

**ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY**  
**PHI 363: RACE, GENDER, AND THE EPISTEMOLOGIES OF IGNORANCE**  
Department of Philosophy  
Illinois State University  
Spring 2014

Dr. Alison Bailey  
Office: 233 Rachel Cooper Hall  
[baileya@ilstu.edu](mailto:baileya@ilstu.edu)

Office hours: MW 4:15-4:45pm  
Tues 11-2, by appointment  
Phone: 309.438.5617

**I. COURSE DESCRIPTION and OBJECTIVES:**

Epistemology is the branch of philosophy that deals with questions concerning the nature, scope, and sources of knowledge. Historically, philosophers have had lots to say about how we come to know things, but relatively little to say about structural ignorance and its effects on knowledge production, epistemic credibility, and social injustice.

The emerging field of epistemologies of ignorance examines the complex phenomenon of ignorance, which has as its aim identifying the different expressions that ignorance takes, examining how they are produced and sustained and what role they play in knowledge practices.

PHI 363 explores meanings of ignorance from both a feminist and anti-racist perspectives. We will analyze the ways in which ignorance, like knowledge, has its own structures, parameters, and practices. Rather than approaching ignorance as simply a “lack of knowledge” or a state of not-knowing, we will explore ways in which ignorance is epistemic, political, and nuanced. In particular, we will examine two specific dynamics of ignorance: willful ignorance (a carefully constructed oblivion that helps to maintain dominance or privilege) and strategic ignorance (a carefully structured and nuanced refusal to internalize oppression).

**Central Course Questions:**

- Are the race and gender of the knower epistemologically significant? If so, then what can we know from where we stand? What can't we know?

- What does it mean to conceptualize ignorance as an epistemological political project rather than as a simple absence or lack of knowledge?
- How are both strategic and willful ignorance practiced, taught, and encoded?
- How do we theorize ignorance in ways that account for the racial, sexual, and gendered identities of the knower?
- How do we learn to remember the histories, memories, and events that we have been taught to forget or ignore?
- What are some strategies for learning to see our own ignorance, and to learn to listen to others in ways that their testimony is heard?

**II. REQUIRED READINGS:** There is one book for this class, the rest of the readings can be found on ReggieNet. Please note that many readings have similar titles and that there are more than one reading by the same author. PLEASE MAKE SURE YOU DOWNLOAD THE CORRECT READINGS!!!!!!!

- (1) Sullivan, Shannon and Nancy Tuana. 2007. *Race and the Epistemologies of Ignorance* Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- (2) Reggie Net articles on reserve.

**HOW TO GET TO REGGIENET:** **If you have problems with ReggieNet please call the ISU Help Desk directly: 438-HELP. If readings are missing, please contact me directly.**

- Point your browser [Firefox works best for ReggieNet] to the Illinois State University homepage: <http://illinoisstate.edu/>
- Click on “My Illinois State” [bottom left].
- Click on the “Central Login” button in top left corner, and type in your ULID and password.
- Click on the “Academics” tab at the top of the page.
- Under the “Course Manager” heading you’ll see “ReggieNet.” Click on that. Your courses will be listed at the bottom. Click on PHI 363: Topics in Epistemology, under the SPRING 2014 tab.
- Click on “Resources and Material” on the left-hand side of the page. The menu below will appear with all of the course resources. Resources are organized in folders. If I use powerpoints, then they will be also posted after class.

### III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

**QUALITY CLASS PARTICIPATION and ATTENDANCE:** Attendance and active participation in class discussion is crucial to your success in meeting the formal course requirements.

You are expected to have read all assigned readings *before* you attend class. Please come to class prepared to discuss the readings and to ask informed questions.

Lectures are designed to assist students in three ways: (1) situating each reading historically, (2) learning to read philosophical material carefully, and (3) cultivating writing skills necessary to summarize arguments in your own words. The course encourages the development of critical thinking skills through regular writing assignments and class discussions. You will be responsible for the material presented during the lectures and it will be a necessary part of our writing assignments.

