

# Phil 2314: Sex, Gender and Race

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## Meetings

T R 9:30 am-10:45 am

## Professor

Jordan MacKenzie  
(Note: you can call me as Jordan, Prof. MacKenzie, or Dr. MacKenzie)

## Phone

919-667-4001

## Email

[jmackenzie@vt.edu](mailto:jmackenzie@vt.edu)

## Office Hours

11:30 am – 12:30 pm T  
and R, and by appointment

In person: MWH 239

Zoom:

<https://virginiatech.zoom.us/j/4377473614>

## Grader

Zeb Dempsey

## Email

[zebdemp@vt.edu](mailto:zebdemp@vt.edu)

## Course Overview

Our society treats people differently based on their (perceived) sex, gender and race. In this course we explore metaphysical, epistemological, ethical and political questions about these categories. What are sex, gender and race in the first place? Are they real properties of people, or invented labels? Should a person's identity ever affect what we owe or expect of them? When (if ever) does somebody's gender or racial identity give them unique insight into society's problems? In this course we critically examine these questions through contemporary readings in the philosophy of race and feminist philosophy.

## Required Text

None.

All readings will be posted on Canvas.

## Background Knowledge Expectations

This course does not presuppose a background in philosophy. Key concepts will be discussed in class, and supplementary resources will be provided on an as-needed basis.

## Class Expectations and Policies

**1. Class Discussions:** Philosophy classes are only as good as the discussions that happen in them. As such, you will be expected to be active, respectful participants in class discussions. You are not required to have your cameras on for the duration of class, but it is strongly encouraged. Trust me—it will make the class go better for everyone.

**2. Accessibility:** I am committed to making this course as accessible as possible. If there is something that I can do to make this course more accessible for you, please come and speak to me. If you need disability-related accommodations, please contact VT's Services for Students with Disabilities (<https://www.ssd.vt.edu/index.html>). Note, however, that you **do not need** to have an officially recognized or diagnosed disability to seek accommodations: you just have to come speak with me.

**3. Changes to the Syllabus:** This is a new course. As such, you should expect the syllabus to change—both as a response to student interest, and as a response to class pacing. I promise not to increase the workload associated with this class, and to give you a decent heads up about syllabi changes.

**4. COVID precautions:** Students are required to wear a mask at all times in this classroom. You are responsible for bringing your own mask. If you think that you might be at risk of having COVID (either due to symptoms or potential exposure), don't come to class. Your absence will count as excused, and you do not need to provide me with proof of a positive test.

**5. Recording policy:** Due to the sensitive nature of topics discussed, I will not be making recordings of this class. If you miss class and would like to know what was covered, I will send you a handout/powerpoint slides. I would also be happy to meet with you to go over what you've missed

## Assignments

1. **Attendance and Participation (10%):** Do the readings, show up for class regularly, and be an active, thoughtful, and respectful participant in class discussions. **Note: I understand that perfect attendance likely won't be possible this semester. That's alright! It's more important that you're an active participant when you're in class than that you attend every class.**
2. **Reflection Assignments (15%):** They are due before class—come prepared to talk about your assignment with your peers. Reflection assignments should be no more than 1 page in length, double-spaced.
3. **Essay 1 (20%):** 3-4 pages, double-spaced. This is a traditional philosophy paper. You'll respond to a prompt that I will provide you. This paper must be argumentative—that is, you must take a stance, make an argument to support that stance, and defend your argument against objections that someone might reasonably have to it.
4. **Essay 2 (25%):** 3-4 pages, double-spaced. This is a traditional philosophy paper. You'll respond to a prompt that I will provide you. This paper must be argumentative—that is, you must take a stance, make an argument to support that stance, and defend your argument against objections that someone might reasonably have to it.
5. **Virginia Tech Article Assignment (30%):** 3-4 pages, double-spaced. You will critically evaluate some aspect of Virginia Tech—it can be a building, a club, a tradition, an administrative policy etc. In performing this critical investigation, you will explain what 3-4 of the theorists covered in this class could say about this aspect of Virginia Tech. You will then offer a verdict about what ought to be done about this thing—should it stay the same? Change? Be replaced with something new? In providing this verdict, be sure to give reasons in support of your conclusion (you can appeal to the considerations brought up by the theorists, or explain why those considerations aren't decisive and give reasons of your own).

