

HS3094G

Ethics and Policy Issues in Pandemic Response

University of Western Ontario
School of Health Studies

Winter 2023
Course Weight: 0.50

COURSE INFO

Tuesdays, 2:30-3:30pm ONLINE

Wednesdays, 1:30-3:20pm UCC-67

INSTRUCTOR

INSTRUCTOR Dr. Maxwell J. Smith, PhD
Assistant Professor

EMAIL maxwell.smith@uwo.ca

OFFICE HOURS **By appointment**
Sign up via email

TEACHING ASSISTANT TBA
EMAIL TBA
OFFICE HOURS Sign up via email

COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course explores and examines key controversies, decision points, and policies arising in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, with an eye toward preparing for future infectious disease outbreaks, epidemics, and pandemics. Topics will include, but are not limited to: allocating ventilators and ICU beds when demand exceeds available supply, vaccine allocation and prioritization, mandatory vaccination, immunity/vaccination certificates, the use of non-pharmaceutical interventions like lockdowns, isolation, quarantine, and travel restrictions, conducting research during public health emergencies, and preventing the creation or exacerbation of health and social inequities. This course will explore these topics through real case examples from the pandemic response locally, provincially, nationally, and globally.

At the end of the course, students will be able to:

- a. Understand the ethical and policy dimensions of prominent challenges faced during the COVID-19 pandemic
- b. Examine the ethical and policy dimensions of decisions made in response to the COVID-19 pandemic
- c. Identify and articulate key ethical and policy considerations applicable to future public health threats

PREREQUISITES

None.

Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

REQUIRED COURSE MATERIALS

There is no required textbook. Required readings and resources will be posted on OWL on a weekly basis. These resources may include relevant peer-reviewed articles, reports, government documents, media reports, websites, and videos. Students can expect 2-3 readings and/or additional website/links to explore each week. Students are responsible for all assigned readings.

As some course components are online, a strong and reliable internet connection is recommended.

LECTURES & ONLINE TUTORIALS

This course will consist primarily of lectures, student-facilitated presentations, and online tutorial discussions. Attendance and participation in lectures and online tutorials are required. The following is a tentative timetable of class topics, which is subject to modification. Students are expected to have read all assigned materials in advance of each week.

Week #	Topic
1	Course Introduction
2	Mandatory Vaccination
3	Immunity & Vaccination Certificates/Passports
4	Critical Care Triage
5	Lockdowns & Restrictive Public Health Measures
6	Use & Regulation of Unproven Therapies
7	Reading week – No classes
8	Health Care Workers’ Duty to Care
9	Setting Priorities for the Allocation of Vaccines
10	Tackling the Infodemic
11	Research During Pandemics
12	Global Governance of Pandemics
13	Living with the Virus
14	Learning Lessons

Contingency plan for an in-person class pivoting to 100% online learning:

In the event of a COVID-19 resurgence during the course that necessitates the course delivery moving away from face-to-face interaction, all remaining course content will be delivered entirely online, either synchronously (i.e., at the times indicated in the timetable) or asynchronously (e.g., posted on OWL for students to view at their convenience). The grading scheme will not change. Any remaining assessments will also be conducted online as determined by the course instructor.

Recording prohibited

Course instructors own and retain the intellectual property rights of their teaching materials. These rights extend to materials used in online settings and digital learning management systems like Owl, Zoom, and TopHat. Students do **not** have permission to make audio or video recordings of lectures, take pictures of lecture material, or distribute any course content. It is the decision of the instructor as to how and when teaching materials can be shared or used. **Unless explicitly noted otherwise, you may not make audio or video recordings of lectures – nor may you edit, re-use, distribute, or re-broadcast any of the material posted to the course website.**

The instructor will endeavour to make any modified PowerPoint slides or other materials used in class available by the beginning of each lecture. Presentations from any guest speakers may not always be shared.

ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATION

	Date	Percent of final grade
Participation	Ongoing	20%
Weekly reflections	Weekly	20%
Outline of final paper	February 17 (by 11:55pm)	15%
Final paper	March 31 (by 11:55pm)	45%

Participation

Participation refers to active engagement with your fellow students and the teaching team about course content (e.g., lecture material, assigned readings/resources, perspectives and arguments emerging in class). Unlike independent assignments (e.g., weekly reflections, the final paper), participation ensures we are exposed to different perspectives, that we are actively stimulating new ideas, discussion, and debate, and that we can explore ideas dialectically.

To participate and receive a good participation grade, it is expected that you will consistently engage in class discussions during our classes – ask questions, express your perspectives, reflect on lecture material or assigned readings/resources, or respond to the perspectives of your classmates.