**Attendance:** You are permitted *three* unexcused absences. After your third absence your participation grade will be dropped by one letter. For example, if you are absent four times, then your participation grade will drop to a B. Five absences earn you a C, six a D, and so on. I will keep track of attendance with a daily sign in sheet at the beginning of class, so please make sure to sign during each class period. **IF YOU HAVE MORE THAN SEVEN UNEXCUSED ABSENCES YOU CANNOT PASS THIS CLASS.**

**B. WRITTEN WORK:** Written work for this class will consist of two take-home papers and short arguments summaries called “microessays.” **YOU MUST COMPLETE ALL WRITTEN WORK TO RECEIVE A GRADE FOR THIS CLASS.**

**Thought Papers:** These assignments will be shaped by a series of questions to guided discussion on a particular topic. This writing exercise is designed to encourage students to make connections between articles in a unit and common themes across topical units. There will be a mid-term and final thought paper.

**Microessays:** These one-page single-spaced summaries are argument-focused abstracts of assigned readings. They are designed to encourage you to read philosophical texts carefully with an eye toward putting the author’s argument into your own words. We will be working on this skill throughout the semester. ***Microessays require very careful readings of particular texts. They take at least EIGHT hours to write well. Please plan accordingly.***

**C. EVALUATIONS:** Your final letter grade will be based on the following.

Four Microessays (10% each)	40%
Two Papers (25% each)	50%
Participation and Attendance	10%

**The following describes the meaning of letter grades for written assignments:**

**"A":** The student easily integrates all parts of the question into a precise, accurate, well-organized, and well-argued discussion. Answers demonstrate a working knowledge or understanding of the readings, lectures, and class discussions. The student has the ability to put relevant ideas into her or his own words. Answers are

well supported with relevant evidence. The student is attentive to spelling and grammar and uses correct citations.

"**B**": The student answers the question with a good understanding of the material by drawing on relevant data for support, but is either missing some important aspect of the answer, or has arguments that are not fully developed. Some supporting information may not be complete or relevant. The answer demonstrates some ability to put ideas into his or her own words. The student has a few errors in spelling and grammar and mostly use correct citations.

"**C**": The student's answer does not show a distinct understanding of the material; It only reiterates lectures, discussions, readings. Most supporting information is not relevant to the question, but is a random recitation of ideas from class notes. There is no organization of material independently of lecture notes. Some errors in principle or fact. No argument development. The student has serious errors in grammar, citations, and spelling.

"**D**": The student's answer shows only vague familiarity with lecture notes, and readings, and no general understanding of question. Serious errors in principle and fact. Little or nothing to organize. Ideas are presented randomly and unclearly. In some cases irrelevant information is presented as an answer to the question. The student's grammar and citation style and spelling are poor.

"**F**" The student's answer is a clueless attempt to make something up that sounds like class lectures, or expounds on a topic distantly related to the question. Poor organization, citations, grammar and spelling.

**D. LATE WORK:** All assignments must be turned at the end of class on due date. Early work is always accepted. I will accept late work, but I reserve the right to deduct points for work handed in after the due date. I am willing to be flexible about due dates in cases of illness, childcare issues, or family emergencies, but I would appreciate you letting me know about these issues in advance if possible.

**E. READING/ASSIGNMENTS** Readings are to be prepared *in advance* of class lectures and discussions. We will be working closely with the readings during our class time, so it is imperative that you come prepared and ready to ask questions. ***Philosophical material is very time consuming and requires students to read selections more than once.*** Your first reading should be a comprehensive reading that charts the author's general argument structure. The second reading should be done with attention to filling in the details of the author's position.

Lectures will frequently cover material not covered in the assigned readings, and for which you will be held responsible. Students are expected to exhibit a *reflective* understanding of

the readings in class discussions and in written work. These means you have made a good faith effort to understand the material and think about how it is related to the content of the class.

