper or check your final draft, the UH Writing Center can complement the class assistance with additional aid. To learn more about one-on-one consultations or to book an appointment, visit the [Writing-Center-Webpage](#). Here is the link for CLASS's students: [UH-Writing-Center](#).

University Policies

Students must comply with the university policies pertaining to ethics and academic honesty. See the following links and read the documents thoroughly: [Student-Conduct-Policy](#) and [Academic-Honesty](#). For counseling and psychological services, visit [CAPS](#). Request for special accommodations is available here: [Adjustments/Auxiliary-Aids](#). Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the University of Houston has issued extraordinary policies listed at the end of the syllabus.

Schedule

Jan 18	Class Introduction
Jan 25	Skepticism about Knowledge (Descartes, pp. 6-13, 18-22)
Feb 1	Cartesian Skepticism (Descartes, pp. 59-69)
Feb 8	Against Cartesian Skepticism (Stroud, pp. 7-25)
Feb 15	Internalism and Externalism (Chisholm, pp. 75-84) [S 243, 10-11:30 am & Online]
Feb 22	External Reference (Putnam, pp. 1-12)
Mar 1	A Defense of Externalism (Putnam, pp. 12-21)
Mar 7	First Paper Due (11:59 pm)
Mar 8	Justified True Belief (Feldman, pp. 8-24) [S 243, 10-11:30 am & Online]
Mar 22	Issues with JTB (Feldman, pp. 25-38, Gettier)
Mar 29	A Priori Knowledge (Chisholm, pp. 26-38)
Apr 5	The A Priori (Ayer, pp. 71-87)
Apr 12	Truth and Probability (Ayer, pp. 46-8, 87-101) [S 243, 10-11:30 am & Online]
Apr 19	Truth and Falsehood (Russell, pp. 69-75)
Apr 26	The Correspondence Theory (Kirkham, pp. 119-41)
May 3	Second Paper Due (11:59 pm)

Bibliography

- Alfred Jules Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*. Dover, 1952.
Roderick Chisholm, *Theory of Knowledge*. Prentice-Hall, 1966.
René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*. Hackett, 1998.
Jeremy Fantl, Jaegwon Kim, Matthew McGrath, and Ernst Sosa (eds), *Epistemology*. Blackwell, 2008.
Richard Feldman, *Epistemology*. Prentice-Hall, 2003.
Richard L. Kirkham, *Theories of Truth*. MIT 1992.
Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*. Cambridge, 1981.
Bertrand Russell, "Truth and Falsehood." In *The Problems of Philosophy*. Cambridge 1912: 69-76.