

## Introduction to Theory of Knowledge

Phil 2500F (Section 001), University of Western Ontario. Undergraduate Course. (Summer evening)

### Information:

Instructor: Jon P. Marsh <jmarsh26@uwo.ca>. Office hour(s): 6:00-7:00 PM, on Tu and Th, in Stevenson, Rm: 4126.  
Class meetings: Tu and Th, 7:00-10:00 PM, in P&AB-148. **Prerequisite(s)/ Antirequisite(s): None.**

### Description:

According to one ancient philosophical tradition, ignorance — the lack of knowledge — is the only genuine evil. Whether or not this is right, knowledge is widely regarded as essential to a well-lived life, and has some title to being called “the chief cognitive state to which we aspire” (Zagzebski, 1996: 1).

But what is knowledge? And what makes it so special? These will be our guiding questions. Although both questions go back to Plato, emphasis will be placed on early modern and contemporary answers. A third question we will consider is whether we have any knowledge. This will take us to the problem of skepticism.

### Methods:

Teaching methods will involve lectures, on some days, and more dialogue-oriented sessions, on others. We will also benefit from occasional learning workshops, for example, on how to write a philosophy paper. Finally, we will watch video clips, such as excerpts from the *The Matrix* (1999), when we discuss skepticism.

### Text:

Zagzebski, Linda. *On Epistemology*. 2009. Wadsworth. First Edition. ISBN-13: 978-0534252342 (**required**).  
Publisher’s listed price: 14.25 USD.

N.B. Any supplementary readings will be made available on OWL, where you will also find a reading schedule.

### Requirements:

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|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| • Attendance/participation           | 15%                                 |
| • Classroom exercise grade           | 15%                                 |
| • Précis and short reflection pieces | 5% (1 page, or less, double-spaced) |
| • Paper                              | 30% (Due 7/18)                      |
| • Exam                               | 35 % (Date: TBA)                    |

Detailed assignment instructions and dates will be posted on OWL <https://owl.uwo.ca/portal>.

### Outcomes:

By the time we are finished, you will have achieved a basic understanding of the core questions, controversies and positions within the philosophy of knowledge, as it has been practiced in the Western intellectual tradition. You will also have greatly improved your capacity to clearly and intelligently present and defend your own thoughts in this domain.

### Evaluation/Explanation of Grades:

All assignments will be accompanied with clear directions. Students will be evaluated in accordance with how well they follow them. For university wide undergraduate grade descriptors/explanations of grades, please follow this link [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/general/grades\\_undergrad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/general/grades_undergrad.pdf)

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**Additional Information:**

Students are directed to view the **Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness** (<https://studentservices.uwo.ca/secure/index.cfm>).

**Policy on accommodation for medical illness of work worth less than 10% of the total course grade:**

Medical documentation will be required; such documentation must be submitted by the student directly to the appropriate Faculty Dean's office and not to the instructor. It will be the Dean's office that will determine if accommodation is warranted.

**Policy on 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: [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_undergrad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf).

**Support Services:**

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.

**Statement on Use of Plagiarism 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>).

**Statement on Use of Electronic Devices:**

The use of electronic devices will not be permitted for the final exam in this course. **Nor, for this course, are they permitted during video or class dialogue sessions.**

**Additional Links:**

Registrarial Services (<http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>)

Student Support Services (<http://westernusc.ca/services/>)

**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://www.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.

**Video/Audio Recording:**

Some class members would be uncomfortable having their faces and/or voices recorded. For this reason, recording any portion of any of our sessions, whether in video and/or audio form, is strictly prohibited.