

**WESTERN UNIVERSITY**  
**DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY**  
**Undergraduate Course Outline 2026-27**

**PHILOSOP 2100A**  
**Bias, Blather, and Bullshit**

**INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION**

Information including instructor contact details and course location can be found on the course Owl BrightSpace: <https://westernu.brightspace.com/>

**PREREQUISITE CHECKING**

No prerequisites.

**DESCRIPTION**

Forty years ago, before the World Wide Web existed, and long before the launch of ChatGPT, the philosopher Harry Frankfurt wrote, in his classic essay, “On Bullshit,”

One of the most salient features of our culture is that there is so much bullshit. Everyone knows this. Each of us contributes his share. But we tend to take the situation for granted. Most people are rather confident of their ability to recognize bullshit and to avoid being taken in by it. So the phenomenon has not aroused much deliberate concern, nor attracted much sustained inquiry.

Frankfurt went on to draw a philosophical distinction between bullshit and lying, and to argue that the distinction matters.

Forty years later, bullshit is more prevalent than before, but it’s no longer true that the phenomenon hasn’t aroused much concern.

In this course, we will explore bullshit and related matters, such as bias, and lying. We will talk about the ethics of truth-telling: do you have a moral obligation to tell the truth, at least sometimes, and, if so, when, and why? We will also discuss the forms that misinformation, disinformation, and deception take in our modern culture, and strategies that those who care about the truth can employ to sift through the sometimes bewildering onslaught of untruth.

**TEXTS**

There is no textbook for the course. Course readings are made available through the course OWL Brightspace.

**OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this course, students will

- be able to distinguish between lying and bullshit
- be able to distinguish between various types of information sources
- understand the influences that shape the media messages that they see
- develop skills for distinguishing between reliable and unreliable sources of information
- understand the major philosophical positions on the ethics of lying
- understand the influences that shape the media messages that they see
- understand the major philosophical positions on the ethics of deception

- refine their own views on the ethics of deception

### **REQUIREMENTS**

Regular class attendance and participation in class discussions is required. Students are responsible for any material or information disseminated in class, and for reading all assigned reading material. In addition, students are responsible for reading any announcements made on the course Brightspace page.

### **METHOD OF EVALUATION**

There will be three in-class writing assignments, of which the lowest grade will be dropped. These are worth 30% each. There will be a final exam, scheduled during the December exam period, worth 40%.

The in-class assignments will be on Oct. 7, Nov. 4, and Nov. 18.

### **AUDIT**

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

### **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.

### **ELECTRONIC DEVICES**

No aids are permitted for any of the written assignments or the final exam. Electronic devices such as calculators, cell phones and smart watches are not permitted when responding to these assessments.

### **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/academic\\_policies/appeals/Academic%20Accommodation\\_disabilities.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/Academic%20Accommodation_disabilities.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/accessible\\_education/index.html](http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible_education/index.html)

### **SPECIAL EXAMINATIONS**

A Special Examination is any examination other than the regular examination, and it may be offered only with the permission of the Dean of the Faculty in which the student is registered, in consultation with the instructor and Department Chair. Permission to write a Special Examination may be given on the basis of compassionate or medical grounds with appropriate supporting documents. To provide an opportunity for students to recover from the circumstances resulting in a Special Examination, the University has implemented Special Examinations dates. These dates as well as other important information about examinations and academic standing can be found [here](#).

### **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](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:

[https://www.uwo.ca/biology/pdfs/undergraduate/rights-and-responsibilities/scholastic\\_discipline\\_.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/biology/pdfs/undergraduate/rights-and-responsibilities/scholastic_discipline_.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](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/gbsv/index.html>. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please [contact support@uwo.ca](mailto:contact.support@uwo.ca).

### **LEARNING DEVELOPMENT AND SUCCESS**

Counsellors at the Learning Development and Success Centre <https://learning.uwo.ca> are ready to help you improve your learning skills. They offer presentations on strategies for improving time management, multiple-choice exam preparation/writing, textbook reading, and more. Individual support is offered throughout the Fall/Winter terms in the drop-in Learning Help Centre, and year-round through individual counselling.

### **USC**

Additional student-run support services are offered by the USC, <https://westernusc.ca/services/>