## Grading Policies

1. **Resubmission:** I want you to succeed in this course. As such, you have the option of resubmitting any of the essay assignment in this course. If you are unhappy with a grade that you receive on an essay assignment, you have two weeks to rewrite it and resubmit it along with a paragraph describing how you have addressed the feedback that you received on the previous draft. Your grade will not go down due to resubmitting, but it may not always go up. You will not get feedback on the resubmitted assignment.
2. **Anonymous Grading:** Please do not put your name on your papers—just write your student number.
3. **Late Assignments:** I will dock 5% of the assignment grade for every 24-hour period it is overdue. I am, however, **very generous about granting extensions** so long as you request them in advance of the deadline. In fact, I am willing to grant *a no questions asked* 24-hour extension on *any* assignment so long as you request it before the due date. I do not grant 'retroactive extensions', so make sure to ask for extensions before the assignment is due!
4. **Fake/Incorrect Submission:** In recent years, I've noticed an uptick in the number of students submitting blank pages, corrupted files, or the wrong documents in lieu of assignments. As of this semester, it is up to you to make sure that you've submitted the right file. If I receive any fake or incorrect documents, I'll simply count the assignment as late.
5. **Citations:** Citations are required for all assignments. I don't care what style you use, but you must include page numbers. A bibliography is not necessary unless you have more than three sources. Any paper with missing or inadequate citations will be docked 5%.
6. **Grade bumps:** I round final grades up to the nearest percent—so an 89.5% will be a 90%, but an 89.4% will not. If you are unsatisfied with your final grade, please know that I do not grant 'grade bumps' (beyond a half percent), and do not offer bonus assignments. If you make good use of my resubmission policy, this should not be an issue.
7. **Academic Integrity:** see official Virginia Tech policy below.

The Undergraduate 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.

Academic integrity expectations are the same for online classes as they are for in person classes. We strongly encourage all instructors to discuss the use of technology, and specifically discuss areas we know are problematic temptations for students such as Chegg, CourseHero, and GroupMe to discourage students from using them. When the semester starts is an appropriate time in addition to providing a kind reminder before exams and assignments about expectations related to these sites. Please make your students aware that we are able to effectively investigate these incidents. If you have any questions about these sites or discussing them with your students, please do not hesitate to call our office. All university policies and procedures apply in any Virginia Tech academic environment, and all students are expected to follow them.

For additional information about the Honor Code, please visit: <https://www.honorsystem.vt.edu/>

## Grading Scale

A grade in the ‘A’ range (90-93=A-, 94-96=A, 97-100=A+) demonstrates an impressive mastery of and insightful engagement with the course material. In written work, the A student is able to reconstruct philosophical arguments with precision and accuracy, develop criticisms that are original, persuasive, and well-developed. In class, the A student attends **at least 80% of classes** having completed the readings, and always or almost always makes exceptionally thoughtful and respectful contributions to class discussions.

A grade in the ‘B’ range (80-83=B-, 84-86=B, 87-89=B+) denotes competent mastery of and reasonable insight into the course material. The B student is able to reconstruct philosophical arguments accurately and develop criticisms that are reasonably persuasive and well-developed. In class, the B student attends **at least 80% of classes**, typically completes the readings, and often makes thoughtful and respectful contributions to class discussions.

A grade in the ‘C’ range (70-73=C-, 74-76=C, 77-79=C+) denotes adequate comprehension and engagement with the course material. The C student is able to reconstruct philosophical arguments with some errors and develop criticisms that are generally relevant to the course material, if not convincing. In class, the C student attends **at least 70% of classes**, regularly does the readings, and sometimes makes thoughtful and respectful contributions to class discussions.

