

PPE 4884: Advanced Topics in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics (PPE Capstone Course)

I. Instructor

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II. Course description

Time and venue

Wednesdays, 4-6:45pm

Holden Hall 303

Course synopsis. This course serves as the Capstone Course for the [PPE Minor](#) at Virginia Tech and provides the final step of the students' learning experience in the PPE curriculum. The course addresses advanced topics at the intersection of philosophy, politics, and economics, in particular topics concerning economic rationality, utility theory, game theory, social choice theory, public choice theory, markets, justice, and democracy. The course allows senior students to synthesize their knowledge gained during their PPE studies and apply it to an interdisciplinary topic of their choice.

Core readings. The PPE Capstone Course builds upon the knowledge and skills acquired in the PPE Gateway Course (PPE 2894). In order to deepen the students' understanding of the core concepts and methods discussed in the PPE Gateway Course, we will read Gaus' textbook, *On Philosophy, Politics, and Economics* (2008). In addition, we will read two core books that address contemporary social problems with ethical, political, and economic dimensions. The core book(s) for this course will be selected by the students together with the course instructor at the beginning of the semester.

Research projects. The main component of this course is the students' research projects. Throughout the semester, students will work on their research projects on an advanced topic in PPE. Students will be asked to investigate their topic from multiple perspectives and develop a conceptual framework that leads to a comprehensive solution to their problem of study. To this end, students, on their own direction, will read articles and books that are relevant to their research projects. At the end of the course, students will present and defend their research findings orally and submit a major research paper.

Guest speakers and pedagogy. In order to enhance the students' learning experience, several guest speakers will be invited to class. In particular, Craig Arthur from Library Services at Virginia Tech will speak about library and database use, citation styles, citation management

software, compiling literature reviews, writing research papers, and plagiarism, all in the context of interdisciplinary research projects. Becca Scott, the Associate Director of the Career Network will speak about career decision making, job searching, and networking. In addition to these internal guest speakers, the PPE Distinguished Public Lecter and PPE Speaker Series at Virginia Tech are an integral part of the PPE Capstone Course. The PPE guest speakers will present their most recent work to our class in order to familiarize students with cutting-edge research in PPE. From an instructional perspective, the PPE Capstone Course combines a range of pedagogical approaches to student learning, such as case-based learning, problem-based learning, flipped classroom activities, in-class active learning strategies, class presentations, and group work.

Learning outcomes. Having successfully completed the PPE Capstone course, students will be able to: (i) explain the limitations and complementary nature of major concepts and methods in PPE, (ii) apply these concepts and methods to formulate comprehensive answers to social problems that have ethical, political, and economic dimensions, (iii) trace the implications of their arguments and possible objections to them, (iv) write a substantial research paper and defend its conclusions orally (advanced discourse abilities), (v) assess the normative implications of major ethical theories and apply them to concrete problems, and (vi) think critically about topics of intercultural and global relevance, especially as a result of discussions of the core book(s) of this course.

III. Assessment

Class participation (30% of grade). Students are expected to (i) complete all required readings before class, (ii) attend all class sessions, and (iii) participate actively and regularly in class discussions. Active class participation, including group discussions and oral presentations, is central to the students' learning experience in this course. It is imperative that students take ownership of this class, form study groups in and outside of the classroom, and pursue their research projects independently. Students should consider this class as an opportunity to learn from *each other* and work on their academic and interpersonal skills (in particular their weaknesses) before they leave Virginia Tech.

If a student must miss a class for a legitimate reason (illness, job interview, etc.), then please inform the instructor by email prior to the absence. In this case, the student will be marked 'absent with reason' for the specific class, and the student's participation grade will not be negatively affected, assuming that the student does not miss too many classes. If a student does not send an email before class that explains the absence, then the student's participation grade will be negatively affected. If a student misses more than two classes unexcused during the semester, then the student will either fail (F) this course or receive a D- for it, depending on the student's remaining overall pattern of attendance.

