

Professor: Dr. Mariana Alessandri

Office: ARHU 302 (across from elevator)

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 12:30-1:30 and Thursdays, 3-4pm (and by appointment)

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Required Texts

Miguel de Unamuno, *Tragic Sense of Life*, trans. by J.E. Crawford Finch (Dover) [ISBN: 9780486202570]

Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, Penguin Classics, ISBN 978-0140444490

Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La frontera*, Aunt Lute Books, ISBN 9781879960855

(All other readings will be posted on Blackboard)

Course Promises

By the end of the semester, you will be able to talk knowledgeably with your friends and family about philosophy. For example, you will be able to tell them who Socrates was, why Seneca wrote letters, how Kierkegaard defines faith, and why Anzaldúa thinks Spanglish is so important. You will be able to explain what it means for Unamuno to say that there is a “tragic sense of life,” and you will also be able to persuade your friends that being called a feminist is a complement rather than an insult.

In the first third of the semester, we will focus on Socrates and Seneca. Socrates didn’t write anything down, so his student Plato wrote down many of the conversations that Socrates had with various people. Socrates said: “The unexamined life is not worth living.” This will be the theme of the course, and we will constantly refer back to Socrates and his idea of what it means to examine one’s life and one’s ideas. Seneca also tries to understand what makes a life worth living. The first half of the course is dedicated to our thinking and living well.

In the second third of the semester we will talk about what it means to have a body rather than just a mind. We start with Kierkegaard, who wrote a book about what it would really mean to have faith in God. If you have ever asked yourself how you would know if God is talking to you or if you are just making Him up, then you have come to the right place. Next, we move to Unamuno, a Spanish philosopher. Unamuno was afraid to die and become nothing, and he says that, at bottom, we all are. Whether you agree or disagree with him, Unamuno is great because he talks about real life.

In the last third of the class we will talk about different kinds of oppression. We will try to define privilege and oppression, as well as figuring out how why feminists exist and what they believe. Lastly we will read Gloria Anzaldúa, a philosopher from the Valley who became famous despite sexism, classism, heterosexism, and racism.

My Philosophy on Philosophy

Philosophy in Greek means “love of wisdom,” and during this semester we will discuss what this entails. We will think critically about questions that you have most likely already considered. I believe that every child is naturally a philosopher—we ask all kinds of big questions about the world. If you have ever asked yourself whether God exists, or about what happens when we die, then you have the heart of a philosopher. As we grow up, we often get dissuaded from asking these questions because they are difficult, and usually have no clear answer. As a result, we lose that sense of wonder about the world, but in this class you will have the opportunity to think about things for thinking’s sake. I believe that thinking (not memorizing, not searching for answers on Yahoo Answers, not regurgitating information, etc.) is a pleasurable activity. In this class, we will learn why philosophers prefer good questions to cheap answers. My job is to help you learn to read, interpret, and write about philosophy. If this is your first philosophy course, you will likely feel that you understand the class discussions but not the readings. This is normal. I am here to teach you how to read philosophy so you can understand it by yourself. By the end of the semester you will have learned to practice philosophy by reading, writing, and being part of a community of scholars.

Becoming a Reader of Philosophy

All of the required books can be found at the reserve desk at the library [3rd Floor]. If you cannot purchase the books you are welcome to make copies of the daily readings and bring the copies to class. Please don’t write in these library books as they are my personal copies.

There will be reading for homework every night; your job is to read the texts before class and then reread them after we have talked about them. The more you read a passage, the easier it becomes to understand. Reading aloud is a good option, and reading together is great. You sometimes have to read the same paragraph four times to figure out what the author is saying. This is not because the author can’t write and it’s also not because you are “no good at it”; it’s because we as a society have become accustomed to short, catchy phrases in the form of Facebook posts and twitter feeds. (Take my Critical Thinking course for more on why we as a society are losing our ability to read complicated ideas).

For each reading I have provided guiding questions (on this syllabus, listed next to the daily assignment). These questions are meant to give you direction as you read. To become good at reading, you must read. This is not a memorization class. Your success or failure will depend on how well you learn to read the text and express your ideas.

Text Policy: Whoever brings their text to class is welcome to be part of the class for the day. The text means paper—either paper books or copies from the library. No e-books. If you do not have the text, you will be marked absent.

Becoming a Philosophical Writer

Good writers read. And they write. On many days, at the beginning of class, you will have an opportunity to write about your own thoughts or the reading for the day. After writing, you will often have a chance to talk with classmates about your ideas. We will then talk about these ideas in a large group. Sometimes I will collect these short writings and give you written feedback on them. These will be helpful for you when it comes to writing your papers and preparing for your exams. You can always talk to me about particular difficulties that you have with writing. Come to my office hours with something written, and we will go over it and I will help you to become better at writing.

