

HONS 3391: The Good Place Spring 2020

Wednesdays 6 p.m. – 7:40 p.m. (Mountain Clock Land) in Rendezvous room 236*

Late 8-week 1 credit interdisciplinary elective course for honors students. *The Pocatello campus of Idaho State University is located on the traditional homelands of the [Shoshone-Bannock Tribal Nation](#)

Architects

Nobel Ang, Ph.D.

Pronouns: He/his

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Xiaomeng (Mona) Xu, Ph.D.

Pronouns: She/her/hers ([What is this?](#))

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Student Hours: By appointment

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Course Description

In this course, we will watch the NBC sitcom *The Good Place* (TGP) together. TGP was selected as an accessible and entertaining vehicle which allows for interdisciplinary exploration of topics from philosophy and psychology. These topics may include (but are not limited to) ethics, emotions, existential crisis, motivation, free will, death, memory, deception, the self, social issues (e.g., attachment, close relationships, soul-mates, diversity, objectification), and neuroscience. The popular and comedic nature of TGP should enhance engagement as we tackle complex and challenging topics. The show also provides relatable examples of these topics in everyday life, facilitating application. We'll also aim to have a forking good time, try to have dope souls and hella ethics, and do the most human thing of all: attempt something futile with a ton of unearned confidence and fail spectacularly!

Course Format

Each week we will meet in person to watch TGP and discuss the episode(s) and assigned material. Discussions offer you an opportunity to share ideas, perspectives, and questions with your peers and to engage in debate. We will provide prompts to facilitate discussion, and moderate as needed, but we will strive to have discussions be student-driven. Some weeks of the course will also include short lectures, student presentations, and/or activities. Outside the classroom you will engage with assigned material, write weekly reflections, and work on your in-class presentation with your peers (you may also contact other peers about coursework, to continue discussion etc. if you would like).

Course Outcomes

In actively participating in the course and completing the assignments, you will be able to:

(1) Identify topics, theories, methods, and terminology from philosophy and psychology as they relate to episodes of TGP and associated material;

- Assignments that demonstrate accomplishment of this outcome: Weekly reflections and in-

class presentation

(2) Articulate the key issues and arguments that arise in discussions of these topics, terms, theories, and methods;

- Assignments that demonstrate accomplishment of this outcome: Weekly reflections and in-class presentation

(3) Analyze and evaluate the issues and arguments of course material, TGP, and classroom interactions.

- Assignments that demonstrate accomplishment of this outcome: Weekly reflections

Readings for this course

Moodle is ISU's online learning system for academic courses. Guides and tutorials are available [here](#). Readings and other material will be posted on the course Moodle site for the week that the readings are supposed to be done (for details, see course schedule below). It is extremely important that you read and otherwise engage with all material in the Moodle section for a particular week (readings, watching videos, completing activities etc.) prior to that week's class session.

Prerequisite Knowledge and Skills

There are no prerequisite courses for this class. We ask that you view the full first season of TGP prior to the start of the class as we will begin viewings with Season 2. You should have basic skills in using computers (or other devices that can access Moodle), internet, and email.

Course Assessments

1. **Weekly Reflections (Course Outcomes 1, 2, 3):** We would like you to write a short reflection paper (1.5 to 2 pages, double-spaced) after class each week, starting from the first week. Reflections should be submitted on Moodle as a Word document or PDF. Please use readable fonts and colors that are perceptible by human eyes (no pleurigloss).

Reflect on what you saw in the episode(s) we covered during class, and examine your thoughts on the class discussion/activity as well as relevant materials assigned for that week. Ideally, you will also make a contribution that continues the class dialogue (see grading rubric). You can reflect on what you've learned, what was surprising, what you agreed/disagreed with and why, applications of the episodes/materials/discussion to your own life, etc. and continue our discussion. If you are reading carefully, email Dr. Xu the words "tarantula squid" before the second class for an extra credit point. We may also give optional prompts at the end of class.

