Calvin and Hobbes Tour the Philosophical World

**Professor:** Christopher Martin  
**Peer Mentor:** Katie Hobbs  
**Advisor:** Deanne Kusserow

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**Class Time and Location:** Tu & Th 12:30-1:50, MAC 109

**Office Hours** for Prof. Martin: Mo: 2:30-5:00, Th: 10:00-11:30 & 2:00-4:00  
**Office Hours** for Katie Hobbs: TBD

**Overview**
Calvin and Hobbes help us to appreciate and think through various philosophical problems …

**First Year Seminar Course**
Calvin and Hobbes Tour the Philosophical World is a First year Seminar, meaning that only freshman are enrolled in the class and that the class is capped at 25 students. The aim of these courses is to help ease first-year students into the college experience. This means that we will spend a fair bit of time discussing things like study habits, when and how to read and take notes, how to best use the library, how to improve your studies outside of the classroom, different social outings on campus and the like. In order to facilitate these extra aims our course will include, in addition to traditional course responsibilities, a host of tasks geared toward helping you to familiarize yourself with many of the opportunities UW Green Bay has to offer. We do this because many studies have shown that the more students are involved not just in their education but, also, their educational institution, the better they do – the more likely they are to graduate and to secure a good career upon doing so. Lastly, we are very fortunate to have Katie Hobbs as our peer mentor for this course. Katie will be assisting me with various aspects of the course but is here primarily to help you all acclimate to life at college and at UWGB. We hope that this course will give you a strong and secure first-step toward a deep, meaningful, and successful college education.

**Goals**

**Method**
- Learn to read (sometimes) difficult materials carefully
- Learn to better articulate and defend your reaction to readings
- Be able to identify potential strengths and weaknesses in arguments
- Attend to the argument of a reading by understanding the argument's structure
- Improve your conversational skills with others, particularly as regards disagreements
- Acquaint yourself with the information resources that surround you (No Wikipedial)
- Learn how to approach real-world problems from a multi-faceted perspective

**Application**
- Gain an awareness and understanding of different philosophical concerns
- Gain an awareness and understanding of competing philosophical theories
- Engage in thoughtful and meaningful philosophical discourse, both with oneself and amongst others
- Be able to understand these issues in a broad and problem-focused setting
- Use thinking and research skills so as to propose and investigate possible solutions
- Work with other students on a presentation of your idea, and deliver it to the class
- Attend 5 or more co-curricular activities

**Requests**
I ask that you read the day's assigned reading before each class. I ask that you come to class prepared to discuss the material, meaning that you have a fair understanding of its contours and several questions about its content. I ask that you are courteous in class, meaning that you arrive on time, refrain from talking, texting or using laptops in
class, respect myself and your colleagues, do not pack up early and the like. I hope that each class will be a terrific learning experience for you, and that each class will extend your understanding a bit and strengthen your critical thinking and speaking skills a bit more.

Phirst-year Success Tasks
Katie will be explaining these in closer detail in another handout, but as part of the GPS program you will be asked to attend a series of workshops meant to help you to better acclimate to life at UW-Green Bay and to help you do well in your Introduction to Biology course. You will also be asked to attend meetings with myself and with Deanne. You are also asked to attend several co-curricular events and a few social activities. Nearly all of these tasks are things you’ll likely (or at least ought likely) to be doing anyway. Your successful completion of them (by submitting a form documenting it) will account for 15 % of your final grade.

Weekly Journals
You will be asked, starting the second week of class, to write a weekly journal entry. You will upload each entry to a folder on our course D2L page. These should be ½ to 1 single-spaced page. They are meant to give you some time to reflect on some aspect of your first semester at college. By reflecting and then writing about the experience, you will better remember it – and have a handy record. (Imagine, when you are about to graduate, returning to these entries to see what were the more pressing issues of your time at UW-Green Bay way back when your first started!)

