

“The MA Seminar” (Philosophy 6950)

Dr. Karen Houle

Fall 2013 & Winter 2014

Class meets:

Mondays 2:30-3:50 (**FALL**) ; Mondays 4:00-5:20 (**WINTER**)

...in the Philosophy Department Seminar room (346)

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Overall Statement of Objectives:

The purpose of the MA seminar is to have a weekly space over the course of the entire first year of a Master’s program where students brand new to graduate school have an opportunity to come together as a cohort and grapple with 3 distinct sets of demands that pertain to graduate-level education in philosophy -- *research & scholarship, pedagogical and institutional* -- and to work together on developing the skills required to meet those various demands well.

Research & scholarship: In the topic-based graduate seminars they are taking at the same time as the MA seminar, students are reading primary and secondary texts, performing exegesis, producing critique, building arguments and counter-arguments, and then pursuing further research for a term paper. Those term papers can be turned into submissions to journals, abstracts for conferences or form part of a future graduate work application package. **Pedagogical:** In the undergraduate courses they are now T.A.’ing, Master’s students are running tutorials, possibly giving input into course structure and testing, meeting with students one-on-one, and of course, marking assignments. Attached to teaching and pedagogy are many, many subtle sub-responsibilities: everything from managing unruly behavior like sexual harassment to understanding how the institution conceives of academic misconduct. **Institutional:** Over and above these scholarly and pedagogical challenges, graduate students are expected to participate in the life of professional philosophers: sitting on committees, helping out with conferences, giving commentaries, chairing sessions, offering formal and informal feedback to peers, attending department functions such as guest lectures, asking questions and participating in formal and informal conversations.

The MA Seminar weekly meetings are intended as a collaborative forum to allow students to identify these challenges and build to the skills relevant to meeting them. Its aim is to support to their success and integrity as learners, scholars, active & visible members of a variety of public and professional communities, and as teachers, over the course of this year and also as future academics.

General Methods and Approach:

In the MA seminar we will read & discuss various articles. Some will be primary philosophy (the students’ own papers, or articles in scholarly journals or venues). Some will be on the nature of philosophy. Some

will address higher education, like the ethical dimensions of scholarship. We will have scholars and educators in to talk. We work together on such skills such: reading texts well (and modeling how to read texts well to your students) textual analysis, writing for different audiences and venues (abstracts, book reviews, journals, grant applications), knowing how to find your way around journals both in terms of what's in them and how to submit to them, team-building across differences in disciplinary idioms, background training and social positions. We would like to help building good habits of note taking, preparing questions for discussion, marking papers fairly and quickly, giving feedback to undergraduate students on tests and papers, giving feedback to one's philosophy colleagues, revising work based on input, handling conflict or difficult behavior in the classroom, speaking effectively in public, reading texts aloud, fielding questions from audiences, chairing panels or meetings, hosting symposia. Which of these we work with will depend in part on interests of the cohort.

Specific Objectives & Tasks of the Course as a Whole:

1. Students will work up a research proposal or statement of interest for the major scholarship (OGS and SSHRC) deadlines, give & get constructive feedback on their proposals from their peers in time to rework their proposals, in order to be able to submit strong grant applications;
2. Students will work up a scholarly paper for presentation at a public venue or conference; the paper will be submitted for consideration to a conference and/or presented during the school year; either at a conference organized by the MA seminar (possibly in conjunction with the Speaker Series or Philopolis) *or* an external conference such as the CPA Annual Meetings at Congress;
3. Students will attend the Department Speaker's Series and work on the oral skills of posing questions;
4. Students will work up a commentary on a scholarly paper, for presentation at a public venue or conference, *or* for inclusion in a philosophical review (such as *Borders*); the commentary will be submitted and/or presented during or by the end of the academic year;
5. Students will write a book review on a recently-published book relevant to their MRP or thesis;
6. In each of the two terms, each student will explain, orally their research interests, and how that research is progressing. This helps students become more comfortable explaining their ideas;
7. Students will be supported in the development of an excellent thesis or research-paper topic so that they enter their second year of MA studies with a clear focus;
8. Each student will choose, circulate, develop discussion questions and lead a discussion on an article centrally-relevant to their research; this will give students an opportunity to work on their teaching and communication skills;
9. Students will co-organize and co-host a public venue for the discussion of philosophy at the end of the two terms';
10. Students will be mentored on, and give collective feedback on, teaching skills

