

PHIL 494/694 Sec 1001: Philosophy of Love and Sex

Instructor: Dr. Arina Pismenny

Pronouns: they/them and she/her

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Office: Ansari Building, room 302A

Office Hours: T: 9-10AM; R: 12-1PM, or by appointment

- These are times set aside for you to drop in with questions, discuss course concepts, get feedback on assignments, or just talk about ideas related to the course. You don't need an appointment, but you're always welcome to email me if you'd like to set a specific time.

Class meets on **TR** 10:30AM - 11:45AM in William J. Raggio Building, room 2025

COMMUNICATION

Please contact me by email. It is best to send an email via Canvas because it tells me which section you are in. In your email, please indicate your name, course and section. Please allow 24 hours for an answer.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Love, sex, and intimate relationships are central to many people's lives, but they are also shaped by social norms, power, and technology. This course examines philosophical questions about both the nature of romantic love and the ethics of sexual and intimate relationships. We begin with Plato's *Symposium* and contemporary debates about whether love responds to reasons, what makes a beloved person irreplaceable, and whether love should be unconditional or permanent. We then turn to how gender identity and misogyny shape loving relationships, asking whether love requires seeing and affirming someone for who they are, whether monogamy and polyamory embody different values, and when objectification is morally wrong.

The second half of the course turns to contemporary sexual ethics. Topics include online dating, deepfake pornography, sexual rights and disability, sex robots, the limits of consent, the nature of sex, and the conditions for pleasurable, agentic, and mutually worthwhile sexual interaction. Throughout the course, students will reconstruct and evaluate philosophical arguments, develop and defend their own positions, and engage respectfully with disagreement.

Why this course matters: Love and sexuality shape our emotional lives, social relationships, and moral values. Reflecting philosophically on these topics helps us understand ourselves and others, engage critically with cultural norms, and navigate intimacy and consent with greater clarity and ethical awareness.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. State and defend a thesis about a philosophical question concerning love, sex, or intimacy using textual and argumentative evidence.
2. Analyze how gender, power, and social norms shape concepts of love and sexual ethics.
3. Evaluate ethical arguments about love, consent, and desire in historical and contemporary philosophical sources.
4. Engage respectfully with diverse perspectives about relationships, sexuality, and identity in discussion and writing.

HOW TO SUCCEED IN THIS COURSE

Each learning outcome is supported by readings, in-class activities, and assignments that build your skills step by step. For example:

- **Explain and apply core concepts** → You will practice in in-class quizzes and apply them in your essays.
- **Critically analyze arguments** → You will do this in written work and during in-class discussions.
- **Engage respectfully with diverse perspectives** → You will apply this skill in discussions and peer feedback, and the Art of Asking Questions discussions.

COURSE MATERIALS

Plato, *Symposium*. Translated by Nehamas and Woodruff. (1989). Hackett Publishing Company. ISBN: 978-0872200760 (also available on Kindle)

All other reading materials are posted on Canvas. It is your responsibility to download them and read them.

GRADES

Measuring your progress in points will make it easy for you to determine your own grade and progress at any time. The total possible number of points for the course is **100**. Final letter grades will be assigned on the standard point/percentage scale:

A: 93–100 | **A–:** 90–92 | **B+:** 87–89 | **B:** 84–86 | **B–:** 80–83 | **C+:** 77–79 | **C:** 74–76 | **C–:** 70–73 | **D+:** 67–69 | **D:** 64–66 | **D–:** 60–63 | **F:** 0–59

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING BREAKDOWN

Syllabus quiz – 0% but required to get a perfect score in order to proceed with the course

In-class reading quizzes (8): 30%

The Art of Asking Questions: 10%

Final project: 40%: 15% oral presentation, 25% final paper

Attendance: 10%

Participation: 10%

Total: 100%

ASSIGNMENTS

Syllabus Quiz (0% of final grade, but required to continue in the course)

You must complete the syllabus quiz on Canvas at the start of the semester. This short quiz checks your understanding of the course policies, assignments, grading, and expectations. It will not count toward your final grade, but you must earn 100% on it, in order to unlock the rest of the course materials and participate in the class.

