General Outline. This seminar aims to give a comprehensive examination of the main issues raised by the phenomenon of vagueness in the philosophy of language, logic, and metaphysics. Topics include: semantic vagueness; vagueness in the world; vagueness and perception; the logic of vagueness; higher-order vagueness. These topics will be addressed via a critical discussion of the main accounts put forward in the literature, including: epistemicism; supervaluationism; degree theories and fuzzy logic; context-based theories.

Organization and Requirements. A solid background in logic and philosophy of language will be presupposed. The course will be run as a seminar and students are expected to participate actively. Requirements for E-credit: short class presentation (15 min) and final paper (approximately 5,000 words). The final paper will account for 70% of the grade. Requirements for R-credit: regular (active) attendance and short class presentation (15 min).

Readings. Most of the required readings are collected in Vagueness: A Reader, edited by Rosanna Keefe and Peter Smith (MIT Press, 1997). Timothy Williamson’s Vagueness (Routledge, 1994) is also strongly recommended. Copies of these books have been ordered at Labyrinth Books (536 West 112th Street, phone 212-865-1588). Both are also available in electronic form on CLIO. Other readings will be posted as .pdf files on the course website.

Tentative Schedule and Readings (K&S = Keefe and Smith; W = Williamson; P = pdf)

1. Jan 16  INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW
   — Diogenes Laertius, Galen, and Cicero: on sorites paradoxes K&S

2. Jan 23  THE PHILOSOPHICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF VAGUENESS
   — Russell: ‘Vagueness’ (1923) K&S
   — Black: ‘Vagueness: An Exercise in Logical Analysis’ (1937) K&S
   — Wright: ‘On the Coherence of Vague Predicates’ (1975) P
   — Unger: ‘There Are No Ordinary Things’ (1979) P

3. Jan 30  FUZZY LOGIC AND DEGREE THEORIES
   — Williamson: Chapter 4, ‘Many-Valued Logic and Degrees of Truth’ (1994) W
   — Gaifman: ‘Contextual Logic’ (1997) P

4. Feb 6  THE EPISTEMIC VIEW
   — Williamson: Chapter 7, ‘Vagueness and Ignorance’, and Chapter 8, ‘Inexact Knowledge’ W
5. Feb 13 CONTEXT-BASED THEORIES
   — Burns: ‘Vagueness and Coherence’ (1986) P

6. Feb 20 SUPERVALUATIONISM (I)

7. Feb 27 SUPERVALUATIONISM (II)

8. Mar 6 SUPERVALUATIONISM (III)

9. Mar 13 Spring Break

10. Mar 20 HIGHER-ORDER VAGUENESS

11. Mar 27 ONTIC VAGUENESS (I)
    — Tye: ‘Vague Objects’ (1990) P

12. Apr 3 ONTIC VAGUENESS (II)

13. Apr 10 VAGUENESS AND METAPHYSICS (I)

14. Apr 17 VAGUENESS AND METAPHYSICS (II)

15. Apr 24 OPEN ISSUES AND CONCLUDING REMARKS