

# Objectivism Seminar

ARU Syllabus - draft

Last updated: March 23, 2025

*Note: This syllabus is a draft and the course details are subject to change if we think changes will help us meet the educational goals of the course. The final syllabus for this course is currently being prepared and will be made available on the course website prior to the commencement of the course.*

**COURSE TITLE:** Objectivism Seminar

**COURSE YEAR AND QUARTERS:** 2024-25, Q3-Q4

**COREQUISITE COURSES:**

None

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This is a two-quarter seminar exploring Objectivism as a philosophical system. Its goal is to help you learn how to better understand and "chew" various principles of Objectivism. We will focus on some of the key principles of Objectivism, especially in ethics, metaphysics, and epistemology. And we will consider a bit of what Objectivism teaches about proper philosophical methodology.

Our focus will not be that of a specialist who is embarking on a study of philosophy in general and of Objectivism in particular but that of a human being, who needs the guidance of philosophical principles. Our focus, in other words (Rand's words), will not be on philosophy for Ragnar but on philosophy for Rearden.

The cash value of gaining a better understanding of some of the central principles of Objectivism and their integration is that the philosophy can become more fully an aid to your own life: to your thinking, work and happiness.

**COURSE DURATION:** 16 weeks

**INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION**

Lead Instructors:

**Mike Mazza**

Dr. Mazza is an associate fellow at the Ayn Rand Institute. He specializes in the philosophy of science with a particular interest in causality. Dr. Mazza received his PhD in philosophy from Saint Louis University.

## **Onkar Ghate**

Dr. Ghate is senior fellow, chief philosophy officer, and a board member of the Ayn Rand Institute. He specializes in Rand's philosophy, Objectivism, and is ARI's senior instructor and editor. He publishes and lectures on Rand's philosophy and fiction, including application of Objectivism to cultural issues. He holds a doctorate in philosophy from the University of Calgary.

Teaching Assistants:

**Lead TAs:** Dan Schwartz, Ricardo Birck

**Assistant TAs:** Mohamed Ali, Marek Michulka, Steven Warden

## **LIVE CLASSES AND RECORDINGS**

This course consists of both recorded lectures and live classes in which we will discuss course material and course assignments. See the course website for a week-by-week *Course Outline and Schedule* of topics, live class dates, and assignment due dates.

*Important:* The first assignment is due before. Be sure to check the date in the *Course Outline and Schedule*.

The course website will also list the Zoom link to to attend.

Participants are strongly encouraged to attend classes live for the best experience. However, we are aware that this is not always possible and recordings of live classes are posted on the course website, usually within an hour or two after the conclusion of each live class. Please watch these if you are unable to attend live. Contact [aru@aynrand.org](mailto:aru@aynrand.org) if you have any issue accessing a recording.

If you attend class live, please turn on your camera unless you are in a setting with distracting activity going on or your device is not on a stable surface. It makes for a much better experience for all participants when faces are visible.

## **READINGS**

Each week, there will be assigned readings from Ayn Rand's nonfiction books and/or from Leonard Peikoff's book on Objectivism. You should have copies of all of these, but especially:

- *For the New Intellectual* (FNI)
- *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal* (CUI)
- *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology* (ITOE)
- *Philosophy: Who Needs It* (PWNI)
- *The Virtue of Selfishness* (VOS)
- *The Return of the Primitive* (ROP)
- *The Romantic Manifesto* (RM)
- *The Voice of Reason* (VOR)

- *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand by Leonard Peikoff (OPAR)*

## ASSIGNMENTS

You will be asked to complete the following types of assignments.

### *Two Types of Weekly Assignments*

Two sets of assignments will be given each week. All students will be placed into one of **two groups, Groups A and B**, and each group will be **alternatively assigned one assignment set – 1 or 2 – each week**.

For example, if Group A is assigned Assignment Set 1 for Week 1, and Group B is assigned Assignment Set 2, then in Week 2, Group A will be assigned Assignment Set 2, and Group B, Assignment Set 1. Please check the course website for the group in which you have been placed.

