

WESTERN UNIVERSITY
Department of Philosophy
Undergraduate Course Outline 2026-27

PHILOSOPHY 2500F:
Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

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

COURSE DESCRIPTION

All areas of philosophy— along with every other field of human knowledge—depend on assumptions about the nature of knowledge. The theory of knowledge, or epistemology, poses the most basic questions about knowledge: What can humans really know about the world? How do we come to know what we know? How do we distinguish genuine knowledge from mere opinion or belief? How can we trust the knowledge claims of other people, as well as our own. The theory of knowledge thus has metaphysical, psychological, and social dimensions as well as directly epistemological ones. This course considers some of the most important problems in the theory of knowledge, from a selection of classical and contemporary viewpoints. In this way we will gain some insight into the origins, motivations, and evolution of these problems as well as their implications for contemporary thought. Topics will include the nature of perception, the relation between sense and reason, scepticism and certainty, trust in the testimony others, deductive and non-deductive inference, and the role of a priori principles in our common sense and scientific knowledge. Although there are no formal prerequisites, some prior familiarity with philosophical texts will be assumed.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. To study classic and contemporary texts in the theory of knowledge
2. To understand the role of epistemological questions in knowledge generally
3. To understand and critically evaluate knowledge claims
4. To develop competence in critical analysis by careful reading and discussion
5. To develop skills of oral expression and argument through class discussion
6. To develop writing skills through written assignments

COURSE SCHEDULE

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

TEXTS

The assigned texts are classic essays or book excerpts from history of epistemology. They will be available on the OWL Brightspace site ***at no cost to the student.***

METHOD OF EVALUATION

Two midterm exams (each 25% of final mark)
Final essay exam (40% of final mark)
Attendance and regular participation in class discussion (10% of final mark)

The midterms will be written outside of class time, at dates and times to be announced. This is a designated assessment. That means you will be permitted to write a makeup only on the recommendation of the academic counselling office of your faculty. They will require documentation. The makeup exams will be scheduled one week after each midterm.

Regarding special consideration in completing assignments, please see “Accommodation” and “Academic Consideration” (below).

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)

Assignments in this course are intended to help students develop the skills of understanding and reflecting on philosophical arguments, interpreting philosophical texts, developing their own arguments, and expressing their ideas clearly and coherently. All submissions, therefore, 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.

In this course, the use of AI (automatic translation tools, grammar checkers, ChatGPT...) is prohibited. The use of such tools will be treated in the same way as any other form of plagiarism. 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.

ACCOMMODATION

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department. Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The UWO Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness and further information regarding this policy can be found at

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

The Student Medical Certificate is available [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

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