

**THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO  
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY  
Undergraduate Course Outline 2017-18**

**Philosophy 1305G: Questions of the Day**

<p><b>Winter Term 2018</b> Class times: M 1:30-2:30, W 1:30-2:30 Classroom: SH 2355</p>	<p><b>Instructor:</b> Prof. Gillian Barker Office: Western Interdisciplinary Research Building (WIRB) 7158 Office Hours: M 3:00-4:00, Th 1:00-2:00 Email: gbarker5@uwo.ca</p>
<p>Section 002 Tutorial time: W 3:30-4:30 Classroom: AHB 1B02  TA: Matthew Howery Office: STvH 3137 Office Hour: TBA Email: mhowery@uwo.ca</p>	<p>Section 005 Tutorial time: Th 12:30-1:30 Classroom: AHB 1B08  TA: Jamie Shaw Office: WIRB 7<sup>th</sup> Floor Office Hour: TBA Email: jshaw222@uwo.ca</p>

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

What is philosophy and how can it contribute to our thinking about “questions of the day”? These are questions that are currently being debated publicly. They include questions about issues concerning social justice, the use of science in setting public policy, and the limits of individual freedom, among others. In this course, we will aim to understand the philosophical significance and complexity of questions like these. We will also discuss what philosophers have said that is relevant to answering them, and consider how to answer them in a reasonable or balanced fashion.

Here are the questions that we’ll cover:

1. What action on climate change is morally required of us?
2. What is racism, and how should we respond to it?
3. To what extent should governments act (e.g. via tax policy) to diminish economic inequality?
4. What is cultural appropriation and is it always bad?
5. Should the government classify people according to their sex or gender on official identity documents (e.g., passports)? If the answer is “yes,” then which system of classification should it use?
6. How open should the Canadian border be to refugees, new citizens, or temporary workers?

**COURSE MATERIALS:** All readings are available for free online, with links in our reading schedule or as PDFs posted on our OWL site. We will also listen to podcasts or videos that are available for free online, to listen to on any computer or smartphone.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

1. Homework and in-class assignments, worth 20%

These assignments will normally have a written component that you complete at home, but some will also have an oral component and thus involve discussion in class.

2. Two essays, approximately 1250 words each, worth 25% each

These are argumentative essays that will give you the opportunity to defend your own position on one of the topics for this course. There will be a rubric for grading these papers that we will discuss in class. You will be required to write outlines for them before they are due and have the outlines reviewed by a peer in class.

3. Final exam, worth 30%

Each of the requirements is designed to help us achieve the goals for the course.

**COURSE GOALS:**

<b>GOALS: As a result of taking this course, you will learn to:</b>	<b>ACTIVITIES: Some of the things we will do to promote these goals are:</b>	<b>ASSESSMENT: We will know how well you have attained these goals by evaluating:</b>
Distinguish between normative and descriptive claims	Discussing this distinction during the first couple of weeks, and reviewing it as needed	Whether you keep track of this distinction in your work for the class (your assignments, in class discussion, and your exam)
Understand the method of doing philosophy	Discussing method in the first couple of weeks, and returning to it as needed	Whether you display an accurate understanding of method in your work for the class
Appreciate the philosophical complexity of different questions of the day	Doing assignments that examine the complexity of these questions	How you describe their complexity in your work for the class

Understand and assess the arguments philosophers have given that are relevant to these questions	Reconstructing philosophers' arguments together in class	How you reconstruct these arguments on your own in your assignments and in your exam
Construct your own clear and persuasive written arguments that respond to these questions	Writing two essays, and engaging in essay peer review	Whether your essays meet the standards set in our grading rubric
Engage in rigorous, respectful debate about heated questions of the day	Having large and small group (tutorial) discussions	Whether our discussion is productive and respectful

### **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://www.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.

**Students are directed to view the Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness** (<https://studentservices.uwo.ca/secure/index.cfm>).

### **Policy on 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 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 Use of Plagiarism 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> ).”

**Additional Links**

- Registrar Services (<http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>)
- Student Support Services (<http://westernusc.ca/services/>)