PPE Distinguished Public Lecture and PPE Speaker Series (20%). The [PPE Distinguished Public Lecture](#) and [PPE Speaker Series](#) are an integral part of the curriculum of the PPE Capstone Course. Usually, three guest speakers are invited per semester to give a public talk. All students are required to attend these talks. As preparation for the talks, students are asked to (i) read the papers of the guest speakers in advance, (ii) prepare 2-3 questions for the speakers in written form and submit the questions to the course instructor at least one day before the talk (by noon), and (iii) actively participate in the Q&A sessions of the talks. In addition, for each talk a small group of students will be selected to have lunch or dinner with the guest speaker and for the PPE Distinguished Public Lecture there will be a public reception after the talk for all students.

The talks and associated lunches/dinners are an excellent opportunity for students to advance their academic and professional skills as well as to network (Note: the meals will be paid for but alcohol is prohibited. The dress code is smart casual).

Research paper (first full version 20%, final version of the paper 30%). For this course, students must write one major research paper on a topic in PPE. Students are free to select their topic, but the topic must be approved in advance by the course instructor. The paper should (i) defend a well-defined thesis, (ii) investigate the topic from multiple perspectives that allows a comprehensive solution to the problem of study, and (iii) be between 4.000 and 5.000 words, not including references. The *first full version* of the paper is due by 4 pm on March 14, and the *final version* of the paper is due by 4 pm on May 2. Please submit an electronic PDF copy of your paper via Canvas before the deadlines. Late submissions, unless excused well in advance, will not be accepted.

IV. Course schedule

1 Course introduction (1/17)		
<i>Readings</i>	<i>Assignments</i>	<i>Skills and learning objectives</i>
Selection of core book(s) for this course: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alexandrova: <i>A Philosophy for the Science of Well-Being</i> • Anderson: <i>Private Government</i> • Ariely: <i>Predictably Irrational</i> • Atkinson: <i>Inequality; What Can Be Done?</i> • Banerjee & Duflo: <i>Poor Economics</i> • Bicchieri: <i>Norms in the Wild</i> 	» Review the list of potential core book(s) for this course and select two books that you would find most interesting for discussion » Be prepared to defend your book selection and explain your choice to your peers in a 5 minute speech » Together, the class will find agreement on two books that we will read in this course	» Skim texts and synthesize core information » Defend one's choice to others and potentially revise one's choice in light of new information » Understand central aspects and dynamics of group decision making
II) Reading: Group work .	» Read the article on group work and summarize its main content in 5 minutes » Consider your own group work experience and describe the conditions under which group work is fruitful for you	» Reflect on the usefulness of group work. Group work will be an essential component of this course and is required in many jobs » Understand the needs of different types of learners and one's own learning practices
2 Concepts and methods in PPE (1/24)		
<i>Readings</i>	<i>Assignments</i>	<i>Skills and learning objectives</i>
I) Gaus, <i>On Philosophy, Politics, and Economics</i> (2008), Introduction and Chapters 1-3	» Read the assigned chapters carefully » Be prepared to present in 5 minutes one concept or methodological consideration that you consider to be central to PPE » Be prepared to present in 5 minutes one core aspect of the readings that you found especially interesting or controversial	» Synthesize and present core information of texts » Analyze core arguments of texts and articulate their central premises and potential criticisms » Understand and apply core concepts and methods in PPE
II) Guest speakers (5:30-6:45pm): Craig Arthur (Learning Services Librarian). <i>Please bring your laptop for the session.</i>	» Topics: library resources, database use, citation styles, citation management software (such as Endnote)	» Become familiar with essential library resources for learning and conducting research » Become familiar with essential research tools

Research paper: Think about a topic for your research paper. Conduct some initial research

3 Concepts and methods in PPE (1/31)		
<i>Readings</i>	<i>Assignments</i>	<i>Skills and learning objectives</i>
I) Gaus, <i>On Philosophy, Politics, and Economics</i> (2008), Chapters 4-6 and Concluding Remarks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Read the assigned chapters carefully » Be prepared to present in 5 minutes one concept or methodological consideration that you consider to be central to PPE » Be prepared to present in 5 minutes one core aspect of the readings that you found especially interesting or controversial 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Synthesize and present core information of texts » Analyze core arguments of texts and articulate their central premises and potential criticisms » Understand and apply core concepts and methods in PPE
II) Guest speakers (5:30-6:45pm): Craig Arthur (Learning Services Librarian). Reading: Szostak, “The State of the Field: Interdisciplinary Research” (<i>please bring your laptop for the session</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Topics: compiling literature reviews, writing a research paper, identifying a scholarly debate, and finding a research topic within such a debate, especially concerning interdisciplinary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Understand the goal, structure, and core elements of research papers » Identify a research topic and understand the challenges of interdisciplinary research projects

