

WESTERN UNIVERSITY
Department of Philosophy
Undergraduate Course Outline 2026-27

PHILOSOPHY 4730G
Intimacy, Love, and Interpersonal Relationships
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

Prerequisite: At least 60% in 1.0 Philosophy course at the 2000-2999 level, or permission of the department.

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

What is love and what does it demand of us? What is intimacy and how does it shape our lives and persons? Why do our interpersonal relationships matter so deeply to us? How can we act well in these relationships, and what can philosophy reveal about the ways in which we can act poorly? How might novel technologies change how we understand love, intimacy, and relationships? In this course, we'll survey such questions and try to develop new answers to some of them. We'll begin our explorations by looking at longstanding debates about the nature of love and friendship. We'll then turn to emerging topics in the philosophy of interpersonal relationships, such as intimacy, abuse, parasocial relationships, stalking, online dating, polyamory, and AI companions.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

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

- Raise and analyze ethical and ontological questions about relationships
- Reconstruct and critique major views about the nature of love and intimacy
- Constructively discuss the philosophy of interpersonal relationships with others
- Predict likely objections to arguments and charitably reply to them
- Develop sustained philosophical arguments

TEXTS:

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

COURSE SCHEDULE: Draft only, subject to change

Week 1:

Thursday 1/7

Troy Jollimore – *Love's Vision* Ch. 2
Ch. 3

Week 2:

Thursday 1/14

Monique Wonderly, “Love and Attachment”

Benjamin Bagley, “Loving Someone in Particular”

Week 3:

Thursday 1/21

Dan Moller, “Love and the Rationality of Grief”

Quinn White, “Love First”

Week 4:

Thursday 1/28

Katarina Perović, “Friendship and Personal Identity”

Diane Jensky, “Friendship and Reasons of Intimacy”

Week 5:

Thursday 2/4

Julie C. Inness, *Privacy, Intimacy, and Isolation*, Ch. 6. “Intimacy: The Core of Privacy”

Jasmine Gunkel, “What is Intimacy?”

Week 6:

Thursday 2/11

Quill Kukla, “Holding the Body of Another”

George Tsar, “Vulnerability in Intimate Relationships”

SHORT PAPER 1 MUST BE COMPLETED BY THIS DATE AT THE LATEST

READING WEEK

Week 7:

Thursday 2/25

Lucy McDonald, “Flirting”

Quill Kukla, “That’s What She Said: The Language of Sexual Negotiation”

Week 8:

Thursday 3/4

Mark Schroeder, “Tipping Points: Abuse and Transformative Discovery”

bell hooks, *All About Love: New Visions*, Ch. 4

Week 9:

Thursday 3/11

Elizabeth Brake, “How Does Stalking Wrong the Victim?”

Sophie Barnett, “Power and Control: Stalking as Neo-Republican Domination”

Week 10:

Thursday 3/18

Alfred Archer and Catherine M. Robb, “The Ethics of Parasocial Relationships”

C. Thi Nguyen, “Twitter, the Intimacy Machine”

Week 11:

Thursday 3/25

William D’Alessandro, “Is it Bad to Prefer Attractive Partners?”

Elsa Kugelberg, “Dating Apps and the Digital Sexual Sphere”

Week 12:

Thursday 4/1

Ole Martin Moen and Aleksander Sørli, “The Ethics of Relationship Anarchy”

Kyle York, “A Couple Reasons in Favor of Monogamy”

Elizabeth Brake, “Love and the Law”

SHORT PAPER 2 MUST BE COMPLETED BY THIS DATE AT THE LATEST

Week 13:

Thursday 4/8

Ariela Tubert and Justin Tiehen, “Authentic Artificial Love”

Micah Lott and William Hasselberger, “With Friends Like These: Love and Friendship with AI Agents”

FINAL PAPER DUE 4/15 at 11:59pm for undergraduates, 4/18 at 11:59pm for grad students

METHOD OF EVALUATION:

Participation (10%):

Class will be discussion based. Students should come to class having carefully done the readings and with some questions in mind (and ideally written down) and points to discuss. If you will be missing more than two classes, you should talk to me.

Discussion Lead (10%):

One week, students will lead or co-lead a class session. This requires giving a brief (10-ish minute) overview of each reading, raising a handful of thoughtful discussion questions, and doing some fielding of discussion.

2 Short Response Papers (20% each):

Students will submit 2 short (500-750 words) response papers on readings of their choice. These must be done in different weeks **and must be turned in at least 3 hours before class**. If you are submitting a response to a reading from week 4, for instance, then you submit that response paper during the fourth week, at least three hours before our class session.

A response should raise and briefly develop one or two significant criticisms of (or interesting, nonobvious questions about) a reading. Developing this criticism might include thinking about how the author might respond to it. The first paper must be turned in by **week 6**. The second must be turned in by the end of **week 12**. While assignments will be turned in via Brightspace, **YOU MUST COMPOSE ASSIGNMENTS IN GOOGLE DOCS and share the link with me** (you can paste the link to the bottom of the assignment). As there is already flexibility to choose the weeks in which you complete these, requests for academic consideration will be denied.

Final Paper (40%):

Your final paper (1500-2000 words for undergraduates, 3500-5000 words for graduate students) should develop a sustained argument and substantially engage with at least one assigned reading. Additionally, graduate students must engage with at least one reading we did not cover in class. While assignments will be turned in via Brightspace, **YOU MUST COMPOSE ASSIGNMENTS IN GOOGLE DOCS and share the link with me** (you can paste the link to the bottom of the assignment). Final paper is due at 11:59pm on **Thursday April 15th** for undergrads and **Sunday, April**

18th for grad students. This assignment may be submitted up to 3 days late without penalty. As such, requests for academic consideration (absent very unusual circumstances) will be denied.

EMAIL POLICY:

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). I will generally respond to (other) emails within two business days. If you haven't heard from me after that, it's possible it fell through the cracks (I'll try not to let that happen!) and you are welcome to email me again.

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). If you would like to dispute your grade, you must present me with concrete reasons why you think your assignment was misunderstood or otherwise should have received a higher score. 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. I

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.**

Students must write all assignments using Google Docs. Failure to compose in Google Docs will result in a 0. Students **must paste the link to their Google Doc at the end of their assignment and must set the share settings to *allow anyone with the link to edit*.** This allows the TA and instructor to see edit history. If plagiarism or unauthorized AI use is suspected, the instructor and/or TA will meet with the student to discuss their ideas, arguments, and writing 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.

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>).

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

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.

