

PHIL 713 Ethic of Identity Graduate Seminar Spring 2026

Instructor: Dr. Arina Pismenny

Pronouns: She/her and they/them

Email: apismenny@unr.edu

Office: Ansari Building, room 302A

Office Hours: M: 9-10AM; W: 1-2PM, in person and on [Zoom](#) 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 bioethics. 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 **M** 10:30 AM - 1:15 PM in Ansari Building 309

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.

I check email on weekdays from 9:00 am to 6:00 pm. If you write after hours or on weekends, please expect a reply during the next business day.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This graduate seminar examines ethical questions concerning social identity by engaging central debates in social ontology, normativity, and power. We will begin with foundational accounts of social reality and social kinds, focusing on how categories such as gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, and neurodiversity are socially constructed, maintained, and contested. Drawing on work in feminist philosophy, philosophy of race, disability studies, and social epistemology, the course investigates how identity categories structure social recognition, distribute material and epistemic resources, and shape moral agency.

Key themes include the relationship between social classification and domination, the normative dimensions of identity categories, historical injustice and reparative responsibility, epistemic injustice and silencing, and the ethical limits of identity politics. Throughout the seminar, we will attend to questions about when social identities are sources of harm, resistance, or solidarity, and how philosophical analysis can illuminate both the persistence of identity-based injustice and possibilities for critique and transformation.

Reading materials will be posted on Canvas unless there is a direct link to a copy on the internet. It is your responsibility to download them and read them.

Course Requirements

- | | |
|--|----------------|
| • Attendance & Participation | 25% |
| • Two Seminar Presentations on Required Readings | 20% (10% each) |

- Short Prompted Paper 15%
- Final Seminar Paper 40%

Grading Scale

A	4.0	94-100	C	2.0	74-76
A-	3.67	90-93	C-	1.67	70-73
B+	3.33	87-89	D+	1.33	67-69
B	3.0	84-86	D	1.0	64-66
B-	2.67	80-83	D-	0.67	60-63
C+	2.33	77-79	E	0.0	0-59

Attendance & Participation

Both regular attendance and participation are essential to any graduate seminar. We are here to discuss course content and workshop our ideas together. But life happens. If you need to be absent from our weekly meetings, please just let me know as soon as you can.

Excused absences must be consistent with university policies in the Graduate Catalog (<https://www.unr.edu/administrative-manual/3000-3999-students/3020-class-absence-policy>) and require appropriate documentation.

Course participation will be assessed in two ways:

First, you are expected to come to class ready to discuss the required readings and to respond to class presentations (quality, not quantity). Quality participation in discussion depends upon being prepared and making a substantial effort to engage the material in class. Attendance and participation are worth 15% of the total score.

Second, you will be expected to submit *six discussion posts* out of possible twelve throughout the course on Canvas. These discussion posts will be short, and they will be comprised of three components: (a) A typed-out passage from the week's required reading and/or a clear reference to the idea/argument you are thinking about; (b) A reflective analysis of the passage/idea/argument as it bears on its text of origin or our other required readings, (200-word minimum/500-word maximum); & (c) A question you wish to pose to the class based on your analysis. The posts should be completed by 12 PM on Sundays. You are welcome to continue the conversation with your peers after the deadline in the Discussion Board. These are worth 10% of your total score.

Seminar Presentations

Each seminar participant will be required to make two in-class presentations on our weekly readings. Presentations should focus on some particular topic or set of related topics

covered in the week's required reading(s) (*many of our readings will cover numerous topics*), but should also be attentive to the broader context of the week's required readings. Each presentation can be accompanied by a handout of roughly 1-3 pages. Presentations should take approximately 20 minutes, and they should conclude with at least three questions for follow-up discussion. All class participants will be expected to respond to the presenter's questions in the follow-up discussion.

Short Paper

Each seminar participant who is taking the course for a grade will be responsible for writing a short response paper (~1000-1500 words) to a given prompt. Prompts will be distributed two weeks in advance of the due date of the paper, and this will occur prior to Spring Break. More specific instructions and details will follow. Papers will be submitted via Canvas by 11:59pm on Saturday, March 21.

Final Seminar Paper

Each seminar participant who is taking the course for a grade will be responsible for writing a 5000–7000-word (double-spaced, 12pt. font) paper. The topic of the paper will be open, but it *must* bear on our seminar topics, and it must discuss and cite at least two of our required readings. I will be consulting each of you on your topics and will be happy to discuss additional readings and sources. This paper will be due via Canvas submission by 11:59 pm on Sunday, May 10.

Course Schedule (subject to change)

Social Ontology and Social Reality	
1/26	Welcome! John Searle, "The Building Blocks of Social Reality" from <i>The Construction of Social Reality</i>; Ian Hacking, "Why Ask What?" from <i>The Social Construction of What?</i>, and Recommended: "Social Ontology" <i>Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy</i>
Social Kinds, Classification, and Power	
2/2	Katherine Ritchie, "Social Structures and the Ontology of Social Groups"; Ian Hacking, "Making Up People" from <i>London Review of Books</i> Recommended: Muhammad Ali Khalidi, "Three Kinds of Social Kinds"
Constructing Social Categories	

