



# University of New Haven

COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES

---

Program of Philosophy

PHIL 4450, Section 01  
Existentialism  
Spring 2018  
M/W from 1:40 to 2:55  
103 Kaplan Hall  
3 Credit Hours

Dr. Douglas Ficek  
Visiting Assistant Professor  
310 Maxcy Hall  
203-932-1177

[DFicek@newhaven.edu](mailto:DFicek@newhaven.edu)

Office Hours: M/W from 10:00 to 12:00

## COURSE SYLLABUS

### Course Description

What does it mean to exist in the world? Are we all alone? Is God dead, as Friedrich Nietzsche infamously declared? And, if human life is without intrinsic meaning, how should we proceed? How, in the end, should we live?

These are huge philosophical questions, and they are questions that existentialist thinkers take very seriously. In this course, we will explore these fundamental questions and how various existentialists have responded to them over the years. We will look at atheistic existentialists like Nietzsche, Simone de Beauvoir, and Jean-Paul Sartre, who reject religious answers as absurd; and we will look at religious existentialists like Søren Kierkegaard, Simone Weil, and Keiji Nishitani, who defend faith, however absurd, in an otherwise meaningless world. We will also study existentialist literature – from Fyodor Dostoyevsky to Albert Camus – and how existentialist concerns can affect us in everyday life. And finally, we will consider the possibility of an existentialist ethics. After all, if we are free, as most existentialists claim, how should we treat each other?

Many philosophers ignore (or even deny) the significance of human existence. Existentialists, however, do just the opposite: They affirm human existence and ultimately defend a radically optimistic conception of humanity.

### Required Texts

- *Existentialism: An Introduction* by Kevin Aho; ISBN: 0745651429
- *Fear and Trembling* by Søren Kierkegaard; ISBN: 0140444491
- *Notes from Underground* by Fyodor Dostoyevsky; ISBN: 067973452X
- *On the Genealogy of Morals* by Friedrich Nietzsche; ISBN: 0141195371
- *Nausea* by Jean-Paul Sartre; ISBN: 0811220303
- *The Stranger* by Albert Camus; ISBN: 0679720200
- *The Ethics of Ambiguity* by Simone de Beauvoir; ISBN: 1480442801
- *Existencia Africana: Understanding Africana Existential Thought* by Lewis R. Gordon; ISBN: 0415926440

The other required texts for this course are available for download on my professional website: [www.douglasficek.com](http://www.douglasficek.com). Download them ASAP, and always have the appropriate texts with you in class, either as hard copies or as electronic documents.

### Course Objectives

- Students will learn (and hopefully appreciate) what it means to do philosophy.
- Students will discover new (and possibly profound) concepts, ideas, and theories.
- Students will become better arguers (in the sense making and evaluating arguments).

### Student Learning Outcomes

- Students will be able to explain course readings in pop quizzes and written papers.
- Students will be able to evaluate course readings in class discussion and written papers.
- Students will be able to develop their own arguments in class discussion and written papers.

### Course Requirements

We will cover numerous texts in this course, and it is your responsibility to read the assigned pages *before class begins*. To this end, I will be giving you several pop quizzes throughout the semester, on which you may use your notes but not the texts themselves. These quizzes will cover new material as well as material that we have already covered. Also, they cannot be made up, so do not make lateness a habit.

In addition to these pop quizzes, I will be assigning two substantial papers. These assignments will be posted on my website, and you will be able to choose from several questions. As always, my strong recommendation is that you choose the questions that you find interesting, not the ones that seem “easiest.” Finally, there will be a final project, which can be another paper or something more creative.

There will not be a midterm exam or a final exam.

### Grading

- Attendance – 10%
- Pop Quizzes – 20%
- First Paper – 20%
- Second Paper – 20%
- Final Project – 30%

Quizzes are worth five points each. Five points is full credit; one point is just signing your name; and zero points is missing the quiz entirely.

Undergraduate Scale			
Grades Between		Scored	Letter Equivalent
97	to	100	A+
94	to	Less than 97	A
90	to	Less than 94	A-
87	to	Less than 90	B+

84	to	Less than 87	B
80	to	Less than 84	B-
77	to	Less than 80	C+
74	to	Less than 77	C
70	to	Less than 74	C-
67	to	Less than 70	D+
63	to	Less than 67	D
60	to	Less than 63	D-
		Less than 60	F

## Caveats

As an instructor, I am pretty easy-going. I do, however, insist upon a respectful atmosphere in the classroom. What does this mean? It means: no phone calls, no texting, no sleeping, no ridiculously long bathroom breaks, and finally no computers, unless you absolutely need them for reading or note-taking. If your phone does go off during class, you have a choice: You can either sing a song for the class, or I can assign an additional paper that everybody must do. *This is not a joke.*

Also, “My flash drive broke” has become the new “My dog ate my homework,” and I will no longer accept it as an excuse for late or incomplete work. Please use [www.dropbox.com](http://www.dropbox.com) (or something similar) to ensure the security of your written work.

