

SYLLABUS FOR PHIL 109 QUEST II SUSTAINABILITY
ROBERT WAGONER
PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT

Course Description

Since the emergence of Philosophy (in the West) in ancient Greece, philosophers have sought to formulate and address fundamental questions about – to name just a few – God, Nature, the Human Being, Knowledge, Free Will, and Morality. Since many of these questions – then as now – cannot be adequately answered by appeals to, for example, scientific knowledge, philosophers have long assumed that intellectual progress can be achieved by developing rational accounts and arguments. Philosophers, for example, in allowing that we cannot, for example, *see* God, have nonetheless thought that it might be possible to show that God exists through argument. In this way, and on many topics, philosophers have taken ARGUMENT as their primary tool of inquiry. The history of philosophy is, among other things, the history of rational argumentation.

We will devote our attention in this course to this history. We will study a number of famous (some famously good, some famously bad) arguments. We will study, in particular, (i) arguments for and against the existence of God, (ii) arguments for and against the rationality of belief in God, (iii) arguments for and against the idea that human beings are free in the sense that is required for moral responsibility, (iv) arguments for and against the idea that human beings, in addition to having a material body, also have an immaterial component (e.g., a soul, or mind), (v) arguments for and against the idea that Morality is something more than simply what our culture tells us. In our study of all of these arguments, we will be concerned to determine not only what makes for an argument but also what makes for a good or bad argument. We will consider the various ways in which a claim, an idea, a fact, or any evidence can be brought to bear either for or against a particular conclusion.

The SIGNATURE QUESTION for our course is “How do people understand and create a more sustainable world?” We will begin the course with a careful study of the emergence of the concept of SUSTAINABILITY and a discussion of its meanings and interpretations. As with other topics that have been the focus of philosophers’ attention, the issues surrounding the concept of SUSTAINABILITY are often very complex. This complexity makes a philosophical approach – i.e., one that focuses on Argument – suitable, since such an approach can help us to identify the morally significant factors that are in play. In addition, our study of some important philosophical arguments will enable us to look carefully and critically at a number of arguments related to SUSTAINABILITY. To that end, we will study (vi) arguments for and against the idea that affluent nations have an obligation to aid the poor of un- or underdeveloped states, (vii) arguments for and against the idea that SUSTAINABILITY is a realistic objective, (viii) arguments for and against the idea that (specifically) western values are compatible with sustainability, (ix) arguments for and against the idea that cities are sustainable, and (x) arguments for and against the idea that achieving or approaching sustainability requires lowering the standard of living.

Liberal Education

Liberal Education is an approach to learning that empowers individuals and prepares them to deal with complexity, diversity, and change. It provides students with broad knowledge of the wider world (e.g. science, culture, and society) as well as in-depth study in a specific area of interest. A liberal education helps students develop a sense of social responsibility, as well as strong and transferable intellectual and practical skills such as communication, analytical and problem-solving skills, and a demonstrated ability to apply knowledge and skills in real-world settings. (AAC&U; http://www.aacu.org/leap/What_is_liberal_education.cfm)

This Quest II course will contribute to your liberal education at UW Oshkosh in a number of ways. First, our study of important philosophical arguments and positions will provide an opportunity for broadening your understanding (and perhaps your perspective) about the topics we will cover. Second, our careful study of these arguments and positions will provide an opportunity for developing the analytic skills that are at the core of a liberal education. Third, our careful study of SUSTAINABILITY in terms of its theoretical and practical implications will provide you with a number of new ways of thinking about, and critically approaching, your own life decisions and habits. Finally, our emphasis throughout the class on the nature of ETHICAL REASONING will help you to develop and articulate your own ethical standpoint and to begin thinking about your role as a socially responsible agent.

University Studies Program (USP)

The University Studies Program (USP) is your gateway to a 21st century college education at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh. This Quest II course is the second in a series of courses that introduce you to the campus and all it has to offer, the vibrant Oshkosh community, and the challenges and opportunities of academic life as you pursue a liberal education.

The Quest classes are designed to provide a solid foundation for the rest of your education here, no matter which major you choose. Your USP courses will also provide the opportunity for you to Explore and Connect as you begin your college education. For further information about the unique general education at UW Oshkosh, visit the University Studies Program website **[Add When Available]**

Signature Questions

In Quest courses, you'll be exposed to three "Signature Questions" that are central to a UW Oshkosh education:

- How do people understand and engage in community life?
- How do people understand and create a more sustainable world?
- How do people understand and bridge cultural differences?