A grade in the ‘D’ range (60-63=D-, 64-66=D, 67-69) denotes a lack of comprehension of and engagement with the course material. The ‘D’ student is unable to accurately reconstruct philosophical positions or develop critiques relevant to the course material. In class, the D student struggles with attendance, shows little evidence of having completed the readings, and rarely makes thoughtful and respectful contributions to class discussions.

## Course Schedule

\*note: this schedule may be updated throughout the semester

### Unit 1: Introduction

January 18: Introductions, no readings

January 20: Ashley Atkins, “Black Lives Matter or All Lives Matter? Color-Blindness and Epistemic Injustice”, pgs. 1-11  
ONLY

## **Unit 2: What is Race?**

January 25: Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Why There Are No Human Races"

January 27: Appiah, continued; Sally Haslanger, "Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?", Intro, Sections 1, 2, 4, 6

February 1: Haslanger, continued

## **Unit 3: Racism and Racist Beliefs**

Feb 2: **Discussion Assignment 1** due on Canvas by 11:59 pm. Be prepared to discuss this assignment with the class.

Feb 3: Neil Levy, "Am I a Racist? Implicit Bias and the Ascription of Racism"

Feb 8: Rima Basu, "To Avoid Moral Failure, Don't See People As Sherlock Does"

## **Unit 4: What is Sex? What is Gender?**

Feb 10: Haslanger, "Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?", Intro, Sections 1, 2, 3, 5, 7

Feb 15: Talia Mae Bettcher: "Trans Women and the Meaning of Women"

Feb 17: Amy Fausto-Sterling, "The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female are Not Enough"

Feb 22: Audre Lorde, "Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Defining Difference"

Feb 24: Essay Assignment 1: In Class Work Day

Feb 27: **Essay Assignment 1** Due on Canvas by 11:59 pm

## **Unit 5: Sexism**

Mar 1: Marilyn Frye, "Sexism"

Mar 3: Kate Manne, *The Logic of Misogyny*, excerpt

## **Spring Break**

Mar 8: No Class

Mar 10: No Class

## **Unit 6: Microaggressions and Emotional Labor**

Mar 15: Regina Rini, "Microaggressions, Macro Harm"

**Mar 16: Discussion Assignment 2** due on Canvas by 11:59 pm. Be prepared to discuss this assignment with the class.

Mar 17: [Metafilter Thread](#)

### **Unit 7: Sexual Preferences and Orientations**

Mar 22: Robin Zheng “Why Yellow Fever Isn’t Flattering: A Case Against Racial Fetishes”

Mar 24: Tom O’Shea, “Sexual Desire and Structural Injustice”

Mar 29: Essay Assignment 2 in-class work day

### **Unit 8: Solidarity, Protest and the Duty to Resist Oppression**

Mar 31: Carol Hay, “The Duty to Resist Oppression”

April 4: **Essay Assignment 2** due on Canvas by 11:59 pm

Apr 5: Bernard Boxill, “Self-Respect and Protest”

### **Unit 9: Pronouns**

Apr 7: Dembroff and Wodak, “The Problem with Pronouns” <https://politicalphilosopher.net/2017/06/23/featured-philosophers-robin-dembroff-daniel-wodak/>

### **Unit 10: Reparations**

Apr 12: Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations”

Apr 14: David Frum, “The Impossibility of Reparations”

### **Unit 11: Student Choice Topic**

Apr 19: TBD

Apr 21: Virginia Tech Article Assignment in-class work day

### **Unit 12: Call Out Culture and Cancel Culture**

Apr 26: Loretta Ross, “I’m a Black Feminist. I Think Call-Out Culture is Toxic”

April 27: **Discussion Assignment 3** due on Canvas by 11:59 pm. Be prepared to discuss this assignment with the class.

Apr 28: Marilyn Frye, “A Note on Anger”

May 8: **Virginia Tech Article Assignment** due on Canvas by 11:59 pm