The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Subject Description Form

Subject Code	CBS1CN36M
Subject Title	Aspects of Western Philosophy
Credit Value	3
Level	1
Pre-requisite / Co-requisite/ Exclusion	Exclusion: CBS1C36 and GEC1C40 and GEC1C46 and GEC1C46M and CBS1CN36 and CBS1C36M
Objectives	The primary focus of this subject is ☐ Art ☐ History ☒ Philosophy and Religion In this subject, the following cluster specific attributes will be emphasized: ☒ Develop a facility for systematic thinking; ☒ Cultivate moral reasoning; ☐ Cultivate aesthetic judgment; ☒ Cultivate a cultural sense; and ☐ Become more globally aware. This subject explores interesting philosophical topics, whereby students' critical thinking and creative imagination will be cultivated and enhanced. They will appreciate the special nature of the Western analytical culture through this subject, and will be equipped with the ability to apply their independent thinking as a generic skill across different disciplines.
Intended Learning Outcomes *(Note 1)*	Upon completion of the subject, students will be able to: (a) APPLY useful skills of logical reasoning; (b) USE productive methods of creative imagination in constructing premises, and ultimately solutions, for problem-solving; (c) DESCRIBE the main lines of thought of selected philosophical classics; (d) IDENTITY the recent trends of the major intellectual controversies characteristic of the Western philosophical tradition; (e) RECOGNIZE the generic importance of intellectual curiosity in philosophical inquiries and other academic subjects. (f) ENHANCE their skills of reading and writing argumentative essays Please explain how the stated learning outcomes relate to the following three essential features of GUR subjects: Literacy, Higher order thinking, and Life-long learning

March 2022

	<u>Literacy</u> This subject enhances students' grasp of the skills of logical reasoning and all-round thinking through reading selected important classic and modern philosophical texts. They will be guided on how to appreciate the power of persuasive reasoning from the discussion of the famous philosophers' writings with the lecturer in class. Also, for the practice of their conceptual literary and reasoning skills, students are required to submit an argumentative essay as part of the subject assessment. [Outcomes (a), (b), (c), (d), (e) and (f)] <u>Higher-order thinking</u> This subject invites students to take part in the process of philosophizing by asking interesting and stimulating questions. Students will see the lecturer to demonstrate, for example, how fallacies could be avoided in answering the questions by the application of logical thinking skills. Once the students have learnt the reasonably sophisticated philosophical reasoning skills, they will be guided to solve the questions for themselves, so much so that students will proactively enter into the level of higher-order, independent thinking. [Outcomes (a), (b) and (e)] <u>Life-long Learning</u> Philosophical thinking is highly effective in broadening students' horizon by cultivating their intellectual curiosity and their independent thinking. Students will be thrilled to learn the mastery of the philosophical tools in conceptualizing problems and constructing creative solutions. After taking this subject, students will be highly motivated to develop an effective problem-solving ability and proactively inquisitive mind, essential for their "learning to learn" across the academic disciplines and for their life-long search for the meaning of one's own existence in the modern world. [Outcomes (a), (b), (e) and (f)]

Subject Synopsis/ Indicative Syllabus
 	
(Note 2)
	1. Methods and Branches of Philosophy
	    (a) Higher-order thinking
	        Critical and creative thinking skills; productive use of skepticism; rules of logical reasoning; ancient Greek paradoxes and puzzles
	
	    (b) Nature of Philosophy
	        Theoretical and practical philosophies; relationships with other disciplines; Russell's conception of the use of philosophy
	
	2. Philosophical Topics
	    (a) Are we dreaming now?
	        Theories of knowledge; reality; correspondence and coherence theories of truth; Descartes
	
	    (b) What is a good life?
	        Teleology; value and fact; material and spiritual interests; objectivity; subjectivity; Confucianism; Buddhism; Socrates; Nietzsche; Nagel
	
	    (c) Why should I be moral?
	        Morality; nihilism; egoism; altruism; self-interest; selfishness; short- term and long-term goals; prudence

	(d) Does God Exist? Problems of evil; ontological, cosmological and teleological arguments; Pascal's Wager (e) Is Time Travel Possible? Nature of space and time; time-machine; grandfather paradox; Back to Future paradox; personal identity (f) Are we Free? Nature of causation; determinism; libertarianism; compatibilism; positive and negative freedom (g) Can Machines Think? Cognition and cognitive science; mental states; disposition; A.I., mind and body; Turing machine; Searle's Chinese Room
Teaching/Learning Methodology *(Note 3)*	Progressive pedagogy Starting with short philosophical puzzles and paradoxes to arouse students' interests, this course adopts a progressive methodology in inviting students to learn the basic rules of logical reasoning and creative thinking. In introducing each philosophical topic, case-studies and stories from daily life will be used to highlight the relevance of philosophy to real life. Then, central philosophical issues will be broached step by step and explored deep into their core. In this manner, students gradually advance in their learning from thinking methods, to small-scale philosophical problems,-for them to challenge, reflect upon, and learn from. Their learning outcome will be assessed by quizzes and class work. At the end of the subject, students are required to submit a term paper. The term paper is an important platform for them to apply their thinking skills to controversial philosophical issues. Reading and writing instructions In this teaching and learning process, students will have finished reading a book on their own. A quiz worth 20 marks on the designated book will be conducted. Hence, the gradual learning process described above will culminate in knowledgeable reading of a lengthy book. Students will also submit a short paper between 1500 and 2000 words on their selected topics. Interactive teaching and learning methods The lecturer will engage the students with interactive Q & A sessions during the lectures, encouraging students to express their views. In addition, short reflective written exercises may be conducted during or after lectures whereby each student will have the chance of practicing independent thinking and enriching their literacy in writing. Samples of excellent performance and pitfalls may be cited for

March 2022

| | discussion between the lecturer and the students.