Our focus in this course will be the second question: How do people understand and create a more sustainable world? We will, however, spend some time getting familiar with all three of the signature questions that you will encounter in your Quest courses.

Sustainability

“Knowledge of sustainability and its applications is the ability to understand local and global earth systems; the qualities of ecological integrity and the means to restore and preserve it; and the interconnection of ecological integrity, social justice, and economic well-being.” (UW Oshkosh Essential Learning Outcomes)

Our goal in this Quest 2 course will be to begin to appreciate the complexity of the issue of sustainability. We will begin by learning some basics, including the three overlapping domains that are central to the concept of sustainability: the environment, society, and the economy. Sustainability is a complex issue, as we will soon see, and there are no simple or easy answers to the problems that are associated with it. Our goal in this course is to see this complexity and to develop the tools that are needed to navigate it. Specifically, by developing our abilities to identify and then evaluate the arguments, we will be able to sort through the complexity in a way that promotes our understanding of these issues.

Ethical Reasoning

An important component of Quest II is its emphasis on ETHICAL REASONING. People engage in *reasoning* in a number of ways. We are capable of theoretical reasoning – reasoning about, for instance, the way a system of ideas or claims is connected. We are capable of *practical reasoning* – reasoning about what to do and how to do it. ETHICAL REASONING is a form of reasoning we all do when we ask questions like “Should I do this?” “Is it right to do that?” “Is this policy good?” “Am I doing what I should to be a good person?” “What should a good person do?” Thus, ETHICAL REASONING is, broadly, reasoning that incorporates our beliefs about values (good, bad). Ethical Reasoning typically reaches a conclusion of the form “X is right/wrong” or “I should do X/not do X”.

In this course, we will be studying ETHICAL REASONING from a variety of standpoints. We will study ETHICAL REASONING on the ground (so to speak) by asking ourselves what we take to be the right or wrong way of doing things. This will become especially clear in our study of SUSTAINABILITY. We will also consider ETHICAL REASONING from broader perspective when we consider the implications for (the very possibility of) ETHICAL REASONING that arise from various philosophical debates (about, for example, whether we have free will, or whether God exists).

Learning Outcomes and Core Abilities

Students can expect to leave this course with the ability to:

1. Identify and describe the components of philosophical arguments.
2. Assess the quality of arguments
3. Identify and explain some famous and influential philosophical arguments.
4. Identify and explain some challenges these arguments face.
5. Think creatively and critically about evidence – e.g., about whether *this* is or is not evidence for *that*.

6. Think creatively and critically about ethical issues, especially in the evaluation of theories or arguments.
7. Identify core assumptions or commitments that distinguish one theory or argument from another.
8. Describe in detail some of the issues embraced by the term 'SUSTAINABILITY'
9. State and explain a definition of SUSTAINABILITY.
10. Identify and explain the significance of some human practices (e.g., manufacturing, aiding undeveloped countries, living in cities) to the SIGNATURE QUESTION.
11. Articulate and explain what ETHICAL REASONING is.
12. Analyze examples of ETHICAL REASONING in terms of their components (e.g., beliefs about value, non-value beliefs, empirical claims).
13. Identify and Explain some of the ways in which (and cases in which) ETHICAL REASONING is indispensable for understanding issues embraced by SUSTAINABILITY.

In Addition to these abilities, students can expect

14. To be able to describe the value of a liberal education.
15. To be familiar with the expectations of a college-level education, the UW Oshkosh **Essential Learning Outcomes**, and the University Studies Program.
16. To be familiar with ePortfolio

Early Alert

After the third week of class, you will receive a grade for your overall progress in this course and each of the courses you are taking in your first semester. This process is called "Early Alert." You will receive this information in an email during the 5th week of classes. Early Alert is designed to help you evaluate your study skills and your class attendance so that you know if you are on the right track. If you need to make some changes, there are resources available to support your academic success. These Early Alert grades are not permanent and will not appear on your transcript.

In this course, the early alert grade will be determined the first writing assignment (due Week 2), the first (Short) Essay Exam (Week 3), and any in class assignments we do during the first few weeks.

Learning Communities

This class is composed of two distinct learning communities (25 students each). Each of these communities has both this course and another (writing or speaking) course together.

Academic Resources

In the University Studies Program, we want you to be successful. Please visit this resource page to read about all the campus services available to support your success. <http://www.uwosh.edu/home/resources>)

In this course, the bulk of our work will involve reading new and often difficult material and writing and presenting on new and challenging ideas. To be successful in this and

other courses at UW Oshkosh, it will be important to continually work to improve your writing, speaking, and reading skills. These will be addressed explicitly in this and other Quest courses, but there are a number of resources that are available to help you at any time. I have listed some of those here. You will also find these and other campus resources posted on D2L in the 'Resources' Document.

