

Western University  
Philosophy 2557G  
*Existentialism*

Winter Term 2016  
Wednesdays 9:30-11:30 &  
Fridays 10:30-11:30  
Classroom: UCC 58

Instructor: Prof. Helen Fielding  
Office Hours: TBA Lawson Hall 3256  
661-2111 ex. 84548  
Email: hfieldin@uwo.ca

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

Existentialists define who we are through what we do and how we live our lives. We cannot turn to external sources such as religion, morals, or public opinion to tell us what to do, or how to find meaning. That is our task in life. This does not mean we are not responsible for others, for the environment, for ourselves. But there is no formula for how to accomplish this responsibility, which can be both terrifying and freeing. In this course we will turn to classic existentialists such as Simone de Beauvoir and Friedrich Nietzsche along with contemporary thinkers to explore how we find meaning in our everyday existence, which is marked by the paradox of seeming to have limitless choice at the same time as there is external pressure to succeed and conform. Ultimately we learn from these thinkers that there are no absolute truths, yet that does not mean that all truths are relative, that there is no right or wrong. Our responsibility is to find our own path in a world we share with others.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES:**

This course will enable students to:

- Understand the fundamentals of the existentialist tradition
- Learn how to apply an existentialist approach
- Recognize the ways we are responsible for the decisions we make and don't make
- Develop reading, questioning, and critical writing skills
- Improve oral communication skills

**TEXTS:** Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, New York, Citadel Press, 1962.

Course text (including excerpts from Friedrich Nietzsche's *Will to Power*, a short story from Albert Camus and other existentialist readings).

Check Webct for announcements

**REQUIREMENTS:**

Evaluation

Text Analysis	25%	(4-5 pages)
Final Essay	35%	(6-7 pages)
Participation	10%	
Final Exam	30%	

**Participation:** Two times during the semester each student will post a discussion question on the class forum. The question must be posted by the end of the day on Thursday. The student who posted the question will lead a small group discussion around the question in the Friday class. Students will be graded on the question, on leading the small group, and on participation in small groups across the semester. This entails keeping up with the readings each week.

**Submission Guidelines:**

- In conformity with departmental policy, all written work must be submitted to *turnitin.com*.
- Late papers will be penalized 2 percentage points per day late.

**Audit**

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

**The Department of Philosophy Policies** which govern the conduct, standards, and expectations for student participation in Philosophy courses is available in the Undergraduate section of the Department of Philosophy website at <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.

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

**THIS OUTLINE IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE, GIVEN SUFFICIENT PRIOR NOTICE.**