Attendance (10%)

Regular attendance is essential for success in this course. You may miss up to four class sessions without penalty; each additional unexcused absence will reduce your attendance grade.

Here is what this means. For 4 or fewer absences: Attendance grade = 100% (full attendance grade). For 5 absences: Attendance grade = 100% - 5% = 95%; 6 absences: Attendance grade = 100% - 10% = 90%; For 7 absences: Attendance grade = 100% - 15% = 85%; For 8 absences: Attendance grade = 100% - 20% = 80%; For 9 absences: Attendance grade = 100% - 25% = 75%; For 10 absences: Attendance grade = 100% - 30% = 70%; **For 11 absences or more: Attendance grade = 0% (dropped from the course).**

Attendance will be taken every class.

Latenesses will also affect your attendance record. Two latenesses will count as one absence. If you do arrive late, make sure to notify me at the end of the class that you were here. Otherwise, once marked absent, the attendance record will not be changed.

Participation (10%)

Participation means contributing to the class discussions by asking questions, making comments, and answering questions. This portion of your grade will depend on your engagement and contribution (quality, not quantity). Your in-class participation will be tracked. In addition, there are a few Discussion Board posts that will also count towards participation.

Homework: You have homework due every week that has assigned readings. It consists of reading the assigned materials, and preparing for the in-class reading quizzes.

In-Class Reading Quizzes (30%)

During Weeks 2–12, on Tuesdays, you will complete ten or eleven short in-class quizzes on the assigned readings. Quizzes will assess your understanding of authors' central claims, concepts, and arguments and may also ask you to briefly apply or evaluate an argument. Unless otherwise indicated, all required readings for the week must be completed before Tuesday's quiz, even when we discuss the second reading on Thursday. Your 2-3 lowest quiz scores will be dropped, and your 8 highest scores will determine your quiz grade. Because the 2-3 drops are designed to accommodate ordinary absences and occasional

difficulties, missed quizzes ordinarily cannot be made up. Students with documented or university-approved absences should contact me as soon as reasonably possible.

The Art of Asking Questions (10%): Students will work in pairs, each assigned a specific reading. Together, each pair will develop one thoughtful discussion question based on the reading, submit it on Canvas, and then lead a brief in-class discussion (about 20 minutes). The goal is to spark dialogue by raising a question that is open-ended, textually grounded, and philosophically engaging. Each group is required to meet with me during my office hours or at another arranged time to go over their question.

Final Project (40%): At the end of term each student will develop and defend their final project in front of the rest of the class. You will need to choose a topic, develop a thesis, and defend it by providing evidence and arguments. You will need to demonstrate the knowledge you have acquired in the course. A list of suggested topics will be provided. After the in-class presentation, each student will submit the undergraduate final paper (3000-5000 words) that corresponds to the project they've presented in class. The presentation is worth 15%, the paper is worth 25%.

ASSIGNMENTS GRADUATE ADDENDUM (PHIL 694)

Graduate students complete the shared course and, in addition:

- **Supplementary readings and quizzes:** During each week in which a reading quiz is given, graduate students will complete one designated supplementary scholarly reading in addition to the readings required of all students. This will ordinarily be one of the recommended readings listed in the schedule; when necessary, an additional article will be assigned. The graduate version of the Tuesday quiz will cover the required readings and the supplementary graduate reading.
- **Graduate Teaching Session:** In place of the paired Art of Asking Questions assignment, each graduate student will facilitate a substantial portion of one class meeting, normally approximately 55–60 minutes following the Tuesday reading quiz. Graduate students may select from the course topics, subject to instructor approval and scheduling needs. We will meet in advance to develop the session's structure, central questions, and activities. Specific topics, dates, and formats will be finalized after the add/drop period.
- **Graduate meetings:** Graduate students will participate in two to three graduate-only meetings scheduled at mutually agreeable times. The first will focus on supplementary readings and seminar-facilitation planning; the second will serve as a research workshop for the final paper. Preparation for and participation in these meetings will form part of the PHIL 694 participation grade.
- **Final research paper:** In place of the shorter undergraduate paper, graduate students will write a substantial research paper of 5,000–7,500 words that engages relevant peer-reviewed scholarship and develops and defends an original philosophical argument. Graduate students will meet individually with me for

research consultations and will receive feedback on both a proposal and a draft. The proposal and draft are required stages of the project but are not graded separately.

