

## CARLETON UNIVERSITY

### PHIL 1200: THE MEANING OF LIFE

#### Course Syllabus Winter Term 2016

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Professor  
Ken Ferguson

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Office Hours:  
T/Th 11:30 – 12:30

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#### Class Time

Tues/Thursday  
1:05-2:25 PM

Location: KM-TH

## 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

**Midterm:** There will be a midterm exam which will be worth 30% of the final grade. It will have the following form: one week before the date of the midterm a list of questions on topics central to the material covered will be distributed to students; the instructor will then select a number of these questions for students to answer on the midterm.

**Term Paper:** Students will be required to write a term paper worth 30% of the final grade. The paper will be about 6 – 8 pages in length (1500 – 2000 words). It will not be a research paper that requires library or Internet sources, but will consist of a critical discussion of some topic or issue central to the course. A list of topics, along with instructions and guidelines for writing the paper, will be available early in the term.

**Final Examination:** There will be a final exam, worth 40% of the final grade, scheduled during the examination period. It will have the same format as the midterm.

## ACCESS TO CULEARN

Students must ensure that they have access to CuLearn, as class lectures and other material will be posted there.

## REQUIRED TEXT

*The Meaning of Life: A Reader*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, edited by E.D. Klemke and Steven M. Cahn (Oxford: Oxford University Press) This text is available in the University Bookstore.

In addition to this text, 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 View – 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) Hedonism – Pleasure is the value of 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 or life is to develop your potential as a human being
- 10) Deconstructing the Issue – the issue of the meaning of life?' has no meaning

## Department of Philosophy and Carleton University Policies (2015-16)

### **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:
  - student name
  - student number
  - course number and section
  - instructor's name
- 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://calendar.carleton.ca/undergrad/regulations/academicregulationsoftheuniversity/acadregsuniv14/>)

### **Academic Accommodation:**

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request the processes are as follows:

**Pregnancy obligation:** write to your professor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details visit the Equity Services website: <http://www2.carleton.ca/equity/>

**Religious obligation:** write to your professor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details visit the Equity Services website: <http://www2.carleton.ca/equity/>

**Academic Accommodations 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](mailto:pmc@carleton.ca) for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send 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 your professor to ensure

accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the PMC website for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally-scheduled exam (*if applicable*) at <http://www2.carleton.ca/pmc/new-and-current-students/dates-and-deadlines/>

You can visit the Equity Services website to view the policies and to obtain more detailed information on academic accommodation at <http://www2.carleton.ca/equity/>

### **Important Dates:**

Sept. 2	Classes start.
Sept. 4	Classes follow a Monday schedule.
Sept. 7	Labour Day - University closed.
Sept. 18	Last day for registration and course changes in Fall and Fall/Winter courses.
Sept. 30	Last day for entire fee adjustment when withdrawing from Fall term or two-term courses.
Oct. 12	Thanksgiving Day – University closed.
Oct. 26-30	Fall Break – no classes.
Nov. 24	Last day for tests or examinations in courses below 4000-level before the Final Examination period.
Dec. 7	Last day of classes, Fall term. Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for Fall term courses.
Dec. 7	Last day to withdraw from Fall term courses (academic purposes only).
Dec. 8	No classes or examinations take place. Review classes may be held, but no new material may be introduced.
Dec. 9-21	Final examinations for Fall courses, mid-terms for Fall/Winter courses. Exams are normally held all seven days of the week.
Dec. 21	Take-home exams are due.
Jan. 6	Winter term classes begin.
Jan. 19	Last day for registration and course changes in Winter term classes.
Jan. 31	Last day for entire fee adjustment when withdrawing from winter courses or winter portion of two-term courses.
Feb. 15-19	Winter Break, no classes.
Mar. 24	Last day for tests or examinations in courses below 4000-level before the Final Examination period.
Mar. 25	Good Friday – University closed.
Apr. 8	Last day of Fall/Winter and Winter 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 Fall/Winter and Winter term courses.
Apr. 8	Last day to withdraw from Fall/Winter and Winter term courses (academic purposes only).
Apr. 9-10	No classes or examinations take place. Review classes may be held, but no new material may be introduced.
Apr. 11-23	Final Examinations. Exams are normally held all seven days of the week.
Apr. 23	Take-home exams are due.

### **Addresses:**

Department of Philosophy:	3A35 Paterson Hall <a href="http://www.carleton.ca/philosophy">www.carleton.ca/philosophy</a> 520-2110
Registrar's Office:	300 Tory <a href="http://www.carleton.ca/registrar">www.carleton.ca/registrar</a> 520-3500
Student Academic Success Centre:	302 Tory <a href="http://www.carleton.ca/sasc">www.carleton.ca/sasc</a> 520-7850
Writing Tutorial Service:	4 <sup>th</sup> Floor, Library <a href="http://www1.carleton.ca/sasc/writing-tutorial-service/">http://www1.carleton.ca/sasc/writing-tutorial-service/</a> 520-6632
MacOdrum Library	<a href="http://www.library.carleton.ca/">http://www.library.carleton.ca/</a> 520-2735