For many of your weekly journals the topic that you are asked to reflect on will be given to you. There will be a few weeks, though, where you are asked to choose a topic yourself. This can be anything whatsoever so long as it relates to some aspect of your first year at UW-Green Bay – it needn’t be academic but certainly can be. The point is just for you to take some time to reflect a bit and to compose your thoughts on the matter. Your journals will be graded largely on effort and quality of writing rather than content. I will be looking to see that you demonstrate that you have reflected on the matter, that you can express yourself well, and that you have proofread the entry so as to correct any grammatical mistakes before submitting it. Your journal entries will also count for 15 % of your final grade.

Reflective Essays
One of our aims in this course is to improve our writing and to improve the manner and depth with which we think about important issues. To accomplish this, I am asking you to compose three reflective essays. Each Reflective Essay should be 3-4 double-spaced pages long. I give you questions in the schedule. You are asked to reflect on the question and to compose an answer. (You can see how the weekly journal entries will help here.) I will be looking to see that you have thought long and hard on the question, and that you have found or are near to finding your own view on it. Do your very best to avoid the superficial and easy answers. Do your very best to dig deep below the question and to arrive at a truly original view. (Here’s a helpful hint: ask yourself whether other people in the class will likely have the same idea or perspective as you – if so, keep thinking. You want your essay to be original.) Unlike your journal entries where I am not so much concerned with the actual content of your writing, here I will be assessing both the quality of your writing and the ideas discussed therein. I will talk about these more as their due dates near. Each Reflective Essay is worth 15 % of your final grade, so 45 % combined.

If you suspect that your writing is not very strong or needs work please be sure to complete a strong draft with enough time to schedule an appointment with the Writing Center to go over your essay.

Analytical Essay
Just as your Reflective Essays will build upon the practice of your Weekly Journals, so too will your Analytical Essay build upon the practice of your Reflective Essays. The idea here is much the same, except that the paper will be a bit longer, researched, and its topic will be chosen by you. In your Analytical Essay you will be asked to present and defend one policy initiative that you think we have an ethical obligation to pursue. You will be asked to research your opinion first, and to include references to your research in your Essay. Basically, this means that you will form your opinion on the matter by first reading through the opinions of others, finding points of agreement and disagreement, and using these to finalize your own original point of view. Your Analytical Essay will be worth 15 % of your final grade.
**Writing Philosophy**

For each of your writing assignments, please be sure to consult Lewis Vaughn’s *Writing Philosophy* text. The first thing we want to be able to do is read well, meaning read carefully. Vaughn (Chapter 1) discusses this, so read this chapter as soon as possible. Chapters 7 and 8 will help a great deal with your Weekly Journals. We all need to work on our writing, and practice and consultation with sources like Vaughn are the only way to do so.

When writing your Reflective Essays you will want, to some degree, to steer the essays toward one or more significant points. To do so you will need to better understand how to present and better convey your ideas. Chapter 3 will help you with this. Your Reflective essays needn't be quite so argumentative as the Vaughn text, but you will likely want to drive home a significant point or two, and these chapters will help you accomplish that. Finally, in your Analytical Essay you will be asked to defend one specific policy initiative, and you will be asked to do so while taking other ideas into consideration. In other words, you'll be asked to defend your opinion against the opinions of others. Chapters 2, 4, and 5 will be very helpful for this task. So, in short, read the Vaughn text carefully, and soon. It will help with each of your writing assignments.

**Presentation**

Finally, you will be asked to work with another classmate in preparing a 5-10 minute presentation discussing one policy initiative that you have encountered over the course of the semester that you find intriguing. Your aim here is to research the initiative, to report to the class on its progress and plausibility, and then to identify its more important strengths and weaknesses. Basically, I’ll ask each group to determine whether their initiative has a beneficial future or not, and to defend their answer. Your presentation, which you will give either at our last meeting or at our allotted final exam time, will account for 10% of your final grade.

