

Philosophy Capstone

PHIL 4888/4888H | Spring 2025

Course Description

The Philosophy capstone course culminates students' work in the major. It offers the opportunity to engage and combine the skills in analysis, critical thought, and clear and cogent expression developed throughout their undergraduate work in philosophy. Students will identify a provisional paper or paper topic prior to enrolling in the capstone course and will spend the semester writing, expanding, and revising this paper under the supervision of the faculty members teaching the capstone. The capstone course will incorporate career readiness elements and overall will strive to provide students with a culminating shared experience as Philosophy majors.

Basic Information

Instructor: Sarah Holtman

Office: Heller 815

Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 11:30-12:30

Email: holtm001@umn.edu

Instructor: Philip Bold

Office: Heller 805

Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 1:20-2:20

Email: bold0169@umn.edu

Course Meetings:

Large Group: Wednesdays, 2:30–5:00 AND Mondays, 2:30–3:20, in Heller 731, from **January 22–March 5** (i.e., until the start of Spring Break);

And Wednesdays, 2:30–5:00, in Heller 731 from **March 19–April 30** (i.e., for 7 weeks after Spring Break).

Small Groups: Mondays, 2:30–3:20, in Heller 830 (Holtman) and Blegen 240 (Bold), from **March 24–April 28** (i.e., for 6 weeks between late March and late April—there will be no meeting on the Monday after Spring Break). During about the first two weeks of the semester, we'll be dividing the class into two groups, largely based on the areas of philosophy in which students plan to write. Although both professors will work with all students in large group sessions, small group discussions will be with just one professor, and comments on drafts will generally come from that person as well.

On the last Monday of the semester, May 5th, we'll have a celebratory gathering with the whole group during our usual meeting time (2:30-3:20)! Details to follow later in the term.

Assignments

Required Assignments

Presentation Category

Topic Presentation (10%) — During the first half of the semester, students will each make a presentation relevant to the topic on which they intend to write their capstone paper. The idea is to start thinking about your paper, to acquaint us all with your general topic, and to get some feedback from the group as a whole. **With this in mind, you'll assign a reading(s) of about 5-10 pages (with some guidance from Profs. Bold and Holtman). Reading assignments will be due to us (your professors) a week in advance of your presentation,** and we will post them on our Canvas site (with any guiding instructions you'd like to offer). Everyone in the course will be responsible for preparing these readings before class.

During your class session, you'll have about 45 minutes to describe your capstone topic and your intentions for the paper, relate your paper/topic to the readings, and guide discussion. Capstone members will be ready with questions and suggestions. Again, this is a time to test out ideas and explore plans for your paper with the community. No matter how much progress you've made on writing/planning your capstone—just a little or a great deal—it's an opportunity to work through the ideas you have so far and receive our thoughts and support. These presentations will take place in **weeks 2–7** of the semester (from **January 29th** to **March 5th**). You will sign up for your particular presentation time (details to be announced at our first meeting on January 22nd).

Our current plan, given the number of students registered, is to have three presentations on each Wednesday during weeks 2-7 and one presentation on each Monday during weeks 3-7. There will be no meeting on Monday, January 27th.

Paper Presentation (20%) — During the second half of the semester, participants will give a research presentation on their capstone paper. This presentation should be in the form of a professional, academic colloquium. You'll want to motivate your topic, explain your take on it, and detail the argument of your paper. Each participant will have 20-25 minutes to present and 10-15 minutes for questions and answers (for a total of 35 minutes). These presentations will take place during weeks 9–14 (From **March 26th** to **April 30th**). You'll again sign up for your particular presentation time. **(Our meeting in week 7—on March 19th—will cover some presentation basics and tips!)**

Paper Category

Capstone Paper (40%) — At the end of the semester, students will submit the final versions of their capstone papers. These papers ought to be just that: the capstone of your Philosophy program! They should be about 15-20 pages long for regular capstone papers, and about 25 pages for honors theses. The final papers are due on the final exam day for our class, **May 10th**.

Participation Category

General Participation (10%) — Among the goals of the capstone course is to form and cultivate a philosophical community among students, one that can support each of you in developing, writing, and presenting an original, well-honed piece of philosophical work. This community can only form, though, if we all show up for presentations and discussions all semester long! For that reason, we'll be recording attendance. You shouldn't see this as a way to gain or lose points though. General participation grades will be assessed holistically, taking into account both active and thoughtful participation and attendance.

Meeting with Faculty Member (5%) — Once during the semester, you must meet with a faculty member in the Philosophy Department to discuss your capstone paper idea or argument. This faculty member should have a specialty relevant to your paper topic so that you can receive some expert advice in the early stages of paper development. (The faculty member may be one of the capstone professors—Bold or Holtman—if either has the relevant expertise.)

Don't send the faculty member a full paper to read! Come to them with a plan: a description of your project, your argument, and questions. What you should be looking for is expert feedback on the argument and direction to additional sources. You should complete this meeting by **March 7th**.

Draft #1 (5%) — You'll submit the first draft of your paper to your small group instructor, who will provide you feedback and guidance on editing and completing the paper. We expect a full draft of the paper, one that details the entire argument on behalf of your thesis. We don't expect perfection though. (It's a draft after all!). The more complete the draft is, the more valuable our feedback will be! The draft is due **April 2nd**.

Draft #2 (5%) — You'll submit the second draft of your paper to peers, who will give you their suggestions. The draft should be complete and incorporate the feedback that your small group professor provided on **Draft #1**. This draft is due **April 23rd**.

Peer Review (5%) — Others in the your small group will read your paper, and you will read and provide feedback on theirs. After students have reviewed each other's papers, we will discuss what we saw and learned in small groups on **April 28th**.

Course Policies

Late Work

If you are going to be unable to hand in an assignment at the deadline, please let Professor Holtman or Professor Bold know before the deadline. As long as you contact us before the assignment is due, we will extend your deadline, no questions asked. Before the assignment deadline, we require no explanation.