These reflections are due at noon the following Monday. For instance, the reflection for Wednesday March 11th is due at noon on the following Monday, March 16th.

2. **In-class Presentation (Course Outcomes 1, 2):** We would like you to team up with three or four other course-mates (groups will be formed during our first class meeting on March 11th) to do an in-class presentation that should ideally take 20 – 25 minutes.

You should discuss and analyze the week’s episode(s), relate it to the assigned materials, and connect it to the concepts and theories we’ve learned about. You may bring in additional materials if you choose. Presentations can be in any format (e.g., talk with slides, created video/audio, debate, lecture and activity) and we encourage you to check in with one or both of us as you/your group works on this to discuss ideas and allow us to provide you with feedback. You should put together a group contract at the beginning of the project that all members agree to (signatures or other verification by each group member is recommended) so it is explicit who is responsible for what piece of the project and who will do what work.

Communication and Feedback

Outside of class, you can contact us via email (preferred method) or phone. You are welcome to contact either or both of us, whatever your preference. You are also very welcome to stop by during student hours and/or to set up a time to meet.

From Mondays to Thursdays, we will respond to emails within 24 hours. Between Friday and Sunday, our response times may be longer, but you can generally expect a response by Monday, unless we are out of town (at a conference, etc.), in which case you can expect a response on our first full day back.

Your weekly reflection papers and in-class presentations will be graded by the beginning of the next class meeting (or by the semester grading deadline for the presentation during finals week).

Grading Policy

You want to be the best student and velociraptor? Your final grade for this course will be based on points accrued across all assignments. No specific assignment is required, however to maximize your learning experience we encourage you to complete all assignments. We will do our best to ensure grading is fair (see rubric); even though fair is the stupidest word humans (nature’s apps) ever invented. Except for “staycation”.

The breakdown of points for the assignments are as follows:

Weekly Reflections (7 x 10 points each)	70 points
In-class presentation	30 points
Total points possible	100 points

The weekly reflection grades are individual. The in-class presentation grade is meant to be a group grade, however please notify us if any issues arise (e.g., if a group member does not follow the group contract and their piece is missing) and we will adjust grades accordingly.

Letter grades will be assigned according to this scale:

Letter grade	Lowest points	Highest points
A	93	100
A-	90	92
B+	86	89
B	83	85

Letter grade	Lowest points	Highest points
B-	80	82
C+	76	79
C	73	75
C-	70	72
D+	66	69
D	63	65
D-	60	62
F	0	59

Note: A final grade that has a fractional component will be rounded up if it is .50 or greater, and rounded down if it is .49 or less. For example, 85.50 would be rounded up to 86 and 85.25 would be rounded down to 85.

Attendance Policy

Since this is only an 8-week course, we urge you to attend all sessions on time. We especially urge you to not miss the session with Dr. Todd May on March 18th. Your grade will not be directly affected by attendance (there are no points allocated for attendance), however it will be difficult to do well on assignments if you miss the classroom discussions/activities and/or you miss the session of your presentation. If you miss a class or know you are likely to (e.g., if you have tickets to Hamilton and there's a rumor that Daveed Diggs is coming back), contact us ASAP. We will work with you to make appropriate accommodations as warranted.

Late Work Policy

Pobody's nerfect. One point will be deducted for each 24-hour period of lateness for the reflection papers. No late work will be accepted after our last day of class (May 6th). If you miss (or expect you will miss) your in-class presentation, contact us ASAP.

Additional Class Policies and Recommendations

No killing. As Chidi explained, "killing is one of the most famous moral no-no's."

Absolutely no Molotov cocktails.

You should think about The Good Place 24/7. That means every day you think 20 thoughts about The Good Place for seven minutes.

Participate *actively* in class. Don't just curl up in your container of goo and sleep.

