

**THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
Undergraduate Course Outline 2020-21**

Philosophy 1040G Ethics, Law, and Politics

Winter Term 2021

Date/Time: Tues (online). and Thurs (online
and in-person). 1:30-2:30

Tutorials: day/time as per your section –
please attend only your assigned section each
week (Required)

Location: 3M 3250 (see details below)

Instructor: Prof. T. Isaacs

Office: UC 2230

Office Hours: Tuesdays 2:30-3:30 and by
appointment

Email: tisaacs@uwo.ca

NOTE ABOUT IN-PERSON CLASS TIME

In trying to balance the physical distancing requirements during the pandemic with some students' desire for an in-person campus experience, there will be one **optional** in-person class per week with the professor on Thursdays, 1:30-2:30 in 3M 3250, provided that a reasonable number of students are interested and, of course, that the health and safety measures are in place. Because attendance will be limited to 20% of the room capacity, it will not be possible for everyone to attend in-person each week. Depending on demand, it may be necessary to set up a rotation. This will be determined in January. In the name of fairness, so that no student is provided a learning opportunity that is denied others, we'll livestream and/or record the in-person sessions.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In our everyday experiences, we are confronted by situations in which we have to decide what is right, and what is wrong. Broadly, we can think of these as ethical "moments", where we have to make a certain kind of judgment: normative or moral judgment. We ask: what is morally permissible in these circumstances? What is morally obligatory? What is forbidden? The answers that we give are important – they will guide our actions, or we may use them to evaluate the actions of others. Either way, they will determine what counts as a right action, or who is a good person.

Politics and law sometimes generate very similar experiences – we ask ourselves whether an action is legal or illegal, which tax or environmental policy is the best for the country, whether the government has done something to violate our rights, and so on. There are many instances where ethics, law and politics intersect.

Consider:

- Pandemic response: Are there any limits to what our various levels of government may

require of us during a global pandemic (such as COVID-19) in order to protect the public health?

- Medical Assistance in Death: When is medical assistance in dying (MAID) a reasonable and justifiable choice?
- Food Waste: What's so bad about throwing out perfectly good food?
- Eating Animals: Is it okay for humans to use animals for food (and to treat farm animals differently from pets)?
- Community Policing: How do we, as a community, respond to evidence of structural racism within police forces?
- Public Apologies: Whoa! That was the worst public apology ever! What is the purpose of a public apology and what does a good one look like?

What do all of these issues have in common? Each has an ethical, legal, and political dimension. In this course, we will consider these and other topics with a view to understanding the ways in which ethics, law and politics intersect, and the ways in which they can sometimes pull in different directions. We will start by having a look at the Canadian Constitution, and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in particular. The Constitution sets the framework in which law and politics are played out – it also embodies and enshrines various values that sound very much like ethical commitments. We will also consider how law and politics differ from what may seem the more personal, or at least less enforceable, sphere of ethics. As we examine the ethical, legal, and political dimensions of these issues through written work, in-class / tutorial discussion, activities and assignments, we'll learn:

- how to produce good, clear philosophical analysis
- how to apply, develop, and defend multiple perspectives
- how to provide and articulate convincing arguments in support of our conclusions

TEXTS

Assigned readings will include a combination of scholarly journal articles and internet resources to be made available to you through the course website on OWL.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of the course, students who have done the readings, completed the assignments, and attended class will be able to:

- Explain, orally and in writing, the difference between an ethical, legal, and political approach to issues.
- Identify and evaluate arguments expressing diverse points of view in relation to course topics
- Construct strong arguments in support of well-reasoned conclusions
- Approach and analyze new topics and contexts from ethical, legal, and political standpoints.

In addition, students will develop their written, oral, and critical skills in these ways:

- By doing tutorial homework assignments and engaging in tutorial discussions through the term, students will develop skills of critical analysis, critical writing, and interactive engagement with others concerning course material.
- By participating in in-class discussions (in both large and small groups), students will become stronger and more confident speakers.
- Through philosophical essays designed to promote the synthesizing and consolidating of course material, students will sharpen their critical writing and critical thinking skills.

