Overview/Background
Philosophy is about asking big questions, thinking carefully about the answer, and not taking any assumptions as obvious or unquestionable. The sub-discipline of Epistemology asks questions like What is knowledge? Can we be sure that we know anything, and what counts as good grounds for saying that we do? What are good sources of knowledge? Is knowing facts different than knowing how to do something? Does it make sense to say that things other than individual people (groups, objects, our body, etc.) "know" things? These questions can be asked generally, as they will be in this class, or they can be asked in a specific arena, for example when Epistemology of Testimony looks at these questions in the context of gaining knowledge by people telling you things. The issues raised by these questions are timeless, but in our modern world, with possibilities like Artificial Intelligence and a recognition of the importance of Traditional Ecological Knowledge in marginalized groups, they are perhaps more pressing than ever. This class will familiarize you with some of the current debates in the epistemology, and will also further develop your ability to understand philosophical arguments and craft well reasoned arguments of your own.

Textbook and Resource Material
The textbooks required for this course are:
Alvin Goldman's *Knowledge in a Social World*. This book will allow us to dive deep into one look at one of those issues. In combination, these books will give you a broad and a deep look at epistemology as a field of study. I recommend purchasing or renting them from Amazon or a similar website, or purchasing them at the campus bookstore. There will also be required and optional readings, videos, and other materials up on Blackboard. They will generally be posted a few days before you will be required to read them for class.

**Course Description and Prerequisites**

This course will critically examine some of the major approaches to epistemological questions in the philosophical tradition. It will do so through a heavy use of argument analysis, collaboration, and incorporation of your own lived knowledge. It is not expected that you will be familiar with epistemology prior to this class. However, this is a senior-level philosophy course, and so a familiarity with philosophical terms and methodologies will be assumed, so if you have any difficulties with these, please talk to me outside of class as soon as you start experiencing problems.

**Learning Objectives/Outcomes for the Course**

This course is designed to give you a familiarity with epistemology as a body of knowledge and a suite of methodologies and approaches. This will be useful for future philosophy classes (try more! They're fun!) and your life more generally. These approaches and this body of knowledge are connected with both the Core Student Learning Objectives and Outcomes, as well as learning objectives and outcomes for a Philosophy degree.

**Core Student Learning Objectives/Outcomes:** Upon completion of this course, students will have demonstrated mastery of the core curriculum objectives of Critical Thinking, Communication Skills, Personal Responsibility, and Social Responsibility. These objectives for core curriculum classes in Language, Philosophy and Culture are set forth by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB). Each associated learning outcome (as defined by UTRGV) is listed here, followed by the ways they will be pursued and assessed. Student learning outcomes will be regularly assessed to determine whether THECB objectives are being met by students completing core curriculum classes.

**CRITICAL THINKING:** *Students will demonstrate comprehension of a variety of written texts and other information sources by analyzing and evaluating the logic, validity, and relevance of the information in them to solve challenging problems, to arrive at well-reasoned conclusions, and to develop and explore new questions.* In this course, this objective will be pursued in several ways. We will read primary philosophy texts, both to understand them and to critique them. This will be done both individually and in groups, necessitating critical thinking as a communal activity (a vital yet underrepresented form of critical thinking). You will also develop a final paper which will require drawing on texts and creating an argument. Additionally, the presentations will be an opportunity to reason and challenge one-another. Critical Thinking outcomes will be assessed via grades of the paper and presentation, as well as your participation in the in-class reading analyses.

**COMMUNICATION SKILLS:** *Students will demonstrate the ability to adapt their communications to a particular context, audience, and purpose using language, genre conventions, and sources appropriate to a specific discipline and/or communication task.* In this course, this objective will be pursued in part through class conversations around the topics of the course. Additionally, you will at many points in the class be working in groups, requiring a high degree of communication. Communication Skills outcomes will be assessed via grades of the presentation and participation in the in-class reading analyses.

**PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY:** *Students will demonstrate an awareness of the range of human values and beliefs that they draw upon to connect choices, actions, and consequences to ethical decision-making.* This learning objective is particularly important to this course. This class focuses in part on understanding how values and beliefs are formed, and how they are connected (via knowledge) to our choices and actions, including in an ethical context.

**SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY:** *Students will recognize and describe cultural diversity, the role of civic engagement in society, and the link between ethics and behavior.* This course objective is also of particular
importance to this course. This class focuses in part on how individuals function within society in terms of knowledge sharing, production, and the ethical obligations that attach to these functions. It also focuses on how societies function in enabling, supporting, or hindering knowledge for individuals and communities, and the social justice and ethical implications of these societal functions. Given the centrality of this learning outcome to the course content, Personal Responsibility outcomes will be assessed in all the evaluations of the class.

