Description
The course is a graduate-style seminar investigating contemporary work in philosophy. It will focus on the book by Scott Soames, *Rethinking Language, Mind, and Meaning*, the central question of which is “What must pieces of information be if they are to play the roles required of them – as bearers of truth and falsehood, and things believed and known – in contemporary philosophy of language and mind, theoretical linguistics, cognitive science, and psychology?” In addition to the book, students will read selections from Bertrand Russell, Gottlob Frege, Saul Kripke, and other contemporary philosophers.

The questions to be taken up fall into two main categories:

(i) those that arise in providing the foundations for genuine sciences of language, mind, and information, e.g., *How do we represent the world in thought and language?*, *If belief, knowledge and assertion are relations holding between (a) agents who believe, know, and assert something and (b) the things they believe, know, and assert, then what are those things?* *What does it mean to say of something that is believed, known, or asserted, that it is true?*, *What must all actual or possible organisms have in common in order to be capable of assertion, belief, or knowledge?*, *What are the meanings of sentences and how are they related to the thoughts and assertions expressed by agents who use them?*, *What is it to understand a language?*

(ii) those that affect one’s views on a wide range of philosophical issues – e.g. *What is the relationship between conceivability (or epistemic possibility), genuine possibility (metaphysical possibility), and logical possibility?* *How does scientific knowledge that a given liquid is H₂O differ from ordinary knowledge that it is water?* *Is it possible that mental phenomena are identical with certain brain states, and that the mind itself is identical with a functioning brain?*

Work and Grading
Each week students will submit very brief essays on specific questions raised by the reading. These will be turned in 48 hours before the seminar, returned 24 hours before the seminar, and discussed during the seminar. All students will write a substantial research paper, which will count for 50% of the final grade. This paper may be either an expansion of some combination of the weekly submitted essays, or an independent project discussed with the professor. Seminar participation will count for 25% and weekly essays will count for 25%.

Books for the Course
Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (paper), published by Harvard University Press.

Assigned articles will be available online.

Schedule

*Part 1: The Study of Language and Meaning in the 20th Century*

Weeks 1-2: The Birth of the Science of Linguistic Meaning
Soames, pp. 1-7 of RLM&M
Soames, chapter 1 of *Philosophy of Language*
Frege, “On Sense and Reference”
Russell, “On Denoting
Week 3: Meaning and Truth Conditions
Soames, chapter 2 of *Philosophy of Language*
Soames, pp. 50-56 of *Philosophy of Language*

Weeks 4-6: Rigid Designation, Direct Reference, and Metaphysical vs. Epistemic Possibility
Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*
Soames, chapter 4 of *Philosophy of Language*
Soames, “Kripke on Epistemic and Metaphysical Possibility”
Soames, “Kripke on Mind Body Identity”

Week 7: What Meaning Cannot Be
Soames, “Direct Reference, Propositional Attitudes, and Semantic Content”

*Part 2: A New Theory of the Relationship between Mind, Meaning, and the World*

Week 8: Why Updating Frege and Russell Is Not Enough
Soames, pp. 1-54 of *What is Meaning?*
Soames, pp. 9-14 of *RLM&M*

Week 9: The Metaphysics and Epistemology of Meaning and Information
Soames, chapter 2 of *RLM&M*

Week 10: Actually, Me, Now – Thoughts that only I can think, that can be thought only now, or here
Soames, Chapter 3 of *RLM&M*

Weeks 11-12: Meaning, Understanding, and Linguistic Cognition
Soames, Chapter 4 of *RLM&M*

Week 13: The Special Role of Perception in Thought
Soames, Chapter 5 of *RTM&M*
Jackson, “What Mary Didn’t Know”
Nagel, “What is it like to be a bat?”

Week 14: Recognizing Recurrence
Soames, Chapter 6 of *RLM&M*

Week 15: Overview
Soames, Précis
Soames, “Yes, Explanation is All We Have”
Soames, “Propositions as Cognitive Acts”