

# Philosophy of Language

PHIL 370, Spring 2011

Professor Allyson Mount  
Keene State College  
amount@keene.edu  
Parker 308; 358-2388

What gives words meaning? How do pointing and other contextual factors influence interpretation? What role do intentions play? How do "Superman" and "Santa Claus" differ from the names of real people? We will explore questions such as these from a philosophical perspective, through readings by Russell, Kripke, Putnam, and others. Prerequisite: IHPHIL100. (Can count as an elective for the Communication major or Philosophy minor, or as a research methods course for the Communication major.)

**Meeting Time:** Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10:00-11:45 in Parker 111.

**Course Goals:** As a result of this course, students should be able to

- Identify major issues, schools of thought, and problems in the philosophy of language
- Analyze arguments and critically evaluate debates about various linguistic phenomena
- Apply an understanding of readings and other course materials to formulate your own assessment of various topics in the philosophy of language

**Readings:** The main source of readings for this course is a coursepack, which is available at the KSC Bookstore. *You should bring the coursepack with you to EVERY class.* Any additional readings will be available on Blackboard or through library reserve.

**Blackboard:** The course syllabus and assignments will be posted on Blackboard, and you will submit most assignments via Blackboard. You can access the site through your MyKSC page. Once logged in, click on the appropriate course link. You should check the course site regularly for announcements and updates.

**Course Requirements:**

- Regular attendance and active class participation.
- Readings for each class, as stated on the syllabus.
- Seven discussion board postings (usually a few paragraphs long). These will often involve explaining your interpretations or giving your own examples to illustrate ideas from the readings.
- Three reading responses (each about 400-500 words long). These will require interpreting and evaluating specific passages, ideas, or examples from the readings.
- Midterm exam, in class in March.
- Final exam, during the examination period in early May.

### **Attendance and Class Participation:**

- Active class participation is an essential part of this course. You should read the assignments thoroughly and arrive at class prepared to participate.
- You are permitted three absences with no penalty. These absences are intended to be used in case of illness. I do not make a distinction between “excused” and “unexcused” absences – if you miss class for ANY reason, you are considered absent. Each absence beyond the permitted three will be penalized by deducting 10 points from your class participation grade. (If you need to miss more than three classes because of college-sanctioned scheduled events, you must provide me with a written list of the dates and reason the absences are necessary by the end of the second week of classes.)
- If you do miss a class, you are responsible for finding out what you missed and getting copies of materials and assignments. Missing class does not excuse you from assignments due that day.
- Repeated tardiness will adversely affect your course grade. If you arrive very late, or leave class early, this will count as half of an absence.

**Grading:** Your course grade will be calculated out of a total of 1000 points, distributed as follows:

- 50 points for class participation, attentiveness, effort, and in-class exercises
- 210 points for discussion board postings (7 x 30 points each)
- 240 points for reading responses (3 x 80 points each)
- 250 points for the midterm exam
- 250 points for the final exam

Numerical Grade	Letter Grade
940-1000	A
880-939	AB
830-879	B
780-829	BC
730-779	C
680-729	CD
600-679	D
Below 600	F

**Etiquette:** To help ensure a productive and friendly class environment, please follow these guidelines:

- *Silence cell phones before class begins.*
- *Do not send text messages,* sleep in class, read magazines, or engage in other activities unrelated to course material.
- Arrive promptly to all class sessions. If unavoidable circumstances delay your arrival, come in quietly and take your seat without disrupting the class.
- Treat your classmates and the instructor respectfully in class discussions.
- Do not begin packing your books before class is over!

**Academic Integrity:** I encourage you to discuss course material with your classmates, and we will often engage in collaborative work in class. Sharing ideas in this manner is an important part of learning. However, you must complete all written assignments on your own.

You are responsible for being familiar with Keene State's Policy on Academic Honesty (<http://www.keene.edu/policy/academichonesty.cfm>), and for following that policy. This includes giving proper credit for the ideas or words of others that you use in your own writing. ***Evidence of plagiarism will be taken very seriously and will result in disciplinary action.*** If you have any questions about what kind of collaboration is or is not allowed, please ask.

You are NOT allowed to do any of the following:

- Copy reading responses, discussion board postings, or other written work from another student
- Allow your written work to be copied
- Share “answers” to reading response questions. While you’re welcome to work together at understanding the readings, when it comes time to actually write out your detailed response to specific assignment questions you must do this on your own. If you’re unsure whether you’re sharing too much information, err on the side of caution and work independently.
- Use a direct quotation or close paraphrase from the text or any other source (including internet sources) without proper citation
- Give or receive help on in-class exams
- Engage in other actions that violate the Keene State College Policy on Academic Honesty

You ARE allowed to do the following:

- Discuss readings and other course materials with your classmates
- Attend office hours for help understanding assignments, readings, and lectures
- Discuss the *general* concepts behind reading response assignments with your classmates, without sharing specific “answers” to questions in the assignment
- Quote from readings or other sources with proper citation
- Copy class notes from another student who was in class on a day you missed, or lend your notes to a classmate
- Study for exams together

#### **Late Assignments:**

- Late reading responses will automatically lose 10 points for any lateness, even if they are turned in later that day. They will be accepted up to a week after they are due, so it is still better to turn them in late than not at all. However, the substantial 10-point penalty will be strictly enforced, since writing the responses after discussing the topic in class provides an unfair advantage. No responses will be accepted more than a week late.