**F. CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE:** Students are expected to behave in a manner consistent with being in a professional environment. Open discussion and disagreement are encouraged in a respectful manner. Open hostility, rudeness, and incivility are discouraged and will result in appropriate action. Mechanical disruptions (cell phones, pagers, electronic devices, music players, etc.) are extremely distracting and will not be tolerated. Students acting in a disruptive or uncivil manner may be dismissed from the class for the remainder of the class period. If necessary, referrals may also be made to Community Rights & Responsibilities for violations of the Code of Student Conduct. Please keep the following in mind.

- **Talking to classmates during class**, even if it's related to the class, disrupts the learning environment. If you have questions about something someone said please raise your hand and ask them.
- **Inform the instructor when you may have to arrive late or leave early.** If you arrive late to class, please sit down quietly near the entrance. If you have to leave early, please sit near the exit so that your departure does not disturb the class.
- **Zero Tolerance cell phone policy.** Turn off your cell phone. Please do not check your cell phone for any reason during class time. THIS IS VERY DISRUPTIVE to my lecturing and to our class discussions!!!! Students texting or emailing during class will be asked to either surrender their phone for the class period or leave.
- **Do not make audio or video recordings of class discussions or lectures** without permission from the instructor or a note from the office of disability concerns.
- **Support your fellow students through the learning process.** Make an effort to get to know your classmates, and help them out when you can. Share notes, share resources. Get to know at least three people you can rely on for notes if you miss the class.

**G. SPECIAL ACCOMODATIONS:**

**Students with Disabilities:** Any student needing to arrange a reasonable accommodation for a documented disability should contact Disability Concerns in 350 Fell Hall, 438-5853 (voice), 438-8620 (TTY). If you need materials translated into the braille alphabet please contact me immediately so we can make arrangements through disability concerns. They often need two weeks advanced notice.

**Students with Children:** Children are welcome in class if they are not disruptive and can sit quietly. Keep in mind some of the material in this class is not for G audiences. Please keep this in mind before you bring your kids.

**Mental Health and Well-Being:** Life at college can get very complicated. Students sometimes feel overwhelmed, lost, experience anxiety or depression, struggle with relationship difficulties or diminished self-esteem. However, many of these issues can be effectively addressed with a little help. Student Counseling Services (SCS) helps students cope with difficult emotions and life stressors. Student Counseling Services is staffed by experienced, professional psychologists and counselors, who are attuned to the needs of college students. The services are FREE and completely confidential. Find out more at [counseling.illinoisstate.edu](http://counseling.illinoisstate.edu) or by calling (309) 438-3655.

**Absences Due to Student Bereavement.** Students who experience the death of an immediate family member or relative as defined in the University Student Bereavement Policy will be excused from class for funeral leave, subsequent bereavement, and/or travel considerations. Students are responsible for providing appropriate documentation to the Dean of Students office and for contacting the instructor as soon as possible to make arrangements for completing missed work. More information is available in the Student Bereavement Policy at <http://www.policy.illinoisstate.edu/2-1-27.shtml>

**H. TIPS FOR READING PHILOSOPHY:** Research shows that the more different ways you present information to the brain the easier it is to learn: hear it, see it, say it, write it, practice it, highlight it, quiz it, etc. The most common problems with reading involve short attention spans. Reading scholarly material takes training and practice. It is a lot like jogging. At first you won't be able to run 5 miles, but if you run a bit each day, you'll soon reach your goal. If you will read through regularly, following the instructions below, what is initially frustrating and hard work, becomes enjoyable and exhilarating.

- **Plan to read in your prime study time.** If you are tired or distracted, you will have difficulty concentrating on these texts. Set a specific number of pages to read within a specific amount of time and organize your work into short tasks for high concentration.
- **As you read the material, highlight, circle, or draw arrows to identify key terms, central themes and their supporting premises, and connections between ideas.** If you own the book, you can also take notes in the margins, or electronically in a pdf reader format or use post it notes. This will enable you to concentrate and stay focused while reading. The process of reading and deciding if the material is important enough to be underlined increases memory for that material.
- **When you have finished reading ask yourself THREE questions:** (1) What is the central thesis that the author is trying to argue for here, and (2) What are the main

ideas, arguments, and concepts that s/he uses to convince me of her or his thesis?  
(3) How do these ideas fit together? Doing this is essential to understanding what you've read. Review the highlighted sections of the article to assist you in this process. Also write down any questions you have or claims you don't understand. These can be brought up in discussion to insure that you understand the readings. Think about how the issues and themes of this article fit in with the class material.

