

CARLETON UNIVERSITY

PHIL 1200: THE MEANING OF LIFE

Course Syllabus Summer Term 2014

**Professor
Ken Ferguson**

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**Office Hours:
TBA**

Class Time

M/W 6:00-9:00

Location: TBD

COURSE SUMMARY

The aim of this course is to explore a number of questions about the meaning of life and related issues: Does life have any meaning or purpose, and, if it didn't, would it matter? Does the meaning of life depend on the existence of God and an afterlife? Should we fear death? Is there such a thing as the good life, or the best way to live one's life, and, if so, what is it? Does the question "Does life have meaning?" itself have any clear meaning? What is it that makes life valuable or worthwhile?

In addressing these and other questions, we will examine many different approaches that have been defended by philosophers, writers and other reflective people, both in the past and the present, including theism, nihilism, hedonism, existentialism, stoicism, Buddhism and many others. We will subject their answers to careful critical scrutiny and do our best to develop our own original approaches to the issues.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Tests: There will be two in-class tests. One will be held about the middle of the course, the second will be held at the end of the course. The test on which students do best will be worth 40% of the overall grade, the other will be worth 30%. The format for these tests will be as follows: a week or two before the date of the test students will be given a list of questions; the instructor will then select a number of these questions for students to answer on the test.

Discussion Essay: Students will write an essay of approximately 5-7 pages in length (1200-1500 words), which will be worth 30% of the overall grade. This will be a discussion paper, not a research paper, which will involve analyzing and evaluating some issue central to the course. A list of topics for students to choose from will be available early in the course.

Optional Participation Grade: Students will be given the option of having 20% of their grade determined by participation in class discussions. For those who choose this option, each exam will be worth 30% and the term paper 20%.

ACCESS TO CULEARN

Students must ensure that they have access to cuLearn, as class lectures and other material will be posted on it.

REQUIRED TEXT

The Meaning of Life: A Reader, 3rd edition, edited by E.D. Klemke and Steven M. Cahn (Oxford: Oxford University Press)

In addition to this text, some required readings will be taken from online sources. (The web addresses for these readings are provided in the outline of Topics and Readings on CuLearn.)

CLASS FORMAT

The emphasis in the course will be on reasoning, analysis and critical evaluation. The role of the Instructor will be to guide students through the readings, to ensure that discussions remain focused on relevant and important issues, and to illustrate the processes of analysis and criticism by repeated example in class. Although attendance will not be taken, students are fully responsible for material missed due to absence.

SHORT LIST OF TOPICS/ISSUES

(For more details, see the list of Topics and Readings posted on CuLearn.)

- 1) Nihilism – Life has no meaning or purpose and so is not worth living
- 2) The religious approach – The meaning of life is dependent on God
- 3) Existentialism – We must create our own meaning
- 4) Death: is it a bad thing or a good thing?
- 5) Pleasure is what gives value to life
- 6) Stoicism and Buddhism – To achieve happiness we must control our desires
- 7) The meaning and purpose of life is to promote the good
- 8) The meaning of life consists of the pursuit of projects of worth and value
- 9) The meaning of life is to develop your potential as a human being
- 10) Deconstructing the Issue – the question 'what is the meaning of life?' has no meaning

Department of Philosophy and Carleton University Policies (Summer 2014)

Assignments:

Unless specifically told otherwise by their instructors, students:

- must not use a plastic or cardboard cover or paper clips
- must staple the paper (there is a stapler on the essay box)
- must include the following in the lower right corner of the cover sheet:
 - student name
 - student number
 - course number and section
 - instructor's name
- The Philosophy Department does not accept assignments by FAX. You may send them by courier, if necessary.
- No assignments will be accepted after the last day for handing in term work – see dates in next column.
- Assignments handed in through the essay box (just inside the glass doors, Paterson Hall, Floor 3A) must be dropped into the box by **4:15** on a regular business day in order to be date-stamped with that day's date. Assignments handed in after 4:15 or on a non-business day will be stamped as having been handed in on the next business day.
- Students are required to keep copies of their assignments. If your paper is lost at any point, you will be considered not to have submitted it if you cannot produce a copy immediately on request.

Deferrals for Term Work:

If you miss a final examination and/or fail to submit a final assignment by the due date because of circumstances beyond your control, you may apply for a deferral of examination/assignment. For deferred examinations, you must apply within 5 working days after the scheduled date of your exam. To apply for deferral of a final assignment, you must apply within 5 working days of the last scheduled day of classes. Visit the Registrar's Office for more information.

Plagiarism:

It is the responsibility of each student to understand the meaning of 'plagiarism' as defined in the Undergraduate or Graduate Calendars, and to avoid both committing plagiarism and aiding or abetting plagiarism by other students. (Undergraduate Calendar Academic Regulations, section 14.3, or <http://www4.carleton.ca/calendars//ugrad/current/regulations/acadre/suniv14.html#14.3>)

Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities:

The Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send me your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with me to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the PMC website for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally-scheduled exam (if applicable).

You can visit the Equity Services website to view the policies and to obtain more detailed information on academic accommodation at <http://carleton.ca/equity/accommodation>.

Important Dates:

May 5	Classes start.
May 12	Last day for registration and course changes for early summer courses.
May 16	Last day for registration and course changes for full summer courses.
May 19	Statutory holiday, university closed.
May 23	Last day for a full fee adjustment when withdrawing from early and full summer courses.
June 17	Last day for early summer classes. Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for term work for courses that end on this day.
June 17	Last day for academic withdrawal from early summer courses.
June 20-26	Final examinations.
July 1	Statutory holiday, university closed.
July 3	Late summer courses begin and full summer courses resume.
July 10	Last day for registration and course changes for late summer courses.
July 23	Last day for entire fee adjustment when withdrawing from late summer courses.
Aug. 4	Statutory holiday, university closed
Aug. 15	Classes follow a Monday schedule. Last day for late and full summer term classes. Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for term work for courses that end on this day.
Aug. 15	Last day for academic withdrawal from late summer and full summer courses.
Aug. 18-23	Final examinations.

Addresses:

Department of Philosophy:	3A35 Paterson Hall www.carleton.ca/philosophy 520-2110
Registrar's Office:	300 Tory www.carleton.ca/registrar 520-3500
Student Academic Success Centre:	302 Tory www.carleton.ca/sasc 520-7850
Paul Menton Centre:	500 University Centre www.carleton.ca/pmc 520-6608
Writing Tutorial Service:	4 th Floor, Library http://www.carleton.ca/sasc/writing-tutorial-service/ 520-6632
MacOdrum Library	http://www.library.carleton.ca/ 520-2735