I. COURSE DESCRIPTION AND GOALS:

American philosophy, especially as represented by classical pragmatism, bears a complicated relationship to the European tradition. On the one hand, it embraces that tradition's commitment to progress. This is best seen in its doctrine of meliorism which contends that things can get better (at least incrementally) if we earnestly apply intelligence to our actions. On the other hand, though, American philosophy rejects many traditional (especially modern) European philosophies, especially insofar as they view knowledge and thought apart from action and aimed what is abstract and absolute. American philosophy proposes a worldview that embraces the purposive, pluralistic, experimental and contextual nature of human thought, activity, and reality. We will consider various pragmatist responses to such issues as: how action is central to knowledge and value; how truth and philosophical categories can be understood instrumentally; how human activity is rooted in our biology; and how habit, impulse, and thought interweave in intelligent action to secure progress.

• Some General Objectives:
- To understand the reasons why (and the means by which) American philosophy breaks away from traditional modes of thought and authority.
- To understand the reasons for and consequences of valuing the experimental method of thought and action, especially at this point in history.
- To understand the embedded nature of humans and their activities, and the implications of this understanding for the treatment of traditional philosophical problems.
- To foster the development (articulation, support, and assessment) of your own “live options.”

II. COURSE OUTLINE:

I. A Thematic Introduction: Dewey’s “The Influence of Darwinism on Philosophy”

II. Emerson: Creating an American Tradition
   1. The New: The American Scholar
   2. Ties to the Old: The Conservative

III. Peirce and the formal beginnings of “pragmatism”
   1. Pragmatic Methodology
   2. Phenomenology and Metaphysics

IV. James: Pluralism and the Will to Believe
   1. Opening the windows of Experience: Radical Empiricism
   2. Faith and Action: Popular Essays
   3. Pragmatism revisited

V. Dewey: Experimentally Reconstructing Experience
   1. Human Nature after Darwin: instrumentalism and progress
   2. Reconstructing Experience

VI. Santayana: Animal Faith and Spiritual “Life” – an alternative vision
   1. Skepticism, animal Faith, and the light of spirit
III. COURSE MATERIALS:
C.S. Peirce, *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*
George Santayana, *Skepticism and Animal Faith*

IV. COURSE WORK:
- **3 Papers (70% total):** There will be three papers, tentatively scheduled after we’re done with Peirce, James, and Dewey. The goal of these papers is for you to pursue your own “live options,” and so I want to allow for variations in your approach to the papers. The most obvious way to do this is to anticipate that you will want to explore one topic more fully than the others. The 30% paper (8-10 pages) allows you to do just this. The other 2 papers will be worth 20% each and will be shorter (5-7 pages). (You will decide which of the 3 papers will count for 30% *prior* to handing the paper in, but one paper will be worth 30%.) I’m being “experimental” in creating this option, so we may need to make changes to this stipulation, e.g. the length of the longer paper, as we go. We will discuss any such changes as a class prior to implementing them.

- **Final Exam (10%):** We will have a final that consists of at least a cumulative essay question. Its goal is to provide an opportunity to draw together different strands and themes from the course from a broader perspective than you will likely achieve in the papers. This exam will be taken during finals week (scheduled for Friday, May 4 at 1 PM).

- **Participation (20% total):** As with other philosophy courses, ongoing and active participation will play a central role in helping you develop mastery of the relevant philosophical skills and content. The notion of a *community of inquirers* built on *democratic participation* also renders this component of your course work especially appropriate. You participation grade will be based on the average of the following items:

  [1] **Discussion Participation:** *Qualitative* participation is vital to learning to think philosophically and is expected throughout the semester. You should carefully prepare for class; this means actively reading and reflecting on the day’s assignment (noting key definitions and arguments and formulating questions) *prior* to class. Discussion participation involves (i) contributing your own views, questions, and reactions to the readings and class discussion, and (ii) carefully listening to, questioning, and responding to the views of others. Aim to participate regularly, but avoid dominating class discussion. (If you’re shy or reserved, let’s talk about that individually.)

  When determining your discussion participation grade, I will look at the *quality* and *pattern* of your participation over the course of the semester. The *quality* of your work is gauged in terms of its (i) *clarity*, (ii) *insight*, and (iii) *sophistication*. In assessing the *pattern* of your work, I will look at (i) *consistency*, (ii) *effort*, and (iii) *improvement* and *progress* (or regress) you have made in critically discussing materials throughout the semester.

  Minimal participation, low attendance, tardiness, inattention, and disruptive (e.g., leaving the class) or dominating class-room behavior will result in a low participation grade. If you are concerned about your participation performance, please don’t hesitate to talk with me.

**Attendance:** You are expected to attend all classes. If you must miss a class, you are responsible for all material covered and assignments distributed or collected. Since I consider attendance a factor of participation, I don’t distinguish between “excused” and “unexcused” absences. (If you’re not present, you can’t contribute.) If you miss more than 3 classes (which is the equivalent of a week), your prep/participation grade will drop 1/3 letter grade per missed day. *Also,* you are expected to contact me so we can discuss your attendance.
B. Inquiries: *Inquiry* is the fundamental process (embraced by most of our thinkers) of identifying problems, proposing solutions (hypotheses), and evaluating (testing) those solutions. Each of you will provide one “inquiry” to lead class discussion this semester. It has a pre-class component, an in-class component, and a post-class component.

