

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
Undergraduate Course Outline 2016-17

Philosophy 2260G: Introduction to Philosophy of Language

Winter Term 2017

Tues 1:30-2:20; Thurs 1:30-3:20

TC 343

Robert J. Stainton

STVH 3126, Thurs 3:30- 4:30

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DESCRIPTION

An introductory survey of philosophy of language. The course will focus on the contemporary Analytic tradition (including authors such as Frege, Russell, Wittgenstein, Austin, Quine, Katz, Davidson and Chomsky).

This year, the two major themes will be the **metaphysics** and **epistemology** of natural languages, specifically:

- 1) Are there really such things as natural languages (e.g., English, Spanish and Urdu)? If so, what sort of thing are they? Are languages abstract, physical, mental, or social?
- 2) How should one investigate natural languages? E.g., should theorists emphasize the methods of mathematics and logic, physics, psychology, or sociology?

REQUIRED TEXTS

None. Any suggested readings will be announced in class and made available electronically.

OBJECTIVES

The twin objectives of this class are development of philosophical skills and familiarity with some central issues in philosophy of language. The skills include close scrutiny of arguments, oral debate, and careful, clear writing. The issues, as noted above, are both metaphysical and methodological. Students will also be introduced to important empirical results about natural languages, where these bear on the philosophical questions.

REQUIREMENTS

Group Presentation: 5%

In-Class Debate: 5%

Five "One Pagers": 25%

First In-Class Quiz: 15%

Second In-Class Quiz: 15%

Glossary: 10%

Final Exam: 25%

Attendance and participation are mandatory in all cases. Students who regularly miss classes, and have not provided medical documentation justifying this, will be requested to withdraw. Students

who miss a debate/exam/presentation/quiz without proper documentation from the Dean's Office will receive a zero on that assignment.

Structure of the class and explanation of assignments

- The **group presentations** will occur early in the term, to facilitate prompt formation of discussion and study groups. There will also be between-group **debates** on issues central to the course. Students will be graded on the performance of the entire group and on their specific contribution to that. Participants will be asked to provide a "team score sheet" to evaluate their peers.
- The **quizzes** will be roughly two hours long. They will be focussed on: the lectures; the "one pager" discussion questions; and the glossary terms.
- Near the end of the term, students will submit their **glossaries** for correction. They will be returned in time to aid in studying for the final exam, which will be scheduled during the official exam period.
- The **final exam**, because it is intended to help the students synthesize everything they have learned into a coherent picture, will cover all the material studied in class.

With the exception of students granted special accommodation, no electronic devices will be permitted during quizzes or exams. Use of handheld devices and browsing of websites during class is very strongly discouraged, as it distracts both the user and his/her neighbours.

Submission instructions

- All written work must be submitted, in anonymous form and in hard-copy, either in class or by means of the Philosophy drop box (on the first floor of Stevenson Hall, beside the elevator).
- It must also be submitted electronically to **Turnitin**: "All required papers are 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>)."
- Late submissions will not be accepted without explicit prior permission of the instructor and/or proper medical documentation.

COURSE OUTLINE

I. Introduction

A. Aims: Information and Skills

B. Three Questions

Qm: What kind of thing is a natural language?

Qp: Are there really any such things?

Qe: How should natural languages be studied?

II. The Metaphysics of Languages, Part One: Qm

A. Katz' Taxonomy: Physical, Mental and Abstract

B. Metaphysical Pluralism (Or, "Languages Are All of the Above")

C. A Related Synthesis: Formalism and Ordinary Language Philosophy

III. The Metaphysics of Languages, Part Two: Qp

- A. Two Versions of Eliminativism about Languages: “Hard” and “Soft”
- B. Arguments For and Against

IV. The Epistemology of Languages: Qe

- A. Clarifying the ‘Should’ in Qe
- B. For Evidential Restrictions: Physicalism and Platonism
- C. Methodological Pluralism (Or, “Against Evidential Restrictions”)

AUDIT

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

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY POLICIES

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.

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

http://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf.

ACADEMIC 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

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

SUPPORT SERVICES

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Student Development Centre <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

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. 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.