Meeting Time: MWF 1:25-2:20
Meeting Place: 218 Fawcett
Instructor: Dr. Irvine
Office: 383 Millett (enter through 370 Millett, the Philosophy Department office)
Office Phone: 775-2610 (If there is no answer, you can leave a message by calling 775-2274.)
E-mail: irvine@aphilosopher.com
Office Hours: MWF 12:25-1:20, 3:30-4:00, and by appointment.
Course Website: http://www.wright.edu/~william.irvine/ (I do not use Pilot!)

Course Work: Students will take three midterm exams and a final exam.
Course Objectives: Students will be introduced to the techniques of inductive and probabilistic reasoning with emphasis on the problems encountered in attempting to justify those techniques.

Course Content Warning: During this class, I will challenge your beliefs about various topics, including, most significantly, your religious beliefs. I do this because philosophers make it their business to challenge accepted beliefs. (Someone who signs up for a philosophy class and expects his beliefs not to be challenged is like someone who signs up for swimming lessons and expects never to get wet.) If it upsets you to have your beliefs challenged, you should avoid this and other courses taught by philosophers.

Math Warning: In this course, you will be asked to plug numbers into mathematical formulas and compute the resulting values. The skills required are pretty basic: addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. If your math skills are poor, you should either come to me for help or consider taking a different course.

Expectations for Class Attendance: I do not take attendance, and there is therefore no direct penalty for missing class. Students who miss class, though, cannot take notes and participate in class discussions, and their course grade will almost certainly suffer as a result. (The last time I taught this class, one-third of the students either dropped it or failed it; most of these individuals had not been coming to class regularly.)

Calculator Use: During exams, you will be allowed to use a “basic” calculator (one that cannot memorize formulas). You will not be allowed to use, as a calculator, any device capable of cellphone, wifi, or other communication.

Course Grade: To determine a student's course grade, I will first convert exam scores into percent scores. Then I will take a weighted average of these percent scores, with each of the three midterms counting 20%, and the final exam (which will be cumulative) counting 40%. I will convert the resulting percent score into a letter grade, using the "standard" scale, with 90% or above being an A, 80% or above being a B, and so on. The above formula applies only to students who take all tests at the official times. Anyone who takes one or more makeup exams will be graded by a formula that might significantly "underweight" the makeup exam(s) in question.

Missed Exams: If you are going to miss an exam, let me know immediately, and if possible, let me know before the exam. The best way to reach me is with an email message! If this is not possible, I can be reached at the numbers listed above, preferably during an office hour! If you miss an exam and wait more than 24 hours (from the start of the exam) to get in touch with me, you will receive a 0% on the exam, even if it turns out that you had a good reason for missing it. Makeup exams will usually be essay exams.

Charity Checkmarks: Periodically in class, I will call on students and ask questions about homework assignments and the topics we are discussing. Students who are able to answer questions asked in class will receive Charity Checkmarks. Those receiving what the instructor perceives to be an unusually high number of Charity Checkmarks can have their course grade raised above what the above formula would give them. Students who are unable, either for physical or psychological reasons, to participate in class discussions should let me know immediately.

Course Text: There is no textbook for this course. There is instead a "course outline," which will be sent—one section at a time and for free!—to students who are enrolled in the course. (It will be sent to your official Wright State e-mail account.) You should print out a hard copy so you can more easily take notes and follow class discussions.

Dates to remember:
No class: Monday, January 19 (MLK Day)
Spring break: March 2-March 6
Last class: Friday, April 24
Exam dates: 1st exam: Friday, January 30  2nd exam: Wednesday, February 25  3rd exam: Friday, March 27
Final Exam: Monday, April 27, 12:30-2:30

(turn over)
Instructor Policies

At the end of each quarter, there are students (e.g., graduating seniors, people on probation, people with scholarships, and people trying to get into certain programs) who come to me, tell me that they needed a certain grade in my course, and ask if there is anything they can do—now that the course has ended—to get it. Unfortunately, if the course has ended, I will not change a grade unless we can find evidence that your course work has been misgraded. It doesn't matter how badly you need the grade in question; I will invariably give you the grade you earned, not the grade you want or need.

