

**WESTERN UNIVERSITY**  
**Department of Philosophy**  
Undergraduate Course Outline 2026-27

**PHILOSOPHY 1040G**  
**Ethics, Law, and Politics**  
Professor Jasmine Gunkel

**INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION**

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

**PREREQUISITE CHECKING**

There are no prerequisites for this course.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Many problems faced by both individuals and societies lie at the intersection of ethics, law, and politics. This course will consider such issues, with a focus on understanding the differences between moral, legal, and political arguments and on solutions to contemporary societal problems. By examining particular issues, we will together wrestle with how to balance competing rights, how to think about the expressive function of the law, and what to do when the morally ideal policy is politically unpopular or legally unworkable. We will discuss issues such as medical assistance in dying, abortion, marriage, drug policy, freedom of speech, and punishment.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Identify and engage with ethical issues at the intersection of ethics, law, and politics
- Reconstruct arguments from philosophical texts and media sources
- Predict likely objections to arguments and charitably reply to them
- Understand and make judgments about the ethical trade-offs of adopting various policy positions
- Constructively discuss ethical issues with others

**COURSE SCHEDULE: TBD**

**Week 1:**

**Tuesday 1/5**

**Thursday 1/7**

**Week 2:**

**Tuesday 1/12**

**Thursday 1/14**

**Week 3:**

**Tuesday 1/19**

**Thursday 1/21**

**Week 4:**

**Tuesday 1/26**

**Thursday 1/28**

Week 5:

Tuesday 2/2

Thursday 2/4

Week 6:

Tuesday 2/9

Thursday 2/11

### READING WEEK

Week 7:

Tuesday 2/23

Thursday 2/25

Week 8:

Tuesday 3/2

Thursday 3/4

Week 9:

Tuesday 3/9

Thursday 3/11

Week 10:

Tuesday 3/16

Thursday 3/18

Week 11:

Tuesday 3/23

Thursday 3/25

Week 12:

Tuesday 3/30

Thursday 4/1

Week 13:

Tuesday 4/6

Thursday 4/8

### TEXTS

All assigned readings will be available on the course Owl BrightSpace.

### METHOD OF EVALUATION

#### **In-class quizzes: 15% (surprise dates)**

There will be 5 surprise reading quizzes. A quiz will consist of a single question requiring a short answer, and will be graded out of 3 points. The quizzes are not meant to be challenging.

Rather, they should be pretty straight-forward if one has done the reading somewhat carefully. A 3 is earned for a correct or near-correct answer, a 2 is earned for a relevant but incorrect answer that demonstrates you've done the reading, and a 1 is earned merely by showing up and taking the quiz. The lowest 2 scores, including 0s due to a missed quiz, will be dropped when calculating your final grade. Because of this built-in flexibility, **all requests for academic consideration will be denied.**

### **Midterm 1 (Week 5): 25%**

This will be an in-class exam covering material from the first part of the course. It will include both multiple choice and short essay questions. See Western's policy on Special Examinations.

### **Midterm 2 (Week 9): 25%**

This will be an in-class exam covering material from the first part of the course. It will include both multiple choice and short essay questions. See Western's policy on Special Examinations.

### **Final exam: 35% (date determined by Registrar)**

This will be an in-class exam covering material from the full length of the course, but with the last part of the course represented disproportionately. It will include both multiple choice and short essay questions. See Western's policy on Special Examinations.

**Exceptionally good participation will earn you a grade bump of up to 3% (exactly 3%, not 3.01%) if your final grade is at the margins.** If your final grade would otherwise be an 87% and so earn you an A, for instance, especially good participation will leave you with an A+. Regularly and thoughtfully participating in class discussion is required to earn this bump.

**EMAIL POLICY:** Due to the large size of the class, you must email your TA about class matters before me. If it's an emergency, if you haven't heard from them for 2 business days, or if they say your question ought to escalate to me, then it is appropriate to email me. I will not address substantive philosophical questions via email. Rather, I find that philosophical matters are much better addressed in person, when we can easily ask follow up questions of each other and more quickly explore many different objections and views. I will not respond to grade questions and disputes (see below for the appropriate process).

**GRADE QUESTIONS AND DISPUTES:** I will not adjudicate grade disputes or explain why a grade was earned via email, but only during my office hours. (If you can't make my office hours, you must set up an appointment with me). You are always welcome to come to my office hours to talk with me about how you might improve your work going forward and earn a higher grade on future assignments. However, if you would like to dispute your grade, you must first talk to your TA about why it was earned. If you would still like to dispute it, you must then present me (during my office hours) with concrete reasons why you think your assignment was misunderstood or otherwise should have received a higher score. Even if I myself would have assigned a slightly different grade to the assignment, this is not enough to overturn the score. In respecting my TAs, their time, and their abilities, I will only overturn the grade they assigned if I think it is not within a *reasonable range* for the assignment in question. And there is also a chance that I will think they have graded much too leniently and will lower (rather than raise) your assignment score.

## **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**

Electronic devices of any kind (including computers, cell phones, and smart watches) are not permitted during quizzes or exams.

## **STATEMENT ON THE USE OF GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)**

**In this course, AI use is prohibited.** AI may not be used for drafting, writing, or editing papers, nor for the development of ideas. Assignments should reflect the students' own thoughts and independent written work. **Use of AI will result in a 0 on the assignment and will be escalated according to Western policy.** If plagiarism or unauthorized AI use is suspected, the instructor and/or TA will meet with the student to discuss their ideas, arguments, and process. The student will need to demonstrate their deep familiarity with the assignment to the satisfaction of the instructor or this will be grounds for escalating the case.

## **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](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](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>).

Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

### **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](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](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](mailto:support@uwo.ca).