Summary of Subject Matter. The course is designed as an introduction to some of the main topics in the philosophy of language in the modern analytic tradition. It will begin with a brief introduction outlining some of the general philosophical issues which the philosophy of language starts from and raises. After this, the course will concentrate on important specific doctrines and theories meant as illustrations of some of the main points, in particular those concerning accounts of naming and describing (Locke, Frege, Russell, Strawson, Donnellan, Kripke); meaning (e.g., Frege, Tarski, Quine, Putnam). Further topics might be (depending on time available) a discussion of the so-called Private Language Argument (e.g., Wittgenstein, Kripke), and the counterposed claim that the language capacity and access to language is innate (e.g., Chomsky or the ‘language of thought’ hypothesis). Of fundamental importance in all this will be Frege’s analysis of sense, especially the sense of sentences via an account of truth-conditions, and Kripke’s criticism of Frege’s theory of naming and descriptions. The course will focus on texts of the various authors selected. The lectures will be to focus on and articulate, and to some extent to expand upon and counterpose, the arguments, positions and claims set out in these texts. The lectures are not designed to replace the readings.

Reading Matter. The basic readings will be made available on MyCourses.

Requirements. Although the class includes no formal material, students must be comfortable with logic and formal techniques. Thus having completed PHIL 210 (Introduction to Deductive Logic) or an equivalent (e.g., COMP 230) is a requirement. Another requirement is that students have done at least one other course in Analytic Philosophy (e.g., a course in philosophy of mind, philosophy of science or philosophy of mathematics).

Marking and Assessment: The final mark is composed of reading journals (20%), a short sketch paper due around the middle of the term (30%), and a final paper due at the end of the exam period with deadline as set by the university (50%) (take-home exam). All work will be assigned on MyCourses, and must be submitted through MyCourses. The reading journals will require short answers (≤ 100 words) to specific questions about the reading material assigned, and will often focus on readings not discussed at length in lectures. The short/sketch paper is to be ≤ 500 words in length on one of the topics to be assigned. The final paper (the take-home ‘exam’) is expected to be ≤ 2000 words in length on a topic to be assigned. More detailed instructions for each assignment will be given in class.
Submission of Work. In order to avoid paper submission, it is required that all work be submitted electronically, to MyCourses, as PDF documents. (WORD files are NOT acceptable: PDFs can be created very simply from any word processor files.) The file titles should be of the form ‘Bloggs-415-X’, where ‘Bloggs’ is here a placeholder for your surname only, ‘X’ is a placeholder either for (as appropriate) ‘Sketch Essay’, ‘Final Essay’ or ‘Journal-n’, where ‘n’ will be either 1, 2, ….

Policy for Late Work: Extensions to deadlines set will be granted only in exceptional circumstances, usually only for medical reasons or other, similar emergencies, and with a medical note or other appropriate documentation. Late work will be penalised at the rate of 5 percentage points per day overdue, so half a grade-scale per day.

McGill Policies

- McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/integrity for more information).

- In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University’s control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

- Students have the right to submit work in French.