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## Advice and comments from previous Philosophy students

Dear new Philosophy students -

Right at the end of a recent quarter's Philosophy class I asked students if they would mind writing a short note of advice or insight to the students who will be taking this course next quarter. Here's what I asked:

I wonder if you wouldn't mind writing just a short note, something that would fit on a small 3x5 card, addressed to the students who will be taking this course next quarter. Maybe offer them a little advice, or encouragement, or perhaps some ideas about the course from the perspective of a fellow student who has now gone through the whole thing. Maybe it could be the sort of thing you wish someone would have told you when you first were starting this class.

Here are some of the things they wrote to you:

1. from Joanie: The first thing I would tell other students is to read the text assigned and use a printed out Study Questions form to write the answers that you come across, and the second thing I would tell them is that Reading the assignments more than once is the only way to truly understand the concepts set forth in this class.
2. from Kimberley: At first I was concerned about the amount of time it would take to participate in this class. But, it turned out fine, because you can do it in anytime-even the middle of the night if you wish. It was so enjoyable that I looked forward to it, and I was dissappointed if there were no postings for me to read. Everyone who takes this class will find something they like and something they can relate to.
3. from Kara: Don't be intimidated by the long syllabus. It sounds like so much work, but it is not unbearable. Just make sure that you are always getting online and making sure you are up to speed. I would suggest going online everyday, even if you are not actually participating in the discussions, just to make sure you haven't missed anything. Also, when you look at the classroom and see all of the red flags and think "Wow, how am I ever going to read all of those comments and get everything else done?" Remember it is not as bad as it looks. It is really interesting to read what everyone else has to say, and before you know it alot of time will have passed! Good luck and have fun.
4. Tony offers two versions:
   1. Version 1  
      Hello new comers of online Philosophy 101!!! I absolutely love this class! I am on my 10th week of it right now. I think I am getting A on this class. I don’t think this class is really all that hard at all. It does require at least of 2 hours of time for this class each day. However, I found myself putting in on average of 30 hours a week. It is a must to try to keep up at it everyday. It is so much harder to keep up after you have fallen 1 week of reading assignment. I have seen people dropped this class because of that. But I have seen most people getting pretty good grade just by keeping up with it. The key is to put your entire heart at it. This class will reward you as much as you put in to it. It is a philosophy! It has soul of its own! Let it reach out to you and embrace you! And don’t quit!
5. Version 2  
   Follow the instructions!!! Turn in your work on time! When answering the questions, don't just answer the obvious, try to be original! That is how I get A on this class!
6. from Danielle: As with any new class the thrill and anticipation overwhelms you and finding your way to class seems a bit much. But within a week or two I was rolling a long with my other classmates. Just like my other classes people came and went we made friends, had deep discussions in which not all of us agreed. I think this class (minus the weekend work) is great. It fits into my schedule nicely and despite being demanding and time consuming it is well worth it. I learned more from this class than any other.
7. from Scott: Give yourself enough time to both read AND think about what you've read. It will take more time than you suppose.
8. from Scott: When I went through Schopenhauer I underlined words in each paragraph that made a sentence that conveyed the idea. Sometimes it was an actual sentence; sometimes I could cobble one together across several sentences. As I have gone back, these "notes" help me get through the logic stream.
9. from Lucas: To find oneself you must first read the assignment. :) To all who seem to get disheartened by the information in this course. Press on and know that this is not set in stone on how the world is it is only a stab at what things could possibly be. I believe this course helps a person, not to change your ideals or beliefs, but to help you reason out all your thoughts, and not always to go with what you were taught.
10. from Angie: When entering this class keep an open-mind. Some things may be overwhelming at first, but relax. Everything comes together in the end like a fine circle making a journey around. I have learned more about myself and where I have been in the last five years, in ten weeks of this class. For the first few weeks it was a little confusing, I was so worried about the readings. Once I became more involved in the discussions, things seemed to iron themselves out. The course was designed in order much like the readings. We entered the cave of darkness and in the end found the light.
11. from Eleanor: I've taken other online courses before, so when I first registered for the course I thought it would be no big deal. Looking over Tom's class schedule and web site almost gave me a heart-attack. I thought I would never make it. But the reading we did, although it seemed like a lot, was actually quite enjoyable. Some of it was confusing, but Tom gets us through the hard parts with his lectures--they are really helpful! When you have a question, there is always somebody, if not more than one person, who will help you. As impersonal as online may seem, I think I have gotten to know my fellow students in this class more than any other "real" classroom. Remember throughout the course to keep an open mind. The ideas being presented are not there to tell you that this is the way you should think...they are just presenting options for you to think about. Remember that people have different views than you do, respect their views, and don't get angry if it seems as though they are not respecting yours. Sometimes it hard to state your views without having it seem like you are trying to put down somebody else's. Give compliments...I always like it when people tell me I did a good job on something.
12. from Val to Eleanor: I liked your suggestion. I smiled when I read the part about Tom's website. It is pretty impressive. It was definitely the most organized on-line class I've taken. But I can relate to the initial heart attack. :-)
13. from Eleanor to Val: I agree that it is definitely the most organized on-line class I have taken. Everything is layed out nice and neat so we can work ahead if we have the chance.
14. from Joanie: I would warn them that they need to set aside about 32 to 45 hours a week to be online or reading the assignments. I would also tell them to take the class with someone if this is possible, sometimes my family got annoyed with all the questions I was asking. It would have been really nice to have some one to talk to about the issues, face-to-face.
15. from Bill: I would suggest the following to a new student of Intro to Philosophy:
    1. Always read the lectures BEFORE you read the books
    2. Print out the study questions, so you can be aware of them as you read.
    3. Have a back-up computer available, just in case!