This means that if you need a certain grade in my course, you must work for it. You will find that I am more than willing to help you learn course material: I would much rather spend time helping you than have to give you a bad grade. There is no such thing as coming in to office hours too often; you will tire of seeing me long before I tire of seeing you. But if you do poorly in this course and make no effort to seek help, you leave me with no choice but to give you a grade that neither of us will be pleased with. I don’t give “pity grades” for the simple reason that I don’t think you are pitiful.

Infrequently Asked Questions

Q1. I already took this course and failed it. Is it true that since I am retaking it, I am sure to pass?
A. Certainly not. In fact, I have had students do worse in the course the second time they took it than the first time. I had one student who failed one of my courses three times. (She refused to come in for help.)

Q2. I am a graduating senior (or a person on a scholarship or a student visa) and I need to pass your course so I can graduate (or keep my scholarship or my visa). Can I assume that you will understand my situation and therefore won’t fail me?
A. I will give you the grade you earn, not the grade you need or want. And by the way, if you get an F in this course, it isn’t me who has failed you, it is you who has failed you; I am just the one whose job it is to deliver the bad news. People who desperately need to pass this course should become regular visitors to office hours at the very first sign that they are doing poorly; if they don’t do this, I can only conclude that despite what they say, it isn’t particularly important to them to attain their goals.

Q3. I am taking your class but won’t be able to attend very often because my life is very complicated. Will you overlook this and give me the grade I would have earned if my life hadn’t been so complicated?
A. If your life is too complicated, it is unlikely that you will succeed in college. I will certainly be willing to help you outside of class, but having done that, I will give you whatever grade you earn, exactly like any other student.

Q4. If I am not doing well in your class, will you come up with extra-credit projects for me to do so I can get a passing grade?
A. No. Your grade will be determined by class exams and assignments, just like it is for everyone else. If you aren’t doing well in class, you need to come in regularly for help. My view is that extra-credit projects are generally given so that students can pass a course without having mastered the course content. If you don’t master the content of this course, you will not pass.

Q5. I won’t get into Harvard Law School unless you give me an A. Will you raise my grade and thereby help me accomplish my goal?
A. Of course not. I will give you the grade you earned, not the grade you want.

Q6. I get As in all the other classes I take. Doesn’t it follow that you should give me an A as well?
A. It doesn’t follow. Maybe you are better in those classes than in this class.

Q7. Would you give a student a B even though doing so would ruin their perfect 4.0 GPA?
A. Yes, if they earned only a B, that is the grade I would give. My goal is to give you the grade you earned, not the grade that allows you to maintain or improve your GPA.

Q8. If I stop coming to class half-way through the quarter, will you give me an INC so I can finish the class (without signing up for it again) in the next quarter?
A. No. Some faculty members do this sort of thing, but I don’t. I will only give an INC to a student who has finished everything but the final, and has been forced to miss the final by circumstances beyond his control. If it becomes clear to you that you can no longer come to class, you should drop the class.

Q9. If I attend every class, will it guarantee that I will pass your course?
A. It depends on what you do in class. If you take lots of notes and participate in class discussions and see me when there are things you don’t understand, it is likely (but not guaranteed) that you will pass. If you don’t take notes and don’t participate, it is unlikely that you will pass even though you are “physically present” in the classroom.

Q9. If I come into office hours to get help, will it guarantee that I will pass your course?
A. It depends on what we do during office hours. If we talk about your pet cat, for example, it will probably have no effect at all on your course grade. If we discuss the course material, it will likely improve your chances of passing, but there are no guarantees.

Q10. If I failed your course in the past, will you sign me in for the next quarter so I can graduate on schedule?
A. It depends on what you did when you took your course in the past. If you, as a graduating senior who was doing poorly, didn’t routinely come to office hours, I can only conclude that you are not a serious student. My classes are invariably filled to capacity. Therefore, to sign you in would be to deprive another, quite likely more serious student, of a seat in the class and thereby slow down his or her academic progress. It would be unfair for me to do this.

Q11. If I felt that I understood the material in your course, will you give me a passing grade?
A. No. You must prove that you understood the material by passing exams.