2/9	Sally Haslanger, "Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?"; Ásta, "The Social Construction of Human Kinds", Mari Mikkola, "Ontological Commitments, Sex, and Gender" Recommended: Natalie Soljar, "Different Women: Gender and the Realism-Nominalism"; Linda Martín Alcoff, "Is Latina/o Identity a Racial Identity?"
NO CLASS – PRESIDENT’S DAY	
2/16	No new readings
Social Kinds, Identity, Historical Injustice and Collective Responsibility	
2/23	Ron Mallon, "Race: Normative, Not Metaphysical or Semantic"; Colleen Murphy, "The Movement for Black Lives and Transitional Justice"; Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò, "Reconsidering Reparations: The Movement for Black Lives and Self-Determination" Recommended: Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Does Truth Matter to Identity?"; Michael Bamshad and Steve Olson, "Does Race Exist?" <i>Scientific American</i>; W.E.B. Du Bois, Ch. 1 "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" from <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i>; Paul C. Taylor, "Appiah's uncompleted argument: W.E.B. DuBois and the reality of race"; Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations" from <i>The Atlantic</i> Bernard R. Boxill and J. Angelo Corlett, "Black Reparations" <i>SEP</i>
Gender, Language, and Social Recognition	
3/2	E. M. Hernandez and Rowan Bell, "Much Ado About Nothing: Unmotivating 'Gender Identity'"; Quill Kukla and Mark Lance, "Telling Gender: The Pragmatics and Ethics of Gender Ascriptions" Recommended: Talia Mae Bettcher, "Trans Identities and First-Person Authority"; Katherine Jenkins, "Toward an Account of Gender Identity"; Burkey Ozturk, "The Negotiative Theory of Gender Identity and the Limits of First-Person Authority"; Robin Dembroff, "Beyond Binary: Genderqueer as Critical Gender Kind"
Ontological Pluralism, Social Worlds, and Moral Understanding	
3/9	María Lugones, "Playfulness, "World"-Travelling, and Loving Perception"; Talia Mae Bettcher, from <i>Beyond Personhood: An Essay in Trans Philosophy</i> Recommended: Talia Mae Bettcher, "Trapped in the Wrong Theory: Rethinking Trans Oppression and Resistance"; Naomi Scheman, "Queering the Center by Centering the Queer: Reflections on Transsexuals and Secular Jews"
Epistemic Injustice	

3/16	Kristie Dotson, “Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing”; Jose Medina, “Epistemic Injustice and Epistemologies of Ignorance” Recommended: Miranda Fricker, “Testimonial Injustice” and “Hermeneutical Injustice.” from <i>Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing</i>; Vanessa Wills, “And He Ate Jim Crow: Racist Ideology as False Consciousness” Short paper due 3/21
3/23	NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK
Sexual Orientation and Sexual Identity	
3/30	Arina Pismenny, “Pansexuality: A Closer Look at Sexual Orientation”; Matthew Andler, The Sexual Orientation/Identity Distinction Recommended: Kurt M. Blankschaen, “Allied Identities”; María Lugones, “Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System”; Kathleen Stock, “Sexual Orientation: What Is It?”; Luke Brunning and Natasha McKeever, “Asexuality”
Disability	
4/6	Shelley Tremain, “On the Government of Disability”; Elizabeth Barnes, Ch 1. “Constructing Disability” from <i>The Minority Body</i> Recommended: Sami Schalk, ““We Have a Right to Rebel”: Black Disability Politics in the Black Panther Party” from <i>Black Disability Politics</i>; Robert McRuer, “Introduction: Compulsory Able-Bodiedness and Queer/Disabled Existence” from <i>Crip Theory</i>
Neurodiversity	
4/13	Nick Walker, “Neurodiversity: Some Basic Terms & Definitions”; August Gorman, “Neurodiversity and The Ethics of Access”; Bradley Lewis, “A Mad Fight: Psychiatry and Disability Activism” Recommended: Zoey Lavalley and Anne-Marie Gagné-Julien, “Affective injustice, sanism and psychiatry”
Identity Politics and Its Limits	
4/20	Linda Martín Alcoff, “Who’s Afraid of Identity Politics?”; Avery Kolers, “The Dilemma of Deference” from <i>A Moral Theory of Solidarity</i> Recommended: Wendy Brown, “Wounded Attachments” from <i>States of Injury</i>
Final Project Workshops	
4/27	Three project workshop presentations

5/4	Two project workshop presentations + Summing Up
5/10	Final paper due

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance, Participation, and Professional Responsibility

This seminar depends on consistent preparation, active participation, and mutual engagement. Students are expected to attend all class meetings, complete the readings in advance, and contribute thoughtfully to discussion. Because this is a small, discussion-based graduate seminar, absences and lack of preparation have a disproportionate impact on the learning environment.

If you anticipate an absence, please notify the instructor as early as possible. In cases of illness, emergency, or other serious circumstances, students should contact the instructor as soon as conditions permit. Reasonable accommodations will be made in cases involving documented extenuating circumstances, including illness, emergencies, religious observance, professional obligations (such as conferences), Title IX-related situations, or other comparable situations.

Late Work and Extensions

Graduate work requires planning, communication, and professional judgment. Assignments are expected to be submitted on time. Late work will generally not be accepted unless an extension has been approved in advance or the delay is due to documented extenuating circumstances.

If you anticipate difficulty meeting a deadline, you should contact the instructor **before** the due date whenever possible. Extensions are not automatic and are granted at the instructor's discretion, but reasonable requests made in good faith will be considered. In approved cases, make-up work must be completed within a mutually agreed-upon timeframe.

Use of Electronic Devices

This seminar prioritizes sustained attention, careful listening, and engaged discussion. Laptops and tablets are permitted for note-taking purposes only. Phones and smart watches should not be used during class unless required for approved accommodations or specific class activities.

Students who need to use electronic devices for accessibility reasons are, of course, welcome to do so. If device use becomes distracting or interferes with discussion, the instructor may ask that it be discontinued.

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 generated 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), as outlined in UNR Academic Integrity Policy ([UAM 6,502](#)).

Some assignments may allow for the use of 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.

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 tele mental 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

Surreptitious or unauthorized recording of class discussions and lectures is prohibited. Students who require recording as an accommodation must contact the Disability Resource Center to arrange authorization.

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.