

WESTERN UNIVERSITY
Department of Philosophy
Undergraduate Course Outline 2026-27

PHILOSOP 3501G
Epistemology

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

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

PREREQUISITE CHECKING

Prerequisite(s): At least 60% in 1.0 Philosophy course at the 2000-2999 level, or permission of the department.

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.

[Student Responsibility for Course Selection](#)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Problems in contemporary theory of knowledge. Topics may include epistemic justification, modern skepticism, foundationalism and coherentism, internalism and externalism, ethics of belief, epistemic probability, testimony, and social dimensions of knowledge.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- (1) Gain an understanding of central issues and positions in contemporary epistemology
- (2) Practice reading and critically evaluating philosophical texts
- (3) Enhance philosophical writing skills
- (4) Develop skills of oral expression and argument through class discussion

COURSE SCHEDULE

The course will be broken into four main units:

Knowledge and Skepticism: What is knowledge? Is it possible to know anything? Does knowledge require certainty? How do you know that you aren't radically deceived about what the world is actually like?

Justification: What does it take for a belief to be justified? Relatedly, what counts as evidence in favor of a belief? Are there some beliefs that don't depend on other beliefs for their justification? Do we need to be aware of our justification for holding a belief, or can some beliefs have a justification that we are unaware of?

The Ethics of Belief: Is what we believe under our control? Or is belief involuntary? Can people be held responsible for what they believe? Is it ever permissible to believe against your evidence? Are we ever obligated to form certain beliefs? Are beliefs morally evaluable?

Social Epistemology: Can you know that something is true just because someone told you so? How should you respond to the fact that many equally smart and well-informed people disagree with you? How do oppressive social forces hinder the transmission of knowledge? How do technologies such as social media, search engines, and deepfakes help or hinder the transmission of knowledge?

TEXTS

The schedule of reading assignments will be available on the OWL Brightspace site

METHOD OF EVALUATION

A midterm exam with short answer and essay questions (25%)

Final paper outline and in-class peer review session (5%)

Final paper (30%)

Five reading responses (5% each)

Participation (15%)

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 electronic devices or aids of any kind will be permitted during the midterm exam.

STATEMENT ON THE USE OF GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

In this course, the use of any generative AI (e.g. automatic translation tools, grammar checkers, ChatGPT...) is prohibited. If unauthorized AI use is suspected, the instructor will ask for research notes, rough drafts, essay outlines, and other materials used in preparing assignments. Students are expected to **retain** these materials until after final grades have been entered. In the unlikely event of concerns being raised about the authenticity of any assignment, students may be asked to produce these materials; an inability to do so may weigh heavily against them. The point of the assignments and activities is to help you practice thinking; you waste everyone's time if you outsource that to an LLM. Please feel free to reach out at any point in the semester (the sooner the better) if you have any questions concerning which tools are appropriate to use in

support of your academic writing.

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%20Accommodationdisabilities.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”

https://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.

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

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/gbsv/index.html>. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.