    4. Be prepared to stay home on the weekends. The class does not take a break for Sat. and Sun.
    5. Try to keep an open mind. Some material you can relate to, other material will appear quite "far fetched."
    6. Dedicate lots of time to the class. It took more than I thought it would.
    7. Don't be afraid to disagree with the Prof. It makes for great discussion.
16. from Michele: Be prepared to work hard. Develop a method of organizing what is due each week and when. Don't even think about procrastinating! Participate daily in the classroom discussions and don't be afraid to ask for clarification if you need it...often this will spark a great discussion thread. Stay focused on the coursework and think outside the box. Look for big picture and you will get a lot of enjoyment out of this class. If you manage to stay with it for the entire course, you will be a better person for it and amazed at what you've learned. Good luck and enjoy the journey!
17. from Eric: I just say if you work hard and do the reading you should do well in this class. I also say you should have great fun with this class as I have this quarter. Next quarter I hope you will save Socrates again. Well good bye and have fun in this class.
18. from Janna: First of all this class is really interesting and can be fun if you keep a good discussion going. At first I was a little confused but it doesn't take too long to pick up on things. The most important thing is to keep up with the discussion and read!! The discussion will give you lots of view points and will really help you understand what's going on and of course to know what's going on at all you have to read the assigned materials. Another good piece of advice I can give you is to keep an open mind and try to explore all possibilities. That's about it, good luck and I hope you enjoy the class like we all did!
19. from Jerrica: Even though there is a lot of reading all the books are well worth the read. When you get confused don't hesitate to ask questions. Remember your classmates may be just as confused as you are, and the only way to clear up that confusion is to ask questions and discuss them. Another essential element to getting through this class (as some of my class mates have already mentioned) is to keep an open mind. Good luck. :-)
20. from Beth: Learn how to make files and concentrate on your self evaluation right from day
21. from Robin: Keep your mind open, don't feel like you have to hide, this class is really fun if you open yourself up for the experiance. Read thru your readings carefully and take notes because it makes discussions and study questions easier. Have fun with this class and use it to open up discussions with people in your everyday life.
22. from Tom: Let your mind open and always be open minded. You don't have to believe or accept what you are taught but examine the topic and philosophers and incorporate only portions of the lessons that you find applicable.
23. from Jessica: No matter how diffucult you percieve these class discussion to be, relax and loosen up, when I realized that my anxiosness and nervousness of not knowing if I was saying the right thing began to interrupt my participation in the class. I realized that we are all different so we will all derive and share many different thoughts on the subjects presented in this class, so go with the flow and don't worry if you feel like you aren't seeing all the points that other student's are making, just take theirs into consideration, as your quotes are probably (more times than not) something that they haven't derived from the text either. Just as beauty is in the eye of the beholder so is the derivation of knowledge.
24. from Tari: Just a word of advice to new students; remember you are communicating with many people of all ages and intelligence when taking an online course. Read every post with an open mind because whether you agree with what they are saying or not you WILL learn something from their way of thinking. You can not have a good discussion with another without at least trying to understand their views and opinions on a subject.
25. from Bernadette: My advice: DON'T PANIC! (remember Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxies?) When you read through Dr. Kern's homepage and see all the reading, writing, questions, links, self-evaluations, exams and research project -- I know you will be tempted to drop the class while you can still get a full refund. Don't. It looks like so much work, but in reality it is so much fun. Dr. Kerns is the best kind of teacher: gentle, fair, and so very wise. His lectures read like you are listening to a friend. He makes complex ideas fun and understandable. You will be eager everyday to log on to see what has been posted by classmates, and eager to share your responses and revelations. This is not the sort of class you forget once it's over. This is the sort of class that changes your life and makes you shiver when you think how very close you came to dropping it. Take a deep breath -- you're in for an incredible journey.
26. from David: One of the things that worked well for me was organizing the folders on my PC. You should have a folder for each week with shortcuts, notes, papers etc. Something else that helped was carrying around a small notebook for those thoughts you'll want to capture and share with classmates.
27. from Pam: Read, re-read, take notes... lots of notes! Read, re-read, take notes... lots of notes!Read, re-read, take notes... lots of notes!Read, re-read, take notes... lots of notes!Read, re-read, take notes... lots of notes!Read, re-read, take notes... lots of notes!Read, re-read, take notes... lots of notes!Read, re-read, take notes... lots of notes!Read, re-read, take notes... lots of notes!Read, re-read, take notes... lots of notes!Read, re-read, take notes... lots of notes!
28. from Luis: This class requires an open mind. If anyone with a closed mind takes this course, they will be really dissapointed. In this class you will be exploring some thoughts that go against everything you believe in and everything you have been taught. If you are an open minded person, please don't drop this class, I think you will be in for a treat. Everytime you log into class, you will receive a little piece of wisdom, what's really cool is that you can share this little wisdom with somebody else. If you are a religious person, don't drop this class. I think that you will see that at the end of the quarter you will have a closer relationship with God. This class has helped me establish a better relationship with God (thanks to the Book of Job).
29. from Angela: For all of you starting this class, a couple of things you need to know:
    1. Be prepared to work.! I would expect to spend at least 12-15 hours online each week plus all the reading assignments, questions, projects, etc.
    2. Participate! One of the most important things you need to do is to take part in the discussions. This is a vital part of learning and also your grade.
    3. Stay caught up! I missed a week and I spent hours reading through hundreds of my classmate's posts. If you check in everyday and keep caught up on reading, it will be much easier.
    4. Be prepared to think! This is probably the most important factor since you are taking a Philosophy course. You will learn to think on a different level and at times the concepts are tough to grasp, but just make sure you ask either the instructor or other classmates if you are lost.
    5. You will learn a lot from this class, if you put a lot of time and effort into it. This class will also teach you a whole new way to look at life and it will make you think harder than ever before. Good Luck!!!