- Discussion board postings will generally be due by 9am. This gives me time before class to incorporate the postings into that day's plans. Postings that are done late but still before class time will automatically lose 5 points. Postings that are done after the start of class time will receive no credit, since they no longer serve the desired purpose.
- You must take the exams at the scheduled time to get credit for them. Exceptions will only be made in emergencies (documentation from a doctor and/or your advisor or dean will be required), or for compelling reasons when alternative arrangements are made *in advance*.

**Inclement Weather:** In case of inclement weather, call my office after 8am to see whether class will be held that day. If it is cancelled, a dated cancellation message will replace my regular voicemail greeting. If there is no cancellation message, you should assume that class will take place as scheduled.

**Students with disabilities:** If you have a disability that may impact your work for this course, please come talk to me about it as soon as possible, so that we can arrange any necessary accommodations.

**Emergency Operations:** In the event that the College closes for a major disaster, all students are responsible for regularly checking their e-mail, voicemail, and Blackboard for information on alternative course delivery procedures and course work submission. Alternative delivery methods are subject to change depending on the nature of the emergency. Students will be responsible for completing their assignments and ensuring that they have completed all of the core requirements for their courses before they will receive a final grade for the course.

# Philosophy of Language

## Syllabus – First half

All readings are from the coursepack. *Always* bring the coursepack to class.

Date	Topic	Readings	Written assignments
Tuesday, January 18	Introduction		
Thursday, January 20	Conventions and Speech Acts	Sinnott-Armstrong and Fogelin, “The Web of Language,” p.17-32	
Tuesday, January 25	Conversational Rules	Sinnott-Armstrong and Fogelin, “The Web of Language,” p.32-48	Discussion Board A due
Thursday, January 27	Metaphor	Davidson, “What Metaphors Mean”	
Tuesday, February 1	The Answering Machine Paradox	Predelli, “I am not here now” <u>AND</u> Romdenh-Romluc, “Now the French are invading England!”	Discussion Board B due
Thursday, February 3	Demonstratives	Mout, “Indexicals and Demonstratives”	
Tuesday, February 8	Analytic vs. Synthetic Statements	Quine, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism” (through section IV)	
Thursday, February 10	Externalism about Meaning	Putnam, “Meaning and Reference” (up to “Indexicality and Rigidity” section)	Reading Response 1 due
Tuesday, February 15	Conversational Context	Stalnaker, “Assertion”	
Thursday, February 17	Conversational Context	Re-read Stalnaker	Discussion Board C due
Tuesday, February 22	Descriptions: Russellian View	Russell, “Descriptions”	
Thursday, February 24	Descriptions: Critique of Russell	Strawson, “On Referring”	

Tuesday, March 1	Referential vs. Attributive Descriptions	Donnellan, "Reference and Definite Descriptions"	Discussion Board D due
Thursday, March 3	Idioms and pronunciation	No assigned reading	
Tuesday, March 8	<i>Midterm Exam</i>		In-class exam

## Philosophy of Language Syllabus – Second half

All readings are from the coursepack. *Always* bring the coursepack to class.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Readings</b>	<b>Written assignments</b>
Thursday, March 10	Vagueness	Merricks, "Varieties of Vagueness"	
March 14-18	NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK		
Tuesday, March 22	Proper Names	Kripke, selections from Lecture I	
Thursday, March 24	Proper Names	Kripke, selections from Lecture II	Reading Response 2 due
Tuesday, March 29	Animal Language	Savage-Rumbaugh et al., "The Capacity of Animals to Acquire Language"	
Thursday, March 31	Animal Language	TBA	
Tuesday, April 5	Translation	Martinich, "Interpretation and Translation"; <u>AND</u> Crumley, "Inside the Chinese Room"	Discussion Board E due
Thursday, April 7	Subjective Experience	Nagel, "What is it like to be a bat?"	

Tuesday, April 12	Indexical Belief	Perry, "The Problem of the Essential Indexical"	Reading Response 3 due
Thursday, April 14	Solitary Language	Bar-On, "On the Possibility of a Solitary Language"	
Tuesday, April 19	Malapropisms	Davidson, "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs"	Discussion Board F due
Thursday, April 21	Malapropisms	Talmage, "Davidson and Humpty Dumpty"	
Tuesday, April 26	TBA	TBA	Discussion Board G due
Thursday, April 28	Course Wrap-Up		

The final exam will take place during the regular examination period in early May.