

Philosophy 164/264 Syllabus

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1 Instructor Information

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The best way to reach me is via email (I check it all the time).

2 Course Reading Materials ☺ Schedule (tentative!)

We will be using the following materials for the course (in chronological order):

1. Brian Skyrms' book *Choice and Chance* (fourth edition). We will begin by reading chapters 1, 2, 6, and 8 of *Choice and Chance*. These chapters will set the stage for the course, by introducing many of the basic logical and analytical tools we'll be using. **Approximate dates:** 9/27–10/9.
2. *Philosophy 164/264 Course Reader* (which contains excerpts from several books and articles). This will be the main source for our discussion of confirmation theory. **Approximate dates:** 10/11–11/6.
3. Wesley Salmon's book *Four Decades of Scientific Explanation*. This book is an encyclopedic classic, and we will read several of its chapters. **Approximate dates:** 11/8–11/29.


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4. Curd and Cover's collection of papers: *Central Issues in Philosophy of Science*. Only a couple of articles will be relevant from this collection (that's why it is labeled "optional" at the bookstore). So, you may not want to buy this one (it will be on reserve anyway). It's a great book to own. It not only contains many seminal papers, but it also has some good commentary as well.
 5. **Time Permitting:** We will read bits of Andre Kukla's book *Studies in Scientific Realism* (it is doubtful that we'll get to this). This book should have been listed as "optional" at the bookstore. You may not want to buy this one (or you may want to return it if you have already bought it — you can always get the relevant bits later, from the reserve copy). Approximate (possible) dates: 12/4–12/6.

All of these items are currently available from the **Stanford Bookstore**. Copies of each are also on reserve at the **Tanner Library** in the **Philosophy Department (Building 90)**.

Occasionally, I will supplement the readings with my own handouts (mainly, for the purpose of distributing paper topics, lecture notes, *etc.*). I will usually distribute paper copies of these handouts to the class. Moreover, electronic versions of the handouts will always be posted on the class website:

<http://philosophy.wisc.edu/fitelson/164>

Handouts will typically be posted in **Adobe Acrobat PDF** format, and will require **Adobe's Acrobat Reader** software (version 3.01 or later) to be viewed, printed, *etc.*

Whenever possible, I will try to disseminate important course information and updates both in class and  *via email* (I'm setting up a course email list this week). So, *please check your email regularly.*

3 More About the Course Web Site

The course website will also contain lots of other useful information relevant to the course. In particular, the course schedule page, at:


<http://philosophy.wisc.edu/fitelson/164/schedule.htm>

will allow you to keep track of where we are in the course. Current readings, paper topics, paper deadlines, lecture notes, *etc.* will all be detailed chronologically on this page. You'll notice that the schedule does not extend very far into the future. This is because I like the course to evolve dynamically throughout the quarter. Typically, I will have things like readings and lectures figured out about two weeks in advance. This allows me to make changes to the course in "real-time," as the quarter progresses.

 I urge you to explore the course website. Many interesting links & materials can be found there.


4 What, When, Where, Why?

Philosophy 164/264 consists of two afternoon "power lectures" [2:15-3:30 pm TR @ Building 200, Room 303]. Attendance will not figure (explicitly) into your final grade. However, much of the material covered in lecture will *not* overlap (in any obvious way) with the readings. So, I assume everyone will attend lectures regularly. The objectives of this course are (*i*) to become familiar with some of the central issues in contemporary philosophy of science (in particular, issues surrounding confirmation and explanation), and (*ii*) to get some practice at writing concise, analytical papers about some of these issues. As will soon become clear, the course will be taught from a highly analytical and critical perspective with much emphasis on the logical

 structure of issues, arguments, and accounts.

5 Papers, Exams, Grades, and all that ...

We will have (*i*) two short paper assignments, and (*ii*) a take-home final examination (essentially, a third short paper). The first short paper will be worth 25% of your final grade, the second paper will be worth 35% of your final grade, and the take-home final examination will be worth 40% of your final grade.

 Roughly every two weeks (starting today!), I will distribute "short paper topics." Usually, these will be questions and issues that I formulate on my analysis of the readings for that "fortnight" of the course. Sometimes, the topics will be drawn from other sources. Your short papers may be discussions of one (or more) of these topics. Or, you may choose your own paper topics (but, please discuss your topics with me first!). You will notice that the topics I distribute are very focused and somewhat narrow. This is intentional. What I'm looking for are concise, precise, and analytical papers. In particular, I'd like the papers (including the take-home final!) to be no more than 4,000 words in length (and, if possible, between 2,000 and 3,000 words). The papers should contain a minimum of window dressing. They should quickly set up the issue/problem, and then (straightaway!) propose a brief and precise analysis/resolution of it. I will meet with each student to discuss their paper topics and papers, and I will allow (and encourage) resubmissions of papers, if this might be beneficial (except for the final!). I will try to provide some examples of "model papers" to give you an idea of the kind of thing I'm looking for. As a rough guideline, you might want to pick up a recent issue of the journal **ANALYSIS**. These are the sorts of papers (in terms of structure, style, and length) that I have in mind. Tentatively, our due dates for the papers and the take-home final are:

- First paper (due October 25th, worth 25% of final grade)
- Second paper (due November 29th, worth 35% of final grade)
- Take-home final (due December 14th – end of exam period, worth 40% of final grade)