Fall Term key tasks:

- ❖ Thinking together about what it means to *do philosophy*
- ❖ OGS and SSHRC research statements prepared
- ❖ Students explain their research interests, field questions
- ❖ Working on marking skills; fostering discussion in seminar
- ❖ Talking together about teaching (challenges, ethical issues, strengths);
- ❖ Getting some good research skills down
- ❖ Attending public lectures, forming questions, engaging in public discourse, commentary

Winter Term key tasks:

- ❖ Submit an article to conference or scholarly journal (and track progress)
- ❖ Thinking together about what it means to do philosophy as scholars and as instructors
- ❖ Each student will choose, circulate, develop discussion questions and lead a discussion on an article centrally-relevant to their research
- ❖ Modeling & mentoring of teaching skills (in seminar visits or possibly recorded)
- ❖ Practical matters: time management, GRE testing, better writing skills, how to look for and handle plagiarism, voice and body comporment during presentations
- ❖ Brown bag discussions or events related to doing graduate work open to larger graduate student community; 1) Writing skills; 2) Leading seminars
- ❖ Attending public lectures, being active as a member of the wider philosophical community (formal and informal)
- ❖ Organizing a MA seminar Symposium for late in the term (April)

Text, Readings, Materials:

No textbooks. Some readings. Print or e-copies will be distributed.

Evaluation:

This course is a **pass/fail** (no grade is assigned). To pass, each student must attend **every** class and make a real contribution. Where required, students will read and give constructive written and-or oral feedback on all assigned materials, on time. When a student fails to complete a task, or does that task poorly (perfunctorily) no matter how minor, the student will not receive a PASS grade.

Course Calendar/Fall Schedule:**First Class:** September 9th, 2013: **Orientation**

- **Task #1:** Let's talk together about what it means to *do* philosophy in light of the philosophy you have already done, and how doing philosophy at this next level might be a little different. Come prepared to discuss the Rudisill article "The Transition from Studying Philosophy to Doing Philosophy." The Rudisill article spells out some of the pedagogical choices that underlie a course like the MA seminar.
- **Task #2:** One student chooses and distributes the reading that s/he will have to teach in seminar next week. This text should be circulated by Thursday at the latest.
- **Task #3:** (For next week: Read Jacques Rancière's "The Ignorant Schoolmaster" (<http://craigeplin.com/RanciereSchoolmaster.pdf>))

Second Class: September 16th, 2013: **Metadiscussion discussion**

- **Three tasks** this week:
- **Pedagogical #1:** Using the text circulated, I will demonstrate an effective way of initiating and generating discussion on a text. Then we will discuss this, and other techniques.

- **Pedagogical #2:** Bring Rancière's critical view into this conversation.
 - **Institutional: Participating in the Scholarly Community:** You must attend the Speaker's Series (and Political Philosophy Conference Keynote) on Friday, September 20th (Dr. Max Pensky, SUNY Binghamton). You must produce (on paper) **one** short questions that you might have posed to Pensky or respondent (Deveaux). We will go over three clear steps to asking a good question. Bring this to next week's class.
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Third Class: September 23th, 2013:

- **Asking Good Questions:**
 - **For Next Class:** by Thursday 26th, send a two-line description of your research to Dave Hudson dhudson@uoguelph.ca. In subject line, make sure you indicate it is for Houle's seminar.
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Fourth Class: September 30th, 2013: **Research Methods I**

- **This session will take place in the Library, Room 034**
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Fifth Class: October 7nd, 2013: **Preparing your Grant Application**

Guest: Don Dedrick (Award's Officer)

***By the 3rd of October, all students will have sent their initial OGS or SSHRC project description to Don Dedrick, and to all the other members of the MA seminar. On Monday we will go through each student's proposal.*

- **TASK:** By Sunday, revise and resubmit proposal to Houle by the end of the week.
 - **Note:** No classes on the 14th. Thanksgiving Monday!
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Sixth Class: October 21st, 2013: **Bridging the Expert-Novice Divide...**

- **Pedagogical: How to Help Students New to Philosophy Read & Discuss Philosophical Texts.**
(Guest: Andrew Robinson)
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Seventh Class: October 28th, 2013: **Brown Bag Discussion #1 on Pedagogy: Marking**

- **OPEN TO ALL STUDENTS !**

By this point in the term, all students will all have had some initial experience marking papers.

