PHILOSOPHY AND ETHICS

GENERAL COURSE

Year 11 syllabus

Acknowledgement of Country

Kaya. The School Curriculum and Standards Authority (the Authority) acknowledges that our offices are on Whadjuk Noongar boodjar and that we deliver our services on the country of many traditional custodians and language groups throughout Western Australia. The Authority acknowledges the traditional custodians throughout Western Australia and their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We offer our respect to Elders past and present.

Content

Rationale

Philosophical thought shapes what people think, what they value, what they consider to be true, and how they engage with others and the world around them. It is one of the foundations of all academic disciplines. It seeks to shed light on questions, such as: what is real; what and how do we understand; how should we live; what is it to be human; and who am I? It deals with issues and problems that cannot be addressed adequately by appealing to experience and experiment alone. Philosophical inquiry requires that we question our assumptions, beliefs and our reasons for holding them. The Philosophy and Ethics General course aims to empower students to make independent judgements on the basis of reason.

Doing philosophy is a practical activity. We do philosophy, for example, when we seek to define something, when we challenge assumptions, when we construct an argument, and when we think about what we are doing, how we are doing it and to what ends. The study of philosophy gives us a set of skills that better enables us to understand, evaluate and engage with our world, whether that is our personal or our social world, our world of work or the wider questions of how the world works.

The relation between the disciplines of philosophy and ethics in this course requires some explanation. Traditionally, ethics has been regarded as a branch of philosophy, alongside metaphysics and epistemology, so that reference to philosophy will normally include reference to ethics. The title 'Philosophy and Ethics' gives ethics a prominent status, signifying that it has particular importance in this course. This status recognises that every member of a society faces ethical issues. A philosophical approach helps people to reflect on, and better understand, difficult ethical issues.

In philosophy and ethics, disagreement is common. Methods of inquiry and the skills of critical reasoning help us deal more effectively with disagreement. This course places considerable emphasis on students who contribute constructively to a philosophical Community of Inquiry.

A philosophical Community of Inquiry, at its simplest, is a collaborative and cooperative process through which students learn with others, and from others, how to engage in philosophical discourse. Such discourse seeks to clarify, analyse, evaluate and define concepts and issues so as to help students understand and deal with complex questions raised by popular culture, by contemporary events and by the history of ideas. A philosophical Community of Inquiry uses the skills of critical reasoning to help students deal more effectively and tolerantly with disagreement.

Employers are increasingly searching for people who can analyse new situations and devise and evaluate appropriate strategies to manage them. The Philosophy and Ethics General course develops thinking skills and moral discernment that students apply to a range of practical situations in their personal, social and working lives.

Course outcomes

The Philosophy and Ethics General course is designed to facilitate achievement of the following outcomes.

Outcome 1 – Philosophical and ethical inquiry

Students use investigative methods to think and argue philosophically.

In achieving this outcome, students:

- participate in open philosophical communities of inquiry
- explore philosophical and ethical concepts, ideas and ideals
- use critical reasoning methods to recognise, analyse, evaluate and develop arguments.

Outcome 2 – Philosophical and ethical perspectives

Students understand that there are philosophical and ethical approaches to making meaning.

In achieving this outcome, students:

- understand that there are different ways of knowing
- understand that there are different viewpoints on the nature of reality
- understand that people need to give good reasons for how they live.

Outcome 3 – Philosophy and ethics in human affairs

Students understand that philosophical and ethical thinking has a role in human affairs.

In achieving this outcome, students:

- understand that there are philosophical traditions
- understand that there are different world views
- understand the influence of philosophical ideas on contemporary culture.

Outcome 4 – Applying and relating philosophical and ethical understandings

Students reflect on, evaluate and respond to a range of human issues by selecting from a repertoire of philosophical and ethical strategies.

In achieving this outcome, students:

- evaluate different ways of knowing about a range of practical issues
- reflect on understandings of the nature of reality and human nature and their relationship to practical issues and situations
- use philosophical and ethical reasoning to respond critically to aspects of human activity.