- **Final presentation:** Graduate students will present their final projects to the class in a conference-style format during the shared workshop sessions. They will be expected to communicate their research to a philosophically informed, non-specialist audience and respond effectively to questions and objections.

Graduate work will be evaluated according to more rigorous standards than undergraduate work. Graduate students are expected to demonstrate greater depth and breadth of scholarly research, theoretical sophistication, independence of analysis, engagement with objections, and originality of argument. All other grading categories and general course policies apply equally to PHIL 494 and PHIL 694 students.

PHIL 694: Graduate Grading Distribution

- **Syllabus Quiz:** 0%, but students must earn 100% to proceed in the course
- **In-Class Reading Quizzes—best 8 of 11:** 30%
- **Graduate Teaching Session:** 10%
- **Final Project:** 40%
 - Conference-Style Presentation: 15%
 - Graduate Research Paper: 25%
- **Attendance:** 10%
- **Participation:** 10%

Total: 100%

COURSE POLICIES

Late Work will not be accepted, and missed assignments cannot be made up except in cases of documented extenuating circumstances. To qualify for a make-up, you must: (1) notify in advance when reasonably possible, or as soon as circumstances permit, (2) provide a formal written excuse, and (3) complete the make-up within one calendar week of the original due date.

Acceptable reasons for absence from or failure to engage in class include illness; Title IX-related situations; serious accidents or emergencies affecting the student, their roommates, or their family; special curricular requirements (e.g., judging trips, field trips, professional conferences); military obligation; severe weather conditions that prevent class participation; religious holidays; participation in official university activities (e.g., music performances, athletic competition, debate); and court-imposed legal obligations (e.g., jury duty or subpoena). Other reasons (e.g., a job interview or club activity) may be deemed acceptable if approved by the instructor.

For all planned absences, a student in a situation that allows an excused absence from a class, or any required class activity must inform the instructor as early as possible prior to

the class. For all unplanned absences because of accidents or emergency situations, students should contact their instructor as soon as conditions permit.

Note taking: [Research shows that note taking significantly improves students' ability to remember and understand the material they have learned.](#) When taking notes, you should write down ideas. *You should **not** be copying the text of the slides, as the slides are available on Canvas, and you are wasting time re-writing them.* Instead, you should be summarizing the material in your own sentences. This is a very good way to learn. You should always take notes in class.

Hand-written notes are superior to typed-up notes because writing notes by hand engages your mind to a much greater extent than typing does. For this reason, I recommend to all of you to write your notes by hand.

Electronic devices class policy: To help us create an engaging and focused environment, please keep laptops, phones and smart watches off during class. Tablets with a stylus may be used for note-taking only. Using a phone during class without prior approval may result in being asked to step out and losing attendance points. Students with approved accommodations may use devices as needed. Laptops may be used when expressly requested for a workshop or other class activity by the instructor.

Content accessibility: This course may leverage 3rd party web/multimedia content. If you experience any issues accessing this content, please notify me as soon as possible.

Generative AI Use:

This course assumes that all work submitted by students, which includes all process work, drafts, brainstorming artifacts, final works – will be created by the students themselves, working individually or in groups as directed by course assignment instructions. This policy indicates the following constitute violations of academic honesty and “cheating”: any unauthorized use of generative AI tools (such as ChatGPT and similar), as outlined in UNR Academic Integrity Policy ([UAM 6,502](#)).

Some assignments may allow the authorized use of such tools but will be expressly described in the assignment instructions. For the purposes of those assignments, specific instructions will be provided on the use of generative AI tools regarding the type of work being allowed (i.e. brainstorming, drafts, final works, etc.). Please email me for any questions or concerns.

Ground Rules

In this classroom, students will be asked to regularly engage in respectful discussions on a variety of topics. In order to maximize the effectiveness of these discussions and enhance the learning experience for all students, the following ground rules for discussions and general classroom participation will be adopted:

- Listen respectfully, without interrupting.
- Listen actively and with a genuine desire to understand other points of view.
- Critique ideas, not people.
- Speak with care and respect, and understand that your words impact others.