To push your writing practice to the next level, you will be writing four 2-page essays. The first will be on Socrates, the second on Seneca, the third on Kierkegaard, and the fourth on oppression. The writing we do in class will help prepare you for these, and we will also have an opportunity to look at anonymous examples of good and not-so-good essays.

In addition, you will have the opportunity to assess how much you have learned in this course, through a written, in-class exam. I will not ask you to memorize facts or regurgitate something you don't understand, but you will have to write strong essays defending your careful interpretations of the text. More detailed information to come.

Our Community

In the classroom, we will form a community of learners who think together and help each other grow as philosophers. There is no way to have a community of philosophers without coming to class every day. You must be totally dedicated to figuring things out with your fellow learners. For this reason I have a strict **attendance policy**. You have 4 days for which you will not be penalized for missing class. These are your "sick days" to do what you please with. You may use your sick days for athletics, religious holidays, university activities, military service, illness, or any other reason. You do not need to bring me a doctor's note. Not taking into account these four sick days, your attendance grade will be averaged and will count for 10% of your final grade. If you are perpetually late to class, you will start getting half-credit for attendance.

Being part of the community in this class also means doing a **presentation** in the middle of the semester. The question will be: who is the most convincing philosopher so far? Socrates? Seneca? Kierkegaard? (Note this is not asking who do you like best). You will have to explain why you chose them (which means you must have a thesis and defense) along with what you think they would say to the other two philosophers. You may do this project in groups, as long as everyone's part is well-defined. I will be grading you individually. You may use PowerPoint but it is not necessary.

Late Work and Email

Late work will be accepted within a reasonable time frame, for a reduced grade, upon approval from professor. If you have consistent trouble turning work in on time, please come and talk to me during office hours. If you email me and I don't email back, then I haven't received it. Use: mariana.alessandri@utrgv.com, not blackboard.

Cell Phone and Computer Use

All cell phones and computers must be powered off at the beginning of class. The first time I see you using your phone I will give you a warning. The second time I will ask you to leave.

Policy Summary

1) Show up, 2) bring your text, 3) put away your phone, and 4) don't plagiarize.

Summary of Grading

Attendance	10%
4 Short essays (10% each)	40%
Presentation (3/7 and 3/9)	10%
Mid-Term Exam (3/30)	20%
Final Exam (May 9 or 11)	20%
TOTAL	100%

Grading scale

A = Excellent (90-100) – If you receive an A in this class, it means you have not only met all of your requirements but have gone above and beyond. You have dedicated yourself to this class, meaning that you have been here (on time) every required class period, you have carefully done your reading for the day, you have written careful essays, you have learned to express yourself in written form, and you are a great community member. It means that you offered your thoughts and listened respectfully to others.

B = Good (80-90) – If you receive a B in this class, it means that you have met all of the requirements, and that you have done so consistently. It means that you have come to class prepared, and that you performed solidly on the exams and essays. If you earned a B it will mean that you are able to follow the lines of philosophical argument, and you may be able to teach someone else what Socrates meant by “philosophy is training for death.” What distinguishes an A from a B student is initiative.

C = Satisfactory (70-80) – If you receive a C in this class, it means that you have met most or all requirements of this class. You may be good at memorizing arguments or details, but maybe don’t quite understand them.

D = Below Average (60-70) – If you receive a D in this class, it means that either you were a poor community member or you performed below average on your assignments (or perhaps you failed to turn in one or more assignments).

F = Failure (below 60) – If you receive an F for this class, it means that either you missed too many classes, or you did not meet the requirements on this syllabus. If you receive an F, you have failed at being a good community member and will have another opportunity to succeed when you retake the course. Most people who fail stop coming to class pretty early on, and don’t turn in their assignments.

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 (Board of Regents Rules and Regulations and UTRGV Academic Integrity Guidelines). All scholastic dishonesty incidents will 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 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.

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 ability@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 ability@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/home>); you will be contacted through email with further instructions. Online evaluations will be available April 12-May 3. Students who complete their evaluations will have priority access to their grades.

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. Student learning outcomes will be regularly assessed to determine whether THECB objectives are being met by students completing core curriculum classes.

1. **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.
2. **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.
3. **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.
4. **SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY:** Students will recognize and describe cultural diversity, the role of civic engagement in society, and the link between ethics and behavior.

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:

1. **CRITICAL THINKING AND READING:** Students will demonstrate well-developed critical thinking and reading skills orally and in writing.
2. **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.
3. **COMMUNICATION:** Students will exhibit well-developed oral and written communication skills; will respond effectively to questions and criticisms of presented material.
4. **ALTERNATIVE POINTS OF VIEW:** Students will demonstrate the capacity to accurately present, analyze and evaluate historically underrepresented philosophical concerns, positions and traditions.
5. **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.