30. from Rachael: Give yourself hours and hours and hours and hours (continued) . . . . . worth of time. Do NOT try to do this class from any other computer than the one with program on it (I'm learning this the hard way). Keep copies of EVERYTHING that you do. Also take tons and tons of notes and do all the reading. This is a very interesting class (no . . . really, this is an interesting class and is worth taking) and may be worth only 5 credits, but the work is that of a class worth 10 (or more) credits. Have fun.
31. from Wendy: My advice.... Breath. This was my first on-line class, and I was a complete wreak. Everything turned out just fine, if not better. In fact I was brave and took two on-line courses at once. Tom's class far surpasses the other class I am taking. Not only will you find the material in the class to be rewarding, but Tom will be there to help you every step of the way. Yes, yes I understand that everything looks overwhelming, but please trust me everything will get better. The organization of this class is wonderful, you will always know what to do, when to do it, and how it should be done. My advice for this class is to not procrastinate. With assignments and due dates you should never procrastinate, and this class is no different than the rest (on-line or in the classroom). Also enjoy what you learn from Tom and from the other students, and you will leave this class with so much more than you came with. Have fun!
32. from Michael: thankyou so much, Tom, I will be leaving this class a better person, and much more enlightened than before.
33. from Doris: To All the new Philosophy Students, You are about to embark on an excellant adventure, one that has changed my life for the better. If you truly want to this will be the experience of a lifetime. You must do at least these things to get what this class has to give. 1) Do all the readings, and read them a few times to get all, or most of the meanings. 2) Read and Respond to your class members. This was the most helpful to me, they will have a lot to teach you if you listen. 3) Keep careful time to how often you log in, it will make things much easier around self-eval time. 4) Be courageous in your answers. Do not be afraid to say what you think. There may be others who will feel the same, you just never know until you do. and 5) You may be overwhelmed by the online stuff at first, and may even feel that it is not a personal environment. However, if you share your experiences others might also, and you may have an experience of a lifetime, one as personal and special as any face to face involved conversation between two people.
34. from Jessica: For me, the time commitment was serious, but to be expected. The biggest hurdle was the scheduling. In many on-line classes, due dates will be in the latter half of the week, allowing you to be away from the computer for a day or so while doing the reading and writing. That is not the case in this class. If you have any plans to be out of town for a weekend (or otherwise away from a computer) for the next 10 weeks, cancel them.   
    That being said, this is the most personally meaningful and thought-provoking class I have ever taken--definitely worth the time and effort. I discovered so many treasures in the reading and savored so many new ideas in the lectures, but the most amazing thing was the diversity of opinions and interpretations that my classmates shared with me.
35. from Doug: My best bit of advice would be to begin replying to messages even if you are not sure of your answers. This allows more of a discussion to take place and helps by giving you an opportunity to better understand the material.
36. from Michael: There are not too many classes that will challenge your beliefs as much as philosophy 101. Unless you are already well versed in Western and some Eastern philosophy, you will need to fasten your seat belt and prepare for a fabulous ride. You will begin by finding the light at the end of the end of the tunnel, the tunnel you entered upon birth. Once you walk into the light of clarity, you will consider the safety and comfort you found while you were in the darkness and the harmless shadows, and you may step back in at times, or merely close your eyes to look at the shadows of reality hidden behind the eyelids. Yet as the journey up the mountain continues, as you are led by the selected readings to a greater vantage point, you will also be moving deeper into the depths of your inner being. And you will find that, in the end, there is a light much stronger within than the sun could ever imagine. If you stay opened minded on this adventure, you are sure to be healed of at least some of the contradictions you cling to. Occationally you will be overwhelmed by the amount of knowledge you are absorbing, and the deadlines which expect you to pull it all together. This is natural, and in its own way, forces your thinking to speed up, and meet the challenge. Just know that as you take this ride that there is no end. You may finish the class, certainly, but what you bring from here you take into eternity.
37. from Sandy: After completing a summer quarter of online philosophy instructed by Dr. Tom Kerns, I walked away with knowledge that I will call upon for the rest of my life. I expected this course to be the usual text book type learning when in fact it goes way beyond that, it will touch your heart and soul. Dr. Kerns is very involved with his students so you are never alone or without help. I would highly recommend this course to anyone.
38. Be on top of things. Look ahead at what you'll be reading, and start early. I helps a lot to print out the assignment for the week and cross of things as you do them. I would also recommend printing out the study questions before you read as well. It helps to know what you should be looking at before you are looking at it. This class started out at a class I had to take, and ended up being a personal awakening. All the time and effort is worth it, but you have to put in the time and effort. Good luck!
39. from Sue: Expect to spend 7 days a week on this class. There is no down time, no reflection time, no days off.
40. from Erica: I believe that this class is kind of difficult to master. Because, you constantly have to be online and watching the work of others. one must constantly reply to the work of other people, which is difficult. ALso, there are quite a few of assignments to stay on top of. I would say to have success in this class you better not have any other kind of agenda, because this class will take all of your time.,
41. from Sonja: I would like to tell you brave students that are taking this course that Philisophy really is a fun and interesting class but it takes alot of time and dedication to fully understand and have appreciation for these great philosphers soncepts. If you hang in there some of you may find that these philosophers have impacted the lives of many people and if your willing maybe even yours. I know that I see the world in a new light and will always question something just to see if I can see it in another way. GOOD LUCK!!!
42. from Jessica: To all the newbie philosophy students... three lines of advice.
    1. Pay attention to what your teacher says. Know when everything is due and then do it. It may be easier the plan your life around philosophy then to plan this class around you busy life.
    2. Don't procrastinate. You'll fall behind, and it is very difficult to come in in the middle of a discussion and understand what is going on.
    3. Beware of Schopenhauer. (you'll understand in week 7 or 8.)

