

PL 302: EXISTENTIALISM - COURSE SYLLABUS  
(Spring, 2022; MW 2:00-3:20pm)

**Professor: Dr. Daniel Coyle**

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**Office Hours:**

M 12:20-12:35pm; 1:30-2:30pm

T 3:20-3:35pm

W 12:20-12:35pm; 1:30-2:30pm

Th 3:20-3:35pm

(\* + M-Th when you see me\*)

& by appointment

**REQUIRED TEXTS:**

Kaufmann - *Existentialism: From Dostoevsky to Sartre* (ISBN: 0452009308)

Nietzsche - *Portable Nietzsche* (ISBN: 0140150625)

Inwood - *Heidegger: A Very Short Introduction* (ISBN: 0198828667)

Course PDFs, \*Handouts,\* and materials @ moodle.com

**OPTIONAL TEXTS:**

Solomon & Higgins - *What Nietzsche Really Said* (ISBN: 0805210946)

**COURSE CONTENT:**

This course will introduce students to the major philosophers and philosophical themes within the movement of “existentialism.” Rather than engage in a sweeping survey of existential philosophy and literature, we will focus more than three quarters of the semester on three key figures: 1) the Danish, and unorthodoxly Christian thinker Søren Kierkegaard; 2) the “European,” and complexly “anti-Christian” philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche; and 3) the German, modern philosopher of *Dasein* [“being (t)here”] Martin Heidegger. These three thinkers are distinguished from other existentialists by their deep and broad understanding of the history of Western ideas—especially those of the ancient Greeks. They inquire into the nature of human existence through such questions as: What (if anything) does it mean to exist? How is existence related to essence? What has theology done to/for us? Where (if anywhere) is human existence going? How are we to live—and die? Their answers are profound and difficult—which suggests the rationale for restricting our focus to these three: if we can understand these thinkers, other (perhaps more popular) existentialists will not be a problem. In the remaining time, we will examine a few of the more important pieces of existential literature. Students should be aware that this course will be conducted as an undergraduate seminar, insofar as this is possible, and that film will be used to catalyze class discussion and the transmission of existential experience.

**CATALOG DESCRIPTION:**

An examination of major issues and problems arising from the existentialist tradition in philosophy through a treatment of one or two representative figures. Prerequisite: one previous course in PL (except PL 241) or consent.

This course fulfills the Writing Reinforcement (WR) requirement for philosophy majors.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES (LO):

Upon successfully completing the course, students will be able to:

### General Student Learning Outcomes

1. Explain the historical development of philosophical thought in the period.
2. Identify, accurately describe, and rationally critique some of the basic arguments of the philosophers of the period as these are set out in some primary texts or selected readings from primary texts.
3. Write expository or comparative analyses of the main philosophical themes as they are differently developed by the various thinkers studied in the course.
4. Argue soundly a philosophical position.

### Writing Reinforcement (WR) Learning Outcomes

Students will be able to:

1. Address specific purposes, contexts, and audiences
2. Develop ideas to meet the demands of the rhetorical situation
3. Utilize appropriate genre and disciplinary conventions (i.e., organization, content, presentation, style)
4. Identify sources suitable to the academic discipline of philosophy
5. Employ syntax and mechanics standard to the disciplinary practice of philosophy
6. Demonstrate the ethics of academic writing

These six Goals for Writing Reinforcement course participants (GWR) are addressed in specific assignments outlined in the following syllabus.

## SCHEDULE

We will follow a *provisional itinerary* of assigned texts to be read before each class. Students are responsible for all readings listed on the itinerary *unless otherwise noted* in class. Additional readings or discussion topics not on the itinerary may be announced in class. You may be asked to write a brief *summary-critique* of a specific reading, which may factor as a component of your *\*participation\** grade (see below).

## DISCUSSIONS

Students are expected to participate in all class discussions, both *in the classroom* and online (in the Moodle discussion forums) – guidelines, discussion formats, and the *\*attendance/participation\** (A&P) grading plan follow below.

## In-Class

Students are expected to *be prepared* for each class (having read carefully the assigned materials) and to be

*present* as active participants in class discussions. If you are not able to be prepared, let me know *before* class, and I will not call on you that day. However, if you are unprepared more than twice, A&P point reduction applies\*. If you are physically in class but *not present*, e.g., absorbed in social-media A&P point reduction applies [*\*see attendance/participation\* (A&P) below*].

