

**WESTERN UNIVERSITY**  
**DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY**  
**Undergraduate Course Outline 2020-21**

**Philosophy 2557F:**  
**Existentialism**

**Fall 2020**  
**Synchronous Thurs. 3:30-5:30**  
**Also with Asynchronous content**

**Instructor: Helen Fielding**  
**Office Number, Office Hours: TBA**  
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**DESCRIPTION**

Existentialists define who we are through what we do and how we live our lives. We cannot turn to external sources such as religion, morals, or public opinion to tell us what to do, or how to find meaning. That is our task in life. This does not mean we are not responsible for others, for the environment, or for ourselves. But there is no formula for how to accomplish this responsibility, which can be both terrifying and freeing. In this course we will turn to classic existentialists such as Simone de Beauvoir, Friedrich Nietzsche, Franz Fanon and Martin Heidegger, who raise these fundamental existential questions. We will also read works from a few contemporary thinkers who existentially explore our ecological relations as well as the limits of freedom such as racialization, sexuality and gender. We will explore how to find meaning in our everyday existence, which is marked by the paradox of seeming to have limitless choice at the same time as there is external pressure to succeed and conform. Ultimately, we learn from these thinkers that there are no absolute truths, yet that does not mean that all truths are relative, that there is no right or wrong. Our responsibility is to find our own path in a world we share with others.

**TEXTS**

- Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (New York: Citadel Press, 1962, 2000). In bookstore.
- Other readings will be made available on OWL.
- Fun but not required reading—perhaps good summer reading, Sarah Bakewell, *At the Existentialist Café* (New York: Other Press, 2016)

**OBJECTIVES**

This course will enable students to:

- Understand the fundamentals of the existentialist tradition
- Learn how to apply an existentialist approach
- Think about the ways we are responsible for the decisions we make and do not make
- Develop reading, questioning and critical writing skills
- Improve oral communication skills

**REQUIREMENTS**

**Evaluation**

Text Analysis	20%	(4-5 double-spaced pages) Due Oct. 15, 2020
Final Essay	30%	(6-7 double-spaced pages) Due Dec. 3, 2020

Forum Participation	20%
Final exam	30%

**Forum Participation Grade:** each week students will be assigned to post a discussion question on the forum on the Friday after the Thursday class for the week's readings. The question should be open and invite discussion. Each student will post 2 questions over ten weeks of class. Other students will be assigned as a small group to discuss the question over the week, ending on the Wednesday the following week. The question asker will then summarize the discussion and provide a synopsis of the main ideas. The two questions with synopsis are worth 5% each. Another 10% is reserved for participation in group discussions.

**Submission Guidelines:**

- In conformity with departmental policy, all written work must be submitted to *turnitin.com* accessed through OWL
- Late papers will be penalized 2 percentage points per day late.

The grade for any missed assignments worth less than 10% will be added to the final exam. I.e. the final exam will be worth more of the final grade.

**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** 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.

**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 [http://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/accommodation\\_medical.pdf](http://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf).

**SELF-REPORTED ABSENCE FORM**

Students who experience an unexpected illness or injury or an extenuating circumstance (48 hours or less) that is sufficiently severe to temporarily render them unable to meet academic requirements (e.g., attending lectures or labs, writing tests or midterm exams, completing and submitting assignments, participating in presentations) should self-declare using the online Self-Reported Absence portal. This option should be used in situations where the student expects to resume academic responsibilities within 48 hours or less.

The following conditions are in place for self-reporting of medical or extenuating circumstances:  
[http://westerncalendar.uwo.ca/PolicyPages.cfm?Command=showCategory&PolicyCategoryID=1&SelectedCalendar=Live&ArchiveID=#SubHeading\\_322](http://westerncalendar.uwo.ca/PolicyPages.cfm?Command=showCategory&PolicyCategoryID=1&SelectedCalendar=Live&ArchiveID=#SubHeading_322)

### **EVALUATION OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE**

At least three days prior to the deadline for withdrawal from a course without academic penalty, students will receive assessment of work accounting for at least 15% of their final grade. For 3000- or 4000-level courses in which such a graded assessment is impracticable, the instructor(s) must obtain an exemption from this policy from the Dean and this exemption must be noted on the corresponding course syllabus. In rare instances and at the Dean's discretion, other courses could receive a similar exemption, which also must be noted in the course syllabus.

### **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:  
[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)

### **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>.

### **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.

THIS OUTLINE IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE, GIVEN SUFFICIENT PRIOR NOTICE