Organisation

This course is organised into a Year 11 syllabus and a Year 12 syllabus. The cognitive complexity of the syllabus content increases from Year 11 to Year 12.

Structure of the syllabus

The Year 11 syllabus is divided into two units, each of one semester duration, which are typically delivered as a pair. The notional time for each unit is 55 class contact hours.

Unit 1 – Reason and actions

This unit enables students to examine some basic elements of reasoning; the distinction between opinion and evidence; the idea of personhood; work, leisure and society; and society, rights and obligations.

Unit 2 – Reason and happiness

This unit enables students to examine the basic components of argument; the concept of fairness; concepts of human fulfilment; material and psychological wellbeing; and the ethics and values of friendship.

Each unit includes:

- a unit description – a short description of the focus of the unit

- unit content – the content to be taught and learned.

Organisation of content

The Philosophy and Ethics General course develops student learning through three content areas:

- How do we know

- What is real

- How should we live

Representation of the general capabilities

The general capabilities encompass the knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions that will assist students to live and work successfully in the twenty-first century. Teachers may find opportunities to incorporate the capabilities into the teaching and learning program for the Philosophy and Ethics General course. The general capabilities are not assessed unless they are identified within the specified unit content.

Literacy

While much of the explicit teaching of literacy occurs in the English learning area, it is strengthened, made specific and extended in the Philosophy and Ethics General course, where students are routinely required to communicate ideas and arguments of varying levels of complexity using both oral and written media. They must generate responses that clarify, analyse and evaluate verbal and written arguments using both conventional written structures and the Community of Inquiry.

Numeracy

Using mathematical skills across the curriculum both enriches the study of other learning areas and contributes to the development of a broader and deeper understanding of numeracy. In the Philosophy and Ethics General course, students number arguments in terms of their constituent components and map them diagrammatically. Students are also required to identify examples of deductive reasoning by cross referencing particular argument structures with logical formulae, to determine their respective validity.

Information and communication technology capability

The information and communication (ICT) capability supports and enhances student learning across all areas of the curriculum. In the Philosophy and Ethics General course, students are encouraged to further their skills through the routine deployment of ICT during research investigations, creating presentations, and using blog and online discussion forums. They are also challenged to be critical and responsible consumers of technology and digital media. The ethics component of the course particularly promotes reflection and discussion about whether technology, in all its different permutations, can be considered to be a public good and whether it has the potential to be a utopian or dystopian feature, depending on the context.

Critical and creative thinking

Activities that foster critical and creative thinking should include both independent and collaborative tasks, and entail some sort of transition or tension between ways of thinking. In the Philosophy and Ethics General course, students are presented with a problem and are challenged to progress their own thinking and understanding, and that of their peers, using the Socratic method. The Community of Inquiry is the central platform for philosophical and ethical exchange, where students have license to be critical of each other's ideas providing their critiques are sustainable and can augment community understanding of a topic.

Personal and social capability

Teachers may find opportunities to incorporate explicit teaching of the personal and social capability depending on their choice of learning activities. The Community of Inquiry invites the focus of inquiry to be directed by the student generated questions, which in turn reflect the interests of the students.

Ethical understanding

Ethical issues arise across all areas of the curriculum, with each learning area containing a range of content that demands consideration from an ethical perspective. Ethical dilemmas, hypothetical thought experiments, and real life scenarios all set a context for discussion within the Philosophy and Ethics General course. Students consider, analyse and evaluate a range of ethical decision-making models, structures of justice and fairness, systems of government, social contract theories, and secular and religious world views. They are challenged to apply particular ethical theories to real-life situations and to evaluate their potential merit and relevance.