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- Come to the MA seminar with the following things: **1)** Two or three challenges you have identified in your marking work; **2)** One or two “tips” you yourself have developed and would like to share, to help the rest of us in our marking .

Eighth Class: November 4th, 2013: **Brown Bag Discussion #2 on Pedagogy: Active Learning**

OPEN TO ALL STUDENTS

By this point in the term, students will all have had some initial experience running seminars.

- Come to the MA seminar with the following things: **1)** Three challenges you have identified in your seminar teaching work; **2)** One or two “tips” you yourself have developed and would like to share, to help the rest of us in our seminars

Ninth Class: November 11th, 2013: **Performance, Part I**

Procedure:

- Students will each present their research, orally, for 2 minutes.
- Then again for 5 minutes.
- The rest of us are simply going to listen, and mind the stopwatch, and give constructive feedback on these four questions:
 - a) From what was said, do you have a clear idea of what their question is?
 - b) From what was said, do you have a good sense of what is important about that question?
 - c) What does this person do well, in terms of orally (and gesturally) conveying their ideas?
 - d) What could this person improve upon, in terms of orally (and gesturally) conveying their ideas?

****Each** student will then write a response to Houle about the experience

Tenth Class: November 18th, 2013: **Publication possibles...**

Task: Starting to think about presenting work in conferences and journals.

- Identify a paper topic.
- Make up a title and four keywords.
- Write an abstract for this. (look up other conferences or Philosopher’s Index to see how they are written). Circulate this to your peers, and to Houle
- Everyone scouts out 3 possible conferences you could submit to (report on the date, location, cost, theme, keynote speaker).
- Ditto with journals. Look through back issues. Troll through your keywords to find out which journals have published on those topics. If you can, find out acceptance rates.

Last Class of Term: November 25th, 2013: **Housekeeping**

- Everyone should give some helpful, critical feedback to the abstract writers (cc. me).
- Start conversation about our MA seminar date-suggestions so we can all weigh in.

- Over the break please communicate just what it is that you would like to focus on next term. I would like to hear from you by December 20th on this count so I can get next term organized.
- Please confirm whether you will be presenting the papers these abstracts are attached to, at our MA conference?
- Let all of us know which conferences you submitted your paper or abstract to.

HAVE A GREAT BREAK!!! SEE YOU IN JANUARY

Regulations..

E-mail Communication

As per university regulations, all students are required to check their <uoguelph.ca> e-mail account regularly: e-mail is the official route of communication between the University and its students.

When You Cannot Meet a Course Requirement

When you find yourself unable to meet an in-course requirement because of illness or compassionate reasons, please advise the course in writing, with your name, id#, and e-mail contact. See the graduate calendar for information on regulations and procedures for Academic Consideration:

http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/graduate/current/genreg/sec_d0e1400.shtml

Drop Date

The last date to drop one-semester courses, without academic penalty, is DATE HERE. Two-semester courses must be dropped by the last day of the add period in the second semester. Refer to the Graduate Calendar for the schedule of dates:

<http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/graduate/current/sched/sched-dates-f10.shtml>

Academic Misconduct

The University of Guelph is committed to upholding the highest standards of academic integrity and it is the responsibility of all members of the University community – faculty, staff, and students – to be aware of what constitutes academic misconduct and to do as much as possible to prevent academic offences from occurring. University of Guelph students have the responsibility of abiding by the University's policy on academic misconduct regardless of their location of study; faculty, staff and students have the responsibility of supporting an environment that discourages misconduct. Students need to remain aware that instructors have access to and the right to use electronic and other means of detection. The Academic Misconduct Policy is detailed in the Graduate Calendar:

http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/graduate/current/genreg/sec_d0e1687.shtml

Recording of Materials

Presentations which are made in relation to course work—including lectures—cannot be recorded in any electronic media without the permission of the presenter, whether the instructor, a classmate or guest lecturer.

Resources

The Graduate Calendar is the source of information about the University of Guelph's procedures, policies and regulations which apply to graduate programs:

<http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/graduate/current/>