A. Description of Course

This course is structured around a central theme: The Meaning of Life. We will examine the various philosophical answers to this question that range from Ancient Greek philosophy through medieval philosophy and ending with modern and contemporary philosophy.

As a senior seminar, the course requires student presentations that analyze, interpret and evaluate the philosophical texts. Students will make comments and raise questions throughout the course.

The senior seminar provides an opportunity for the department to assess the success of the philosophy program as a whole; faculty from the department will join the main professor in evaluating student papers and presentations. Grades for the student record will be assigned by the main professor, Dr. Mirela Oliva.

B. Texts:


Further readings are posted on Blackboard (BB).

C. Course Learning Outcomes. Through this course the student will:

1. Develop skills of textual analysis and interpretation.
2. Develop skills of critical thinking and oral argumentation.
3. Learn how to do academic research.
4. Understand the philosophical aspects of the question of the meaning of life.

5. Understand the similarities and differences of ancient, medieval, and modern approaches to the meaning of life.

6. Understand the Catholic Intellectual Tradition in its relation to the history of philosophy.

7. Develop an own philosophical account on the meaning of life.

**D. Course Requirements / Grading:**

1. **Overall preparation and participation: 10%** Students must be present for class; must be prepared for each class by reading the text, having some notes and questions ready at hand; providing questions and feedback to presenters; discussing issues in class.

2. **Baseline “Outcomes” Essay: 10%** Write a 4-5 page paper as an exposition of a brief text by St. Thomas Aquinas. The exposition should explain the main body of the argument by identifying key terms and arguments and explaining some of the objections and replies.

3. **Two class presentations on reading(s) for the day: 40% total (10% for short and 30% for long).** Students will read carefully and analyze a text for the day; make a presentation in class that unpacks the basic concepts and arguments of the philosopher. The short presentation will require about ten to fifteen minutes outlining the main concepts of the reading assignment. The longer presentations will last about twenty-five minutes. The student must provide an exposition of the outline or structure of the reading; a glossary of key terms; and a narrative summary of the basic arguments. In addition, the student will indicate some potential objections to the argument and raise some questions for class discussion. These presentations are composed in advance of class and are read out loud to the class. Each presenter will furnish a copy of his/her presentation to each member of the class, to the professor, and to the visiting faculty member who will be present for each presentation.

4. **Paper developed from a presentation: 20%** The student will build on the in class presentation and develop a paper on the given thinker(s) providing biography, bibliography, and interpretation of the text(s) as a whole, and evaluating the philosophical achievement of the philosopher(s). Due last day of class in both printed and electronic format.

5. **Final Exam: 20%** The student will write a final essay comparing and contrasting the philosophers studied in class.
E. Schedule of readings

1. T Jan 13 Introduction

2. Th Jan 15 Academic training: how to do research, how to write a paper, how to make a presentation.

Origins of the question of the meaning of life

3. T Jan 20 Sauter, The Question of Meaning, ch.1 &2 (BB)

4. Th Jan 22 Ecclesiastes (BB)


6. Th Jan 29 Quinn, The Meaning of Life According to Christianity (TB)

7. T Febr 3 Tolstoy, My Confession, (TB)

8. Th Febr 5 Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, I, q.1, art. 10

9. T Febr 10 Research orientation

Meaning of life, purpose and happiness

10. Th Febr 12 Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, Book 1 (BB)

11. T Febr 17 Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, I-II, q. 1-5

12. Th Febr 19 Schlick, On the Meaning of Life (TB)

Meaning of life and meaning of the universe

I. The absurdity of the universe


14. Th Febr 26 Russell, A Free Man's Worship (TB)

15. T March 3 Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus (TB)

II. Meaningful universe

16. Th March 5 Job; Wiesel, The Messengers of God (BB)
T March 10, Th March 13 – **Spring break**

17. T March 17  Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 103

18. Th March 19  **Research orientation**

**Looking for the true life: authenticity, death, and *vera vita***

19. T March 24  Heidegger, *Being and Time*, authenticity, totality and death, #45, 46, 47, 48, 49
20. Th March 26  Heidegger, *Being and Time*, the existential structure of death, #50, 51, 52, 53
21. T March 31  Heidegger, *Being and Time*, the possibility of authenticity, #54, 55, 56, 57

**Th Apr 3 - Easter**

22. T Apr 7  Heidegger, *Being and Time*, #58, 59, 60
23. Th Apr 9  Augustine, *Confessions*, Book X (BB)

**Meaning of life and meaning of history**

25. Th Apr 16  Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, ch. 25 (BB)

**Meaning of life and common sense**


29. Th Apr 30  **Review**