Intercultural understanding

Although intercultural understanding focuses primarily on the development of skills, behaviours and dispositions, it also draws on students' growing knowledge, understanding and critical awareness of their own and others' cultural perspectives and practices derived from learning area content. In the Philosophy and Ethics General course, students are required to draw extensively on the thinking of Ancient civilisations; on both Analytic and Continental traditions; and on contemporary schools of thought representing different cultural and epistemological interests and influences. They are exposed to, and asked to make sense of, global 'expert' opinions, and are challenged to systematically deconstruct and reinterpret these in the context of their own social, historical, cultural, economic and geographic experiences.

Representation of the cross-curriculum priorities

The cross-curriculum priorities address contemporary issues which students face in a globalised world. Teachers may find opportunities to incorporate the following priorities into the teaching and learning program for the Philosophy and Ethics General course. The cross-curriculum priorities are not assessed unless they are identified within the specified unit content.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander priority provides opportunities for all learners to deepen their knowledge of Australia by engaging with the world's oldest continuous living cultures. Discussions in the Philosophy and Ethics General course that will naturally lead into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, culture and contemporary perspectives may include: the concepts of justice, fairness, liberty, equality, rights and tolerance; ideas of social identity and of common good; moral concepts in different cultures; ideas about social responsibility and obligations to the individual, society, citizenship and civic involvement; and ethical issues of life and death.

Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia

An understanding of Asia underpins the capacity of Australian students to be active and informed citizens working together to build harmonious local, regional and global communities, and build Australia's social, intellectual and creative capital. It also builds understanding of the diversity of cultures and peoples living in Australia, fosters social inclusion and cohesion, and is vital to the prosperity of Australia. There are many opportunities for students to consider Asian perspectives within the Philosophy and Ethics General course.

Sustainability

Sustainability education is futures-oriented, focusing on protecting environments and creating a more ecologically and socially just world through informed action. Actions that support more sustainable patterns of living require consideration of environmental, social, cultural and economic systems and their interdependence. There are opportunities for students to consider issues of sustainability within the Philosophy and Ethics General course.

Unit 1 – Reason and actions

Unit description

This unit enables students to examine some basic elements of reasoning; the distinction between opinion and evidence; the idea of personhood; work, leisure and society; and society, rights and obligations.

Unit content

This unit includes the knowledge, understandings and skills described below.

How do we know?

Critical reasoning

- the recognition of facts and giving reasons for opinions written in natural language
- the use of experience and other kinds of evidence to understand problems

Methods of inquiry

- recognising and being able to ask both closed (fact-based) and open (debatable) questions
- formulating simple hypotheses and using practical observations to obtain evidence for or against these hypotheses
- understanding the idea of goodness in inquiry
- types of inquiry: dialogue

Imagination and interpretation

- the distinction between invention and discovery
- devising possible ways of solving problems using imagination and interpretation
- lateral thinking as an act of imagination

Analysing, clarifying and evaluating concepts

- the concepts of work, leisure and play
- understanding what an obligation is and recognising that some obligations are mutual
- the concepts of safety, duty, harm and benefit

What is real?

Scientific world view

- the distinction between subjective judgement and objective information, and how science uses these concepts

Conceptions of ultimate reality

- different ways of thinking about ultimate reality

Persons

- general characteristics that help to define being a person, such as consciousness, reason, language, social membership, emotions, intentional actions, creativity, embodiment, accountability, responsibility, and authenticity

How should we live?

Governance

- the nature of laws

- the distinction between laws and rules

- the concepts of legal and moral rights

- the basis for rights

- the concept of fairness and its relation to rights

Communities and cultures

- various kinds of paid and unpaid work

- the relationship between work and community life

- voluntary community work

- the value of work to individuals, families and more broadly, what counts as good work

Self and others

- the rights of individuals

- moral and legal duties to others

- the recognition of moral virtues

Unit 2 – Reason and happiness

Unit description

This unit enables students to examine the basic components of argument: the concept of fairness; concepts of human fulfilment; material and psychological wellbeing; and the ethics and values of friendship.