### **Online Written Discussions (Moodle forums for textual engagement) [WR]:**

**Weekly Text Critique (WTC):** Post a written one-page **Summary-Critique** to the Moodle **WTC** forum *each week*. These critiques need to be *textual* and *timely*, well-crafted, and between 250-400 words. See *Summary Critique* PDF for assignment details.

(Students are expected to post *one critique per week* for ten weeks. The forum will remain open through the thirteenth week, which thus allows for extra credit *if* you do not achieve ten perfect scores. Remember to *title* all posts according to the reading/chapter/topic/text you choose. And remember to always reference the *author date* and *page numbers* [(e.g., Jullien 1995, 93)], or if referencing an ancient or accepted *Classic*, reference the *passage number* (e.g., *Genesis* 1:23 or *Laozi* 36)

**Special Topics Meditations** forum (STM): - From time to time, I will raise **specific topical questions** and ask you to post a single *meditation-response* to the **Special Topics Meditation Forum** on moodle. These single topic activities need to be thoughtful, timely, and substantive. Special topics forums will stay open for a limited time (usually about 1 week – counts as “Participation” in *A&P*).

Your grade on these textual engagements depends on regular activity throughout the term—please give them appropriate priority.

**Post thresholds** (to encourage *topical*, thoughtful, timely, and substantive posts): If you reach Moodle posting limits and still have more to say on a topic or text, you can post additional thoughts in the *Informal Discussions* or *Lecture Spillover Discussions* Forums, note, however, that these (the **Informal and Lecture Spillover Discussions**) forums are *not graded*, however, participation in this open forum is noted.

**Open Discussions:** If you would like to discuss topics outside the immediate purview of our texts, post your questions or comments to the *Informal Discussion* area. Here you may question (or even rant about) almost anything, as long as you are polite and somehow link it to our class.

Class participation is most important to intellectual development, for as Plato tells us, *dialectic* or “cross-conversation” is the very method of *philosophia*. Participation includes regular thoughtful contributions to class discussions.

The following *Guidelines for Class Discussion* are borrowed and adapted from Kirk Hanson of Stanford University School of Business.

- (1) Are the points made substantive, relevant to the discussion? Are they linked to the comments of others?
- (2) Is the participant a good listener? Do comments show the participant has been listening?
- (3) Do comments show evidence of analysis of the readings or issue at hand?
- (4) Do comments add to our understanding of the texts or issues at hand?
- (5) Does the participant distinguish among different kinds of data (i.e., facts, opinions, beliefs, etc.)?
- (6) Is there a willingness to test new ideas or are all comments “safe” (e.g., repetition of case facts without analysis and conclusions)?
- (7) Is the participant willing to interact with other class members?
- (8) Do comments clarify and highlight the important aspects of earlier comments and lead to the clearer statement of the concepts being covered?
- (9) Has the participant attempted to bring other readings, both from the text and from other sources, to bear on the cases under consideration?
- (10) Do the comments show awareness of the philosophical dimensions of the problem at hand and do these comments fit into a consistent, coherent philosophical framework?

These *Guidelines* apply in the online realm as well.

When posting written discussions online please show common courtesy toward your

classmates (think before you post): use polite language and respect alternative points of view. The purpose of philosophy discussion is not to rave, but to *express yourself coherently* and back up your opinions (and interpretations) with *reasoned arguments*. Keep your *weekly text queries & responses* on topic. Non-relevant posts in this area will be deleted (or moved to a non-graded area), with a reason why sent to the author.

If you would like to discuss topics outside the immediate purview of our texts, post your questions or comments to the *Informal Discussion* area. Here you may question (or even rant about) almost anything, as long as you are polite and somehow link it to our class.

## QUIZZES AND EXAMS

There will be five “**pop quizzes**” and three scheduled **exams**. You may be quizzed on *any* previously assigned readings. Exams may contain material covered in any of your readings and class discussions. I may also assign homework (such as writing assignments or research projects) that will supplement your quiz and exam scores. Exams will consist of a series of short-answer questions (true-false, multiple choice, or fill-in-the-blank) followed by a few *philosophical* short-essay questions. We will have a review session before each announced exam. (If unforeseen circumstances force us to change a scheduled exam, I will announce the new date in class and on Moodle.)

