PH458
EVIDENCE AND POLICY

2017/18 Course Guide

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY, LOGIC AND SCIENTIFIC METHOD
PH458 PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

Teacher Responsible: Dr. Ioannis Votsis

Contact Details: Room LAK3.01 (Lakatos Building)
Tel: 020 7955 1100
Email: i.votsis@lse.ac.uk
Website: www.votsis.org

Lecturer: Dr. Ioannis Votsis

Seminar Teacher: Dr. Ioannis Votsis

Office Hours: Tuesdays 15:00-16:00

Timetables: http://www.lse.ac.uk/intranet/diaryAndEvents/timetables/home.aspx
Introduction

Overview

Good policy decisions - whether concerning climate, conservation, international development, poverty, education, medicine, or health - require rational deliberation over whether the proposed policy will (or is likely to) bring about the intended outcome. Will lowering CO2 emissions reduce global warming? Will mass mammography decrease the number of deaths from breast cancer? Will making a drug available on the NHS have (as a rule) a positive effect on patients? Will smaller class sizes enhance scholastic achievement? The obvious suggestion is that answers to such questions are the result of rational deliberation just in case they are based on good evidence and appropriate reasoning. But what counts as good evidence and appropriate reasoning? And what happens when different kinds of evidence pull in opposite directions? Are certain types of evidence more telling than others? And if so, why? Does evidence that the policy works in one country mean that we should have confidence that it will work in another country? If there can be no guarantee of success, will the given policy at least increase the probability of the desired outcome? These are some of the central issues addressed in the course.

Aims and Objectives

It might seem initially that only experts, only scientists involved in the field, can tell what counts as good evidence and appropriate reasoning. Yet even experts are susceptible to error. In this course, you can learn how to be ‘evidence-savvy’, how to ask the right questions about evidence and reasoning as well as how to think about risk-assessment and its relation to policy. Mastering the course provides a basis for more advanced studies on the relationship between evidence and policy.

Coursework (Formative Assessment)

Attendance of all lectures and seminars is compulsory. Philosophy is about engaging actively with ideas. Participating in lectures and seminars is an essential way to experience it.

In more detail, students are expected to:
• Attend lectures and seminars and participate in seminar discussion.
• Write one formative essay of approximately 2000 words and submit it through Moodle by the pre-arranged deadline (see Moodle).
• Answer three short questions posted weekly on Moodle, and submit them through Moodle before 09:00am of the day that the relevant seminar takes place. These answers are not marked, but serious submission is required.

Short Answer Questions. Answers to the questions will typically be 3-5 sentences. A good short answer has the following qualities.

• It is focused on the question. Don’t write down everything you know on the topic! Only include material that is relevant to the question set.
• It is clear and precise. Obfuscation will only harm your essay!
• It shows you are familiar with the material, for instance through discussion of the main view(s)/argument(s) relevant to the question, through expression of these ideas in your own words, through illustration with your own examples, and through your own critical evaluation.

Students are expected to submit their answers each week, and discuss them during the seminar. The upshot is that when the time comes to prepare for the exam, students should already have answers to 30 questions on the taught material – a formidable store of information!

Essay Questions. The essays must be written either on a topic from the relevant essay list (two such lists are distributed on Moodle) or on a topic discussed with, and approved by, the course leader. Your essay should ideally have the following elements:

• A short introductory section that includes a sentence-long assertion of the main thesis that provides an answer to the essay question. The introduction should also contain a preview of what’s to come.
• An in-depth review of the main positions and arguments for or against. That is, a discussion of the background for the thesis. In
order to understand the thesis, there is always some context that must be explained.

• One or more crisply formulated and, if possible, formalised argument(s) supporting your thesis. The argument must be both valid (or at least of a certain inductive strength) and supported through evidence and further argument.
• Counter-arguments to your view and argument(s) and replies thereof.
• A short summary of what you have achieved in the essay.
• A bibliography that contains all and only the works you cited in the text.
• Potentially some footnotes that contain information of secondary importance.

Essays that take the aforementioned instructions seriously and apply them successfully are highly likely to do well in the evaluation. Students will also receive credit for organisation, originality, and general clarity of writing.

Students with no prior training in analytical philosophy may find the following helpful when planning and writing essays:


Teachers will mark essays and give critical feedback only for essays turned in on time. Marks for formative essays do not count towards the final mark students receive for the course.

**Summative Assessment**

The final mark received for the course is determined by two factors. First, a summative essay due Friday 26 January 2018 at 17:00 to be submitted through Moodle and which accounts for 33% of the total mark. Second, a two-hour written examination in the summer term which accounts for 67% of the total mark.