This course requires that you read everything, including this syllabus, very carefully!!

- **Additional Online Philosophical Resources:** Like all disciplines, philosophy uses terms of art, concepts and ideas with which you might not be familiar. Here are a few online resources that you may turn to for guidance. Many have very good articles on feminist philosophy.
  - **PhilPapers [Feminist Philosophy]:** <http://philpapers.org/browse/feminist-philosophy/>
  - **The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy:** <http://www.iep.utm.edu/>
  - **The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy:** <http://plato.stanford.edu/>
  - **Tips for Writing Philosophy:** <http://www.philosophypages.com/sy.htm#wri>
  - **Philosophical Terms Dictionary:** <http://www.philosophypages.com/dy/index.htm>

**I. ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: CHEATING and PLAGIARISM:** Academic Integrity is expected in all classroom endeavors. Plagiarism and other forms of dishonesty will not be tolerated. Students who have questions regarding issues of academic dishonesty should refer to the University regulation which outlines unacceptable behaviors in academic matters. Students are responsible for reading and understanding the Student Code of Conduct which is available:

<http://deanofstudents.illinoisstate.edu/students/get-help/crr/code-of-conduct.shtml>

**Students who violate university policy on academic honesty can expect me to pursue such matters to the full extent of ISU conduct codes (up to and including seeking expulsion from the university).** Any work submitted with evidence of cheating or plagiarism will automatically receive a failing grade for the assignment. The *ISU Faculty Disciplinary guide* offers the following examples of plagiarism. This is a partial list:

- Turning in someone else's work as your own
- Copying materials without footnoting/citing
- Making up sources on a bibliography
- Fake an illness to avoid a test or assignment due date
- Submit the same paper to another class without permission
- Purchasing term papers or other work and turning it in as your own
- Cutting and pasting text from internet sources and presenting that work as your own.

- Sabotage someone else's work
- Failing to report grade errors
- Collaborating on assignments without instructor's permission
- Engaging in bribery or blackmail
- Hiring a ghost writer
- Using papers found on the Internet as your own work
- Altering or forging an official university document

**It is your responsibility to understand how to cite scholarly material properly.** If you don't, please read the materials on ISU's Center for Teaching and Learning Website: <http://english.illinoisstate.edu/kalmbach/351/oldwebs/Morton/DeprtInfo/Plag.html>

For the purposes of this class you don't need to use full citations for assigned readings, just for readings that you bring in from outside class. Please cite assigned readings thus: Frye defines oppression as "a system of barriers that reduce and immobilize" (Frye 1983, 8).

**J. TENTATIVE COURSE READING SCHEDULE:** Below is a list of reading units. The pace of the class will drive the time we spend on each of them and at times I may change the order of the readings. I reserve the option to adjust the syllabus to meet the needs of the class.

## **READING SCHEDULE:**

**NEW BEGINNINGS: SOCIAL EPISTEMOLOGY:** Social epistemology studies the social dimensions of knowledge. Feminist epistemology starts from the premise that the production of knowledge is political; that is, that it is shaped by relations of power. Projects in feminist epistemology are motivated by the basic project of identifying and eliminating oppression. In epistemic terms this requires attending to who knowers are, whose knowledge gets uptake, and the role of epistemic biases. In this section we look at the politics of objectivity. Objectivity has traditionally been constructed in terms of neutrality, a space from which knowing subjects come to know the world in ways that are universal and bias-free. Feminist epistemology challenges this view, arguing that 'objectivity' cannot escape the trappings of the knower's gender and race. What does it mean to say that S knows that P? Who is S? Might alternative accounts of objectivity that consider the question 'Who is S?' yield more objectivity?