*Pre-class:* A likely way of constructing your inquiry is to ask:

a. What’s a real and significant problem that arises from the day’s reading?  
   i. Consider why the problem is significant (or: why a resolution is needed or desirable).  
   ii. The problems may be within or between articles. The problems may (and probably should) be related to (by being generated from or tested by) lived experience and action.  
   iii. The problem may have sub-parts (mini-problems, as it were). If so, identify them. Another way of looking at the problem is to consider if it can be broken down into a series of doubt-resolution or means-ends relationships.

b. What are some likely ways (means) of resolving that problem? Clearly explain at least two such means or ways of resolving the problem, indicating how each might resolve the original problem.

c. Evaluate the resolutions (means):
   i. Which resolve(s) the problem in the most desirable manner? (You may need to explain what constitutes “most desirable.”)  
   ii. What are limitations or further problems that the resolutions themselves (even the best one) might generate?

Creative alternatives are also possible; I ask that you consult with me prior to pursuing such an alternative.

*In-class:* you will bear primary responsibility for the day’s work.

*Post-class:* **Follow-up Assessment of your Inquiry:** Hopefully you will learn much when presenting and discussing your inquiry that will deepen your understanding of the issue and perhaps also of your interests and philosophical strengths. Hence, after we discuss your inquiry, write an assessment in which you:

a. Present the key points made in class discussion of your inquiry, explaining the main comments and questions made in response to your prompt. Explain clearly how you did (or now would) respond to these.

b. Explore how your view has changed (or deepened) as a result of discussion and further study. (By “further study” I mean to include the following readings we do on the philosopher on whom you prompted. This gives you the opportunity to consider your inquiry in a larger context.) For instance, have you changed your mind about the significance of the original problem, or about what constitutes its best resolution? Do you think that your inquiry exposes a flaw in the philosopher’s position, or did the process increase your appreciation for what is good or desirable in his philosophy?

*Submission deadlines and Grading:*  
The inquiry need to be carefully written, typed and no more than 2 pages (single spaced, no more than 1000 words) long. Email the class (27303@rhodes.edu) your inquiry by 5 PM the day before your inquiry; I’ll make copies for the class. All students are expected to read the inquiry before class.

Your follow-up assessment is due no later than the 1st class meeting after we finish studying the philosopher on whom you did an inquiry.

Your inquiry and assessment will be graded on (i) clarity and accuracy, (ii) significance and level of insight/sophistication, and (iii) representation of effort and intellectual growth.
If it appears that you will miss your scheduled contribution, you may make it up so long as (1) there is an opening on the schedule, and (2) you discuss the matter with me at least 24 hours before class (unless this is legitimately impossible).

• **Grading Criteria:** See “Grading Criteria for Written Work” and “Writing Hints” in our folder on the Academic Server.

V. MISCELLANEOUS:
• **Successful Classroom:** Respect towards all members of the class and to course content is the key. I work hard to generate a setting in which we can be honest and critical, but my efforts are futile without your individual contributions. Impediments to a successful classroom include tardiness, disruptive talking, lethargy, excessive absences, and leaving the classroom before the end of the hour. We are biological creatures, but since we also have a certain mastery over our bodies, please take care of your biological needs before class.

• **Grading Scale:** See “Grading Criteria for Written Work” handout for specifics.
  
  A  94 and up  
  A- 90-93  
  B+  87-89  
  B  84-86  
  B- 80-83  
  C+  77-79  
  C  74-76  
  C- 70-73 etc.

• **Computer Component:** You are responsible for reading and responding to notes, assignments, questions, etc. that I send out via e-mail.

• **Film Component:** I will likely show a film or TV episode relevant to course material. (Presently, I’m planning on showing the episode of *BtVS*, “Earshot,” when we read James’ “On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings.” Further details will be provided at the appropriate time.

• **Academic Volume Resources:** Our class has a folder on the Academic Server (Philosophy → Shade → Public → PHIL 370). Included are: (1) readings that are handed out, (2) study questions (for some of the readings), (3) as well as biographies and timelines, (4) a list of additional books and websites for the course. Please consult this folder, and let me know if you have problems accessing it or finding materials. I will announce new documents that need to be read; if you are absent, you are responsible for reading these.

• **Honor Code:** The Honor Code stipulates that the all work you submit is to your own. You may incorporate materials that are not your own in prompts or papers (no other uses of additional materials are allowed) so long as these are properly cited. If you have questions, ask. You are encouraged to discuss topics and assignments with your colleagues, but the work you hand in must be your own, i.e., it must be formulated and written in your own words and style reflecting your own thoughtful treatment.

• I’ll be glad to help in any way I can, so don’t hesitate to darken my doorway.

*This syllabus is subject to revision (but don’t worry; I’ll discuss any changes with the class before I make them).*

Calendar to be distributed separately.