

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
Undergraduate Course Outline 2022-23

Philosophy 1040G Ethics, Law, and Politics

Winter Term 2023	Instructor: Prof. T. Isaacs
Date/Time: Tues and Thurs 11:30-12:20	Office: StvH
Tutorials: day/time as per your section – please attend only your assigned section each week (Required)	Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 2-3 p.m. and by appointment
Location: SEB 1059	Email: tisaacs@uwo.ca

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In our everyday experiences, we are confronted by situations in which we have to decide what is right, and what is wrong. Broadly, we can think of these as ethical “moments”, where we have to make a certain kind of judgment: normative or moral judgment. We ask: what is morally permissible in these circumstances? What is morally obligatory? What is forbidden? The answers that we give are important – they will guide our actions, or we may use them to evaluate the actions of others. Either way, they will determine what counts as a right action, or who is a good person.

Politics and law sometimes generate very similar experiences – we ask ourselves whether an action is legal or illegal, which tax or environmental policy is the best for the country, whether the government has done something to violate our rights, and so on. There are many instances where ethics, law and politics intersect.

Consider:

- Pandemic response: Are there any limits to what our various levels of government may require of us during a global pandemic (such as COVID-19) in order to protect the public health?
- Medical Assistance in Death: When is medical assistance in dying (MAID) a reasonable and justifiable choice?
- Sex Work: So what if someone wants to sell their body for sex?
- Food Waste: What’s so bad about throwing out perfectly good food?
- Eating Animals: Is it okay for humans to use animals for food (and to treat farm animals differently from pets)?
- Community Policing: How do we, as a community, respond to evidence of structural discrimination within police forces?

What do all of these issues have in common? Each has an ethical, legal, and political dimension. In this course, we will consider these and other topics with a view to understanding the ways in which ethics, law and politics intersect, and the ways in which they can sometimes pull in different directions. We will start by having a look at the Canadian Constitution, and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in particular. The Constitution sets the framework in which law and politics are played out – it also embodies and enshrines various values that sound very much like ethical commitments. We will also consider how law and politics differ from what may seem the more personal, or at least less enforceable, sphere of ethics. As we examine the ethical, legal, and political dimensions of these issues through written work, in-class / tutorial discussion, activities and assignments, we'll learn:

- how to produce good, clear philosophical analysis
- how to apply, develop, and defend multiple perspectives
- how to provide and articulate convincing arguments in support of our conclusions

TEXTS

Assigned readings will include a combination of scholarly journal articles and internet resources to be made available to you through the course website on OWL. You will find all readings in the Course Readings tool on the OWL site, clearly tagged with the date and topic.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of the course, students who have done the readings, completed the assignments, and attended class will be able to:

- Explain, orally and in writing, the difference between an ethical, legal, and political approach to issues.
- Identify and evaluate arguments expressing diverse points of view in relation to course topics
- Construct strong arguments in support of well-reasoned conclusions
- Approach and analyze new topics and contexts from ethical, legal, and political standpoints.

In addition, students will develop their written, oral, and critical skills in these ways:

- By doing tutorial homework assignments and engaging in tutorial discussions through the term, students will develop skills of critical analysis, critical writing, and interactive engagement with others concerning course material.
- By participating in in-class discussions (in both large and small groups), students will become stronger and more confident speakers.
- Through philosophical essays designed to promote the synthesizing and consolidating of course material, students will sharpen their critical writing and critical thinking skills.

REQUIREMENTS

1. **Three** 1000-word philosophy essays (15% each=45%)

In each paper, you will engage in critical philosophical analysis and argument, requiring you to develop and defend your position on an issue we discuss in class. You will receive detailed instructions and a list of topics to choose from for each of these essays.

DUE DATES: February 7; March 7; April 6

2. Tutorial homework assignments and tutorial attendance (20%)
Each week you will have a one-hour tutorial to attend. It will be **at a scheduled time**. The homework and assignments for tutorials will vary from week-to-week, but will typically involve a short written component that you complete in advance, followed by an “in-class” oral component, drawing on the homework and involving work/discussion in small groups. Details of homework to be provided. Weekly tutorial attendance is required.
3. Final Examination (30%). To be held on campus during the final examination period (April 13-30, 2023). The date, time, and location to be announced when the Office of the Registrar releases the examination schedule. Please do not arrange travel between April 13-30 until you know when your exams are scheduled and can be sure to be present for any in-person examinations.

AUDIT

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

POLICIES

ATTENDANCE

You are expected to attend all lectures and required to attend your weekly tutorial with homework completed.

LATE PENALTIES

Essays are due to the OWL site under the relevant assignment **by 5 p.m. on the due date**. Essays arriving after the due date will be penalized 3 points per day for one week. After one week they will receive a grade of zero (in the absence of documentation supporting otherwise, of course—see “Accommodation” and “Self-Reported Absence,” below).

EMAIL

My preference is always to meet with students face-to-face (whether in my office or on Zoom or some such platform), during office hours or by appointment. If you have a minor matter that requires a brief response, or you would like to arrange an appointment to see me outside of office hours, feel free to e-mail me (tisaacs@uwo.ca). I’ll do my best to get back to you quickly, and certainly within a day or two. If you don’t hear from me within a couple of days, that means your message got lost in the shuffle and I urge you to try me again.

PREREQUISITES

“Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your

Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.”

This course has no prerequisite.

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY POLICIES

The **Department of Philosophy Policies**, which govern the conduct, standards, and expectations for student participation in Philosophy courses are 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.

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.

ACCOMMODATION

Students with disabilities work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here: [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#)

ACADEMIC CONSIDERATION FOR STUDENT ABSENCE

For Western University policy on Consideration for Student Absence, see:

[Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness – Undergraduate Students](#)

and for the Student Medical Certificate (SMC), see:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf

RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATION

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is given in the [Western Academic Calendar](#).

EVALUATION OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

At least three days prior to the deadline for withdrawal from a 1000- or 2000-level course without academic penalty, students will receive assessment of work accounting for at least 15%

of their final grade. Generally, students can expect some form of feedback on their performance in a course before the drop date. In rare instances, at the Dean's discretion, an exemption can be issued, 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, as outlined in the policy [Scholastic Discipline for Undergraduate Students](#).

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>).

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/>
- Health and Wellness: <http://www.uwo.ca/health/>
- Support options for survivors of gender-based and sexual violence: https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/disclose.html
- Your Home Faculty's Academic Counselling or Academic Advising Office will support or refer whenever you have an issue that is affecting your studies. 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

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to [Health and Wellness](#) 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.