

WESTERN UNIVERSITY  
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY  
Undergraduate Course Outline 2023-24

**PHIL 4900G**  
**Honours Capstone**

Winter Term	Instructor: N/A
-------------	-----------------

**PREREQUISITE**

Third or fourth year standing in the Honours Specialization in Philosophy. Students completing the Specialization or Major in Philosophy may be admitted with permission from the instructor.

**DESCRIPTION**

There are two versions of the Honours Capstone course in Philosophy: a regular seminar (Phil 4900F/G) and a community-engaged learning (CEL) course (Phil 4901F/G). One of these is available each year and students enrolled in the Honours Specialization in Philosophy must take at least one. This year we are offering the seminar version, in which students will read and present on material recently published either in the instructor's areas of expertise or on student's particular interests. Students will be guided through the process of identifying paper topics that could contribute to active research in philosophy. Projects are generally individual, but collaborations will be permitted given sufficient justification and instructor permission. Note that for group work, group members will receive identical grades for all assignments.

**TEXTS**

All course material will be available on our OWL site. There is nothing you'll need to purchase. Given the nature of the course, not all the course material will be available in advance and students will help to decide what material we will cover together.

**OBJECTIVES**

- ◀ Through their experience in this course, students should be better able to:
- Comprehend, assess, and stimulate discussion about philosophical and other theories that focus on themes for this course
  - Understand how philosophical discourse can also contribute to practical problems (e.g. issues in AI, medical ethics, business, scientific methodology, social justice, etc.)
  - Communicate philosophical ideas to a public audience, both orally and in writing
  - Work effectively individually or in groups on a project of philosophical importance



**METHOD OF EVALUATION**

The main assessments for the course are the following:

- Research proposal, worth 30%
- Research paper, worth 60%
- Participation, worth 10%

Details on these assessments appear below. Deadlines appear in the course schedule. All written assignments should be double-spaced with normal margins and 12-point font. They should be submitted as PDF documents to Assignments on OWL. The penalty for late assignments is 2% per day (including weekends), for up to 5 days after which they will not be accepted.

### **Research Proposal, worth 30%**

- *Picking readings on a theme in consultation with me, worth 5%*
  - This assessment will be pass/fail. If students complete it diligently, they will get full marks. Near the beginning of the course, they will choose a theme and we will add the chosen themes and readings to our course schedule (see below).
- *The research paper proposal, worth 15%*
  - The proposal should be about 500 words (not including the bibliography). It should define the research question for the paper and provide a sketch of how the author(s) will approach that question as well as a preliminary bibliography. The proposal will be graded based on how clear it is, how plausible the plan is for the paper, and the quality of the research done to date.
- Presentation of the research proposal, worth 5%
  - Students will offer a brief (10 minute?) presentation of the research idea.
- Response to the research proposal, worth 5%
  - A designated student will offer a response and critique of the research proposal.

### **Research Paper, worth 60%**

As suggested above, students will write a philosophical research paper on a theme that they have chosen in previous steps.

- The paper should be 3000-3500 words (including notes but not the bibliography). It will be graded using the following criteria:
  - [ARG]: Are there cogent arguments in support of a thesis? Do the claims made in different parts of the paper follow from one another and are they consistent? [10 marks]
  - [ORG]: Is there a plan laid out for the paper at the outset and does it follow that plan? Does the paper have an explicit overall direction? [10 marks]

- [CLR]: Is the thesis clear and is the paper clearly written overall? Could another student at the same level who is not enrolled in the course understand it? [10 marks]
- [UND]: How well does the paper engage with relevant philosophical and other theories? [10 marks]
- [REL]: Is the paper clear about its implications and contributions, both to philosophy and to other areas of human concern? [10 marks]
- [OBJ]: Does the paper raise and respond well to important objections to the main argument? [10 marks]

### **Participation, worth 10%**

Students will be asked to describe and assess their participation in the course at the end of it. Their description should be no more than 2 pages and they should grade themselves out of 10. They will need to factor in how often and how well they participated in class by, for example, coming prepared for discussions with the class as a whole or with their group, engaging in active listening, and providing constructive feedback to presentations by their peers. They should also mention what they did outside of class, such as meeting with group members or sharing ideas with them via email or using tools from our OWL site.

If students are not able to come to class because of illness or for some other legitimate reason, then they can make up their absence by writing a 2-page, double-spaced reflection on the reading(s) assigned for the relevant week. They can do that at most three times.

### **COURSE SCHEDULE**

Most classes will involve discussion of a theme and philosophical papers on that theme. Time will also be allotted for individuals and groups to discuss their projects, with input from me as needed. You can think of this course as a combination of a broad overview of contemporary philosophical issues along with a specific capstone project.

Here is a tentative schedule:

#### **January 11: Introduction to the Course**

- Please come prepared to discuss possible ideas for philosophical themes that we can use to structure the course. This course is *very student driven*, so it is imperative that you engage in a proactive manner.