- **Center for Academic Resources:** The Center for Academic Resources (CAR) provides free, confidential tutoring for students in most undergraduate classes on campus. CAR is located in the Student Success Center, Suite 102. Check the Tutor List page on CAR's website (www.uwosh.edu/car) for a list of tutors. If your course is not listed, click on a link to request one, stop by SSC 102 or call 424-2290. To schedule a tutoring session, simply email the tutor, let him/her know what class you are seeking assistance in, and schedule a time to meet.
- **Writing Center:** The Writing Center employs specially trained students with a passion for helping their peers become better writers. The services it offers are beyond merely checking for grammar; instead, the Center strives to teach students the process of good writing. Appointments are free, confidential, and are at your convenience. For more information, email wcenter@uwosh.edu, view their website (<http://www.uwosh.edu/wcenter/>), visit them at SSC 102, or call 424-1152.
- **Reading Study Center:** The Reading Study Center is an all-university service whose mission is to facilitate the development of efficient college-level learning strategies in students of all abilities. The center offers strategies for improved textbook study, time management, note-taking, test preparation, and test-taking. For more information, email readingstudy@uwosh.edu, view the website (<http://www.uwosh.edu/readingstudycenter>), visit them in Nursing Ed Room 201, or call 424-1031.

Additional Resources

- **ME**
 - If you have questions or problems or concerns or just something you want to talk about, please feel welcome to come see me. I have regular office hours and am often available at many other times. I spend most of my office hours cleaning my office, which I hate doing, so please come by.

E-portfolio

As you move through your courses at UW Oshkosh, you will archive your learning in an ePortfolio. The ePortfolio can be found in D2L. The ePortfolio will help you keep track of papers, speeches, reports, projects, and other assignments in your Quest and Explore courses, so that you can see your progress and connect ideas across different classes. You can continue to use this portfolio in your major classes, so that you are ready for your Capstone course or experience as you near graduation. You can even use the ePortfolio after you graduate to show evidence of your learning to employers or graduate schools. In this course (and in all your USP courses), a specific assignment has been

designated to be uploaded to your ePortfolio. More details will follow in class. Your peer mentor can assist you with getting your UW Oshkosh ePortfolio started.

In this course we will be uploading the third writing assignment to ePortfolio. This paper will integrate our understanding of SUSTAINABILITY, ETHICAL REASONING, and Philosophical Argumentation.

Required Texts (Tentative)

Great Philosophical Arguments: An Introduction to Philosophy. Vaughn, L. (ed). Oxford University Press. 2012

Taking Sides: Clashing Views in Sustainability, Taylor, R. (ed)., McGraw Hill 2012

Course Schedule

Week 1	<p><u>Topics</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to the Course • Introduction to Philosophy • Introduction to Sustainability Signature Question • Introduction to Ethical Reasoning <p><u>Reading Assignments</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issue 1 in Taking Sides: Sustainability (pp. 2-17) 	<p><u>Assignments</u></p> <p>- A 1-1.5 page essay: Topic: Arguing about Sustainability.</p>
Week 2	<p><u>Topic</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arguing about God <i>a posteriori</i> <p><u>Reading Assignments</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Cosmological Argument (selections) in Vaughn (pp. 39-64) 	-
Week 3	<p><u>Topic</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arguing about God <i>a priori</i> <p><u>Reading Assignments</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Ontological Argument (selections) in Vaughn (pp.99-113) <hr/> <p>Discussion Day: God and Sustainability. Questions for Discussion/Writing?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What role, if any, does, should, or could the belief in a deity play in one’s attitudes towards the environment, nature, duties to future generations, society or anything else relevant to the concept of Sustainability? 	-

