

Meaning of Life

Phil 3820 – Hybrid Course

COURSE INSTRUCTOR: Lex Newman

Email: Lex.Newman@utah.edu

URL: <https://sites.google.com/view/lexnewman>

GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANT: Caleb Hylkema

Email: Caleb.Hylkema@utah.edu

URL: <https://faculty.utah.edu/u1368858>

A detailed course Syllabus will be available at the start of the semester. In the meantime, here is some *preliminary* information about the course – all *provisional*:

Course Content

We'll consider a wide range of views related to the *meaning of life*. Course topics include such conceptual issues as what it *means* to say that life has meaning, along with the relationship of meaningfulness to such notions as *happiness* and *pleasure* (likely readings: Nozick, Baumeister, Ben-Shahar); the relevance of *God* (likely readings: Pascal, James, Haidt, Chalmers); *liberty* (likely readings: Harris, Frankl, Sartre); *suicide* and *absurdity* (likely readings: Camus, James, Nagel); *attitudes* (likely readings: Seligman, Emmons); *meditation* (likely readings: Dalai Lama, Ricard, Wright); *suffering* (likely readings: Nietzsche, Bloom); *spirituality* (likely readings: James, Newberg, Moody); and *lifestyle* (likely readings: Brooks, Wiking).

The course topic encompasses many difficult questions and problems of longstanding intellectual and practical interest. Generally speaking, it will not be our aim to provide definitive answers and solutions – indeed, the course Exams will focus on student comprehension of the positions and associated problems we cover, but not the ultimate resolution of those problems. (As a bonus, perhaps the course will help students in their personal quest to live meaningful lives!)

As a 3000 level course, Phil 3820 has no formal prerequisite. The course is open to all students – including where this is the student's very first philosophy course. (Given the course topics, Phil 3820 contributes to the Philosophy Department Area I requirement for philosophy majors and minors.)

Hybrid Course

Note that this is *not a remote learning* course. There are weekly in-person meetings, at which attendance is expected. (Absences count against a student's grade.)

The schedule of classes is a bit confusing. It indicates that this is a "*hybrid*" course that meets Mon-Wed-Fri (12:55 – 1:45 pm). In view of the hybrid format we'll adopt, the *only* regular weekly *in-person* meetings will be at the Wednesday time slot (again, 12:55 – 1:45). (The Monday and Friday timeslots will be used *only* on special occasions – including the first day of the semester.)

This counts as a *hybrid* course in the sense that the course will include a mix of both web-delivered content *and* in-person meetings – with the teaching format following (what pedagogical theorists call) a "flipped classroom" approach. Weekly student work will consist of two main kinds of activities (here setting aside activities related to student preparations for Exams and the Paper):

- Consuming the weekly course content:
 - View the weekly *video lectures*. (Web links are provided on the course Canvas.)
 - Take the easy, short *Quiz* following each video lecture (helps keep students on task).
 - Complete the assigned *readings*.
- Attending the Wednesday meetings for *in-person discussion* – bring *clickers* (explained below).

Canvas

Online course materials will be supported through Canvas. The course Canvas pages should be up and running at least one week prior to the beginning of the semester.

Grading

Provisionally: Course grades will be based on two in-person *exams*, weekly in-person *participation*, *quizzes*, and a short *paper*.

Clickers

Students must purchase two items at the Campus Bookstore:

- "Clicker" – the needed brand is *Turning Technologies*. (Echo360 is the same brand.)
- Registration/Subscription code for the Clicker.

The Bookstore sells more than one clicker, so be sure to get the Turning Technologies brand. Students will *need* to have an appropriate clicker (they can be purchased used). They are not inexpensive. However, they're *much* less expensive than a typical course textbook (which as it happens, you will *not* need to buy). Once a clicker is owned, it may be used in other U of Utah courses using that brand of clickers.

Instructions for *registering* clickers (for our course) will be posted at the start of the semester. (Note that the *Smart Phone* App option will be not enabled for this course.)

Course Texts

Rather than a traditional textbook (a significant expense in most cases), all course readings will be distributed as PDF files (or web links) via the course Canvas. This will allow for more flexibility in the readings that we'll use (rather than having to settle for the particular essays that happen to be collected together in any single text). Among the nice benefits, to you, is that the text readings are all *free*. Furthermore, they can be read on any computer, e-reader, iPad, etc.