## Course Outline

January 17 – NO CLASS

January 22 – Course Introduction

### WHAT IS EXISTENTIALISM?

January 24 – *Existentialism: An Introduction* by Kevin Aho (2014), pp. 1-33

January 29 – *Existentialism: An Introduction* by Kevin Aho (2014), pp. 34-62

January 31 – *Existentialism: An Introduction* by Kevin Aho (2014), pp. 63-104

February 5 – *Existentialism: An Introduction* by Kevin Aho (2014), pp. 105-139

### 19TH CENTURY EXISTENTIALISM

February 7 – *Fear and Trembling* by Søren Kierkegaard (1843), pp. 41-82

February 12 – *Fear and Trembling* by Søren Kierkegaard (1843), pp. 83-108

February 14 – *Fear and Trembling* by Søren Kierkegaard (1843), pp. 109-147

February 19 – *Notes from Underground* by Fyodor Dostoevsky (1864), pp. 3-20

February 21 – *Notes from Underground* by Fyodor Dostoevsky (1864), pp. 20-41

February 26 – *On the Genealogy of Morals* by Friedrich Nietzsche (1887), pp. 3-42

February 28 – *On the Genealogy of Morals* by Friedrich Nietzsche (1887), pp. 43-82

March 5 – *On the Genealogy of Morals* by Friedrich Nietzsche (1887), pp. 83-145

### 20TH CENTURY EXISTENTIALISM

March 7 – “In the Depths of the Abyss” by Miguel de Unamuno (1912)

March 12 – SPRING BREAK

March 14 – SPRING BREAK

March 19 – Selections from *I and Thou* by Martin Buber (1923)

March 21 – *Nausea* by Jean-Paul Sartre (1938), pp. 1-81

March 26 – *Nausea* by Jean-Paul Sartre (1938), pp. 81-178

March 28 – *The Stranger* by Albert Camus (1942), pp. 3-59  
April 2 – *The Stranger* by Albert Camus (1942), pp. 63-123  
April 4 – “The Love of God and Affliction” by Simone Weil (1942)  
April 9 – *The Ethics of Ambiguity* by Simone de Beauvoir (1947), pp. 7-34  
April 11 – *The Ethics of Ambiguity* by Simone de Beauvoir (1947), pp. 35-73  
April 16 – *The Ethics of Ambiguity* by Simone de Beauvoir (1947), pp. 74-159  
April 18 – “What Is Religion?” by Keiji Nishitani (1961)  
April 23 – *Existentialia Africana* by Lewis R. Gordon (2000), pp. 1-40  
April 25 – *Existentialia Africana* by Lewis R. Gordon (2000), pp. 41-95  
April 30 – GUEST LECTURE: Carlos Alberto Sánchez  
May 7 – FINAL EXAM (10:30-12:30)

## UNIVERSITY POLICIES & ACADEMIC REGULATIONS

The following policy excerpts have been taken from the [Student Handbook](#). Follow the link to view the policy in its entirety.

### Add/Drop Policy

January 24th is the final day to drop this course so that it does not appear on your transcript. After the first week of class, self-service registration will not be enabled for students to directly add or drop classes. Students should contact the registrar’s office directly or the Academic Success Center for assistance with adding and dropping courses during this time.

### Attendance Policy

Students are expected to attend regularly and promptly all their classes, appointments, and exercises. The instructor has the right to dismiss from class any student who has been absent more than two weeks (pro-rated for terms different from that of the semester). A dismissed student will receive a withdrawal (W) from the course if they are still eligible for a withdrawal per the university’s course withdrawal policy, or a failure (F) if not. A student who is not officially registered in the course is not permitted to attend classes or take part in any other course activities. Students absent from any class meeting are responsible for making up missed assignments and examinations at the discretion of the instructor.

### Religious Observance Policy

The University of New Haven respects the right of its students to observe religious holidays that may necessitate their absence from class or from other required university-sponsored activities. Students who wish to observe such holidays should not be penalized for their absence, although in academic courses they are responsible for making up missed work.