	<p>2. What attitudes or practices (especially related to the environment/sustainability) are suggested by the major religious traditions of the world (e.g., Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism)?</p>	
Week 4	<p>Topic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Problem of Evil <p>Reading Assignments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Argument from Evil (selections) in Vaughn (pp. 135-166) 	Day 1 of Week 4 – Short Essay Exam
Week 5	<p><u>Topic</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Rationality (and Morality) of the Belief in God’s Existence <p><u>Reading Assignments</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clifford’s <i>Ethics of Belief</i> James’ <i>The Will to Believe</i> <p>(These reading assignments will be available on D2L)</p> <hr/> <p>Discussion Day: Evil, Ethical Belief, and Sustainability</p> <p>Questions:</p> <p>1. How can the disagreement between Clifford and James about what it is <i>morally</i> acceptable to believe be applied to concerns about Sustainability?</p> <p>- Supplemental Reading (required): Issue 2 in Taking Sides (pp. 17-35 selections TBA).</p> <p>2. What do you take to be (either generally or in some specific case) the ethically appropriate response to the existence of evil in the world? How does this relate to environmental ‘evils’? To the evils of society?</p>	Short Paper Due – 1-2 Page Paper on Philosophical Argument and Evaluation
Week 6	<p><u>Topic</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainability and Religious Belief <p><u>Reading Assignments</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> TBA - 	-
Week 7	<p><u>Topic</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fundamental Issues & Ethical Reasoning: Am I a body, or do I have a body? <p><u>Reading Assignments</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chapter 4 (selections) in Vaughn (pp262-336) 	Essay Exam
Week 8	<p><u>Topic</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fundamental Issues & Ethical Reasoning: Am I free to choose what to do? <p><u>Reading Assignments</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chapter 5 (selections) in Vaughn 	Group Assignments. First Draft outline due. Group Schedule Due.
Week 9	<p><u>Topic</u></p>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fundamental Issues & Ethical Reasoning: Am I free to choose what to do? <u>Reading Assignments</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chapter 5 (selections) in Vaughn <hr/> Discussion Day: Free Will and Ethical Action Questions 1. If hard determinism is true (and we do not have free will), then what follows about our social policies, philosophical arguments, and so on about the environment, social justice, and in general sustainability? That is, are they pointless? Explain why or why not. 2. On which of the three positions on free will does it seem that human beings are more responsive to reasoning, and so to giving and receiving of ethical reasons?	
Week 10	<u>Topic</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fundamental Issues & Ethical Reasoning: Is Morality Relative to my culture? <u>Reading Assignments</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chapter 6 (selections) in Vaughn on the “Argument for Cultural Relativism (pp. 437-448) • Issue 3 in Taking Sides: “Are Western Values, Ethics, and Dominant Paradigms Compatible with Sustainability?” (pp. 36-63 (selections)) 	Due – Discussion Journals/Final Reflection
Week 11	<u>Topic</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainability, Ethics, and Aiding the Poor <u>Reading Assignments</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hardin <i>against</i> aiding the poor (Vaughn 608-619) • Singer <i>for</i> aiding the poor (630-637) 	Third Writing Assignment (SUSTAINABILITY Paper) Due Final Group Outline Due Group Handout Due
Week 12	Group Presentations – SUSTAINABILITY	
Week 13	Group Presentations – SUSTAINABILITY	
Week 14	Review & Exam	Essay Exam

Assignments and Assessments: There are 5 classes of assignments and assessments for this course. See below table for details.

In Class Assignments (at least 60 = ~8%)	
In – Class Assignments	At least 50 points
Individual Responses (in class)	At least 10 points
Written Work (180 points = ~ 23.5%)	
1 st Writing Assignment	30 points
2 nd Writing Assignment	50 points
3 rd Writing Assignment (SUSTAINABILITY, ETHICAL REASONING, Argument)	100 points
Exams (250 points = ~33%)	
1 st Essay Exam (short)	50 points
2 nd Essay Exam (mid-term)	100 points
3 rd Essay Exam (final)	100 points
Discussion Journals – SUSTAINABILITY Questions (90 points = ~12%)	
Journal Completion	30 points
Journal Review/Analysis	30 points
Journal Response Selection	30 points
Group Presentations - SUSTAINABILITY (180 = ~23.5%)	
Group Outline Draft	10 points
Group Outline Final	20 points
Group Handout Draft	10 points
Group Handout Final	20 points
Group Presentation	100 points
Individual Group Assessment	20 points

I. In-Class Assignments and Assessments

1. In-Class Assignments will include (among, perhaps, other things): (a) brief in-class quizzes over the reading assignments; (b) group quizzes/writing assignments that aid in understanding a concept, argument, or issue; (c) mini-presentations by groups and/or individuals. Most of our activities in class that involve writing or speaking will count toward the final grade.
2. At least once during the semester, you can expect to be called on to answer a question or explain a concept to the class. I typically begin class by calling on people to answer a few review questions, for example. You will receive credit for this when it happens.