Research paper: Think about a topic for your research paper. Conduct some initial research

4 Core books and research topics (2/7)		
<i>Readings</i>	<i>Assignments</i>	<i>Skills and learning objectives</i>
I) Core book(s): Ariely, <i>Predictably Irrational</i> , Introduction and Chapters 1-8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Read the assigned chapters carefully and be prepared to present in 5 minutes one core aspect of the readings that you found especially interesting or controversial » Explore some secondary literature on the topic and explain its relevance to your peers in 5 minutes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Synthesize and present core information of texts. » Analyze core arguments of texts and articulate their central premises and potential criticisms » Understand the complexity and relevance of contemporary topics in PPE
II) Research topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Present your topic and paper outline for 3 minutes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Improve presentation skills » Improve argumentation skills

Select a topic for your research paper and develop an outline

5 Core books and research topics (2/14)		
<i>Readings</i>	<i>Assignments</i>	<i>Skills and learning objectives</i>
I) Core book(s): Ariely, <i>Predictably Irrational</i> , Introduction and Chapters 9-15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Read the assigned chapters carefully and be prepared to present in 5 minutes one core aspect of the readings that you found especially interesting or controversial » Explore some secondary literature on the topic and explain its relevance to your peers in 5 minutes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Synthesize and present core information of texts » Analyze core arguments of texts and articulate their central premises and potential criticisms » Understand the complexity and relevance of contemporary topics in PPE
II) Research topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Present your topic and paper outline for 3 minutes » Explain the importance of your research topic and its interdisciplinary nature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Improve presentation skills » Improve argumentation skills » Identify important ethical, political, and economic dimensions of your research topic

Select a topic for your research paper and develop an outline

6 PPE talk: Fabian Wendt (2/21)		
<i>Readings</i>	<i>Assignments</i>	<i>Skills and learning objectives</i>
I) Research talk: Fabian Wendt (Chapman University), 4-6pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Read some of the work of the guest speaker and the views that the speaker has defended in the literature » Think critically about the speaker's work and be prepared to ask questions at the public talk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Understand complex arguments and cutting edge research in PPE » Identify potential research ideas for your own research project » Become familiar with standards of publishable work » Develop and improve public speaking skills
II) Lunch and/or dinner with the guest speaker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Study the CV of the guest speaker in order to be able to engage in meaningful conversations with the speaker about his/her career and interests » Ask some follow-up questions to the talk » Ask the speaker for relevant career advice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Develop academic and professional skills » Develop networking skills and explore potential career opportunities in and outside of academia » Develop and improve etiquette and hosting skills

Work on your research paper

7 Core books and professional development (2/28)		
<i>Readings</i>	<i>Assignments</i>	<i>Skills and learning objectives</i>
I) Core book(s): Stiglitz, <i>Making Globalization Work</i> , Chapters 1-5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Read the assigned chapters carefully and be prepared to present in 5 minutes one core aspect of the readings that you found especially interesting or controversial » Explore some secondary literature on the topic and explain its relevance to your peers in 5 min 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Synthesize and present core information of texts » Analyze core arguments of texts and articulate their central premises and potential criticisms » Understand the complexity and relevance of contemporary topics in PPE
II) Guest speaker (5:15-6:45pm): Becca Scott , Associate Director - Career Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Topics: career decision making, job search, and networking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Identify career opportunities » Consider professional development opportunities in and outside of academia

Work on your research paper.

