

**MISSOURI WESTERN STATE UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES  
PHL260/360: PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH  
Jon Mark Mikkelsen, Ph.D.  
Spring 2012**

*Course description and overview*

PHL260 has been designed as a “pro-seminar”-type course focusing on a single canonical text or topic with limited enrollment (6–15 students). The course is intended to provide students seriously interested in the formal study of philosophy with a thorough introduction to contemporary methods of philosophical research, including: (1) general reflection on the nature of philosophical problems/issues and an exploration of alternative contemporary methods of philosophical investigation; (2) the interpretation and analysis of primary source materials; (3) the proper use of secondary materials, including bibliographical and handbook/encyclopedic resources now generally available both in print and electronic formats; and (4) the oral and written presentation of research findings.

The text selected for study this semester is Jean-François Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). Written at the request of the Conseil des Universités of the government of Quebec (Canada), the work was originally published in French as *La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1979).

The course will be divided into two parts (see proposed course schedule attached). Roughly the first half of the semester (Weeks 1–7) will be devoted to a thorough reading of Lyotard’s “report.” During this part of the course, attention will also be given to: (i) the discussion alternative, contemporary methods (or “models”) of philosophical research; (ii) the identification of significant primary source materials generally considered relevant for the study of this text; and (iii) some of the most significant interpretations and analyses of the text available in electronic, printed article, and book-length secondary sources available in the Western library, through MOBIUS, and by use of the internet. There is, therefore, an expectation that students will also, during this part of the course: (iv) acquire basic competence in using bibliographical resources such as *The Philosopher’s Index*, J-STOR, and handbook/encyclopedic-type resources such as *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* and the online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (v) acquire an appreciation of the contemporary, standard format for articles published in philosophical journals and book-length anthologies; and, (vi) through active class participation, begin to develop both the cognitive and affective abilities needed to engage in productive, serious philosophical discussion with others.

The first part of the course will, however, be devoted primarily to a “slow, close reading” of Lyotard’s book and *not* to the study of secondary source materials. The second part of the course, on the other hand, will focus on the study of significant, selected journal article-length secondary materials and on the preparation of 6–12 page (professionally formatted) papers to be read in class during the last three weeks of the semester and revised for final submission before the end of the term.

*Plagiarism / Late work*

All students are expected to do their own work. No credit will be given for any work that violates well-recognized academic standards for originality and documentation. Late work will be accepted only at the discretion of the instructor.

### ***Student evaluation***

The final grade for the course will be based upon student performance in the following three areas: (1) mid-term oral examination over the content and philosophical significance of Lyotard's *Postmodern Condition* (100 points, or 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ %); (2) class presentations and participation (100 points, or 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ %); (3) final research project paper (100 points, or 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ %). Students who do not do reasonably well, i.e., who do not earn a grade of at least "B," on the mid-term examination, or who do not within a reasonable amount of time demonstrate competence in the use of electronic and traditional print secondary sources, may be discouraged from attempting to complete the course. (More detailed information on the criteria to be used for the determination of grades in each category will be provided in the course of the semester.)

### ***Students with disabilities***

Any student enrolled in the class who has a disability that prevents the fullest expression of abilities should contact the instructor as soon as possible to discuss course requirements.

### ***Office hours and contact information***

MWF 12 noon–1 p.m., T/Th 11 a.m.–12 noon, or by appointment  
Department of History, Philosophy & Geography (Popplewell 115)  
Campus e-mail: mikkelsen@missouriwestern.edu  
Phone: (816) 271-4530

**MISSOURI WESTERN STATE UNIVERSITY**  
**COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES**  
**PHL260/360: PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH**  
**Jon Mark Mikkelsen, Ph.D.**  
**Spring 2012**

**Course schedule**

**Week 1**

- (1) Wed., Jan. 18 Course introduction and self-introductions; discussion of print and electronic research sources that students must demonstrate competency in using in individual sessions with the instructor by the end of Week 3; discussion of recommended secondary and supplementary source materials available on Reserve (at the Library) and on WebCT.
- (2) Fri., Jan. 20 Jean-François Lyotard (1924–1998), *Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (hereafter *PC*), “Introduction,” pp. xxiii–xxv