### Withdrawal Policy

March 28th is the final date to request a withdrawal for this term. Students wishing to withdraw from a course MUST officially do so by completing the [online form](#) or by submitting a [course withdrawal form](#) to the registrar’s office. This request must be submitted to the Office of the University Registrar (and signed by the International Services Office if you are an international student). The grade of **W** will be recorded, but the course will not affect the GPA.

## **Incomplete (INC) Grade Policy**

A grade of Incomplete (INC) is given only in special circumstances and indicates that the student has been given permission by the instructor to complete required course work (with the same instructor) after the end of the term. In the absence of the instructor, a student should contact the Department Chair.

## **Academic Integrity Policy and Procedures**

The University of New Haven expects its students to maintain the highest standards of academic conduct. Academic dishonesty is not tolerated at the University. To know what is expected of them, students are responsible for reading and understanding the statement regarding academic honesty in the [Student Handbook](#). Please ask me about my expectations regarding permissible or encouraged forms of student collaboration if there is any confusion about this topic.

The [Dean of Students Office](#) offers a range of support to students. It answers questions, provides information about and referrals to campus resources; assists in students' adjustment to the University; promotes programs which address student needs, concerns and interests; and helps students in resolving problems of any type.

## **Commitment to Positive Learning Environment**

The University adheres to the philosophy that all community members should enjoy an environment free of any form of harassment, sexual misconduct, discrimination, or intimate partner violence. If you have been the victim of sexual misconduct, we encourage you to report this. If you report this to a faculty/staff member, they must notify our college's Title IX coordinator about the basic facts of the incident (you may choose to request confidentiality from the University). If you encounter sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, sexual assault, or discrimination based on race, color, religion, age, national origin, ancestry, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability please contact the Title IX Coordinator, Caroline Koziatek, at 203-932-7479 or [ckoziatek@newhaven.edu](mailto:ckoziatek@newhaven.edu). For more information, visit [Title IX at the University of New Haven](#).

## **Reporting Bias Incidents**

At the University of New Haven, there is an expectation that all community members are committed to creating and supporting a climate which promotes civility, mutual respect, and open-mindedness. There also exists an understanding that with the freedom of expression comes the responsibility to support community members' right to live and work in an environment free from harassment and fear. It is expected that all members of the University community will engage in anti-bias behavior and refrain from actions that intimidate, humiliate, or demean persons or groups or that undermine their security or self-esteem. ([Reporting Options](#))

## **UNIVERSITY SUPPORT SERVICES**

The University recognizes that students can often use some help outside of class and offers academic assistance through several offices.

### **Center for Student Success (CSS)**

The Center for Student Success provides students with the multitude of resources available on campus and assists students in fulfilling their educational, social and personal goals.

### **University Writing Center**

The mission of the Writing Center (an expansion of the Writer to Writer peer-tutoring program) is to provide high-quality tutoring to undergraduate and graduate students as they write for a wide range of purposes and audiences. Tutors are undergraduate and graduate students studying Biology, Communications, Criminal Justice, National Security, Engineering, English, Environmental Science, Finance, Forensic Science, Legal Studies, Marine Biology, Music, Nutrition, and Psychology. We are here to work with you at any stage in the writing process; just bring in your assignment, your ideas, and any writing you've done so far. To make an appointment, you can register for an account with our scheduling site at <https://newhaven.mywconline.com> or visit us in person at our desk on the first floor of Peterson library (just to the left after you enter the library).

### **Center for Learning Resources (CLR)**

The Center for Learning Resources (CLR), located in the Peterson Library, provides academic content support to the students of the University of New Haven using metacognitive strategies that help students become aware of and learn to apply optimal learning processes in the pursuit of creating independent learners. CLR tutors focus sessions on discussions of concepts and processes and typically use external examples to help students grasp and apply the material.

### **Accessibility Resources Center**

Students with disabilities are encouraged to share, in confidence, information about needed specific course accommodations. The Accessibility Resources Center, located in Sheffield Hall, is responsible for and committed to providing services and support that serve to promote educational equity and ensure that students are able to participate in the opportunities available at the University of New Haven. Accommodations cannot be made without written documentation from the Accessibility Resources Center.

### **Counseling & Psychological Services**

The Counseling Center offers a variety of services aimed at helping students resolve personal difficulties and acquire the balance, skills, and knowledge that will enable them to take full advantage of their experience at the University of New Haven.