Spring Break (one week)

8 Final discussion of core books (3/14)		
<i>Readings</i>	<i>Assignments</i>	<i>Skills and learning objectives</i>
I) Core book(s): Stiglitz, <i>Making Globalization Work</i> , Chapters 6-10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Read the assigned chapters carefully and be prepared to present in 5 minutes one core aspect of the readings that you found especially interesting or controversial » Explore some secondary literature on the topic and explain its relevance to your peers in 5 min 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Synthesize and present core information of texts. » Analyze core arguments of texts and articulate their central premises and potential criticisms » Understand the complexity and relevance of contemporary topics in PPE
II) Concluding discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Be prepared to give a 5 minute final assessment of the core book(s) of this course » Reflect on what you have learned from these book(s) and our discussions of them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Synthesize core arguments and the most important facts of significant books in PPE » Present and defend one's views to a critical audience

First full version of the research paper is due via Canvas by 4 pm

9 PPE talk: Marion Fourcade (3/21)		
<i>Readings</i>	<i>Assignments</i>	<i>Skills and learning objectives</i>
I) Research talk: Marion Fourcade (University of California, Berkeley)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Read the paper very carefully and formulate 2-3 questions that you would like to ask the speaker about his/her work » Send the questions via email to the course instructor one day before the talk (by noon) » Carefully analyze the writing style and structure of the paper. Is it well-composed? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Understand complex arguments and cutting edge research in PPE » Identify potential research ideas for your own research project » Become familiar with standards of publishable work » Develop and improve public speaking skills
II) Lunch and/or dinner with the guest speaker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Study the CV of the guest speaker in order to be able to engage in meaningful conversations with the speaker about his/her career and interests » Ask some follow-up questions to the talk » Ask the speaker for relevant career advice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Develop academic and professional skills » Develop networking skills and explore potential career opportunities in and outside of academia » Develop and improve etiquette and hosting skills

Find more literature for your research paper and integrate it

10 Core literature research paper and educational experience at Virginia Tech (3/28)		
<i>Readings</i>	<i>Assignments</i>	<i>Skills and learning objectives</i>
I) Select one article/book that is central to your research project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Present in 5 minutes the main argument of the article/book and explain its ethical, political, and economic relevance » Explain in 2 minutes how the article/book connects with your research project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Improve presentation skills » Improve argumentation skills » Identify important ethical, political, and economic dimensions of your research project
II) Education at VT and PPE Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Group work: Before class, meet in small groups (2-3 students) and discuss the questions below » Prepare together a PowerPoint presentation that summarizes your findings. Submit the presentation to the instructor one day before class (by noon). Bring your presentation on a memory stick to class. » 1) What, exactly, did you learn at Virginia Tech? » 2) What changes would you make to improve the learning experience at Virginia Tech? » 1) Was the PPE Program a valuable part of your educational experience at Virginia Tech? » 2) What changes would you make to improve the PPE Program? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Reflect on the core goals of undergraduate education » Be able to assess one's educational experience » Improve team work skills » Improve presentation skills

Prepare a revised version of your research paper for the peer-review process

10.5 PPE talk: Catherine Herfeld - University of Zurich 4-6pm (4/2)

11 Peer review of research papers (4/4)		
<i>Readings</i>	<i>Assignments</i>	<i>Skills and learning objectives</i>
I) Reading: Peer Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Read the assigned article and discuss in 5 minutes how to best conduct a peer review » Reflect on your own experience of peer-review processes and explain what works best for you 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Understand the challenges of peer review processes » Deal appropriately with constructive and destructive feedback
II) Peer review: Each student is assigned to read and comment on the research papers of two classmates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Read the assigned papers, comment, and send them to your classmates a day before class » Discuss your comments in class and offer constructive feedback to improve the paper 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Learn how to provide useful feedback to the work of others » Improve teamwork skills

Revise your paper after the peer-review process and prepare your research presentation

12 Research presentations (4/11)		
<i>Readings</i>	<i>Assignments</i>	<i>Skills and learning objectives</i>
Research presentations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Prepare a PowerPoint presentation of your research paper (bring on memory stick to class) » The precise length of your presentation and discussion afterwards will be specified in class 11 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Improve presentation skills » Improve argumentation skills » Improve public speaking skills » Improve discussion skills