Good luck. You're about ready to learn some of the greatest ideas in the last 2 1/2 millenia.

1. from Todd: This is definitely a worthwhile class if you are willing to put in the time and effort. Be sure to come into it with an open mind and take advantage of the class room discussions - you will learn a lot from your fellow students. Do the readings and lectures early in the week so you can be an active participant. Enjoy - it seems like a lot of work during the class but afterwards you will be amazed at everything you learned and thankful that you put in the effort.
2. from Greg: This class is amazing and life changing if effort is put into it. The keys to success are 1) Read, Read Re-read until you get it 2)Trust what you think, it may be a new concept 3) Log on and read all postings 4)Converse on line and you will be amazed at the new friends you will make 5) Free your mind and the rest will fallow (En Vogue) Don't skip anything and keep track of everything you do. It all comes to a end whare everything ties together. Good Luck and don't be surprised if you are a better person when you finish the class.
3. from Melanie: Dear fellow students, Be prepared for the journey of a lifetime. Start off with an open mind, but allow it to expand even more throughout the quarter, as some of your most fundamental beliefs may be questioed. Leave a lot of time for reading as it may take quite a while to become familiar with philosophy, the many ideas it explores, and the many ways it is written. If you have children, put them to bed on time, so they are not pulling you away from your monitor every, uh, five minutes. Oh, and be nice to Tom. He's an understanding and wonderful person who has an interesting way of helping you out when you need it (right?). Have a great quarter and enjoy your trip!
4. from Leah: To all of you unsuspecting knowledge-seekers: Prepare to be enlightened. Open your mind. Share your self. Let yourself be emancipated. Participate. Edify. Journal. Take notes, keep the notes, you will use them. Don't punch your computer screen. ENJOY!!!
5. from Tonya: Philosophy is a class that will effect your life, not just your GPA. If you are willing to keep an open-mind and are up to a challenge, this is the perfect course. Your beliefs in life will sometimes be challenged...but don't get discouraged. It's OK to not agree all the time, just remember to try to understand the points that are being made. Here are a few more tips:
   1. Log-on at least once a day and read/respond to posts...they stack up pretty fast.
   2. Try to never get behind, stay ahead. This class is constantly moving and even one day behind can make things difficult.
   3. Be patient and respectful, some discussions can get pretty intense because your personal feeling are involved...but also, never be afraid to say how you feel, or even just ask a question.