#### **January 18: Theme 1 and group discussion**

- The theme for this week is one I've chosen: *knowledge in the age of fake news*.
- The readings are the following:
  - Rini, R. (2017). Fake news and partisan epistemology. *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal*, 27(2), E-43.
  - Lackey, J. (2021). Echo Chambers, Fake News, and Social Epistemology. *The Epistemology of Fake News*, 206-227.

- Furman, K. (2022). Epistemic Bunkers. *Social Epistemology*, 1-11.

**January 25: Preliminary ideas for research projects and philosophical themes to discuss**

**Feb 1: Theme 2 and group discussion**

**February 8: Theme 3 and group discussion**

**February 15: Theme 4 and group discussion**

**February 22: SPRING BREAK**

**February 29: Theme 5 and group discussion**

- \*Paper proposals due

**March 7: Presentations of and responses to paper proposals**

**March 14: Theme 6 and group discussion**

**March 21: Theme 7 and group discussion**

**March 28: Theme 8 and group discussion**

- \*Final papers due

**April 4: Oral presentations of papers; group discussion**

**April 8: CLASSES END.** No assignments can be accepted after this date.

## **COURSE POLICIES**

### **A Note on Course Content**

In this course, we may be dealing with some controversial issues. While rigorous debate across differing perspectives is expected and encouraged, it is crucial that all members of the class participate respectfully and in a non-dogmatic way. In other words, you will need to be charitable toward others and their views, be open to the fact that your own views may be mistaken, and never express hatred or prejudice. If, at any point, you find that our discussions are distressing to you, then I encourage you to speak with me. Should your needs exceed my professional capacities, then I will do my best to help you find the support that you need.

### **Etiquette for Email and Classes**

Please be sure to be professional when sending emails and when participating in class. When emailing, put the course number in the subject line (Phil 4900G), include an appropriate

greeting (e.g., “Dear Professor Anderson”), and sign your name at the end so that I know who is emailing me (!).

The expectation for our classes is that you will be alert, prepared, and actively participating. To that end, you should minimize distractions (e.g., from your cell phone—silence it and keep it out of sight—and from your computer—turn off alerts that might pop up on your screen). You should have copies of the weekly material at hand and be prepared to ask or answer questions about it. 

## **DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY POLICIES**

The Department of Philosophy policies that govern the conduct, standards, and expectations for student participation in Philosophy courses are available in the Undergraduate section of the Department of Philosophy website <http://uwo.ca/philosophy/undergraduate/policies.html>. It is your responsibility to understand the policies set out by the Senate and the Department of Philosophy, and thus ignorance of these policies cannot be used as grounds of appeal.

## **UNIVERSITY POLICIES**

### **Accommodation**

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds *for any missed assessments worth 10% or more of their final grade* must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. *Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department.* Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student’s Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The UWO Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness and further information regarding this policy can be found at [http://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/accommodation\\_medical.pdf](http://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf).

*When a course requirement conflicts with a religious holiday* that requires an absence from the University or prohibits certain activities, students should request accommodation for their absence in writing at least two weeks prior to the holiday to the course instructor and/or the Academic Counselling office of their Faculty of Registration. Please consult University's list of recognized religious holidays (updated annually) at <https://multiculturalcalendar.com/ecal/index.php?s=c-univwo>.

*Students with disabilities* are encouraged to contact Accessible Education, which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The policy on Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities can be found at [https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/Academic\\_Accommodation\\_disabilities.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/Academic_Accommodation_disabilities.pdf).

### **Evaluation of Academic Performance**

At least three days prior to the deadline for withdrawal from a course without academic

penalty, students will receive an assessment of work accounting for at least 15% of their final grade. For 3000- or 4000-level courses in which such a graded assessment is impracticable, the instructor(s) must obtain an exemption from this policy from the Dean and this exemption must be noted on the corresponding course syllabus. In rare instances and at the Dean's discretion, other courses could receive a similar exemption, which also must be noted in the course syllabus.

### **Course Assignments**

The last day of scheduled classes in any course will be the last day on which course assignments will be accepted for credit in a course. Instructors will be required to return assignments to students as promptly as possible with reasonable explanations of the instructor's assessment of the assignment.

### **Academic Offences**

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_undergrad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf)

### **Plagiarism Checking**

All required papers may be subject [and will be subject in this course] to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com <http://www.turnitin.com>.

### **Support Services**

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Student Development Centre <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

*Students who are in emotional/mental distress* should refer to Mental Health@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help. Immediate help in the event of a crisis can be had by phoning 519.661.3030 (during class hours) or 519.433.2023 after class hours and on weekends.

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. *If you have experienced sexual or gender-based violence (either recently or in the past)*, you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at [https://www.uwo.ca/health/student\\_support/survivor\\_support/get-help.html](https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html). To connect with

a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact [support@uwo.ca](mailto:support@uwo.ca).