

Social Science Honors Sequence
Naturalized Epistemology and the Social Sciences
T/Th 12:30-1:50 PM/SSPA 1100

Professors:

Jeff Barrett (j.barrett@uci.edu), SST 765 Kyle Stanford (stanford@uci.edu), SST 769
We will both be available immediately after class most lecture days or by appointment.

Teaching Assistants:

Kino Zhou (yutingz3@uci.edu), Sections Wed 2PM & 4PM; Office Hrs Tues/Thurs
3:30PM-4:30PM in SST 792

Sam Eklund (Seklund@uci.edu), Sections Wed noon & Thurs 10AM; Office Hrs Tues
11AM-noon and Thurs 2-3 PM in SST 788

Will Stafford (stafforw@uci.edu), Sections Thurs 2PM & 4PM; Office Hrs Tues/Thurs
11AM-noon in SST 792

Course Website: <https://eee.uci.edu/16f/70010>

Course Description: This course concerns epistemology—the study of human knowledge and justified belief—addressed from an interdisciplinary perspective including methods characteristic of philosophy, history, and the social sciences. We begin by describing the traditional philosophical view of what knowledge amounts to. Then we will discuss two famous challenges to the idea that we can know anything about the world at all, due to philosophers Rene Descartes and David Hume. Following a suggestion by Hume, we will next consider what empirical research in the social sciences can contribute to our understanding of human knowledge. We will discover that a number of classic findings of the social sciences reveal that the faculties we rely on in the acquisition of knowledge are systematically unreliable, misleading, and subject to deception in myriad ways we never would have anticipated and indeed find hard to believe even when they are demonstrated experimentally. We will then explore Thomas Kuhn’s famous suggestion that the theories and methods we use to establish these scientific results are themselves open to an important skeptical challenge. We will suggest that the upshot of this investigation is that we cannot acquire any knowledge at all without making some assumptions about the nature of the world and the processes of inquiry—and yet, as our own inquiry will by then have revealed, many of the assumptions we rarely question have been undermined by empirical research. We will conclude by proposing an alternative picture of human knowledge as an ongoing process of belief revision and problem solving, according to which it is possible to provide justification for many of our beliefs about the world even as we constantly update our assumptions about the nature and reliability of our faculties and methods in light of ongoing research in the social sciences.

Schedule:

Week 0: Course Introduction: Knowledge, Skepticism, and Naturalized Epistemology. Reading from Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (readings available on course website)

Week 1: I: Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Chs. I-IV
II: Hume, *Enquiry*, Chs. V, VII, IX

Week 2: I: Hume, *Enquiry*, Ch. XII; Pinker, "Good Ideas" (from *How the Mind Works*, pp. 343-351)
II: Hoffman, *Visual Intelligence*, Chs. 1&2 (partial)

Week 3: I: Loftus, "Make My Memory: How Advertising Can Change Our Memories of the Past"; Festinger and Carlsmith, "Cognitive Consequences of Forced Compliance"; Thomas, Stanford, and Sarnecka, "No Child Left Alone"
II: Kruger and Dunning, "Unskilled and Unaware of It: How Difficulties in Recognizing One's Own Incompetence Lead to Inflated Self-Assessments"; Strayer and Johnston, "Driven to Distraction"; Maier, "Reasoning in Humans"

Week 4: I: Hall and Johansson, "Using Choice Blindness to Study Decision Making and Introspection"; Hall, Johansson, and Strandberg, "Lifting the Veil of Morality: Choice Blindness and Attitude Reversals on a Self-Transforming Survey";
II: Nisbett and Wilson, "Telling More Than We Can Know"

Week 5: I: Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Preface & Ch. I-V
II: **1st Midterm Examination, in class**

Week 6: I: Kuhn *SSR*, Ch. VI-VIII
II: Kuhn, *SSR*, Ch. IX-X J&K gone

Week 7: I: Kuhn, *SSR*, Ch. XI-XIII
II: Kuhn, *SSR*, Postscript; Laudan, "A Problem-Solving Approach to Scientific Progress"

Week 8: I: Vos Savant, "Ask Marilyn" Parade magazine columns from 9/9/90, 12/2/90, 2/17/91, and 7/7/91; Tversky and Kahneman, "The Framing of Decisions and the Psychology of Choice"; **2nd Midterm Distributed: Take Home Exam on Kuhn**
II: Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" (final section only!)

Week 9: I: Skyrms, *Choice and Chance*, pp. 128-136
II: Thanksgiving Break

Week 10: I: Skyrms, *Choice and Chance*, pp. 109-127; **2nd Midterm Exam due at beginning of class**
II: Peirce, "The Fixation of Belief"

Readings: There are two books for the course: *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, by David Hume, and *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, by Thomas Kuhn. Both are available in the UCI bookstore, and the Hume is also available for free online. All other readings will be made available through the course website, using a distribution system we will explain in class. Reading should be completed before lecture.

Grades and Exams: Grades will be determined by two midterms and one (cumulative) final examination, worth 30%, 30%, and 40% (respectively) of your final grade. The first (in-class) midterm examination and the final exam will involve answering a number of

essay-style questions, each with equal weight in the final grade. This examination will allow for some flexibility in which questions one answers. The second midterm will be a take-home exam that will involve writing more carefully organized, more detailed, and more polished answers (within fairly stringent word limits) to a smaller number of essay-style questions, with little or no choice in the questions each student must answer. You are welcome to study together for either midterm or both, **but you must actually compose your answers to the questions on the second midterm by yourself**. A list of study questions will be made available before each of the examinations.

Sections: There is no direct penalty for not participating in section, but consistent, active, smart participation can improve one's course grade by as much as one-half letter grade.

Academic Honesty: UCI's policy on Academic Honesty can be found at: http://www.senate.uci.edu/senateweb/default2.asp?active_page_id=754. Please note that we take all instances of academic dishonesty extremely seriously, and it is *your* responsibility to know what constitutes a violation of this policy.