

# PHIL 540: Seminar in Epistemology: Knowledge, Context, and Probability (Joint seminar: UBC–SFU)

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Office hours: TBA and by appointment

Course meetings: SFU Harbour Centre: HCC1500, September–December 2017, Tu 6–9 pm

This seminar has three central topics:

1. **Knowledge and its role in philosophical theorizing**—related to what is sometimes called, following Timothy Williamson, the “knowledge first” project. Central questions include whether knowledge is itself a mental state; whether knowledge should be understood in terms of more primitive epistemic notions like belief and justification; whether knowledge has roles to play in articulating norms of belief, assertion, and action, etc.
2. **Contextualism about knowledge ascriptions**—the idea that ‘knows’ is a context-sensitive word, and therefore that knowledge ascriptions express different propositions in different conversational contexts. Central questions include the degree to which contextualism is plausible, how it compares to rivals, and how the linguistic/semantic theorizing that characterizes contextualism bears on more traditional questions in epistemology, which are not in general questions about language.
3. **Probability and epistemology**—how graded notions like ‘degrees of belief’ and probabilistic assignments compare to ‘all or nothing’ epistemic notions like belief and knowledge.

The seminar will be centred primarily around two new books in contemporary epistemology: *Probabilistic Knowledge* by Sarah Moss, and *Contextualising Knowledge* by Jonathan Ichikawa. Both are currently forthcoming with OUP. We’ll read both books in their entirety, along with some additional related material. Both authors have agreed to make pdfs of their books available free of charge; most other readings, you can access electronically via library subscriptions.

Students will be assessed according to the following criteria:

- Weekly Brief Précis Responses (20%)
- Main Presentations (15%)
- Supplemental Presentations (10%)
- Final Essay (30%)
- Essay Preliminaries (15%)
- Peer Feedback on Essay Preliminaries (10%)

## Schedule:

TBD. (Email the instructor for the current draft plan.)