## CRITICAL RESEARCH PAPER [WR]

The course will culminate in a *critical research paper* that is argumentative in nature (– you will argue *for* or *against* a position, an idea, a tradition, an interpretation, or methodology). Your research should creatively contribute to advancing our understanding. Partial details of the paper format and requirements are outlined below, additional information will be provided as we become more familiar with the texts. Students will present a brief summary of their research at the end of the semester. The point of the presentation is to encourage and provoke class discussion. I expect you to *take a stand, make an argument, and bring up original questions*. (failure to present research will result in a \*participation\* deduction).

*Research requirements:* \*at least\* two primary texts & one full-text article from instructor or one approved from the BSC Library Databases (e.g. “Jstor,” “Academic Search Premier,” “Philosopher’s Index” etc.), see <http://library.bsc.edu/tools/online.htm>

\*\*The BSC library (<http://library.bsc.edu>) provides access to academic books, articles, and numerous online resources. Librarians are available to help you identify, locate and evaluate the information you need to complete your assignments. Please make use of their services!\*\*

## GRADES

Your final grade will be determined by a straight average according to the following plan:

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Your final grade will be determined by a straight average according to the following plan:

15% - \*attendance/participation\* (3% or 30 points *deducted* per missed session after 2 free passes – 150 points)

10% - *weekly text queries & responses* in Moodle discussion area (>1 per week, 100 points)

10% - *special topics meditations* in Moodle discussion area (periodic, 100 points)

10% - four pop quizzes (4 x 25 → 100 points)

20% - two (announced) Exams (2 x 100 → 200 points)

35% - Research Paper

(including:

1. Proposal with Bibliography – 2.5% (= 25 points)

2. Thesis Paragraph with *Updated Annotated Bibliography* – 2.5% (= 25 points),

3. Draft – 5% (= 50 points)

4. Peer Critique – 5% (= 50 points)

5. Final Draft - 20% (= 200 points)

(Research Paper → 350 points)

(100% = 1000 total points)

*Missed work:* There will be no make-up exams or quizzes. Un-excused missed exams will receive a “zero.” *Late written work will be docked 15% per day* (- material turned in after due date/time is “late” [if something is due “in class,” then any time after the beginning of class on the stated due date is late]). In *documented cases* of health issues (verified by a physician, not a nurse, on an official letterhead), family emergencies, jury duty, etc. you may substitute a *cumulative - comprehensive* timed online exam for one missed exam (NOTE: this benefaction may only be invoked once). (\*if you have a *legitimate excuse*, I will try to accommodate your situation given that you contact me immediately.\*)

Grade discrepancies must be reported within one week of posted grades.

ATTENDANCE, COURTESY, PREREQUISITES, AND SUCCESS IN THIS COURSE:

*Attendance* will be taken intermittently (3% or 30 points will be *deducted* per missed session after 2 free pass). Students who regularly miss class discussions and quizzes will almost surely miss assignments, group work, and do poorly on exams. *If your attendance & participation points fall to zero, you automatically fail the course.* Please consult the College’s official policy regarding withdrawals. Unless you have permission from the dean, I do not give “Incompletes.”

*Courtesy and Tardiness:* Please show common courtesy toward the class: turn off all mobile devices during class. Habitual tardiness or policy abuse will be *penalized* through the “attendance/participation” grade component listed above -- after being tardy two times, infractions will be treated as an absence.

*Prerequisites:* technically, there are no prerequisites for this course, however, you must be able to express yourself in writing. If you are uncomfortable writing short essays, you should postpone this course until you have had more writing practice.

The key to doing well in this class is careful, thoughtful, and thorough *reading*. We will be studying primary texts that can be tedious, complicated, and very difficult (you will probably need to read most texts more than once). Your job is to *engage* the texts and reflect them upon your own lives. (Hint: make reflective and interrogative notes in your books or in your weekly text critiques.) If you feel uncomfortable or confused about anything in the course, please do not hesitate to schedule an appointment with me. Finally, remember always to bring your texts to class.