Learning Objectives for Philosophy Degree: This course may also be taken to fulfill a requirement for a B.A. in Philosophy. Students who graduate with a degree in philosophy from UTRGV are expected to have attained a certain level of intellectual development which is characteristic of the intense study of philosophy. The goals for all philosophy classes that count towards the major in philosophy include, in combination with the particular goals for the course, the following objectives:

**CRITICAL THINKING AND READING:** Students will demonstrate well-developed critical thinking and reading skills orally and in writing. As discussed above, this objective will be pursued in several ways. We will read primary philosophy texts, both to understand them and to critique them. This will be done both individually and in groups, necessitating critical thinking as a communal activity (a vital yet underrepresented form of critical thinking). You will also develop a final paper which will require drawing on texts and creating an argument. Additionally, the presentations will be an opportunity to reason and challenge one-another. Critical Thinking and Reading outcomes will be assessed via grades of the paper and presentation, as well as your participation in the in-class reading analyses.

**HISTORY:** Students will describe the history of Philosophy, by identifying and distinguishing between the major historical and conceptual divisions of philosophy, the positions within those divisions, and major thinkers who contributed to those periods and specializations. In this course, students will be exposed to and be expected to critically engage with a range of important epistemological theory from the history of philosophical thought. History outcomes will be assessed via grades of the paper and presentation, as well as your participation in the in-class reading analyses.

**COMMUNICATION:** Students will exhibit well-developed oral and written communication skills; will respond effectively to questions and criticisms of presented material. As discussed above this objective will be pursued in part through class conversations around the topics of the course. Additionally, you will at many points in the class be working in groups, requiring a high degree of communication. Communication Skills outcomes will be assessed via grades of the presentation and participation in the in-class reading analyses.

**ALTERNATIVE POINTS OF VIEW:** Students will demonstrate the capacity to accurately present, analyze and evaluate historically underrepresented philosophical concerns, positions and traditions. The first half of this course will engage with several underrepresented philosophical concerns, positions, and traditions such as Standpoint Theory and Feminist Epistemology more generally, and Postcolonial Theory’s discussion of Traditional Ecological Knowledge. The second half of the course will drill down on one theory of social epistemology, which is itself an underexamined (albeit growing) area of epistemological thought. Alternative Points of View outcomes will therefore be assessed via grades of the paper and presentation, as well as your participation in the in-class reading analyses.

**PERSONAL, CIVIC, AND/OR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:** Students will articulate and evaluate their various activities, identities, values, and goals in order to develop a flexible strategy for ongoing personal growth, community engagement, and/or professional achievement. This course, more than a more traditional introduction to epistemology might, will require thinking through the ethical norms around various epistemic practices and asking how we should (ethically) come to know things. This requires serious introspection, and is in addition to the more typical critiques of one’s putative
knowledge that epistemology requires. This class, therefore, pursues these learning objectives by encouraging students to be more careful, more accurate, and kinder knowers. Development outcomes are assessed via grades of the paper and presentation, as well as your participation in the in-class reading analyses.

Course Requirements:
- Study the readings
- Participate in class discussions
- Develop and give an online group presentation
- Write a midterm paper
- Write a final paper

Study the Readings
Every day, there will be a section of one of the textbooks or other texts to read for class. I will also recommend bonus readings in class on the same topic which are not required, but which might be useful for your final paper or presentation. There are more readings in Philosophy classes than in many other disciplines, so plan accordingly. You are expected to understand and discuss the materials presented each week, and the class will build on these ideas cumulatively, so if you are having trouble with something, be sure to discuss it with classmates or with your instructor as soon as possible.

Participate
Participation from all the students is absolutely vital for a successful philosophy class and is part of your grade. Participation includes doing the readings, attending class, speaking in groups about the reading, speaking as a group to the entire class about your group’s ideas for the reading, engaging in argumentation and discourse, and doing all of these things in a way that respects your classmates and instructor.

Develop and Give an online Group Presentation
You will be assigned into groups after the drop period has ended. Your group will develop an online presentation illustrating some of the important concepts in the class in an entertaining and informative way. Your group grade is based on creativity, clarity, and accuracy. Your individual grade may be lower than the group grade, based on how much work you do in the group (you will assess yourself and your groupmates will assess you).