- Alan Goldman, "A Guide to Social Epistemology" [Reggie]
- Lorraine Code, "Taking Subjectivity into Account" [Reggie]
- Sandra Harding, "What is Feminist Epistemology?" [Reggie]
- Nancy Tuana, "Coming to Understand: Orgasm and the Epistemologies of Ignorance..." [Reggie]
- Sandra Harding, 'Strong Objectivity' and Socially Situated Knowledge" [Reggie].

**WRITING MICROESSAYS:** We will pause at this point to have a writing workshop on how microessays. We will be reading Marilyn Frye's essay, "Oppression" and using this essay's content to learn how to write a microessay. I will then divide the class into two groups. On a given day, one group will be responsible for writing their microessays. I will start class by asking them to review the article.

- Marilyn Frye, "Oppression" [ReggieNet]
- Microessay Workshop, [Read Handouts]

**THEORIZING IGNORANCE** Why have philosophers theorized knowledge and not ignorance? Is ignorance simply a gap in knowledge, or is it a product of where each of us is situated in cultures of inequality? How might ignorance be the product of privilege or arrogance?

- Linda Martín Alcoff, "Epistemologies of Ignorance: Three Types" [REI]
- Charles W. Mills, "Introduction" and "Overview," p. 1-40. [Reggie: All in one file]

**WHITENESS and THE EPISTEMOLOGIES OF IGNORANCE:** What are the racial dimensions of ignorance? What are the epistemic dimensions of whiteness? How can we explain well-intended white people's consistent perpetuation of racial injustices? How might white ignorance be managed effectively as a means of harm-reduction?

- Lee Mun Wah, *The Color of Fear* [Film]
- Bailey, "White Talk" [Reggie]
- Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege, Male Privilege..." [Reggie]
- Charles W. Mills, "White Ignorance," 13-38 [RIE]
- Elizabeth Spelman, "Managing Ignorance," 119-135 [REI]

**RESPONSIBILITY, COMPLICITY and CULPABLE IGNORANCE:** How can one be responsible for perpetuating a wrong if one does not know it's wrong? If white ignorance is rarely visible to those of us with white privilege, then can whites truly be held accountable for their ignorance? In what ways might whites be complicit in the construction and maintenance of white ignorance and the harms that accompany it?

- Sandra Bartky, "Race, Complicity, and Culpable Ignorance" [Reggie]
- Barbara Applebaum, "White Ignorance and Denials of Complicity" [Reggie]
- Barbara Applebaum, "Moral Responsibility and Complicity ..." [Reggie]

**EPISTEMIC CREDIBILITY and TESTIMONIAL INJUSTICE:** What forms does epistemic injustice take? How might people be specifically harmed in their capacities as knowers? How is it we fail, indeed refuse, to hear some people's testimonies while eagerly embracing others? How do those who lack epistemic credibility resist their epistemic erasure? How do they navigate the fact that they are routinely misunderstood?

- Miranda Fricker, "Testimonial Injustice" [Reggie]
- Miranda Fricker, "Prejudice in the Credibility Economy" [Reggie]
- Miranda Fricker, "Hermeneutical Injustice" [Reggie]
- Kristie Dotson, "A Cautionary Tale: On Limiting Epistemic Oppression" [Reggie]
- Bailey, "Strategic Ignorance" [REI]
- Gail Pohlhaus, "Wrongful Requests and Strategic Refusals to Understand" [Reggie]

**IGNORANCE, ARROGANCE, and VULNERABILITY** How might one learn to overcome epistemic biases? What are some strategies open to us for epistemic compassion?

- Uma Narayan, "Working Together across Difference" [Reggie]
- Maria Lugones, "Playfulness, 'World'-Travel," and Loving Perception" [Reggie]
- Mariana Ortega, "On Being Lovingly, Knowingly Ignorant: White Feminism and Women of Color" [Reggie]
- Erinn Gilson, "Ignorance and Vulnerability" [Reggie]
- George Yancy, "Whiteness as Ambush and The Transformative Power of Vigilance" [Reggie]