Unit content

This unit includes the knowledge, understandings and skills described below.

How do we know?

Critical reasoning

- understanding what it means to make an inference that is written in natural language
- recognising the role of assumptions and intuitions in reasoning

Methods of inquiry

- the use of examples and counter-examples in arguing for or against a proposition
- diagnosing, from practical observation, a range of problems and generating and testing hypotheses to resolve these
- types of inquiry: elenchus

Imagination and interpretation

- the use of imagination to develop different types of questions
- the use of imaginative analogies in developing arguments

Analysing, clarifying and evaluating concepts

- the concepts of pleasure, happiness and wellbeing as examples of conceptual clarification
- the concept of a game
- the concept of fairness in games, and the role of umpires and other arbitrators in games
- the concept of fairness in a broader social context

What is real?

Scientific world view

- connections between science and technology
- criteria for evaluating new technologies
- the idea of material/scientific progress and its relationship to human happiness

Conceptions of ultimate reality

- different ideas of what is a good life and how to achieve it

Persons

- the ideas of pleasure, happiness, fulfilment and wellbeing

- the distinction between material wellbeing and psychological wellbeing

- the roles of family and friendship in wellbeing

- the idea of personal autonomy

- the idea of authenticity

How should we live?

Governance

- the concept of rights

- various sources of rights

- the concept of leadership

- various forms of leadership

- social roles of umpires, judges, law-makers and citizens

Communities and cultures

- the diversity of cultural mores

- the recognition of cultural difference and its relation to human happiness

Self and others

- the concept of friendship

- the value and importance of friendship

- the relationship between peer pressure, moral virtues and friendship

School-based assessment

The *Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE) Manual* contains essential information on principles, policies and procedures for school-based assessment that needs to be read in conjunction with this syllabus.

Teachers design school-based assessment tasks to meet the needs of students. The table below provides details of the assessment types for Philosophy and Ethics General Year 11 syllabus and the weighting for each assessment type.

Assessment table – Year 11

Type of assessment	Weighting
Critical reasoning Typically these are short answer questions which require students to demonstrate skills in critical reasoning and methods of inquiry. All questions, items, example arguments and instructions are written in natural language. At least two critical reasoning tasks should be administered under test conditions.	20%
Philosophical analysis and evaluation Typically these are extended answers which require students to summarise, clarify, and critically evaluate the cogency of arguments put forward in dialogues and texts. This typically involves making judgements about inferential strength, the acceptability of premises and relevance of examples used to support the claims. This should include philosophical analysis and evaluation of arguments in: • Community of Inquiry dialogues between two contributors • an article/extract which can deal with any combination of ethical, epistemological and/or metaphysical topics/themes or issues. At least two philosophical analysis and evaluation tasks should be administered under test conditions.	30%
Construction of argument Typically this is an extended writing format, such as an essay which requires students to: define terms and concepts, put forward a premise or thesis, employ examples and counter-examples, justify the development of the argument, avoid contradiction, synthesise contrary claims and establish a conclusion that follows from the premise and the examples. This process uses/applies the elements of arguments developed in critical reasoning and philosophical analysis and evaluation. At least two construction of argument tasks should be administered under test conditions.	20%
Test Can be conducted during and/or at the end of each semester and/or unit.	30%

Teachers are required to use the assessment table to develop an assessment outline for the pair of units (or for a single unit where only one is being studied).

The assessment outline must:

• include a set of assessment tasks

• include a general description of each task

• indicate the unit content to be assessed

• indicate a weighting for each task and each assessment type

• include the approximate timing of each task (for example, the week the task is conducted, or the issue and submission dates for an extended task).

In the assessment outline for the pair of units, each assessment type must be included at least once over the year/pair of units. In the assessment outline where a single unit is being studied, each assessment type must be included at least once.

The set of assessment tasks must provide a representative sampling of the content for Unit 1 and Unit 2.

