

# PHILOS 743A/B: PhD Seminar

Fall 2023–Winter 2024

McMaster University

Instructor: Dr. Megan Stotts

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Office: UH 306

Office hours: Thursdays 11:30am–12:30pm, and by appointment

**Course Meetings (Fall and Winter):** Wednesdays, 9:30–11:20am

**Course Website:** Important information about the course will be posted on Avenue to Learn.

## Course Description:

This course is required for all second-year Philosophy PhD students, and enrollment is open only to them. It runs for the full year, but meets only once every two weeks, on average. The main purpose of the seminar is to ensure that all students in the PhD program possess the information and skills needed to succeed during the dissertation phase of the program, and beyond. During the Fall term, our meetings will consist of a series of workshops focused on various aspects of professionalization. The professionalization workshops are required for students enrolled in the seminar, and are also open to any other graduate student in the department who wishes to attend. The other major component of the course is preparing and presenting a paper, and commenting on and discussing each other's work, during the Winter term.

## Course Objectives:

1. Provide professional development opportunities related to both academic and non-academic career paths
2. Improve philosophical writing skills
3. Improve skills in discussing one's own work with peers
4. Improve skills in commenting on others' work

## Required Texts:

None.

## Course Evaluation:

This course is graded on a Pass/Fail basis. To pass, students will need to do all of the following:

- (1) Attend class regularly and participate in discussion.
- (2) Write and present a new paper of their own.
- (3) Write and present a commentary on a paper written by a peer.
- (4) Write up two substantial questions about others' papers whenever they are not assigned to do (3).

If there is any danger of a student failing the course, the instructor will contact them and provide suggestions to improve performance. These assignments are weighted equally in the sense that all of them are required to receive a Pass.

**About Attendance and Participation:**

Students are expected to attend class regularly. A student who is unable to attend a particular class meeting should contact the instructor (in advance, if possible). Students are expected to participate regularly in class discussions. One challenging aspect of this course is that we will all be asked to read and discuss papers on topics that may be unfamiliar to us. I encourage you all to do your best—but if participation in class discussions is something with which you have special difficulties, feel free to reach out to me at the start of the term.

Participation will be evaluated on a Pass/Fail basis, on the merits of thoughtfulness, relevance, and constructiveness. Students may assume that they are on track to receive a Pass unless they hear otherwise from the instructor.

**About the Paper:**

Each student will be asked to write a new paper between 4,000 and 5,000 words in length (not including notes and references). Each student will be assigned one session of the course during which we will discuss their paper. The session will begin with a 10-minute summary by the paper's author, and then a commentary written by a peer. The paper itself will be due (via email to the instructor) two weeks before the student's scheduled presentation date, for circulation among the members of our class and other department members who wish to attend the discussion. The one exception is our January 10 presenter, whose paper is due December 21 because the university does not permit assignments to be due during the December break.

You are encouraged to begin work on this paper early in the Fall, and welcome to contact the instructor for feedback as you choose your topic. This must be a new paper, not a revised version of a previously written term paper. It is also distinct from your QE document (which is a thesis proposal rather than an actual paper). You are encouraged to consult your supervisor about your choice of topic, and your paper can (though does not have to) be a draft of a possible dissertation chapter, as long as you write it as a paper that can stand on its own. In other words, your paper must have a clear thesis for which you argue just within that paper, and it cannot be just a literature review. Students are encouraged to make use of the writing support available at the [Writing Centre](#).

The paper will be evaluated on a Pass/Fail basis, on the merits of the philosophical skill it displays. Students who have submitted their paper on time and presented it as planned may assume that they received a Pass unless they hear otherwise from the instructor.

**About the Commentary:**

For each meeting of the seminar in which a paper is discussed, one student will be asked to provide a formal commentary lasting 5–10 minutes, as sometimes occurs at academic conferences. Guidance on this task will be provided as our first paper presentation approaches. The commentary is due via email (to both the instructor and the paper's author) 48 hours before the meeting at which the paper will be discussed.

The commentary will be evaluated on a Pass/Fail basis, on the merits of the philosophical skill it displays and its constructiveness to help improve the other student's paper. Students who have submitted their commentary on time and presented it as planned may assume that they received a Pass unless they hear otherwise from the instructor.

### About the Written Questions:

Before each meeting of the seminar in which a paper is to be discussed, all students who did not write that week's paper or commentary will be asked to submit two substantial questions about the paper. These are due via email (to both the instructor and the paper's author) 24 hours before the meeting at which the paper will be discussed.

The written questions will be evaluated on a Pass/Fail basis, on the merits of their thoughtfulness and relevance. Students who have submitted their comments on time may assume that they received a Pass unless they hear otherwise from the instructor.

### Course Policies:

1. **Extension and Rescheduling Policy:** Once students have been assigned dates for the paper presentations and commentaries, those deadlines will be firm. Extensions for the papers and commentaries (and thus, rescheduling of sessions) will be possible only in seriously extenuating circumstances. Even after our schedule is set, students are asked to keep all of our meeting times for both terms open in case such rescheduling is necessary. Because the purpose of the written questions is to stimulate discussion at our meetings, extensions on them will also be possible only in seriously extenuating circumstances. Written questions submitted after the relevant course session has begun will need to be expanded to 1–2 page (double-spaced) response papers to be accepted.
2. **Generative AI Policy:** Students are not permitted to use generative AI in this course. In alignment with [McMaster academic integrity policy](#), it “shall be an offence knowingly to ... submit academic work for assessment that was purchased or acquired from another source.” This includes work created by generative AI tools. Also stated in the policy is the following: “Contract Cheating is the act of “outsourcing of student work to third parties” (Lancaster & Clarke, 2016, p. 639) with or without payment.” Using Generative AI tools is a form of contract cheating. Charges of academic dishonesty will be brought forward to the Office of Academic Integrity.
3. **Changes to the course outline:** The instructor reserves the right to make changes to this course outline. Any changes by the instructor will be announced via email or in class.

### University Policy Statements:

1. **Academic Accommodations of Students with Disabilities:** Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or [sas@mcmaster.ca](mailto:sas@mcmaster.ca) e-mail to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University's Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities policy.
2. **Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous or Spiritual Observances (RISO):** Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the RISO policy. Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office normally within 10 working days of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.
3. **Courses with an Online Element:** Some courses use on-line elements (e.g. e-mail, Avenue to Learn (A2L), LearnLink, web pages, capa, Moodle, ThinkingCap, etc.). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of a course using these elements, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts,

and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in a course that uses on-line elements will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

4. **Extreme Circumstances:** The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.
5. **Academic Integrity:** You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty.

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at <https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/>

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- improper collaboration in group work.
- copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

### ***Schedule of Meetings***

Please continue to reserve all of the registrar-scheduled meeting times for the course in case rescheduling any of the meetings below becomes necessary.

#### **September 13:**

The Qualifying Exam

Work/Life Balance as a PhD Student

#### **September 27:**

Academic Conferences and Publishing

#### **October 18:**

Developing as a Teacher

#### **November 1:**

Non-Academic Careers Panel

**November 15:**

Writing a Dissertation

Introduction to the Academic Job Market

**January 10, 2024:**

Paper presentation and discussion

**January 24:**

Paper presentation and discussion

**February 7:**

Paper presentation and discussion

**February 28:**

Paper presentation and discussion

**March 13:**

Paper presentation and discussion

**March 27:**

Paper presentation and discussion

**April 10:**

Paper presentation and discussion