The strangest thing is that many of us in this class are getting emotional that it is almost over (including myself)...I have never experienced that in a class before. What you will learn can stay with you for the rest of your life. One of the main reasons is because of your instructor Tom...so follow his guide, ask questions (he is always responsive, never leaves you hanging!), and try to open yourself to what wisdom he has to offer. Good luck! ~Tonya

1. from Brenda: Philosophy is a mind expanding class that you will really enjoy if you are up for a challenge. Be prepared to spend many hours every week on this class. If you do not have many hours then do not take this class. Best Wishes. :)
2. from Jeremy: You know, it's not too late to drop this class and sign up for something easier, like Rocket Science. But seriously, the first thing you will need for this course is paper and lots of it, and an extra ink cartridge, don't believe me, wait until half-way thru. If you have a lot of classes, then this might not be the one for you this quarter, it demands a lot of time and effort, and if you willing to give that time and effort your life will be forever changed and richly rewarded. Keep up with the reading and checking everyone's posts. If you were looking for a challenging course, you've got it. Hopefully, I haven't scared you away(or maybe I'm trying too, run now, while you still have the chance, what are you waiting for, don't keeping reading this, run) this is a great class. Have a great time!!!! I know all of us did!!!!! The Best of Luck to all of you!!!!!
3. from Jeanna: Dear Students, It will seem like way too much work and time spent in one class, when you first look at it, but in reality, it is not that bad. If you just keep up with the weekly assignments your fine, and it's actually a very interesting class, so I don't think you'll have trouble keeping up, because you'll want to do your homework. Oh, and make sure you post your responses, and replies to other students comments, it is also required. I enjoyed the class, and would take another quarter of it. Have fun and good luck!
4. from Elli: Hold on tightly to your hats, this class is a bucking bronco that will take you on one wild ride!! In serious terms, prepare yourself mentally for a lot of work, a lot of thinking, a lot of reading and some very challenging material. Don't be intimidated by the immensity of the website and all, very soon it will become your friend and will find it a very valuable and easily understood resource. Keep in mind though, that this class IS well worth all of the effort it will take to complete. You will finish feeling and being a deeper, more complete, more accomplished person. Final note of caution, if you have any tiny buckaneers running (or crawling) about your feet and knees, I would reccomend either taking this class when they are a little bigger, or making sure that you can reserve A LOT of time where you will not be distracted or disturbed. ENJOY!!!!!!!!