Course Schedule

All material such as readings are on the course Moodle site.

emotions, motivation, free will, death, memory, deception, the self,

Week	Date	Topic and Readings
1	March 11 th Led by: Ang and Xu	Everything is Great! (Parts 1 & 2) Introduction, go over syllabus, form presentation groups, watch TGP S2 E1-2 in class and discuss. <i>Topics for the week:</i> Memory, death
2	March 18 th Led by: Todd May	Todd May's talk: 5:30pm-7pm @Wood River Room (you are required to attend this in place of class meeting for this week). There will also be an opportunity to meet informally with Professor May after his talk. Optional: Take the quiz on Moodle to see which TGP character you are. <i>Topic for the week:</i> Ethics - how to live a decent life
3	March 25 th Led by: Jeremy Bearimy	Spring Break: You are welcome to watch more episodes of TGP on your own (e.g., we will not be watching S2 E3 together). You can also go somewhere and reboot yourself.
4	April 1 st Led by: Ang	<i>Group 1 Presentation</i> Team Cockroach and Existential Crisis: Watch S2 E 4-5 in class. <u>Assigned Reading:</u> "The Philosophy of the Midlife Crisis" and excerpt from Albert Camus, "The Myth of Sisyphus" <i>Topics for the week:</i> Existential crisis, emotions, motivation
5	April 8 th Led by: Xu	<i>Group 2 Presentation</i> Trolley problem: Watch S2 E6 in class. We will also play the Trial by Trolley board game together. <u>Assigned Reading:</u> Slate article on the trolley problem <i>Topics for the week:</i> Moral decision making, free will, memory, deception
6	April 15 th Led by: Ang	<i>Group 3 Presentation</i> Leap to Faith and Best Self: Watch S2 E9-10 in class. <u>Assigned Material:</u> Kierkegaard's Leap of Faith (article), The Teleological Suspension of the Ethical (video). Optional: Chidi's Kierkegaard Rap <i>Topics for the week:</i> Faith, rationality, and choice
7	April 22 nd Led by: Xu	<i>Group 4 Presentation</i> The Burrito and Somewhere Else: Watch S2 E12-13 in class. <u>Assigned Readings:</u> "Mindy St. Claire and the Male Gaze (Or Lack Thereof)"; Jameela Jamil's "My Career is Not Reflected by the Size of My Body"; Manny Jacinto interview <i>Topics for the week:</i> Diversity, objectification, the self
8	April 29 th Led by: Xu and Ang	<i>Group 5 Presentation</i> Everything is Bonzer! (Parts 1 & 2): Watch S3 E 1-2 in class. <u>Assigned Material:</u> Knee & Petty (2013) Implicit theories of relationships; Destiny and Growth Beliefs Scale. <i>Topics for the week:</i> Soulmates, attachment, love, neuroscience and fMRI methodology
9	May 6 th Led by: Xu and Ang	<i>Group 6 Presentation</i> The Snowplow and Jeremy Bearimy: Watch S3 E 4-5 in class. Play trust game (on Moodle) <u>before class</u> . Optional: TGP podcast; "A non-binary ode to Janet"; "How TGP taught moral philosophy to its characters and creators"; "Mother Forkin' Morals" (a 4-part video series on philosophy with Todd May). <i>Topics for the week:</i> Trust, virtue ethics, consequentialism, deontology, nihilism

Institutional Policies and Resources

Academic Integrity

You are expected to act with integrity. Remember, “Lies are like tigers. They are bad.”

Please review the following:

- [ISU Academic Integrity Policy](#)
- [ISU Library Guide on Plagiarism](#)

Student Conduct Code

You are expected to abide by the policies and procedures outlined in the [Student Handbook](#).

Discrimination and Harassment

Title VII, Title IX and University policy prohibit harassment, discrimination and sexual misconduct. Discrimination occurs when an individual or group of individuals is treated adversely based on the individual’s or group’s actual or perceived membership in a protected class. Harassment is unwanted or unwelcome behavior or conduct toward an individual because of his or her protected class that is sufficiently severe, persistent or pervasive to have the impact of unreasonably interfering with a person’s learning environment. For more details, please refer to the discrimination and harassment policies found in the [Student Handbook](#).