**Assignment Set 1:** We will pose questions on the course's readings and topics for the coming week, from which **you will select one question to answer**. The questions will be posted every Sunday at 7 pm UTC with a submission deadline of Wednesday at 7 pm UTC.

**Why are you being asked to answer a question before the lecture on the topic?** It is easy to read Rand's essays and nod passively in agreement. But in order to get the most out of the material as well as the lectures in the course, you need to think carefully about the readings and grapple with the arguments being made therein. This assignment requires you to do that and then to convey in writing what you think you have understood from the readings and their arguments. The issues you are being asked about will then be explored in more depth in the lectures, with further follow-up in the live class discussions.

**Assignment Set 2:** A recorded lecture will be posted every Wednesday at 7 pm UTC. In this assignment you are required to **submit a question** about the recorded lecture and the topics discussed therein. In submitting the question, **you need to explain your current thinking about the question:** e.g., what is generating the question or why are you asking it, whether you have a hypothesis about what the answer to your question is, whether you think your question is important or not and why, or stating it a bit differently, how gaining more clarity on the matter you're raising will advance your understanding of Rand's ideas. The submission deadline for this is Sunday at 7 pm UTC.

**Why are we asking for such details when you post your question?** Because these details shape what the question really is and means, and often point one to the path to answering it; the more habitual it becomes for you to ask for such details about your own questions, the easier it will become for you to start answering your own questions.

**In order to receive full points for this assignment**, your question must: (1) be a single focused and well-defined question; (2) be relevant to the topic of the recorded lecture; (3) include, as explained above, an explanation of why you are asking the question (e.g., what value you seek to gain by clarifying your confusion on this matter, or why you think you are confused about the issue); (4) be submitted on time and remain within the word limit.

Note that both sets of weekly assignments are aimed at encouraging and developing an active, integrating mind in regard to philosophical issues.

### *Tutorial paper*

**One tutorial paper**, in which you will answer one of the assigned topics. In your paper, you should **focus** not on rhetorical style, but **on how clearly you can get your thoughts and arguments stated in writing**. The paper will be discussed in a tutorial session of 45 minutes to one hour with an instructor or teaching assistant(s), and will have a maximum word count of 1,400 words. You will receive a **grade** after the session, which **will take into account both the quality of the written paper and your oral discussion of it** (these two parts are equally weighted for determining your grade for the tutorial).

**Immediately prior to your tutorial, you should re-read and reflect on the paper you submitted**, and come prepared to discuss its contents and arguments, including how your thinking may have evolved since submitting the paper. The feedback you will receive on the paper will be during the oral discussion of it, so please come prepared to discuss the issues as well as any questions you want to raise.

You will be emailed a list of tutorial questions two weeks before your tutorial paper is due. Tutorial papers will be due on the Monday of the week of your tutorial appointment at 12pm (noon) UTC.

The course website will also contain a schedule, listing for each student the week in which your tutorial will take place. Someone will reach out to you closer to the week of your tutorial in order to schedule its exact date and time for that week.

Please note that staying within the maximum word count, when there is one stated for an assignment, is an important part of the assignment and will be reflected in the assignment's grade. A word count requires you to think what is most important and essential, and to state (only) that in your answer.

### *Final exam*

(Note: The inclusion of a final exam in this course is still being considered. What follows are some tentative details that are subject to change. Please check the Syllabus linked to the course website close to the course start date for accurate information.)

**A final exam of two to three hours in length**, which will take place after live classes end in Q2 and which will have both a written and an oral component. Someone will be reaching out to you in Q2 to schedule the day and time of your exam.

### **COURSE PARTICIPATION**

As we've said, you are **strongly encouraged to attend classes live and to actively participate when you do**. We are aware, of course, that this is not always possible. But there are other ways to participate in the course, and course participation will be part of everyone's final grade for the course. The **other ways to participate in the course** are to complete optional assignments and to come to office hours held by instructors and TAs.

