

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
Department of Philosophy

PHILOSOP 2356G
Philosophy and Climate Change

PREREQUISITES

None

COURSE DESCRIPTION

A well-known philosopher identified the central questions of philosophy as: What can I know? What must I do? What may I hope? In this course we will look at these questions as they arise in connection with climate change, not with an aim to finding definitive answers to them, but with the goal of developing skills to help us deal with these questions in the face of an ever-changing climatic and political situation.

We are none of us experts in all aspects of climate change (not even climate scientists!). We must to some extent rely on others in deciding what to believe about scientific matters, such as climate change. This poses the problem of navigating the often bewildering web of information, misinformation, and disinformation about climate change. We will discuss the nature of evidence in science, and the ways that messages in the media get shaped by various forces in society.

Climate change also raises questions of what actions are to be taken. We will explore issues of personal responsibility (should we focus on personal lifestyle choice?) and collective responsibility.

There is a tendency in some presentations to talk as if it is too late for meaningful action. We will face this sense impending doom, and raise the question: what kind of future is possible?

No background in climate science will be assumed; in the first weeks we will go over the basics of contemporary climate science.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will be able to explain the basic conclusion of contemporary climate science, and the nature of the evidence for those conclusions. They will be able to identify and employ strategies for distinguishing reliable and unreliable information on the internet. They will be able to describe the major approaches to thinking about the relation between individual and collective responsibility. They will be able to present, and critically evaluate, ethical arguments that arise in the context of climate change.

COURSE SCHEDULE

The course material will consist of four modules.

Module 1 (2 weeks)

What can we know? Introduction to climate science

Module 2 (5 weeks)

What should we do? Ethics of climate change

Module 3 (2 weeks)

What can we know? Climate change, media, and public relations

Module 4 (2 weeks)

What may we hope? Prospects for change

TEXTS

Assigned materials available on OWL Brightspace.

There is no textbook or other materials to be purchased for this course.

METHOD OF EVALUATION

Students are required to attend class and participate in class discussion, and are responsible for all information conveyed in class. There is no attendance mark for class attendance.

There are 3 short assignments; of these, the lowest grade will be dropped.

Each student will do a course project; details to be discussed in class. Each student will provide feedback on three of their classmates' course project.

Drafts of the course projects are due on March 12. Instructor will assign a preliminary grade and provide feedback. Students will have the option of revising their projects in light of feedback, and resubmitting it by April 4.

There are two tests, a midterm test, held in class on Wednesday, Feb. 26, and a final exam scheduled by the Registrar during the December exam period. Students who, for acceptable reasons, miss the midterm must contact their academic counsellor no later than 48 hours after the test, and preferably, if circumstances permit, before the test. There will be a make-up midterm at a time and date to be announced, approximately one week after the midterm.

Students are expected to be familiar with the policy on academic consideration:

https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration_Sep24.pdf

Short Assignments (9% each; drop lowest)	18%
# 1, due Jan. 29	
# 2, due Mar. 5	
# 3, due Mar. 26	
Course project. Draft due Mar. 12; final version due Apr. 4	24%
Review of classmates' course projects, due Mar. 19	3%
Tests:	
Midterm, Feb. 26, in class	25%
Final, exam period, date TBA	30%

Assignments will be submitted online via OWL Brightspace. Late assignments will be penalized 5% per day late. In conformity with departmental policy all written assignments must be submitted to turnitin.com for plagiarism checking by the due date. Assignments not submitted to turnitin by the due date will be counted as late, and students will not receive credit for written assignments not submitted to turnitin.com.

No assignments will be accepted after the last day of classes, April 4, 2025.

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.

AUDIT

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

ELECTRONIC DEVICES

Students are permitted to bring laptops or other electronic devices to class for the purpose of taking notes. Use of these devices during class for purposes not related to the course is not permitted. Students who wish to record lectures must receive permission from the instructor; recording without permission is not permitted.

No aids are permitted for the exams. Electronic devices of any kind (including calculators, cell phones and smart watches) are not permitted.

STATEMENT ON THE USE OF GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

All assignments are to be your own work. You are permitted to use a spell checker or grammar software, but you are not permitted to use generative AI language modules such as ChatGPT. Submitting work that contains text generated by software counts as plagiarism and is an academic offence. 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

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 https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration.pdf

The Student Medical Certificate is available at

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

ACADEMIC CONSIDERATION

Students may request academic consideration in cases of extenuating circumstances – that is, personal circumstances beyond the student’s control that have a substantial but temporary impact on the student’s ability to meet essential academic requirements.

1. Requests for academic consideration are made to the Academic Advising office of Faculty in which the student is registered.
2. Requests for academic consideration include the following components:
 - a. Self-attestation signed by the student;
 - b. Indication of the course(s) and assessment(s) relevant to the request;
 - c. Supporting documentation as relevant

Requests without supporting documentation are limited to one per term per course.

Documentation for medical illness, when required, includes the completion of a [Western Student Medical Certificate \(SMC\)](#) or, where that is not possible, equivalent documentation, by a health care practitioner. Requests linked to examinations scheduled by the Office of the Registrar during official examination periods as well as practice laboratory and performance tests typically scheduled in the last week of term always require formal supporting documentation.

Policy on Academic Consideration – Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs

RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATION

Western’s Policy on Accommodation for Religious Holidays can be found here:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_religious.pdf.

In the case of mid-term tests, notification is to be “given in writing to the instructor as early as possible, but not later than **one week** prior to the writing of the test”.

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.

SCHOLASTIC 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

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>).

ACADEMIC ADVISING

Your Home Faculty's Academic Advising Office will support or refer whenever you have an issue that is affecting your studies, including information on adding/dropping courses, academic considerations for absences, appeals, exam conflicts, and many other academic related matters. 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

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western (<https://uwo.ca/health/>) 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 (24/7 availability).

GENDER-BASED AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Western University [is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence](#) (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website: https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.