Student Grievance Process

Students with academic complaints/grievances should first meet with the instructor responsible for the policy, procedure or decision that resulted in the student’s initial complaint/grievance. If the student is still dissatisfied after that meeting, the student should next meet with the instructor’s department head and then with the dean of the college in which the course is offered. For more details, please refer to the [Complaint Procedures](#).

Confidentiality

ISU handles all academic records with the strictest adherence to Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) guidelines. For information on student confidentiality please visit the [ISU Confidentiality Agreement page](#).

Academic Resources

If you find yourself in a sit of doubting, these resources may be helpful:

Library

The [ISU Oboler Library](#) provides a variety of resources online, including access to journals and articles.

- Phone: (208) 282-3152
- [Online chat, email, and appointments](#)

Student Success Center

The [Student Success Center](#) provides FREE tutoring in math and writing, and some content areas.

- Pocatello: (208) 282-3662, success@isu.edu
- Idaho Falls: (208) 282-7925, ifssc@isu.edu

Technical Help

The [IT Service Desk](#) is the place to start with technical issues. They can help you make sure your system is up to date, has all the needed software installed, and troubleshoot issues. In addition, they maintain a knowledge base of articles you can search to find answers.

- Phone: (208) 282-4357
- Email: help@isu.edu
- [TigerTracks \(Online Knowledge Base\)](#)

Disability Services

We are committed to helping all students achieve their fullest potential. If you have a disability, have a record of a disability, or are perceived as having a disability that substantially limits one or more major life activities, you may apply for services at the Disabilities Services in Pocatello (Rm 125 Rendezvous Complex, 282-3599), or at [ISU Disability Services](#). Late notification may cause the requested accommodations to be delayed or unavailable, per ISU policy. During the semester, you should continue to work with us to make sure accommodations are appropriate and to update them as needed.

Other Support Services

In addition to academic services, ISU provides a wide range of support for students.

- [Student Services](#)
 - Many student services are listed on the above web page
- [Central Academic Advising](#)
- [Counseling and Testing Service](#)
- [Diversity Resource Center](#)
- [Financial Aid](#)
- [ISU Health Center](#)
- [Scholarship Office](#)

Grading Rubric for Weekly Reflection Papers

Grade	Score	The Good Place Scoring Notes	Translation
A Toilet Full of Broccoli	0	Missing work. Or work so incomprehensible we can't even re-render our chorfs.	Work is missing/not submitted. Or work is so incomprehensible that we can't even begin to think about how to award a grade.
Ya Basic	1-3	It's devastating. You're devastated.	Work merely gives a synopsis of the episode/s viewed and/or materials covered, and the synopsis given is so lacking that the reader has to make some very educated guesses in order to make sense of it.
Derek	4-5	Stuck in tree. Can't stop saying "Jason".	Work merely gives a synopsis of the episode/s viewed and/or materials covered, and the synopsis is lacking in some important way(s).
Derek Hofstetler	6-7	Something about wind chimes.	Work merely gives a synopsis of the episode/s viewed and/or materials covered. But the synopsis is very clearly and compellingly written, and makes the reader want to engage more deeply.
Derek Hofstetler, P.I.	8-9	Rocking a tuxedo.	Work discusses relevant themes and covers appropriate episodes and materials. The discussion, however, is somewhat superficial, and could use polishing and/or additional evidence to encourage further dialogue on these themes.
Maximum Derek	10	Rocking a tuxedo and eating the fanciest martini.	Work discusses relevant themes and expertly covers appropriate episodes and materials. Writing, logic, and arguments are strong and make an original contribution to the existing dialogue.
Beyonce	10.4	Because everything can be up to 104% perfect. We will reserve this grade for truly exceptional work that blows our minds and makes us see the time knife.	Work engages in discussion that blows the reader's mind, causing the reader to lose sleep pondering over the themes discussed. Seriously, this kind of work should come with a health warning label.