Write Two Papers
This requirement is the largest part of your grade, as it is a highly important skill, particularly for Philosophy. Each paper assignment will be broken down into smaller assignments throughout the semester. If you do not receive a good grade on one of these assignments, it is highly recommended that you talk with the instructor in order to not have problems with later assignments which build on the earlier ones. You are also highly encouraged to use the Writing Center with all stages of the paper.

Grading Policies
The grading scale is as follows:
A  100 – 90%
B  80 – 89%
C  70 – 79%
D  60 – 69%
Fail below 60%

The grade is divided as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation/Attendance</td>
<td>15 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>Online Group Presentation</td>
<td>20 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm Paper</td>
<td>30 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Paper</td>
<td>35 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100 %</td>
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Calendar of Activities

January 19  Classes Begin
February 3  Last day to drop a class before it appears on the transcript and counts toward the “6-drop” limit. Last day to receive a 100% refund for dropped classes (other policies apply when a student is withdrawing from all classes).
March 2 (tentative)  Presentations Due (Tentative. Any change will be announced in class and on BlackBoard)
March 9 (tentative)  Midterm Paper Due (Tentative. Any change will be announced in class and on BlackBoard)
March 14-18  Spring Break; university closed
March 25-26  Easter Break; university closed
April 13  Drop/Withdrawal Deadline; last day for students to drop the course and receive a DR grade. After this date, students will be assigned a letter grade for the course that will count on the GPA.
May 4 (tentative)  Final Paper Due (Tentative. Any change will be announced in class and on BlackBoard)

UTRGV Policy Statements

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:
If you have a documented disability (physical, psychological, learning, or other disability which affects your academic performance) and would like to receive academic accommodations, please inform your instructor and contact Student Accessibility Services to schedule an appointment to initiate services. It is recommended that you schedule an appointment with Student Accessibility Services before classes start. However, accommodations can be provided at any time. Brownsville Campus: Student Accessibility Services is located in Cortez Hall Room 129 and can be contacted by phone at (956) 882-7374 (Voice) or via email at accessibility@utrgv.edu. Edinburg Campus: Student Accessibility Services is located in 108 University Center and can be contacted by phone at (956) 665-7005 (Voice), (956) 665-3840 (Fax), or via email at accessibility@utrgv.edu.

MANDATORY COURSE EVALUATION PERIOD:
Students are required to complete an ONLINE evaluation of this course, accessed through your UTRGV account (http://my.utrgv.edu); you will be contacted through email with further instructions. Online evaluations will be available Nov. 18 – Dec. 9, 2015. Students who complete their evaluations will have priority access to their grades.

ATTENDANCE:
Students are expected to attend all scheduled classes and may be dropped from the course for excessive absences. UTRGV’s attendance policy excuses students from attending class if they are participating in officially sponsored university activities, such as athletics; for observance of religious holy days; or for military service. Students should contact the instructor in advance of the excused absence and arrange to make up missed work or examinations.

SCHOLASTIC INTEGRITY:
As members of a community dedicated to Honesty, Integrity and Respect, students are reminded that those who engage in scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and expulsion from the University. Scholastic dishonesty includes but is not limited to: cheating, plagiarism, and collusion; submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person; taking an examination for another person; any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student; or the attempt to commit such acts. Since scholastic dishonesty harms the individual, all students and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced (see the Board of Regents Rules and Regulations and UTRGV Academic Integrity Guidelines). Scholastic dishonesty incidents may be reported to the Dean of Students.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT, DISCRIMINATION, and VIOLENCE:
In accordance with UT System regulations, your instructor is a “responsible employee” for reporting purposes under Title IX regulations and so must report any instance, occurring during a student’s time in college, of sexual assault, stalking, dating violence, domestic violence, or sexual harassment about which she/he becomes aware during this course through writing, discussion, or personal disclosure. More information can be found at www.utrgv.edu/equity, including confidential resources available on campus. The faculty and staff of UTRGV actively strive to provide a
learning, working, and living environment that promotes personal integrity, civility, and mutual respect in an environment free from sexual misconduct and discrimination.

**COURSE DROPS:**
According to UTRGV policy, students may drop any class without penalty earning a grade of DR until the official drop date. Following that date, students must be assigned a letter grade and can no longer drop the class. Students considering dropping the class should be aware of the “3-peat rule” and the “6-drop” rule so they can recognize how dropped classes may affect their academic success. The 6-drop rule refers to Texas law that dictates that undergraduate students may not drop more than six courses during their entire undergraduate career. Courses dropped at other Texas public higher education institutions will count toward the six-course drop limit. The 3-peat rule refers to additional fees charged to students who take the same class for the third time.