

WESTERN UNIVERSITY
Department of Philosophy
Graduate Course Outline 2025-26

PHILOSOP 9900B
Prospectus Course

Winter Term 2026	Instructor: Robert J. Stainton
	Office: StH 3126
Class Days and Hours: Mondays 9:30 am - 12:30 pm	Office Hours: Mondays 2:00 - 3:00 pm
Classroom: TBA and online via Zoom	Phone: +1-519-617-8495
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PREREQUISITE CHECKING

There is no formal prerequisite for this course. However, it is intended for students who presently have a doctoral supervisor. What's more, ideally, students will have already completed all course work and all comprehensive/competency exams. The course is designed to be a transition point on the way to writing the doctoral thesis.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

PhD students in philosophy are required to produce a prospectus summarizing their doctoral dissertation project. They must defend the prospectus in an oral examination held by their Prospectus Committee. This prospectus must present a clear, coherent, and promising research plan.

The primary aim of the Prospectus Course is to support PhD students in developing this research plan, including drafting a clear and coherent prospectus. In this course we will discuss model prospectuses, research methods, and writing strategies. The primary focus, however, will be on student presentations and peer-led discussion of drafts of parts of the prospectus and of the prospectus as a whole. Accordingly, each member of the course must be prepared to present and share their research in a way that is intelligible to a broad philosophical audience and attend class prepared to comment constructively on the work of their peers. The instructor of this course will facilitate and support the development of the prospectus and ensure that students remain accountable to deadlines.

In addition, the Prospectus Course is designed to both aid with professionalization and to make students more consciously aware of methodological issues in philosophy.

The course is graded on a pass/fail basis. Regular attendance, participation in in-class activities, and successful and timely completion of assignments will suffice for a pass. Students enrolled in this course must have a supervisor by the time the course starts, and it is highly desirable that they have completed all other degree requirements by the time the course begins. It is expected

that students will meet regularly with their supervisor(s) while taking the course.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

The main purpose of this course is to provide a supportive and collegial environment in which to assist students in writing a draft prospectus document.

The prospectus document is a (maximum, excluding bibliography) 4500-word document (including notes) that provides a summary of the main plan for your dissertation project: the aims, the research questions, the lines of argument relied on, and the motivating philosophical context.

In addition, students who attend class regularly, do the readings, and complete the assignments will:

1. Further develop some of the skills required for conducting advanced research in philosophy (broadly understood), including the identification, analysis, clarification, and evaluation of debates, theses, and positions.
2. Hone some of the skills required for expressing philosophical concepts, positions, debates, and theses clearly and economically in writing and in conversation.
3. Have ample opportunity to present their work to, and to receive feedback from, their peers and the instructor and thereby develop important oral presentation skills.
4. Acquire a deeper appreciation of the range of topics subject to philosophical treatment and the range of methodologies used by contemporary philosophers.
5. Recognize the painful truth that producing good work in philosophy involves time, effort, and (repeated) revision!

REQUIRED TEXTS

Timothy Williamson (2020). *Philosophical Method: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 9780198810001.

\$12.99

<https://global.oup.com/academic/product/philosophical-method-9780198810001?cc=ca&lang=en&>

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1: Organization and Introduction

- Reading: Prospectus Requirements
https://www.uwo.ca/philosophy/graduate/Programs/phd_program2/prospectus.html
- Ballroom exercise: Where do you fit in with respect to figures and theories in your sub-field?
- Guest lecture by Jenny Richmond-Bravo, Doctoral Professional Development Coordinator at Western, on planning for careers outside the academy

Week 2: Introducing Philosophical Methodologies

- Reading: Timothy Williamson (2020). *Philosophical Method: A Very Short Introduction*, pp. 1-58.
- Discussion of Assignment 1: “Fearcitement”
- Discussion of Supervisor’s Responsibilities

Week 3: More on Methodology & Aims and Timelines

- Reading: Timothy Williamson (2020). *Philosophical Method: A Very Short Introduction*, pp. 59-129.
- Discussion of Assignment 2: Aims and Work Plan

Week 4: Methodology in History of Philosophy

- Reading: Christina Mercer (2019). “The Contextual Revolution in Early Modern Philosophy.” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 57(3): 529-548.

Week 5: Discussion of Sample Prospectus Documents from Previous Students

- Submission of Assignment 3: Annotated Bibliography (List of key readings)
- Submission of Assignment 4: On the Role of History

Week 6: Situate Yourself

- Discussion of Assignment 5: Literature Review (Prose version)

Week 7: Spring Reading Week. No Classes

Week 8: Research Questions and Research Tools

- In-Class Presentations (i.e., Assignment 6)

Week 9: Thesis Outline

- Discussion of Assignment 7

Week 10: Draft Prospectus, First Chapter

- Discuss Assignment 8A

Week 11: Draft Prospectus, Second Chapter

- Discuss Assignment 8B

Week 12: Complete Draft Prospectus

- Submit Assignment 9

Week 13: Revised Draft of Prospectus

- Discuss Assignment 10

End of Term: Three Minute Thesis Event

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Your grade for this course will be based on ten assignments. You will be graded on a pass/fail basis. When you submit a completed assignment, you will automatically receive a grade of pass. Some assignments will be presented and commented on by your peers as well as the instructor in class.

Assignment 1: One-Pager Describe what you find most exciting about undertaking a thesis project in philosophy here at Western, but also what is most worry-inducing for you. This assignment will not be shared with your fellow students. (No more than 500 words.)

Assignment 2: One-Pager Explain your main aims while completing the thesis, along with the steps you plan to take to achieve those aims. It is likely that one of your aims will be to defend a conclusion; where this is the case, students should briefly sketch that conclusion. Feel free to include deadlines for yourself. (No more than 500 words.)