We cannot expect that every student will have an opportunity to meaningfully participate in class discussion every week. For this reason, participation grades will be calculated only from your top six weekly participation marks. Additionally, for those unable to make a contribution during in-person class, you may choose to make a brief written contribution via a dedicated online forum on OWL (no longer than 100 words) as part of the online tutorial component of the course. For those choosing to participate via this option, you will be expected to respond to a question that Professor Smith verbally identifies as that week’s ‘participation question’. This ensures that your participation is related to content emerging from class discussion. If you did not participate during class and choose to avail yourself of this written alternative, your written contribution to the forum should be submitted/posted on the day of the lecture by 11:55pm. Because participation is meant to be a contribution to our collective learning and engagement with course content, these written submissions will be accessible to other students on the forum. However, there is no expectation that other students or the teaching team will respond/engage with these written contributions, but it is okay if anyone chooses to.

Participation counts toward 20% of your final grade. Participation will be graded every week, with the exception of week one. To calculate your participation grade for the course, we will take the average of your top six weekly participation marks.

In the School of Health Studies, each course instructor sets specific expectations for attendance and participation that are specific to the course, teaching objectives, and learning outcomes. Regular attendance is expected and essential for all courses, but particularly those that include participation grades in their evaluation schemes. Participation means not only attendance, but active engagement in the class, including (for example) contribution to small and large group discussions, a demonstrated effort to prepare for class by completing assigned readings before class, and following the instructor's guidelines for use of electronic devices during class time. Students who miss classes, or parts of classes, are responsible for the material they have missed. Instructors are not obliged to review the contents of missed lectures.

Persistent absenteeism may have serious repercussions and may result in you failing this course. In this course, the equivalent of 3 weeks of unexcused absences, per term, will be considered to be persistent absenteeism. Persistent absenteeism will result in you being contacted by the instructor, who may request a meeting. Continued absence after this point will be reported to the Undergraduate Chair and may result in debarment from submitting the final course paper. In such a case, you would receive a grade of zero on the evaluations from which you were debarred.

Weekly reflections

Ethics is not just about opinions. Ethics requires rigorous, coherent reasoning that is explicitly grounded in values, principles, and theories well-supported by evidence and logical arguments. Ethical positions on COVID-19 policies can therefore be well-supported or not well-supported. Consequently, it is crucial that we each come to class each week equipped with more than just our opinions. To facilitate critical engagement and reflection, and to ensure our views are grounded in explicit ethical reasoning, each week you will be expected to submit a brief reflection informed by that week's assigned readings/resources. You will be asked to respond to an online question that includes a written contribution of no more than 250 words in length. Excellent weekly reflections will demonstrate that you have thoughtfully and critically reflected on the question/topic as well as the assigned readings/resources. Your weekly reflections should serve as a starting point for our in-class discussions and potentially the development of a focus for your final paper. Anonymized weekly reflections may be referenced during lectures to stimulate discussion.

Weekly reflections count toward 20% of your final grade. Weekly reflections will be graded every week, with the exception of week one. To calculate your weekly reflections grade for the course, we will take the average of all weekly reflections.

Outline of final paper

Students will prepare and submit a 2-page outline of the course's final paper (see below) in order to receive feedback on potential avenues for further exploration. Further instructions and a rubric for evaluation will be disseminated in the first few weeks of the course.

Final paper

Students will write a final paper on a topic or issue of their choosing and examine the associated ethical and policy dimensions. Further instructions and a rubric for evaluation will be disseminated in the first few weeks of the course.

There will be no final exam.

Extensions and late assignments

In order to be fair to your peers and the instructor and teaching assistant, assignments submitted after the deadline which did not receive a written, pre-arranged approval for extension by the instructor will be penalized by 5 percentage points per day (including Saturday and Sunday) and will only be accepted up to seven days after the due date/time. If you think you will be unable to hand in an assignment on time, please contact the instructor as soon as possible.

Grading

The university-wide descriptor of the meaning of letter grades, as approved by Senate:

A+	90-100	One could scarcely expect better from a student at this level
A	80-89	Superior work that is clearly above average
B	70-79	Good work, meeting all requirements and eminently satisfactory
C	60-69	Competent work, meeting requirements
D	50-59	Fair work, minimally acceptable.
F	below 50	Fail

It is expected that the grades for this course will fall between 74-78. In the event that the course average falls outside this range, a constant may be added (or subtracted) from each student's grade, by the instructor, to bring the class average in line with school policy.