Assessment tasks not administered under test/controlled conditions require appropriate validation/authentication processes.

Grading

Schools report student achievement in terms of the following grades:

Grade	Interpretation
A	Excellent achievement
B	High achievement
C	Satisfactory achievement
D	Limited achievement
E	Very low achievement

The teacher prepares a ranked list and assigns the student a grade for the pair of units (or for a unit where only one unit is being studied). The grade is based on the student's overall performance as judged by reference to a set of pre-determined standards. These standards are defined by grade descriptions and annotated work samples. The grade descriptions for Philosophy and Ethics General Year 11 syllabus are provided in Appendix 1. They can also be accessed, together with annotated work samples, through the Guide to Grades link on the course page of the Authority website at www.scsa.wa.edu.au.

To be assigned a grade, a student must have had the opportunity to complete the education program, including the assessment program (unless the school accepts that there are exceptional and justifiable circumstances).

Refer to the *WACE Manual* for further information about the use of a ranked list in the process of assigning grades.

Appendix 1 – Grade descriptions Year 11

A	**Scope of enquiry** Diagnoses problematic aspects in familiar propositions, issues, assumptions and/or concepts in order to modify hypotheses. **Cogency of argument** Weighs ideas against one another, using relevant examples and counter-examples to clarify and/or correct thinking. **Relevance of inference** Makes inferences about a range of concepts, evidence, claims and/or arguments. **Range of evidence** Analyses and evaluates concepts and/or evidence using analogies.
B	**Scope of enquiry** Uses open questions to explore familiar propositions, issues, assumptions and/or concepts in order to generate hypotheses. **Cogency of argument** Connects relevant ideas and/or reasons in order to establish a controlled and coherent perspective. **Relevance of inference** Narrates, describes and/or explains strong and weak claims in a text and/or experience. **Range of evidence** Uses evidence and/or concepts to generate analogies.
C	**Scope of enquiry** Uses questions and provides definitions and/or examples that enable some propositions and conclusions to be made. **Cogency of argument** Explains and/or adjusts ideas and/or reasons with a general sense of purpose. **Relevance of inference** Engages with concepts and/or claims identified in a text and/or experience in a generalised way. **Range of evidence** Examines evidence and concepts to separate facts from opinions and/or concrete from abstract.
D	**Scope of enquiry** Uses questions and provides definitions and/or examples haphazardly so that propositions and conclusions are vague. **Cogency of argument** Connects ideas clumsily and/or crudely with little or no engagement and/or explanation. **Relevance of inference** Asserts claims and/or questions rashly and shows a limited engagement with a text and/or experience. **Range of evidence** Uses evidence carelessly, making hasty generalisations about concepts.
E	**Scope of enquiry** Relies on simplistic assumptions, definitions and/or closed questions to present a case. **Cogency of argument** Struggles to identify causality between concepts. **Relevance of inference** Responds in a defensive manner and reacts personally to a concept, text and/or experience. **Range of evidence** Ignores evidence and/or concepts in favour of dogmatic views.

Appendix 2 – Glossary

This glossary is provided to enable a common understanding of the key terms in this syllabus.

Dialectic

1. A Socratic conversation or dialogue in which contradictory claims about basic beliefs or first principles are analysed and evaluated, with the stronger claim judged as the best way to proceed in an inquiry [from Plato].

2. A process of resolving logically opposite, yet equally compelling, claims about an idea or concept so that such claims exist no longer in dichotomy but as synthesised knowledge [from Hegel].

Dialogue

The use of conversation as philosophical inquiry by extending obligations and rights to the participants, for example, the Community of Inquiry.

Elenchus

The Socratic method of question and answer that seeks to clarify a complex idea by eradicating contradictions, often through examples from daily life, especially from crafts and skills.

Scientific method

The agreed method of gathering and interpreting phenomena in the sciences through observation, description, prediction, replication and explanation in order to identify, correlate, and sequence cause and effect.