As mentioned above, students are required to attend quizzes. The content of the quizzes and presentations will give occasion for the lecturer to point out the strengths and weaknesses of students' work as well as to discuss sample answers.

Peer interaction between students is also promoted in group discussion during tutorials. Students will be divided into subgroups responsible for leading a discussion on philosophical questions which the lecturer will distribute in the beginning of the semester. Peer interaction is fundamental for their training in logical reasoning and the development of independent thinking.

<u>Multi-media teaching tools</u>
Relevant film extracts and documentaries will be used as initial foci for some topics to invite students to be engaged in reflecting about interesting philosophical questions.

A variety of entry points (reading, writing, dialogues, self-explorations, thinking through multi-media) will be employed, suitable for students from different academic disciplines and backgrounds. Students will appreciate the invitation from this subject to assume a reflective stance, a manifestation of the successful implementation of philosophical thinking in real-life situations. |

Assessment Methods in Alignment with Intended Learning Outcomes

(Note 4)

Specific assessment methods/tasks	% weighting	Intended subject learning outcomes to be assessed (Please tick as appropriate)					
		a	b	c	d	e	f
1. Class participation: In- class exercises	30%	√	√	√	√	√	√
2. Quizzes	30%	√	√	√	√	√	√
3. Term Paper: (1500 – 2000 words)	40%	√	√	√	√	√	√
Total	100%						

Student Study Effort Expected

Class contact:	
▪ Lecture	26 Hrs.
▪ Tutorial	13 Hrs.
Other student study effort:	
▪ Self Study	40 Hrs.
▪ Reading and writing	40 Hrs.
Total student study effort	119 Hrs.

Reading List and References

Please indicate clearly in this section if the subject should have an "R" designation. If so, subject proposers should also indicate clearly which items on the Reading List constitute the expected reading requirement and include the page numbers.

Required Reading

A study guide including reading review questions and a glossary will be provided.

Law, Stephen. (2003). *The Philosophy Gym: 25 Short Adventures in Thinking*. Thomas Dunne Books. (224 pages)

Reference List

(1) Baggini, Julian. (2004). *What's it All About? Philosophy & the Meaning of Life*. Oxford: OUP.

(2) Blackburn, Simon. (1999). *Think: A Compelling Introduction to Philosophy*. Oxford: OUP.

(3) Christopher Falzon. (2002). *Philosophy Goes to the Movies: An Introduction to Philosophy*. London: Routledge.

(4) Creel, Richard E. (2001). *Thinking Philosophically: An Introduction to Critical Reflection and Rational Dialogue*. Oxford: Blackwell.

(5) Davies, Paul. (2002). *How to Build a Time Machine*. Penguin Books.

(6) Fearn, Nicholas. (2001). *Zeno and the Tortoise: How to Think Like a Philosopher*. London: Atlantic Books.

(7) McInerny, D.Q. (2005). *Being Logical: A Guide to Good Thinking*. New York: Random House, Inc.

(8) Morrow, David R. & Weston, Anthony. (2016). *A Workbook for Arguments: A Complete Course in Critical Thinking*. 2nd edition. Indiana: Hackett Publishing Co.

(9) Russell, Bertrand. (1996). *History of Western Philosophy*. London: Routledge.

(10) Russell, Bertrand. (1959). *The Problems of Philosophy*. New York: OUP.

(11) Solomon, Robert et al. (2015). *Introducing Philosophy: A Text with Integrated Readings*. 11th edition. New York: OUP.

(12) Swinburne, Richard. (1996). *Is There a God?* Oxford: OUP.

(13) Warburton, Nigel. (2006). *Philosophy: The Classic*. 3rd edition. London: Routledge.

(14) Washburn, Phil. (1997). *Philosophical Dilemmas: Building a Worldview*. New York: OUP.

Note 1: Intended Learning Outcomes
Intended learning outcomes should state what students should be able to do or attain upon completion of the subject. Subject outcomes are expected to contribute to the attainment of the overall programme outcomes.

Note 2: Subject Synopsis/ Indicative Syllabus
The syllabus should adequately address the intended learning outcomes. At the same time over-crowding of the syllabus should be avoided.

March 2022

Note 3: Teaching/Learning Methodology
This section should include a brief description of the teaching and learning methods to be employed to facilitate learning, and a justification of how the methods are aligned with the intended learning outcomes of the subject.

Note 4: Assessment Method
This section should include the assessment method(s) to be used and its relative weighting, and indicate which of the subject intended learning outcomes that each method purports to assess. It should also provide a brief explanation of the appropriateness of the assessment methods in assessing the intended learning outcomes.

Subject Offering Department	CBS/APSS
Cluster Area	Please check the box(es) below to indicate the cluster area(s) the subject contributes in a major way: ☐ Human Nature, Relations and Development [CAR(A)] ☐ Science, Technology and Environment [CAR(D)] ☐ Chinese History and Culture [CAR(M)] ☒ Cultures, Organisations, Societies and Globalisation [CAR(N)]
Medium of Instruction	English
Requirements intended to fulfil	☐ China-Study Requirement (CSR) ☐ English Reading (ER) and English Writing (EW) ☐ Chinese Reading (CR) and Chinese Writing (CW)