

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

**PHILOSOP 4310F  
Scientific Realism**

**Cross-listed with PHILOSOP 9225**

**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: at least 60% in 1.0 Philosophy course at the 2000-2999 level, or permission of the department.

**DESCRIPTION**

Scientific realism is, roughly, the position that the theoretical posits of science should be taken literally, even if they seem to refer to things that are not directly observable, and that acceptance of a scientific theory involves acceptance of these posits as really existing. It is contrasted with various forms of anti-realism, including an instrumentalist view according to which a scientific theory should be taken to be no more than a systematic way of relating observable phenomena. Discussions about scientific realism, pro and con, have occupied a major part of philosophy of science during the past 50 years, and the discussion continues. This course is an introduction to those discussions. Readings will include some of the influential contributions to these discussions.

**TEXTS**

Selected readings, available on the course Brightspace page.

**OBJECTIVES**

Students will be able to identify the main tenets of scientific realism, and explain the motivations of various forms of anti-realism. Students will be able to recognize the main forms of scientific realism and critically evaluate them. This will form a basis of forming judgments about the credibility of scientific claims.

**REQUIREMENTS**

Weekly class attendance and active participation in class discussions is required. Students are responsible for reading the assigned texts and for coming to class prepared to discuss them. In addition, there will be two tests, and a final project.

**METHOD OF EVALUATION**

There will be two tests, a midterm and a final. In addition, students will submit, at the end of term, a course project on a course-related topic of their choosing. Details to be discussed in class.

Students will submit a draft of their course project, and will resubmit a revised version after receiving comments.

Midterm, Oct 27	30%
Final, exam period, date TBD	30%
Course project draft, due Nov. 19	10%
Course project, final version, due Dec. 9	30%

### **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.

### **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

### **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.

### **ACADEMIC 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)

### **PLAGIARISM CHECKING**

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>.

### **STATEMENT ON THE USE OF GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)**

The use of generative AI on assignments is prohibited unless permission is explicitly granted in the assignment instructions. For assignments on which use of generative AI is permitted, students who use generative AI must disclose this use and submit a transcript of their interactions with the AI program along with the assignment. Undisclosed use of generative AI will be treated as an academic offense.

Any unauthorized use of generative AI will be treated as an academic offense. 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.

### **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.