- Do not monopolize discussions.
- Support your positions with reliable evidence.
- Commit to learning and sharing information.
- Be open and willing to change your perspectives based on what you learn from others.
- Recognize that each person comes to a discussion with experiences that are different from your own.
- Recognize that there are different approaches and ideas for solving problems.
- Avoid blame, speculation and inflammatory language.
- Avoid generalizations about social groups.
- Avoid assumptions about any member in the class.
- Do not ask individuals to speak for their (perceived) social group.

COURSE SCHEDULE (SUBJECT TO CHANGE)

Date	Questions/Goals	Reading	Assignments
INTRODUCTION			
Week 1 8/25, 8/27	Introduction: What is Philosophy? What is Philosophy of Love and Sex? What are we seeking when we seek love?	The Syllabus; Plato's <i>Symposium</i> : Introduction; the dialogue (from Apollodorus 172A through Pausanias 185E)	Syllabus quiz due 8/28 Discussion Board – Introduce Yourself (participation) due 8/29
The Nature of Romantic Love I			
Week 2 9/1, 9/3	Is love a search for health, completion, beauty, or admiration?	9/1 <i>Symposium</i> : Eryximachus (186A-189D), Aristophanes (189E-194E), and Agathon (195A-199C) 9/3 <i>Symposium</i> : Agathon & Socrates exchange (199D-201C), Socrates and Diotima (201D-212C) <u>Recommended</u> : Jerome Neu, "Plato's Homoerotic Symposium"	In-Class Reading Quiz 1
The Nature of Romantic Love II			
Week 3 9/8, 9/10	Is love an ascent beyond particular people, or attachment to one irreplaceable person?	9/8 <i>Symposium</i> : Socrates and Diotima (201D-212C) <i>continued</i> , Alcibiades (212C-222C); Final dialogue (222D-223D) 9/10 Martha Nussbaum, "The Speech of Alcibiades"	In-Class Reading Quiz 2 The Art of Asking Questions Group 1

		Recommended: Iakovos Vasiliou, "Plato, Socrates, and Love"	
Love and Reasons			
Week 4 9/15, 9/17	Do we love people because of their valuable qualities? Can love have causes without having reasons?	Simon Keller, "How Do I Love Thee? Let Me Count the Properties"; Nick Zangwill, "Love: Gloriously Amoral and Arational" <u>Recommended</u> : Nico Kolodny, "Love as Valuing a Relationship"; Arina Pismenny, "The Amoralism of Romantic Love"	In-Class Reading Quiz 3
Love, Gender, and Recognition			
Week 5 9/22, 9/24	What does it mean to love authentically across gender identities? Can genuine love coexist with misrecognition, subordination, or misogyny?	Gen Eickers, "Being Trans, Being Loved: Clashing Identities and the Limits of Love"; Caroline R. Lundquist, "Internal Bleeding: How Covert Misogyny within Loving Relationships Tears Us Apart" <u>Recommended</u> : Simone de Beauvoir "Woman in Love" from <i>The Second Sex</i> ; Watch: <i>Disclosure: Trans Lives on Screen</i> (2020) documentary by Sam Feder (available on Netflix)	In-Class Reading Quiz 4 The Art of Asking Questions Group 2
Love and Valuing			
Week 6 9/29, 10/1	Does loving someone as irreplaceable commit us to loving them unconditionally and forever?	Christopher Grau, "Irreplaceability and Unique Value"; Troy Jollimore, "Should We Want to Be Loved Unconditionally and Forever?" <u>Recommended</u> : Robert Kraut, "Love <i>De Re</i> "	In-Class Reading Quiz 5
Ethical Non-monogamy: Polyamory			
Week 7 10/6, 10/8	Is "loving more" ethically better? What do jealousy	Elizabeth Brake, "Is 'Loving More' Better? The Values of Polyamory"; Luke Brunning,	In-Class Reading Quiz 6 The Art of Asking Questions Group 3

