

**THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
Course Outline 2026-27**

Philosophy 4210F/9400: Philosophy of Language Survey

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Fall Term 2026	Instructor: R. Stainton
Day and Time: M 10:30-12:30, W 10:30-11:30 am	Office Location: StvH Room 3126
Classroom: Course location can be found on the course Owl BrightSpace: https://westernu.brightspace.com/	Office Hours: TBA
	E-mail: rstainto@uwo.ca

COURSE DESCRIPTION

An introductory survey of theories of linguistic meaning, drawing principally on classic articles in Analytic philosophy of language which have served as a foundation. Topics will include: reference, truth conditions and possible worlds; assertions and other speech acts; speakers' reference; conversational implicature; metaphor; indexicals and demonstratives; pragmatic determinants of what is said.

Authors may include: J.L. Austin, Emma Borg, Robyn Carston, Donald Davidson, Keith Donnellan, H. Paul Grice, David Kaplan, Saul Kripke, David Lewis, John Searle, Dan Sperber & Deirdre Wilson, and Catherine Wearing.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

The main objectives are to fine-tune students' skills as linguists and philosophers, and to introduce key concepts, positions and arguments in semantics/pragmatics. The focus, as noted, will be on philosophical foundations.

To make these objectives achievable, students should have a background in at least one of philosophy or linguistics. It is not required that students have both, but it would be extremely difficult for a student with background in neither to master the skills and information in play.

COURSE SCHEDULE

I. Introduction

Aims and Logistics

Background: Frege and Russell

II. Varieties of Reference

Peter Strawson, "On Referring"

*Keith Donnellan, "Reference and Definite Descriptions"

Saul Kripke, "Speaker's Reference and Semantic Reference"

David Kaplan, "Demonstratives"

III. Assertion and Other Speech Acts

*J.L. Austin, "Performative Utterances"

David Lewis, "Scorekeeping in a Language Game"

IV. Pragmatics and What Is Said

H.P. Grice, "Logic and Conversation"

Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, "Précis of *Relevance*"

John Perry, "Thought without Representation"

John Searle, "Literal Meaning"

*Emma Borg, "Minimalism versus Contextualism in Semantics"

V. Metaphor

Donald Davidson, "What Metaphors Mean"

Catherine Wearing, "Metaphor and What Is Said"

VI. Final Review

TEXTS

M. Ezcurdia and R.J. Stainton (eds.)(2013) *The Semantics-Pragmatics Boundary in Philosophy*.
Peterborough, ON: Broadview.

CAD73.75

<https://broadviewpress.com/product/the-semantics-pragmatics-boundary-in-philosophy/#tab-description>

METHOD OF EVALUATION

In-Class Participation: 15%

In-Class Team Debate: 15%

Three "Briefing Notes": 30%

Take-Home Final Exam: 40%

- *Participation*: Because a main aim is inculcation of skills in philosophical and linguistic discussion, attendance and participation are mandatory. Students who regularly miss classes without justification will be requested to withdraw.
- *Debates*: Students will be divided into teams of about four or five, and each team will be assigned either the "pro" or "con" side of a resolution. There will be a group score which will then be modified based on peer reports of the individual student's contribution to the group.

- *Briefing Notes:* At the outset of the relevant classes, students will hand in two to three pages of typewritten notes on the chapter assigned. 750-1000 words is appropriate. These “briefing notes” will explain the main aims of the text and the main means by which those aims are met. In the usual case, the article’s main aim will be to establish a conclusion, and the main means will be via an argument, but there can be exceptions. Outlining these means/aims is to be sharply contrasted with describing, sub-section by sub-section, what the author covers in the text. Use of secondary sources is encouraged but not required.
- *Final Exam:* The exam, which will be scheduled during the formal exam period, will cover overarching themes from the entire class and will be essay-based. Its aim is to help students synthesize the material in the various readings and lectures into a coherent whole.

Submission instructions

- All written work must be submitted via the Assignment tab on OWL for plagiarism checking and also submitted in hard copy, either in class or via the Philosophy Drop Box outside the Philosophy office.
- Late submissions will not be accepted without explicit prior permission of the instructor. There is no “late penalty”.

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.

STATEMENT ON THE USE OF GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

Use of ChatGP and other AI tools is not permitted. 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%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.

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

PLAGIARISM CHECKING

In addition to submitted hard copies of assignments for grading, all required papers must also be submitted 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](#) and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you have experienced gender-based or sexual violence (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts, [here](#). To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

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.