

WESTERN UNIVERSITY
Department of Philosophy
Undergraduate Course Outline 2026-27

PHILOSOP 4900
Honors Capstone

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

PREREQUISITE CHECKING

Third or Fourth year standing in the Honours Specialization in Philosophy

It is your responsibility to ensure that you have the prerequisites for this course or have special permission to take the course without the prerequisites. [Student Responsibility for Course Selection](#)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

There are two versions of the Honors Capstone course in Philosophy: a regular seminar (Phil 4900F/G) and a community-engaged learning (CEL) course (Phil 4901F/G). One of these is available each year and students enrolled in the Honours Specialization in Philosophy must take at least one. This year we are offering the seminar version, in which students will read and present on material recently published either in the instructor's areas of expertise or on student's particular interests.

For winter 2027 the course will focus on wicked problems. Introduced in 1967 by Churchman and further developed in 1973 by design theorists Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber, the concept of 'wicked problems' highlights societal issues that are difficult to define and solve due to their complex and intricate nature. While initially introduced in a public policy context, this notion has since been used to describe a wide range of ongoing challenges, including public health, sustainability, climate change, and biological conservation. The goals of this course are: 1) to reflect on the nature of wicked problems, critically assessing the meaning and adequacy of this concept for characterizing complex problematic collective situations, 2) to highlight the role of philosophy in tackling these problems, and 3) mapping and analyzing specific wicked problems selected by students enrolled in the course. Short of becoming an expert on one given problem, anyone taking this course will become better equipped to explore and promote the relevance of philosophy in addressing some of the most challenging problems of our time.

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

This course is entirely discussion-based and requires full and ongoing engagement from all students. Topics and readings will be briefly introduced during class, but there will be no lectures or formal academic presentations. Students are expected to have read the materials and should be ready to engage in structured, inclusive, and constructive discussions meant to push their reflection further. The instructor will propose a subset of analytical tools and problems during the first half of the semester. In the second half, students will introduce their own case study. Although this is a course in philosophy, students are encouraged to consult and share reading materials coming from a variety of sources and disciplines.

COURSE SCHEDULE (tentative)

Week 1 Intro

Week 2 Wicked Problems and Criticisms

Week 3 Pluralism

Week 4 Sustainable Values and Knowledge Co-production

Week 5 Controversy Mapping

Week 6 Intersectionality and Boundary Objects

Week 7 (Feb 25) Problem Pitch

Weeks 8-12, Case Studies

TEXTS

There are no texts to buy for this course. The course site contains links to resources we will consult for the first half of the course. Readings for the second half will depend on the cases studied and students' personal research.

METHOD OF EVALUATION

The final grade will be based on the following scheme:

1. Preparing and leading a discussion (15%, once during Weeks 2-6)
2. Problem Pitch (25%, Week 7)
3. Final Paper (45%)
4. Participation (15%)

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.

STATEMENT ON THE USE OF GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

In this course, students are permitted to use AI tools exclusively for information gathering and preliminary research purposes. These tools are intended to enhance the learning experience by providing access to diverse information sources. However, it is essential that students critically evaluate the obtained information, exercise independent thinking, and engage in original

research to synthesize and develop their own ideas, arguments, and perspectives. The use of AI tools can serve as a starting point for exploration; however, students are expected to uphold academic integrity by appropriately attributing all sources and avoiding plagiarism. Assignments should reflect the students' own thoughts and independent written work. By adhering to these guidelines, students contribute to a responsible and ethical learning environment that promotes critical thinking, independent inquiry and allows them to produce original written contributions.

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

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.