#### *Optional assignment*

Each week, there will be a forum where you can post a question that has arisen from the readings, your reflection on them, or issues previously discussed in the course that seem connected to the current week's topics. Similar to the required assignment, you should explain why you are asking the question you are asking. This is one way to participate in the course even if you are unable to attend the live sessions.

#### *Office hours*

As stated earlier, the course website contains information about office hours availability and the links to book an appointment. We encourage all students to make use of office hours to discuss both course material and your own assignments. But for those students unable to attend the live sessions, we especially encourage you to come to some office hours, and this is the other way to participate in the course even if you are unable to attend the live sessions.

### **OVERALL COURSE GRADE**

(Note: The grade breakdown is subject to change. Please check the course website close to the course start date for accurate information.)

Your course grade will break down as follows:

- 35% of total = average of your short assignment grades, each graded on a scale of 0 to 5
- 25% of total = grade on your tutorial paper, graded on a scale of 0 to 20
- 30% of total = grade on your final exam, graded on a scale of 0 to 20
- 10% of total = course participation grade

Your participation grade will be determined by how often you attend class live and **participate** in the discussion, by how often you pose questions on the optional question boards, and by the office hours you attend. If you are unable regularly to attend class live, you should each quarter attend at least one office hour appointment and pose three questions on the optional questions board.

## **GRADE SCALE** (with typical reasons for receiving a given score)

[The following grade scale also included in the **ARU Handbook**]

**0** – no assignment was submitted

**1** – the assignment was submitted, but it either does not answer the question, is too unclear to read, or is too perfunctory to count as taking the assignment seriously (e.g., a one sentence answer).

**2** – the assignment answers the question, but it has significant problems (e.g., major points are missing, significant errors are present in the answer, the writing is unclear in important ways).

**3** – the assignment is basically good; it answers the question and correctly identifies some major points, but either omits a major point, contains some errors, or does not show enough independent thinking about the issue (e.g., too much quoting of Rand and not enough evidence of the student's own thinking).

**4** – the assignment answers the question well and identifies the major points without any major errors and shows evidence of independent thinking about the issue.

**5** – the assignment answers the question exceptionally well and identifies the major points without any errors and shows evidence of independent thinking, understanding and insight. (The score of 5 is rare.)

If an answer is on the borderline between two grades, factors such as the clarity or originality of the answer can make the difference between a lower and a higher grade.

## **LATE ASSIGNMENTS**

Weekly assignments that are submitted **within** 24 hours after the deadline will receive one penalty point (i.e., one point will be deducted from the grade), while assignments submitted **more than** 24 hours after the deadline will automatically receive a 0. These rules also apply to new deadlines (i.e., those that are set when we grant extensions).

---

## **GENERAL POLICIES:**

Familiarize yourself with the [ARU Handbook](#) if you have not already done so. Unless specified otherwise in this syllabus, all policies in the Handbook are in effect for this course.

## **COURSE WEBSITE:**

Logistical details about the course are available at the course website[LINK to be provided by ARU], including:

- Live class schedule and Zoom link for attending live classes
- Recordings of past classes
- Office hour details, including links to book an appointment
- Teaching assistant information
- How to join the ARU Discord server

The course website is also accessible through your dashboard after logging into the [ARU website](#). Contact [aru@aynrand.org](mailto:aru@aynrand.org) if you have any issues accessing the site.

**COURSE COMMUNICATION:**

- Course announcements are posted in the Announcements tab of the course website and automatically emailed to all participants. Please make sure you are receiving these emails and that they are not going to your spam folder. If you join after the start of class, be sure to check the Announcements tab for anything you may have missed.
- For questions about course content, structure or schedule, please ask during the live class or in the course channel on the ARU Discord server (see the Discord tab of the course website). Questions about your assignments and grades should be directed to the teaching assistant.
- For personal administrative issues (e.g., website problems), contact [aru@aynrand.org](mailto:aru@aynrand.org).
- If you have a technical issue preventing submission of an assignment, email your assignment to the TA and cc: [aru@aynrand.org](mailto:aru@aynrand.org) to troubleshoot the matter.