Plagiarism and other scholastic 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: https://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/PolicyPages.cfm?PolicyCategoryID=1&Command=showCategory&SelectedCalendar=Live&ArchiveID=#SubHeading_189

All required papers may be subject 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>).

English proficiency for the assignment of grades

Please see: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/exam/english.pdf

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

The undergraduate experience is rewarding and challenging socially, emotionally, and intellectually. Finding ways to balance scholarly life with our personal lives can be tough, but it's important to learn how to manage stress. Western provides several health and wellness-related services to students, which may be found at <http://www.health.uwo.ca/>. You can also check out the Campus Recreation Centre or the McIntosh Gallery (<http://www.mcintoshgallery.ca/>), for alternative spaces to reconnect with your bodies and

restore your spirit. You may also want to access local resources that are closer to where you are living during the school year. Recalibrating ourselves emotionally begins with slowing down, reminding ourselves that we are ok, and taking a few deep, slow breaths. This remarkably effective strategy brings the body from stress mode into a more relaxed state.

If you are in emotional or mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western Mental Health Support - Health & Wellness - Western University (<https://www.uwo.ca/health/psych/index.html>) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help or Thames Valley Family Services (<https://www.familyservicethamesvalley.com/>), a trusted provider within the community. To help you learn more about mental health, Western has developed an interactive mental health learning module, found here: Health & Wellness - Western University (<https://www.uwo.ca/health/>). It's also advisable to have a wellness safety plan if you don't want to reach out to formal services. Having the numbers of a few trusted individuals is another strategy.

Academic Consideration

The University recognizes that a student's ability to meet their academic responsibilities may, on occasion, be impaired by extenuating circumstances, including short-term illness or injury. Reasonable academic consideration is a cooperative process between the University, the student, and academic staff. All participants in the process must act in good faith, and fulfil their respective obligations, if it is to succeed.

Students who experience an extenuating circumstance (illness, injury, or other extenuating circumstance) sufficiently significant as to temporarily render them unable to meet academic requirements, may submit a request for academic consideration through the following routes:

- (i) For medical absences, submitting a Student Medical Certificate (SMC) signed by a licensed medical or mental health practitioner, in order to be eligible for Academic Consideration; or
- (ii) For non-medical absences, submitting appropriate documentation (e.g., obituary, police report, accident report, court order, etc.) to academic advising office in their Faculty of registration, in order to be eligible for academic consideration.

Students seeking academic consideration:

- Are advised to consider carefully the implications of postponing tests or midterm exams or delaying handing in work;
- Are encouraged to make appropriate decisions, based on their specific circumstances, recognizing that minor ailments (e.g., upset stomach) or upsets (e.g., argument with a friend) are not normally an appropriate basis for an SMC;
- **Are advised that all necessary documentation, forms, etc. are to be submitted to the academic advising office within two business days after the date specified for resuming responsibilities**

Support services

There are various support services around campus, and these include, but are not limited to:

1. Student Development Centre -- <http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/>
2. Student Health -- <https://www.uwo.ca/health/>

3. Registrar’s Office -- <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca/>
4. Ombudsperson Office -- <http://www.uwo.ca/ombuds/>

Common concerns

Concern	How to address concern
Course administrative matters	Read through the course outline or email instructor if question cannot be answered from information in the course outline
Course content questions	Refer to the OWL Resources (notes, calendar, etc). Email the instructor.
Grade disputes and requests for appeals	A student requesting an appeal to a specific course with respect to a grade for an assignment or examination must first contact their instructor to discuss such matters. Visit the following website for guide on submitting an appeal: https://uwo.ca/fhs/policies/appeals.html

EMAIL COMMUNICATION

All questions should be posted on OWL forums. Forums will be used regularly as a ‘first line’ for asking questions about course content. Students can expect questions to be answered by the instructor or teaching assistant within 48 hours, with the exception of weekends. Students are also encouraged to respond to questions to facilitate learning and share their own insights on course content. The instructor may delete posts that are deemed to be inappropriate.

Any other issues/queries (non-content-related/personal) should be done through email. If you send a message to the instructor or TA that is better suited for the forum discussion, you may not receive an email response.

In all of the above communication tools and any time you are interacting on our shared OWL website, it is expected that you will use proper grammar and punctuation. You are also expected to respect your peers, teaching assistants, and instructor in any discussion/forum or communication.

KEY DATES

Outline of final paper due	February 17
Reading week (no classes)	February 18-26
Last day to drop course without academic penalty	March 7
Final policy analysis paper due	March 31