Assignment 3: Annotated Bibliography Compile a list of the seminal readings with respect to your research question and provide a sentence or two explaining the relevance of each entry.

Assignment 4: One-Pager Explain what role the history of philosophy and/or the history of science will play in your thesis project *or* explain why historical work is not directly relevant to your specific thesis project. (No more than 500 words.)

Assignment 5: Two-Pager Situate yourself with respect to the key literature in your sub-field, i.e., as indicated in Assignment 3. (No more than 1000 words.)

Assignment 6: In-Class Presentation In not more than 15 minutes, introduce your intended research question, explain to your fellow students why it matters, and describe some of the research tools you will use to answer it. As with Assignment 2, it is not obligatory to have a working hypothesis in place, but if you have one already, feel free to introduce it too. (Students must consult with their dissertation supervisor about this assignment. They may either seek the supervisor's aid in creating the presentation, or share a revised draft post-in-class-presentation.)

Assignment 7: Dissertation Outline Regardless of whether you will be writing a monograph or a series of three integrated articles, draft a point-form outline of at least a portion of your planned thesis project. Include at least:

- An introductory section on both your aims and the nature/importance of your research question
- A methodology section
- A partial bibliography

(Students must consult with their dissertation supervisor with respect to the outline. They may either seek the supervisor's aid in creating the outline, or share a revised draft after we discuss it in class. No more than 1500 words.)

Assignment 8: Chapter Summaries Based on discussions with your dissertation supervisor, and regardless of whether you will be writing a monograph or a series of three integrated articles, submit a draft Prospectus of at least two chapters of the thesis. (No more than 1500 words.)

Assignment 9: First Draft of Prospectus This assignment will not be shared with your fellow students. (No more than 4500 words.)

Assignment 10: Revised Prospectus This assignment will be read and commented on by everyone in the course. (No more than 4500 words.)

Three Minute Thesis Presentation A 3-minute thesis event will be scheduled after the end of classes. All students in the prospectus course this term will present their 3-minute theses to the members of the department. (All other PhD students in the department be invited to present as well.) This is intended to be a proper in-person event with refreshments. The 3-minute thesis is to

consist of a single slide that will serve as the basis for a 3-minute description of your dissertation project. See here for details: <https://threeminutethesis.uq.edu.au/resources/3mt-competitor-guide>.

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.

AUDIT

Students wishing to audit the course should consult with the instructor prior to or during the first week of classes.

ELECTRONIC DEVICES

No aids are permitted for the final exam. Electronic devices of any kind (including calculators, cell phones and smart watches) are not permitted.

STATEMENT ON THE USE OF GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

In this course, students are permitted to use AI tools exclusively for information gathering and preliminary research purposes. These tools are intended to enhance the learning experience by providing access to diverse information sources. However, it is essential that students critically evaluate the obtained information, exercise independent thinking, and engage in original research to synthesize and develop their own ideas, arguments, and perspectives. The use of AI tools can serve as a starting point for exploration; however, students are expected to uphold academic integrity by appropriately attributing all sources and avoiding plagiarism. Assignments should reflect the students' own thoughts and independent written work. By adhering to these guidelines, students contribute to a responsible and ethical learning environment that promotes critical thinking, independent inquiry and allows them to produce original written contributions.

If plagiarism or unauthorized AI use is suspected, the instructor will ask for research notes and/or drafts of assignments after the assignment has been submitted. Students must keep all notes and first drafts until the assignment is returned to them.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION AND ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION

Academic Accommodation is “a means of adjusting the academic activities associated with a course or program of student in order to permit students with disabilities to participate in those activities at the University and to fulfill the essential requirements of a course or program.”

<https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academicpolicies/appeals/Academic%20Accommodation%20for%20Students%20with%20Disabilities.pdf>

Students with disabilities are encouraged to register with Accessible Education at the earliest opportunity. “Accessible Education plays a central role in Western’s efforts to ensure that its academic programs are accessible for all students”

<http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessibleeducation/index.html>

The Student Medical Certificate is available at:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf

ACADEMIC CONSIDERATION

Students may request academic consideration in cases of extenuating circumstances – that is, personal circumstances beyond the student’s control that have a substantial but temporary impact on the student’s ability to meet essential academic requirements.

1. Requests for academic consideration are made to the Academic Advising office of Faculty in which the student is registered.
2. Requests for academic consideration include the following components:
 - a. Self-attestation signed by the student;
 - b. Indication of the course(s) and assessment(s) relevant to the request;
 - c. Supporting documentation as relevant

Requests without supporting documentation are limited to one per term per course.

Documentation for medical illness, when required, includes the completion of a Western Student Medical Certificate (SMC) or, where that is not possible, equivalent documentation, by a health care practitioner. Requests linked to examinations scheduled by the Office of the Registrar during official examination periods as well as practice laboratory and performance tests typically scheduled in the last week of term always require formal supporting documentation.

Policy on Academic Consideration – Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs

RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATION

Western’s Policy on Accommodation for Religious Holidays can be found here:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_religious.pdf.

In the case of mid-term tests, notification is to be “given in writing to the instructor as early as possible, but not later than **one week** prior to the writing of the test”.

COURSE ASSIGNMENT

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.

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: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Statement on the use of plagiarism-checking software

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>).

ACADEMIC ADVISING

Your Home Faculty's Academic Advising Office will support or refer whenever you have an issue that is affecting your studies, including information on adding/dropping courses, academic considerations for absences, appeals, exam conflicts, and many other academic related matters. Do not hesitate to reach out to them if you are struggling and unsure where to go for help. Contact info for all Faculties is here: https://registrar.uwo.ca/faculty_academic_counselling.html

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western (<https://uwo.ca/health/>) 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 (24/7 availability).

GENDER-BASED AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Western University is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website: 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.