REQUIREMENTS

1. **Three** 1000-word philosophy essays (15% each=45%)
In each paper, you will engage in critical philosophical analysis and argument, requiring you to develop and defend your position on an issue we discuss in class. You will receive detailed instructions and a list of topics to choose from for each of these essays.
DUE DATES: January 28; March 4; April 1 (really!)
2. Tutorial homework assignments and tutorial attendance (20%)
Each week you will have a one-hour tutorial to attend in an online format. It will be online **at a scheduled time**. The homework and assignments for tutorials will vary from week-to-week, but will typically involve a short written component that you complete in advance, followed by an “in-class” oral component, drawing on the homework and involving work/discussion in small groups. Details of homework to be provided. Weekly tutorial attendance is required.
3. Final examination (35%)
The final examination will be a combination of short and longer answer questions based on material covered in the course readings, lectures, and tutorial content (homework and in-class work). The exam will be held in the examination period (April 8-30), date and time TBA.

AUDIT

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

POLICIES

ATTENDANCE

You are required to attend all lectures and your tutorial. Tuesday’s class will be online (interactive); Thursday will be in-person and streamed online (interactive). Tutorials are online (interactive).

ONLINE CLASS ETIQUETTE

Please attend online sessions with the same level of respect that you would bring to in-person sessions. More specific guidelines will be posted in the course materials.

LATE PENALTIES

Essays are due to the OWL site under the relevant assignment **by 11:55 p.m. on the due date.** Essays arriving after the due date will be penalized 3 points per day for one week. After one week they will receive a grade of zero (in the absence of documentation supporting otherwise, of course—see “Accommodation” and “Self-Reported Absence,” below).

EMAIL

My preference is always to meet with students face-to-face (whether in my office or, as long as pandemic measures are in place, on Zoom or some such platform), during office hours or by appointment. If you have a minor matter that requires a brief response, or you would like to arrange an appointment to see me outside of office hours, feel free to e-mail me (tisaacs@uwo.ca). I’ll do my best to get back to you quickly, and certainly within a day or two. If you don’t hear from me within a couple of days, that means your message got lost in the shuffle and I urge you to try me again.

ELECTRONIC DEVICES IN THE CLASSROOM

Group agreement to be devised collectively by the students planning to attend the in-person sessions. Things to consider: Screens and sounds can be a distraction to others, so at a minimum please keep all devices on silent during class and devise a policy that minimizes distraction to others. My hope is that you will keep your use as focused as possible on what will promote your learning and engagement with this class, leaving other uses of these wonderful tools for another time. For more ideas about the use of electronics in the class see blog posts from Professor Shannon Dea (Philosophy at Waterloo) here:

<https://uwaterloo.ca/arts/blog/post/electronics-classroom-time-hit-escape-key> and Professor Philip Guo (Computer Science at California at San Diego) here: <http://www.pgbovine.net/class-laptop-policy.htm>

PREREQUISITES

“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.”

This course has no prerequisite.

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY POLICIES

The **Department of Philosophy Policies**, which govern the conduct, standards, and expectations for student participation in Philosophy courses are 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.

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.

SELF- REPORTED ABSENCE FORM

Students who experience an unexpected illness or injury or an extenuating circumstance (48 hours or less) that is sufficiently severe to temporarily render them unable to meet academic requirements (e.g., attending lectures or labs, writing tests or midterm exams, completing and submitting assignments, participating in presentations) should self-declare using the online Self-Reported Absence portal. This option should be used in situations where the student expects to resume academic responsibilities within 48 hours or less.

The following conditions are in place for self-reporting of medical or extenuating circumstances: http://westerncalendar.uwo.ca/PolicyPages.cfm?Command=showCategory&PolicyCategoryID=1&SelectedCalendar=Live&ArchiveID=#SubHeading_322

EVALUATION OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

At least three days prior to the deadline for withdrawal from a course without academic penalty, students will receive assessment of work accounting for at least 15% of their final grade. For 3000- or 4000-level courses in which such a graded assessment is impracticable, the instructor(s) must obtain an exemption from this policy from the Dean and this exemption must be noted on the corresponding course syllabus. In rare instances and at the Dean's discretion, other courses could receive a similar exemption, which also must be noted in the course syllabus.

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.

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.

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>).

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.