Your Final Grade, then, breaks down as follows:

- Phirst-year Success Tasks --- 15%
- Weekly Journals --- 15%
- 3 Reflective Essays --- 45%
- Analytical Essay --- 15%
- Presentation --- 10%

I use the following grade scheme. A = 93 and above. AB = 88-92. B = 83-87. BC = 78-82. C = 73-77. CD = 68-72. D = 63-67. F = 62 or below. An A paper will receive a 95, an AB a 90, a B an 85, a BC an 80, C a 75, a CD a 70, D a 65 and F a 55.

**Policies**

This course will have a D2L site where I will post the syllabus, co-curricular activities form, handouts on your papers and any other handouts I may write up for you as the semester progresses. The D2L page also includes an easy way to track your grades. In addition, you can post questions on the D2L page under the Discussion tab. I will do my best to monitor these and to respond to any questions posted there.

I do not allow cellphones or laptops in class. Texting or surfing the web is insulting to our efforts to teach the class, and quite a distraction. If I see you texting or on a computer I will ask you to leave class for the day.

Any essays that are submitted late will be docked a half-grade per day overdue. For example, if a B essay is submitted on Thursday but was due on Wednesday, the essay grade will be dropped from a B to a C/B. Failure to submit the reflective or analytical essays are grounds for failure of the course.

If you are struggling, have questions, or would like some clarification on anything having to do with the course please stop by my office hours or Katie’s. We are here to guide you but also to help. There are always ways to improve your progress through the course, and the earlier we talk about them the better. Don't allow yourself to become frustrated. You will be challenged by this course, but we mean for the challenge to be something that makes you stronger, so be sure to let us know, early, when you might need some help.
Katie, who has been through many different courses with many different faculty members, is also here to help you. She has my full support in advising you with anything regarding our course. She is also here to help and possibly advise you all on issues outside of the class, including personal issues, family issues, roommate problems and the like. She is very personable and understanding. She will also know where to direct you for further help with any of these issues.

Lastly, students with a documented disability who need accommodations must contact the Disability Services Office at 465-2841. Reasonable accommodations can be made unless they alter the essential components of the class. Contact the instructor and Disability Services Coordinator in a timely manner to formulate alternative arrangements.

**Texts**

*How Philosophy can Save your Life*, by Marietta McCarty  
*Plato, Five Dialogues* (transl. G.M.A. Grube)  
*Freedom, Determinism, and Responsibility*, by John Lemos  
*Who’s to Say: A Dialogue on Relativism*, by Norman Melchert  
*Mind and Brain: A Dialogue on the Mind-Body Problem*, by Rocco Gennaro  
*Three Conversations about Knowing*, by Jay Rosenberg  
*Writing Philosophy*, by Lewis Vaughn

**Schedule**

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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Lecture Topic</th>
<th>Readings, Assignments, Due Dates, Etc.</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>9/3</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>Introductions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>9/5</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>“What’s the Value of a College Education?” by Andrew Mills (D2L)</td>
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|      | 9/12 | R   | Mariette, McCarty, *How Philosophy Can Save Your Life* | “Simplicity”  
|      |      |     |              | Essay # 1 Due to Dropbox |
| 3    | 9/17 | T   | Plato, *Five Dialogues* | Apology |
|      | 9/19 | R   | Plato, *Five Dialogues* | Apology |
|      | 9/26 | R   | Mariette, McCarty, *How Philosophy Can Save Your Life* | “Perspective” |
| 6    | 10/8 | T   | Plato, *Five Dialogues* | *Phaedo*, 96a-107b |
|      | 10/10| R   | Plato, *Five Dialogues* | *Phaedo*, 96a-107b  
<p>|      |      |     |              | Essay # 2 Due to Dropbox |
| 7    | 10/15| T   | Mariette, McCarty, <em>How Philosophy Can Save Your Life</em> | “Flexibility” |
|      | 10/24| R   | Mariette, McCarty, <em>How Philosophy Can Save Your Life</em> | “Individuality” |
|      | 10/29| T   | Rocco Gennaro, <em>Mind and Brain</em> | The First Night |</p>
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<th>Date</th>
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<td>10/31</td>
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<td>“The Second Conversation”</td>
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<td>“The Second Conversation”</td>
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<td>15</td>
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