II. Writing Assignments

1. The First Writing Assignment will be due in Week 2. The question/prompt will be (roughly): “Drawing on what we have learned about the concept of Sustainability, Philosophical Arguments, and Ethical Reasoning, choose two practices in which you, personally are engaged one of which you think is sustainable, and one of which you do not. In the paper, present the evidence (in

- the form of an argument) that supports your conclusions about these two practices.
2. The Second Writing Assignment will be due in Week 5. This will be a 1-1.5 page paper in which you will choose one of the argument we have discussed in class and (1) Identify and Explain the argument (e.g., what are the premises? What is the conclusion? What tacit premises/assumptions are there?) and (2) Evaluate the argument.
 3. The Third Writing Assignment is a longer paper (3-4 pages) due in the second half of the semester (Week 11). The broad topic of this paper is SUSTAINABILITY AND ETHICAL REASONING. I will supply a number of topics on which you may write. These topics will range from (1) Specific questions about a specific sustainability issue and its ethical dimensions (e.g., ‘heirloom design’ vs. planned obsolescence in manufactured goods) to (2) more general questions about broader ethical issues (or foundational issues) and their impact on or implications for sustainability (e.g., to what extent does our being – or not being – free and responsible (and rational) agents *require* that we behave in certain ways with respect to the environment or society?). This paper will be uploaded to your e-Portfolio.

III. Essay Exams

1. The First Essay Exam will be a short exam. You will answer 3-4 short essay questions. The purpose of this exam is to assess your basic comprehension of the concept of SUSTAINABILITY, of the basic features of philosophical arguments, of ETHICAL REASONING, and of the topics we cover in the first three weeks of the course. This exam will be held prior to the Early Alert Deadline.
2. The Second Essay Exam will serve the function of a traditional mid-term exam. This exam will consist of some mixture of short and long essay questions (and perhaps some short answer questions as well).
3. The Third Essay Exam will be a final exam and will be similar in format to the second essay exam. On this exam, you will be asked to answer a variety of questions that will cover the entirety of the course material. NB. Though the exam will be cumulative in this regard, it will nonetheless focus more heavily on (1) new material since the mid-term exam and (2) issues that have remained the focus of our attention throughout the course (e.g., the analysis and critique of philosophical arguments, issues of sustainability, issues associated with ethical reasoning).

IV. Discussion Journals/Reflections

1. On three occasions during the semester, we will devote an hour of class time to discuss issues that connect the themes of our course (i.e., Argument, Ethical Reasoning, Sustainability, and the variety of topics we cover (e.g., God, Freedom, the Self). These “Discussion days” are set aside in the schedule above. For each discussion day, you will be asked to prepare by composing answers to the discussion questions. These should be roughly .5 to 1 page responses to each question. These will be uploaded at the appropriate time to D2L and stored.

2. After our third ‘Discussion Day’, you will be asked to look back at your discussion responses and compose a short (1 page) analysis/reaction to your own views as they have changed, developed, shifted, etc. throughout the semester. When you submit the final review, you will select one of your 6 answers to be graded.
 - a. Summary (Submit Review + One Discussion Question Response for Grading on Week 10.

V. Group Presentations

During the second half of the semester, I will divide the class into 10 groups of 5 students each for group presentations. These presentations will have three aspects: (1) Philosophical Argument; (2) SUSTAINABILITY; and (3) ETHICAL REASONING. Each group will be given a topic, with an assigned reading (from Taking Sides: Sustainability), and will be responsible for the following:

1. A DRAFT outline of the main argument of the paper (Due Friday of Week 8).
2. A Schedule (Signed by all members of the group) of suitable meeting times. (Due Friday of Week 8).
3. A Final Outline of the Main Argument (Due Week 10)
4. A handout for the rest of the class (Draft Due Monday of Week 11. Final Version Due Friday of Week 11).
5. A 10-15 Minute Group Presentation in Class (Weeks 12-13).
6. A final (1/2-1 page) self-assessment of the group’s presentation. (Week 13)

Topics for Group Presentations (Tentative)

- Is SUSTAINABILITY Practical for Emerging Economies?
 - Topic 1 = Yes
 - Topic 2 = No
- Is Limiting Consumption Rather Than Limiting Population the Key to SUSTAINABILITY?
 - Topic 3 = Yes
 - Topic 4 = No
- Are Social Concerns Taken Seriously in the “Triple Bottom Line” of SUSTAINABILITY?
 - Topic 5 = Yes
 - Topic 6 = No
- Are Cities SUSTAINABLE?
 - Topic 7 = Yes
 - Topic 8 = No
- Is Technological Innovation the Main Driver for Achieving SUSTAINABILITY?
 - Topic 9 = Yes
 - Topic 10 = No