**Week 2**

- (3) Mon., Jan. 23 Continued
- (4) Wed., Jan. 25 *PC* pp. 3–6: §1. The Field: Knowledge in Computerized Societies
- (5) Fri., Jan. 27 *PC* pp. 6–9: §2. The Problem: Legitimation

**Week 3**

- (6) Mon., Jan. 30 *PC* pp. 9–11: §3. Method: Language Games
- (7) Wed., Feb. 1 Continued
- (8) Fri., Feb. 3 *PC* pp. 11–17: §4. The Nature of the Social Bond: The Modern Alternative & §5. The Nature of the Social Bond: The Postmodern Perspective

**Week 4**

- (9) Mon., Feb. 6 *PC* pp. 18–27: §6. The Pragmatics of Narrative Knowledge & §7. The Pragmatics of Scientific Knowledge
- (10) Wed., Feb. 8 *PC* pp. 27–41: §8. The Narrative Function and the Legitimation of Knowledge; §9. Narratives of the Legitimation of Knowledge & §10. Deligitimation
- (11) Fri., Feb. 10 Continued

**Week 5**

- (12) Mon., Feb. 13 *PC* pp. 41–47: §11. Research and Its Legitimation through Performativity
- (13) Wed., Feb. 15 *PC* pp. 47–53: §12. Education and Its Legitimation through Performativity
- Feb. 15–18 APA Central Division (Chicago)
- (14) Fri., Feb. 17 Continued

**Week 6**

- Mon., Feb. 20 Presidents’ Day
- Feb. 22–24 Galileo’s Legacy Conference – Environmental Restoration: Benefits and Challenges
- (15) Wed., Feb. 22 *PC* pp. 53–60: §13. Postmodern Science as the Search for Instabilities
- (16) Fri., Feb. 24 Continued

**Week 7**

- (17) Mon., Feb. 27 *PC* pp. 60–67: §14. Legitimation by Paralogy
- (18) Wed., Feb. 29 Continued
- (19) Fri., Mar. 2 Continued

**Week 8**

(20) Mon., Mar. 5	TBA
(21) Wed., Mar. 7	TBA
(22) Fri., Mar. 9	TBA

**Spring Break**

• Mar. 11–18

**Week 9**

(23) Mon., Mar. 19	Discussion of secondary sources
(24) Wed., Mar. 21	Discussion of secondary sources
• Wed., Mar. 21	Midterm “progress reports” due
(25) Fri., Mar. 23	Discussion of secondary sources

**Week 10**

(26) Mon., Mar. 26	Discussion of secondary sources
(27) Wed., Mar. 28	Discussion of secondary sources
• Mar. 29–Apr. 1	ACTC Annual Conference (Milwaukee)
(28) Fri., Mar. 30	Discussion of secondary sources
• Fri., Mar. 30	Last day to withdraw from classes

**Week 11**

(29) Mon., Apr. 2	Discussion of secondary sources
• Mon., Apr. 2	Fall/summer registration begins
(30) Wed., Apr. 4	Discussion of secondary sources
(31) Fri., Apr. 6	Discussion of secondary sources

**Week 12**

(32) Mon., Apr. 9	Student presentations (Swindler)
(33) Wed., Apr. 11	Student presentations (Rosen)
(34) Fri., Apr. 13	Student presentations (Bloom)

**Week 13**

(35) Mon., Apr. 16	Student presentations (Wells)
(36) Wed., Apr. 18	Student presentations (White)
(37) Fri., Apr. 20	Student presentations (Holland)

**Week 14**

(38) Mon., Apr. 23	Student presentations (TBA)
(39) Wed., Apr. 25	Student presentations (TBA)
(40) Fri., Apr. 27	Student presentations (TBA)
(41) Mon., Apr. 30	Student presentations (TBA)

**Final exam period**

Fri., May 4 (11:30 am–1:20 pm)

**Final grades due**

Thurs., May 10 @ 2 p.m.