13 PPE Distinguished Public Lecture: Amartya Sen (4/18)		
<i>Readings</i>	<i>Assignments</i>	<i>Skills and learning objectives</i>
I) Research talk: Amartya Sen (Harvard University)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Read the paper very carefully and formulate 2-3 questions that you would like to ask the speaker about his/her work » Send the questions via email to the course instructor one day before the talk (by noon) » Carefully analyze the writing style and structure of the paper. Is it well-composed? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Understand complex arguments and cutting edge research in PPE » Identify potential research ideas for your own research project » Become familiar with standards of publishable work » Develop and improve public speaking skills
II) <i>Public reception after the talk</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Study the CV of the guest speaker in order to be able to engage in meaningful conversations with the speaker about his/her career and interests » Ask some follow-up questions to the talk » Ask the speaker for relevant career advice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Develop academic and professional skills » Develop networking skills and explore potential career opportunities in and outside of academia » Develop and improve etiquette and hosting skills

Prepare your research presentation

14 Research presentations (4/25)		
<i>Readings</i>	<i>Assignments</i>	<i>Skills and learning objectives</i>
Research presentations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Prepare a PowerPoint presentation of your research paper (bring on memory stick to class) » The precise length of your presentation and discussion afterwards will be specified in class 12 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Improve presentation skills » Improve argumentation skills » Improve public speaking skills » Improve discussion skills

Finalize your paper after your research presentation

15 Concluding discussion (5/2)		
<i>Readings</i>	<i>Assignments</i>	<i>Skills and learning objectives</i>
Evaluation of course and concluding discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Reflect on your course experience and think about potential ways to improve the PPE Capstone Course 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Improve evaluation skills » Improve feedback skills » Improve public speaking skills

Final research paper is due via email by 4 pm

V. Miscellaneous

- A. I may update this syllabus from time to time. As such, please check the syllabus occasionally on Canvas in order to make sure that you have always the most recent version, especially with regard to weekly assignments.
- B. Please be punctual for class. Latecomers will be only very reluctantly tolerated. Being late for class is not only impolite and disrespectful towards your peers and the instructor, but it also interrupts and often wastes valuable class time.
- C. Please turn off your cell phones before class and store them away. The use of laptops and tablets in the classroom is allowed only for the purpose of note taking. If you fail to abide by this policy and, for example, surf the web during class time, then you will lose all of your participation points for the whole semester, without warning or notification.
- D. Students are expected to abide by standards of civilized discourse, which includes being respectful of positions taken by others with which one disagrees. This course encourages trying out and defending positions, whether or not one is personally persuaded by, or otherwise attached to them.
- E. Please treat our guest speakers with the utmost respect, professionalism, and hospitality. The speakers set aside valuable time to come to our class and their experience depends significantly on your engagement. Please keep in mind that you represent the PPE Program at Virginia Tech as well as the University. It is essential that the PPE Program establishes a positive reputation on and off campus, and you are its most valuable and visible assets.
- F. Students are bound by the Virginia Tech Honor Code. Please familiarize yourself with its content. The Honor Code pledge that each member of the university community agrees to abide by states: "As a Hokie, I will conduct myself with honor and integrity at all times. I will not lie, cheat, or steal, nor will I accept the actions of those who do." Students enrolled in this course are responsible for abiding by the Honor Code. A student who has doubts about how the Honor Code applies to any assignment is responsible for obtaining specific guidance from the course instructor before submitting the assignment for evaluation. Ignorance of the rules does not exclude any member of the University community from the requirements and expectations of the Honor Code. For additional information about the Honor Code, please visit: www.honorsystem.vt.edu.
- G. By taking this course, students agree that all submitted work may be subject to submission for textual similarity review using plagiarism prevention technology, such as [Turnitin](#). Submitted work will be included as a source document in the reference database of the prevention technology software solely for the purpose of detecting instances of plagiarism.
- H. If you are a student with special needs or circumstances, if you have emergency medical information to share with me, or if you require special arrangements in the case that the building must be evacuated, then please make an appointment with me as soon as possible during my office hours. You may also directly contact the [SSD Office](#) at Virginia Tech.