

Goals of the class

The goals for the course

Students taking this course will become familiar with problems of philosophy that meet the following criteria. First, studying them gives insight into questions about how to live and our place in the universe. Second, the written material is exceptionally good. Third, the materials and questions are representative of the discipline of philosophy. This last point means that this course serves as an introduction to the discipline of academic philosophy. The first two points mean that the course should be valuable even to those who will pursue other academic interests.

The course emphasizes arguments and writing. Students who successfully complete this course will learn how to construct arguments, how to interpret analytical writing, how to raise objections to arguments, and how to write extended analytical essays of their own.¹

Critical thinking as a goal for college

“With all the controversy over the college curriculum, it is impressive to find faculty members agreeing almost unanimously that teaching students to think critically is the principal aim of undergraduate education. ... The ability to think critically—to ask pertinent questions, recognize and define problems, identify the arguments on all sides of an issue, search for and use relevant data, and arrive in the end at carefully reasoned judgments—is the indispensable means of making effective use of information and knowledge. ... investigators have found that many entering freshmen arrive at college in a condition of ‘ignorant certainty,’ believing that most or all problems have definite answers, that ignorance may keep them from knowing

¹ <http://carneades.pomona.edu/2010-PoP/>

the answer, but that the truth can be found by consulting the right expert. During the college years, most students do make significant progress (from 'ignorant certainty' to 'intelligent confusion'), but large majorities remain in a naive relativist state, persuaded that many problems have no single correct answer and that none of the possible answers is necessarily better than the others. Only a small minority of seniors emerge convinced that ill-structured problems are susceptible to reasoned arguments based on evidence and that some are sounder than others."²

² Derek Bok, *Our Underachieving Colleges*, (Princeton University Press, 2006), pp. 109, 114.