	and compersion teach us about love?	“The Distinctiveness of Polyamory” <u>Recommended:</u> Harry Chalmers, “Is Monogamy Morally Permissible?”; Kyle York, “Why Monogamy Is Morally Permissible”	
Sexual Objectification			
Week 8 10/13, 10/15	What is morally troubling about treating someone as an object? Can sexual objectification ever be permissible?	Immanuel Kant, “Duties Towards the Body in Respect of Sexual Impulse” from <i>Lectures on Ethics</i> ; Martha Nussbaum, “Objectification” <u>Recommended:</u> Raja Halwani, “Casual Sex, Promiscuity, and Objectification”	In-Class Reading Quiz 7
Online Dating & Deepfake Porn			
Week 9 10/20, 10/22	How does digital intimacy reshape objectification and consent?	Lily Frank and Michał Klincewicz, “The Moral Rights and Wrongs of Online Dating and Hook-Ups”; Claire Benn, “Deepfakes, Pornography and Consent” <u>Recommended:</u> Daniel Story and Ryan Jenkins, “Deepfake Pornography and the Ethics of Non-Veridical Representations”	In-Class Reading Quiz 8 The Art of Asking Questions Group 4
The Right to Sex			
Week 10 10/27, 10/29	Is there a right to sexual fulfillment? What could such a right require without entitling anyone to another person?	Amia Srinivasan, “The Right to Sex”; Ezio Di Nucci, “Sexual Rights, Disability and Sex Robots” <u>Recommended:</u> A. G. Holdier and Kelly Weirich, “AI Romance and Misogyny: A Speech Act Analysis”	In-Class Reading Quiz 9 The Art of Asking Questions Group 5
Sex, Agency, and Consent			
Week 11 11/3, 11/5	What does consent establish, and what ethical problems can remain after everyone consents?	Elise Woodard, “Bad Sex and Consent”; Quill Kukla, Ch 1 – “Beyond Consent” from <i>Sex Beyond “Yes”</i>	In-Class Reading Quiz 10

Beyond Consent: Sexual Agency and Good Sex			
Week 12 11/10, 11/12 Possible Lilley Museum Trip TBC	How should we understand sex, and what enables pleasurable, agentic, mutually worthwhile sexual interaction?	Greta Christina, "Are We Having Sex Now or What?"; Quill Kukla, Ch 3 – "Scaffolding Good Sex" from <i>Sex Beyond "Yes"</i> <u>Recommended</u> : Manon Garcia, Ch. 7 – "Sex as a Conversation" from <i>The Joy of Consent</i>	In-Class Reading Quiz 11 The Art of Asking Questions Group 6
FINAL PROJECT WORKSHOPS (1)			
Week 13 11/17, 11/19	Bring your laptop to class. Take notes, raise questions, provide constructive feedback for your peers	11/17 No new readings. Structured synthesis discussion; final project workshop 11/19 Three student presentations	Discussion Board "Final Paper Thesis Statement" (participation)
THANKSGIVING BREAK			
Week 14 11/24, 11/26	Engage in independent reading and reflection on course materials. Prepare questions or insights for upcoming discussions and assignments.	Go over the instructions for the final project and paper.	
FINAL PROJECT WORKSHOPS (2)			
Week 15 12/1, 12/3	Take notes, raise questions, provide constructive feedback for your peers	Six student presentations	Discussion Board "Final Paper Thesis Statement" (participation)
FINAL PROJECT WORKSHOPS (3)			
Week 16 12/8	Take notes, raise questions, provide constructive feedback for your peers	Three student presentations	Discussion Board "Final Paper Thesis Statement" (participation)
FINAL ESSAYS			
DUE 12/14			Upload your essay on Canvas

UNIVERSITY POLICIES AND RESOURCES

Academic Integrity

The University Academic Standards Policy defines academic dishonesty and mandates specific sanctions for violations. See the University Academic Standards policy: UAM 6,502.

Policy and resources: [UNR Academic Standards](#)

Disability Services

Any student with a disability needing academic adjustments or accommodations is requested to speak with me or contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) as soon as possible to arrange for appropriate accommodations. The DRC is located in the Pennington Student Achievement Center, room 230, phone: (775) 784-6000, email: drc@unr.edu.

