

# PHIL 7570: Seminar in Philosophy: Social Metaphysics

University of Virginia | Spring 2023  
Mondays 3:30-6pm in the Philosophy Department Seminar Room

**Professor** Dee Payton  
**Office Hours** Tuesdays & Wednesdays 11-12pm in Cocke Hall 207 or by appointment.  
**Email** [dpayton@virginia.edu](mailto:dpayton@virginia.edu)

**Course Description.** In this seminar we will focus on the metaphysics of social construction, with a special focus on the mechanics of different social construction relations. We will also spend some time with the question of how to best evaluate views about how social construction works: is there a general list of desiderata available here, and if so, what is on that list and why?

**Course Website.** You can access our course site on UVA Collab here:  
<https://collab.its.virginia.edu/portal/site/dc77ed28-93cd-41b9-9054-7554f0c14a23>

**Accessibility.** UVA is committed to creating a learning environment that meets the needs of its diverse student body. If you anticipate or experience any barriers to learning in this course, please feel welcome to discuss your concerns with me. If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, you may also want to meet with the Student Disability Access Center (SDAC), to request an official accommodation. You can find more information about SDAC, including how to apply online, through their website at [www.studenthealth.virginia.edu/SDAC](http://www.studenthealth.virginia.edu/SDAC). If you have already been approved for accommodations through SDAC, please make sure to send me your accommodation letter and meet with me so we can develop an implementation plan together.

**Course Texts.** There is no textbook for this course. All of the course readings are posted on our course Canvas site.

## Course Goals.

---

Many professional philosophers have research responsibilities, and for the most part, those research responsibilities center on giving talks at conferences and publishing papers.

This course is designed to give you practice preparing short papers for conferences, giving talks on those papers, and then revising your work in light of the feedback you receive. To facilitate this, the course will be divided into two parts. The first 4-5 weeks of each part will consist in instructor-guided discussion, and the last three weeks will be student presentations, structured in the style of APA colloquia.

## **Course Requirements.**

---

### **Weekly Write-Ups (20%)**

You are responsible for turning in one write-up during each of the instructor-led discussion weeks (eight in total). These write-ups should be very short (no more than 200-300 words, seriously!), and in your write-up, you should give your “two-cents” on a reading for the week. This can be a brief objection, an extension of the argument, a question, a connection you see between this reading and something in another literature . . . just make sure to critically engage with the material for the week. I will use these assignments to guide our class discussion, and you might be asked to share what you wrote with the rest of the seminar.

### **Presentations (30%)**

Each student enrolled the course will give two 30-minute talks, followed by a 20-minute Q&A. These assignments are designed to provide you with practice giving talks to professional philosophical audiences. Each presentation is 15% of the course grade.

### **Short Papers (30%)**

Each student enrolled in the course is responsible for two, 3,000-word papers. Each paper is 15% of the course grade.

### **Final Paper (20%)**

At the end of the seminar you will expand one of your 3,000-word papers into a 5,000-word paper.

*The course reading schedule is on the next page.*

## (Tentative) Reading Schedule\*

---

### **Week 1: Introduction to Social Metaphysics**

Required reading: Mason & Ritchie 2020; [Naturalistic Approaches to Social Construction](#) (§1)

### **Week 2: Representations & Reality**

Required reading: Hacking (1999, ch. 1); Haslanger (1995; 2003)  
*Optional:* Epstein (2015, ch. 5); Haslanger (2012, ch. 13)

### **Week 3: Causal Construction**

Required reading: Khalidi (2010); Mallon (2016, ch. 2 & 3)  
*Optional:* Marques (2016)

### **Week 4: Constitutive Construction**

Required reading: Ásta (2018, ch. 1 & 2); Searle (1997, ch. 2 especially pages 43-51)  
*Optional:* Díaz-León (2016)

### **Week 5: Student Presentations**

### **Week 6: Student Presentations**

*—Spring Break—*

### **Week 7: Student Presentations**

### **Week 8: Grounding Construction**

Required reading: Schaffer (2017); Sider (2017); Barnes (2014)  
*Optional:* Griffith (2017, 2018)

### **Week 9: Essence Construction**

Required reading: Passinsky (2021); Payton (forthcoming)

*Optional:* Mason (2021); Haslanger (2014)

### **Week 10: Realism & Deflationism**

Required reading: Barnes (2017), Díaz-León (forthcoming)

*Optional:* Sider (2017); Díaz-León (2018)

### **Week 11: Special Topics in Social Metaphysics**

Required reading: TBD

*Optional:* TBD

Topic suggestions: gender, race, sexuality, disability, ameliorative projects vs. descriptive projects . . .

### **Week 12: Student Presentations**

### **Week 13: Student Presentations**

### **Week 14: Student Presentations**

*\*This schedule is subject to change. If that happens, the syllabus will be updated & redistributed.*

## ***Background on Explanatory Tools, Relations, & Methods in Analytic Metaphysics***

### **Causation**

#### [The Metaphysics of Causation](#)

Paul & Hall, *Causation: A User's Guide* (2013)

Schaffer, "Causation and the Laws of Nature: Reductionism" (2007)

### **Constitution**

#### [Material Constitution](#)

Bennett, "Construction Area: No Hard Hat Required" (2011)

### **Grounding & Fundamentality**

#### [Metaphysical Grounding](#)

Fine, "Guide to Ground" (2012)

Schaffer, "On What Grounds What" (2009)

Sider, *The Tools of Metaphysics*, chapter 1 (2020)

### **Essence**

Fine, "Essence and Modality" (1994)

Fine, "Senses of Essence" (1995)

Rosen, "Real Definition" (2015)

### **Realism & Deflationism**

Thomasson, *Ontology Made Easy* (2014)

Sider, *Writing the Book of the World*, chapters 5 & 9 (2011)