### **BSC Resources for Writers and Readers**

Located in Humanities 102, the BSC Writing Center offers in-person and virtual peer-to-peer tutoring and quiet, supportive lab space to work on writing assignments. The Center's tutors are students from a wide variety of majors on campus and have the range to address student writing needs with discipline specificity. Supervised and assisted by BSC Writing Center directors, the tutors provide one-on-one consultations for any student at any point in the writing process. The BSC Writing Center is open Sunday-Thursday 4pm-8pm. To ensure a full 30-minute tutorial time slot, students are encouraged to be mindful of assignment-heavy weeks, keep track of due dates, and visit the Writing Center at their earliest availability during open hours. Please contact Dr. MK Foster or Professor Laura Tolbert ([writingcenter@bsc.edu](mailto:writingcenter@bsc.edu)) with any questions or requests for virtual appointments.

### **Academic Accessibility and Accommodations**

Students with a disability that qualify under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and/or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and require accommodations should be registered with BSC's Accessibility Office. If you are registered for academic accommodations, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible to discuss any accommodations that may be necessary. During this discussion you are not expected to disclose any details concerning your disability though you may do so at your discretion. If you have a disability but have not yet registered, please contact Dr. Sandra Foster, Assistant Director of Accessibility Services and Resources, at 205-226-7909 or [smfoster@bsc.edu](mailto:smfoster@bsc.edu), or visit Olin 210. Keep in mind that no accommodation will be made unless and until the instructor receives official notification from the College.

### **Title IX**

Birmingham-Southern College is committed to the creation and maintenance of a safe learning environment for students and the campus community. The College forbids any type of sexual or gender-based misconduct among its students, faculty, and staff. The College encourages all members of the academic community to report suspected sexual and gender-based misconduct to the appropriate authorities so that it can be investigated, remedied, and eliminated. BSC forbids retaliation against any person who has opposed, reported, or participated in an investigation concerning sexual or gender-based misconduct. See the BSC Title IX website ([www.bsc.edu/titleix](http://www.bsc.edu/titleix)) for more information, including an online report form. If you or a peer have experienced such misconduct, there are faculty and staff members who are trained in supporting students by answering questions and helping them navigate this process. The list of advocates can be found along with other helpful resources on the Title IX website.

### **HONOR CODE**

Finally, students of course are expected to abide by the Honor Code in regard to all assignments. Peer discussions and group study are encouraged. However, graded work must be your own. Blatant violations of the honor code will result in your failing this class.

### **Recommended Films:**

*Seventh Seal* (1957) - Dir. Ingmar Bergman

*La Jetée* (1962) Dir. Chris Marker

*Steppenwolf* (1974) - Dir. Fred Haines

*Vernon, Florida* (1981) Dir. Errol Morris

**PL 302 Existentialism** *\*Provisional Itinerary\** (M,W – 11:00 updated June. 23, 2021)

Week/Date	Topics & Texts (to be read before each class)	Assignments Due
<b>1:</b>  Feb. 2	INTRODUCTION	Print PDF Readings from Moodle *BEGIN “WEEKLY TEXT CRITIQUES” (WTC) ON MOODLE* <i>REVIEW SYLLABUS DISCUSSION OF WTC FOR INITIAL RESEARCH METHODOLOGY &amp; DOCUMENTATION (WR)</i>
<b>2:</b> 7  9	Kaufmann, 11-51; film TBA  Dostoevsky <i>Notes from Underground</i> , I-VI (Kaufmann, pp. 52-67)	* POST TO SPECIAL TOPICS MEDITATIONS FORUM (STM) BEFORE SUNDAY MIDNIGHT (2/6) *
<b>3:</b> 14  16	Dostoevsky <i>Notes from Underground</i> , VII-XI (Kaufmann, pp. 67-82)  Kierkegaard (Kaufmann, pp. 83-94); TBA	*CONTINUE “WEEKLY TEXT CRITIQUES” (WTC) ON MOODLE*
<b>4:</b> 21  23	Kierkegaard (Kaufmann, pp. 94-120)  Review, *EXAM 1*	*MEDITATION DUE BEFORE SUNDAY MIDNIGHT*  *CONTINUE WTC ON MOODLE*
<b>5:</b> 28  Mar. 2	Nietzsche - <i>Portable Nietzsche</i> , pp. 1-19, 29-30  Nietzsche - <i>Portable Nietzsche</i> , pp. 48-50; <i>PDF</i> → Birth of Tragedy [BT] Kaufmann <i>Existentialism</i> , 121-125	*CONTINUE WTC ON MOODLE*
<b>6:</b> 7  9	Nietzsche - <i>Portable Nietzsche</i> , pp. 51-73; <i>PDF</i> → <i>Human, All Too Human</i> [HA, MOM, WS]  Nietzsche - <i>Portable Nietzsche</i> , pp. 73-75 TBA	*CONTINUE WTC ON MOODLE*  <i>[NOTE WE WILL REVIEW INITIAL AND ESSENTIAL WR WTC ELEMENTS IN PREPARATION FOR WEEK 9 (WR)]</i>
<b>7:</b> 14  16	Nietzsche - <i>Portable Nietzsche</i> , pp. 76-92; <i>PDF</i> → <i>Dawn</i> [D]  Nietzsche - <i>Portable Nietzsche</i> , pp. 92-102; <i>PDF</i> → <i>Gay Science</i> [GS]	*CONTINUE “WEEKLY TEXT CRITIQUES” (WTC) ON MOODLE*
<b>8:</b> 21 23	*** Spring Vacation (3/21 - 3/29) - ENJOY! AND READ ***	Film

