

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
Undergraduate Course Outline 2015-2016

Philosophy 2500F: Introduction to Theory of Knowledge

Fall Term 2015
W 12:30-2:30, F 1:30-2:30

Instructor: Prof. Gillian Barker
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DESCRIPTION

This course is an introduction to epistemology or theory of knowledge. The course will focus on the core questions of epistemology: What is knowledge? What, if anything, do we know? How do we know it? More specific topics include the nature of perception, belief, justification and truth; the sources of knowledge; skeptical questions concerning the extent of our knowledge; and the role of social context as reflected in debates about relativism, social construction, and feminist epistemology. In the first half of the course we will explore the history of epistemological thought in Western philosophy, from its roots in Ancient philosophical thought through the Early Modern debates between Rationalists and Empiricists and responses to these, and more recently to American Pragmatism and Logical Positivism. In the second half, we will turn to the contemporary scene, looking at central epistemological debates from the mid-twentieth century to the present, with a focus on debates about the nature of knowledge (a topic of renewed controversy!), naturalized epistemology, theories of truth, and whether justification depends on factors internal or external to the mind of the knower.

TEXTS

Our main source of readings will be *Human Knowledge: Classical & Contemporary Approaches*, edited by Paul K. Moser and Arnold Van der Nat, and *An Introduction to Epistemology* by Jack S. Crumley III. A few additional readings will be supplied as we go along.

OBJECTIVES

This course has three main aims. The first is to acquaint students at an introductory level with the core questions, theories and arguments of classical and contemporary epistemology in the Western philosophical tradition. The second is to give students training and practice in the basic skills of philosophy, including following, analyzing and evaluating logically-complex arguments, contributing to fruitful exploratory discussions and debates with their peers employing the tools of philosophical thought, and constructing clear and cogent arguments in a philosophical idiom. The third is to provide students with the opportunities and models that they need to begin to do some epistemological investigation themselves—to make sense of the large-scale relationships among philosophical ideas about knowledge, to identify and weigh philosophical problems, and to formulate substantial original philosophical claims and defend them both orally and in writing.

REQUIREMENTS

The class format will consist of lecture and discussion. Discussion will be an important element of the course, so it is important that you stay on top of the reading and do some thinking about it before class. Course requirements include active participation, several short informal writing exercises, two short (4 page) papers, a longer (7 page) final paper, and a short-essay final exam. They are weighted as follows:

Participation.....	10%
Informal Writing.....	20%
Short Paper	20%
Exam.....	25%
Final Paper.....	25%

AUDIT

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

The **Department of Philosophy Policies** which govern the conduct, standards, and expectations for student participation in Philosophy courses is available in the Undergraduate section of the Department of Philosophy website at <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.

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.