

WESTERN UNIVERSITY
Department of Philosophy
Undergraduate Course Outline 2025-26

PHILOSOP 2037G
Philosophy and Artificial Intelligence

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Information including instructor contact details and course location can be found on the course Owl BrightSpace: <https://westernu.brightspace.com/>

PREREQUISITE CHECKING

No 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.

[Student Responsibility for Course Selection](#)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Will robots take all our jobs? Will humans become cyborgs? As we rely more and more on machines and other new technologies, they are changing how we interact with the world and one another. In this course we will consider the impact of artificial intelligence on our current lives, and on our future. It has been said that “Philosophy will be the key that unlocks artificial intelligence”—presumably for the better. On the other hand, the Oxford philosopher Nick Bostrom has warned that advances in superintelligence may soon make humans obsolete. Who should we believe? This course will address these and other issues by (1) coming to better understand the technology itself; (2) exploring the traditional philosophical problems it raises, e.g. Can machines think, or be conscious, or have rights?; and (3) grappling with the significant ethical and social issues raised by the rapid deployment of this new technology.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

The goal of this course is to familiarize students with some of the philosophical challenges posed by advances in the field of artificial intelligence (AI). By the end of the course, students will have a better understanding of the nature and scope of AI and the metaphysical, ethical and social implications of various forms and applications of AI. Students will also be in a position to take more advanced courses in a number of different areas of philosophy, including but not limited to, Philosophy of Science, Philosophy of Technology, Philosophy of Mind, and Ethics.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Tentative:

Week 1: Turing machines and the foundations of computing

Week 2: Neural networks

Week 3: Basics of machine learning: statistical analysis

Week 4: Basics of LLMs: next token prediction
Week 5: Review of above materials, Friday in-class exam
Week 6: Foundations of Ethics
Week 7: Reading Week
Week 8: Foundations of Justice
Week 9: Foundations of Economics
Week 10: Review of above materials, Friday in-class exam
Week 11: Case study 1: AI in Healthcare
Week 12: Case study 2: AI in Law
Week 13: Case study 3: AI in Education
Week 14: Discussion and wrap-up

In-person final exam, schedule TBD

TEXTS

Blackburn, S. (2001). *Think: A Compelling Introduction to Philosophy*. Oxford University Press. \$22.50

https://www.amazon.ca/Think-Compelling-Introduction-Simon-Blackburn/dp/0192854259/ref=asc_df_0192854259?mcid=a0826924115f3ee9870461f128a11531&tag=googleshopc0c-20&linkCode=df0&hvadid=706764789991&hvpos=&hvnetw=g&hvrnd=4972705329166463515&hvpon=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=&hvdev=c&hvdvcmld=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=9192395&hvta rgid=pla-435469997888&psc=1&hvocij=4972705329166463515-0192854259-&hvexpln=0&gad_source=1

Coeckelbergh, M. (2020). *AI Ethics*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. \$11.50

https://www.amazon.com/Ethics-MIT-Press-Essential-Knowledge/dp/0262538199/ref=tmm_pap_swatch_0

METHOD OF EVALUATION

The evaluation will consist of three exams.

Test 1, end of week 5, in person, multiple-choice & short answer format, 25%
Test 2, end of week 10, in person, multiple-choice & short answer format, 35%
Final Exam, as scheduled, in person, short essay format, 40%

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

Laptops and other note-taking devices are permitted in class, with the exception of exam days. *No aids are permitted for any exam. Electronic devices of any kind (including calculators, cell phones and smart watches) are not permitted.*

STATEMENT ON THE USE OF GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

The use of generative AI or other machine learning tools is permitted for studying, note-taking, and any other purpose deemed helpful by the individual student.

However, as per the policy on electronic devices, no use of AI tools will be permitted on any exam.

If plagiarism or unauthorized AI use is suspected, the instructor will ask for research/study notes and/or drafts of assignments after the exam has been submitted. Students must keep all notes until the exam is returned to them. The instructor reserves the right to schedule a separate, in-person, oral exam in cases where unauthorized AI use appears likely.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION AND ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION

Academic Accommodation is “a means of adjusting the academic activities associated with a course or program of student in order to permit students with disabilities to participate in those activities at the University and to fulfill the essential requirements of a course or program.”

<https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academicpolicies/appeals/Academic%20Accommodationdisabilities.pdf>. Students with disabilities are encouraged to register with Accessible Education at the earliest opportunity. “Accessible Education plays a central role in Western's efforts to ensure that its academic programs are accessible for all students”

<http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessibleeducation/index.html>

SPECIAL EXAMINATIONS

A Special Examination is any examination other than the regular examination, and it may be offered only with the permission of the Dean of the Faculty in which the student is registered, in consultation with the instructor and Department Chair. Permission to write a Special Examination may be given on the basis of compassionate or medical grounds with appropriate supporting documents. To provide an opportunity for students to recover from the circumstances resulting in a Special Examination, the University has implemented Special Examinations dates. These dates as well as other important information about examinations and academic standing can be found [here](#).

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

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.