\*This Itinerary may be changed in class at anytime.

9:	28  30	Nietzsche - <i>Portable Nietzsche</i> 121 ff. [= <i>Zarathustra (Z)</i> ] <Convalescent*  TBA	*Start <i>thinking</i> about a research topic, <i>speak</i> with a reference librarian to help you <i>discover-produce</i> an argument (esp. * <i>discuss</i> Research Sources,* <i>explore</i> library databases,* <i>identify</i> two primary texts & two full-text articles [We will continue to discuss RESEARCH METHODOLOGY & DOCUMENTATION mentioned in the "Critical Research Paper section of the Syllabus (WR)]  Turn in Library Discovery sheet **
10:	Apr. 4  6	<i>PDF</i> → <i>Beyond Good and Evil [BGE]</i> ; Nietzsche - <i>Portable Nietzsche</i> 440-442; 443-446 Nietzsche - <i>Portable Nietzsche</i> 454-459; 463-473 [= <i>Twilight of the Idols (TI)</i> ]	* <b>Research Proposal</b> [state: "I propose to research ____"] with provisional Bibliography (incl. 5 possible sources) -- due on Moodle before class (WR)
11:	11  13	Nietzsche - <i>Portable Nietzsche</i> 473-479 (TI), 479-484 (TI) 485-546 (TI) 546-556 (TI) Nietzsche - <i>Portable Nietzsche</i> 556-563 (TI); Review  TBA	* <b>Thesis Paragraph</b> ("I will argue __ because __") w/ Updated <b>Annotated Bibliography</b> (due on moodle before Friday night 11:55pm)* (WR)
12:	18  20	HEIDEGGER (KAUFMANN, pp. 233-236, 237-241, 242-244)  Heidegger (Kaufmann, pp. 245-249, 250-257)	*CONTINUE WTC ON MOODLE*
13:	25  27	Heidegger (Kaufmann, pp. 257-264, 265-269, 270-274)  Heidegger (Kaufmann, pp. 257-279)	<b>**First Draft Due</b> (5-pages bring 3 copies)** (WR)  * <b>Peer Critiques Due*</b> (WR)  *MEDITATION DUE BEFORE SUNDAY MIDNIGHT*
14:	May 2  4	Discuss Research  Camus (Kaufmann, pp. 375-378)	PRESENT & DISCUSS RESEARCH    *END WEEKLY TEXT CRITIQUES ON MOODLE (SUN. MIDNIGHT, 5/8) *MEDITATION DUE BEFORE SUNDAY MIDNIGHT*
15:	9	Discuss Research (*Last day of classes, Mon. May 9*) * READING DAYS Tues. 5/10; Sat. 5/14; Sun. 5/15   *Final Examination (Thursday, May 12, before 4pm)*  (Seniors grades due Wed. May 18, 9am)	* <b>Research Paper</b> (10-page Final Draft) *Research Paper due by Tues. 5/10, before midnight. * (WR)