More info: [UNR Disability Resource Center](#)

I am committed to creating a course that is inclusive in its design. You are encouraged to contact me about issues in the class and to get help. I also welcome feedback that will assist me in improving the experience for all students. If, at any point in the term, you find yourself not able to fully access the space, content, and experience of this course, we encourage you to contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC). It is never too late to request accommodations—our bodies and circumstances are continuously changing. By making a plan through the DRC, you can arrange accommodation without disclosing your condition to course instructors.

Mental Health Support

There are times when you may experience difficulties in life, and you may benefit from seeking help. Mental health services are available to you as a student at no additional cost through Counseling Services at the Pennington Student Achievement Center. This includes same-day in-person and telemental health initial consultations, brief individual counseling, and group counseling sessions. Limited same-day appointments can be scheduled online via [Counseling Services](#) or by calling 775-784-4648. Additional brief drop-in "Let's Talk" student consultations are also available in the Counseling Services Annex located at the southwest corner of Great Basin Hall.

Civil Rights & Equal Access

The University of Nevada, Reno is committed to providing a safe learning and work environment for all. If you believe you have experienced discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic/dating violence, or stalking, whether on or off campus or need information related to immigration concerns, please contact the University's Office of Civil Rights & Equal Access.

More info: [Office of Civil Rights & Equal Access](#)

Academic Success Services

Your student fees cover usage of the [University Math Center](#), [University Tutoring Center](#), and [University Writing and Speaking Center](#). These centers support your classroom

learning; it is your responsibility to take advantage of their services. Keep in mind that seeking help outside of class is a sign of a responsible and successful student.

Statement On Failure to Comply with Policy

In accordance with section 6,502 of the University Administrative Manual, a student may receive academic and disciplinary sanctions for failure to comply with the policy, including this syllabus, for failure to comply with the directions of a University Official, for disruptive behavior in the classroom, or any other prohibited action. "Disruptive behavior" is defined in part as behavior, including but not limited to failure to follow course, laboratory, or safety rules, or endangering the health of others. A student may be dropped from class at any time for misconduct or disruptive behavior in the classroom upon the recommendation of the instructor and with the approval of the college dean. A student may also receive disciplinary sanctions through the Office of Student Conduct for misconduct or disruptive behavior, including endangering the health of others, in the classroom. The student shall not receive a refund for course fees or tuition.

Recording Policy

- **Student-created recordings:** Surreptitious or covert video-taping of class or unauthorized audio recording of class is prohibited by law and by Board of Regents policy. This class may be videotaped or audio recorded only with the written permission of the instructor. In order to accommodate students with disabilities, some students may have been given permission to record class lectures and discussions. Therefore, students should understand that their comments during class may be recorded.
- **Instructor-created recordings:** Class sessions may be audio-visually recorded for students in the class to review and for enrolled students who are unable to attend live to view. Students who participate with their camera on or who use a profile image are consenting to have their video or image recorded. If you do not consent to have your profile or video image recorded, keep your camera off and do not use a profile image. Students who unmute during class and participate orally are consenting to have their voices recorded. If you do not consent to have your voice recorded during class, keep your mute button activated and only communicate by using the "chat" feature, which allows you to type questions and comments live.

Campus closures and delays:

In the event of class cancelations or delays caused by inclement weather conditions, fire/smoke conditions, or other unforeseen emergencies, the safety and well-being of students are the University's top priority. Official notifications will be disseminated through the University website and other official channels with details related to any campus delays or closures.

In the event of a campus closure, you will be informed as to whether the class will be offered remotely or if it will be canceled. If the class is canceled, you will receive information on how to address any missed course content.

Students facing significant impacts due to these events are encouraged to communicate with their instructor for potential accommodations.

Religious Observance – Students with religious or cultural observances that coincide with this class should notify the instructor in writing by the second week of the semester to discuss arrangements for making up missed work.

Veteran Services – Veterans, active-duty military, and military-connected students are encouraged to connect with the [UNR Veteran Services Office](#) for resources and assistance.

Diversity and Inclusion Statement – The University of Nevada, Reno actively supports a diverse and inclusive campus culture because diversity in all of its forms makes for a stronger and healthier University.

Land Acknowledgment – We acknowledge that the University of Nevada, Reno is situated on the traditional homelands of the Numu (Northern Paiute), Wašiw (Washoe), Newe (Western Shoshone), and Nuwu (Southern Paiute) peoples.