The exam will consist of the following:

• 6 short-answer questions, all of which must be answered.
Adequate answers will be about a paragraph long. The questions will be chosen word-for-word from the list of the 30 short answer questions provided throughout the Michaelmas term.

- 5 essay questions, of which one must be answered.

The essay question and the group of 6 short answer questions bear equal weight. That is: 50% of the exam mark is based on the essay question and 50% is based on the 6 short-answer questions.

Note: The above only concerns LSE examinations. Students from other colleges attending this course have to take intercollegiate examinations; they do not take the LSE examination. These students will be told by their own colleges when their examination will take place and on what materials they will be assessed. Neither the lecturer of this course nor the LSE are involved in the organisation of these examinations.

**Internet Access**

By enrolling in this course, students agree that they will access the internet regularly. This will allow them to submit coursework online by the pre-assigned due dates. In particular, they need to ensure that they have enough time to learn how to submit coursework online, and to troubleshoot any potential problems before the due date. To avoid such problems, please don’t to wait until the last minute!

**Academic Integrity**

LSE seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one’s own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another’s work as one’s own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. If you are not sure what constitutes plagiarism, visit the Harvard Guide to Using Sources at [http://goo.gl/hFa7EF](http://goo.gl/hFa7EF).

**Self-Plagiarism**

Your summatively assessed work cannot normally contain any material
that you have previously submitted as part of another summative assessment. Sometimes exceptions may be granted, but you must tell your supervisor or course teacher about this, because further conditions will apply. Re-using your own material without permission from your supervisor or course teacher risks committing an offence of self-plagiarism.


**Accessibility Needs**

Your success at LSE is important to us. Every student is entitled to the opportunity to have a meaningful learning experience. You are warmly encouraged to discuss your particular learning styles and requirements with me personally during Office Hours. Students with special needs or disabilities are also encouraged to avail themselves of the services of LSE's Disability and Wellbeing Service. They may be contacted by email at disability-dyslexia@lse.ac.uk or by phone at (0)20 7955 7767. If you plan to make a request, please remember to make an appointment for an Individual Student Support Agreement (ISSA) and contact their lecturers about your requests as early in the semester as possible, so we can make sure that you are accommodated.

**Timetabling Note:**

Please note that the lecture/seminar time and location may change over the course of the year. When that happens students will be notified in advance. For information about timetables and rooms please refer to the official LSE timetables at: [http://www.lse.ac.uk/admin/timetables/confirmed/restricted/module_sessional.htm](http://www.lse.ac.uk/admin/timetables/confirmed/restricted/module_sessional.htm)

**Texts**

*Main Text (this is recommended but not required):*

**Other Useful Texts:**


**Surveys**


**Web Resources**

*Google Scholar:* [https://scholar.google.co.uk/](https://scholar.google.co.uk/)
*Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* [Link in LSE e-library]
*The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy:* [http://www.iep.utm.edu](http://www.iep.utm.edu/)
**Topics**

*Disclaimer:* The compulsory readings can be changed at any time in order to respond to the needs of course participants. It is important that students check for updates on Moodle every week.

**Michaelmas Term**

**Week 1:**
LECTURE 1: Wednesday Sept. 27.
TOPIC: Evidence-Guided Policy: What is it? Why do we need it?

*Required Reading:*

*Further Reading:*

**Week 2:**
LECTURE 2: Wednesday Oct. 4.
TOPIC: Public Understanding of Science

*Required Reading:*

Further Reading:

**Week 3:**
LECTURE 3: Wednesday Oct. 11.
TOPIC: Epistemic Autonomy

Required Reading:

Further Reading:
**Week 4:**
**LECTURE 4:** Wednesday Oct. 18.
**TOPIC:** Evidence and Values

*Required Reading:*

*Further Reading:*

**Week 5:**
**LECTURE 5:** Wednesday Oct. 25.
**TOPIC:** Aggregating Judgment

*Required Reading:*

*Further Reading:*

**Week 6:**
**LECTURE 6**: Wednesday Nov. 1.
**TOPIC**: The Precautionary Principle

**Required Reading:**

**Further Reading:**

**Week 7:**
**LECTURE 7**: Wednesday Nov. 8.
**TOPIC**: Case Study: Medicine

**Required Reading:**
Further Reading:

Week 8:
LECTURE 8: Wednesday Nov. 15.
TOPIC: Case Study: Climate Science

Required Reading:

Further Reading:

**Week 9:**
**LECTURE 9:** Wednesday Nov. 22.
**TOPIC:** Case Study: Politics

**Required Reading:**

**Further Reading:**

**Week 10:**
**LECTURE 10:** Wednesday Nov. 29.
**TOPIC:** Case Study: Economics

**Required Reading:**
Further Reading: