

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

**Philosophy Course Number: PHIL 3501  
Title: Epistemology**



**Fall Term 2020-2021**

*Asynchronous*

**VoiceThread lecture posted: 2:30 p.m. Mon.**

**Zoom Lecture (live and recorded):**

**2:30-3:30 p.m. Wed.**

**Zoom Discussion (live not recorded):**

**3:30-4:30 p.m. Wed.**

**No classroom meetings-all materials on OWL**

**Instructor: Jacqueline Sullivan**

**Office 7170 WIRB**

**Zoom Office Hours only: Mon 2-3 p.m.,**

**Wed. 11 a.m.-12 p.m.**

**E-mail: [jsulli29@uwo.ca](mailto:jsulli29@uwo.ca)**

**DESCRIPTION**

Epistemology considers questions about knowledge: what it is to have knowledge, as opposed to mere opinion or conjecture, and how we can justify our claims to knowledge. For this reason, it has played a part in the history of the other main branches of philosophy, metaphysics and ethics, examining the justification for our claims to knowledge about what there is, and how we ought to act. For the same reason, epistemological inquiry has played a part in the history of science and mathematics, and every intellectual field in which there is a need to examine the grounds of our beliefs. This course considers some of the most important problems in the theory of knowledge, from a selection of classical and contemporary viewpoints. In this way we will gain some insight into the origins, motivations, and evolution of these problems as well as their implications for contemporary thought. Topics to be considered include justification of beliefs, scepticism and certainty, foundationalism and coherentism, connections between knowledge and language, deductive and non-deductive inference, naturalized epistemology, testimonial knowledge, epistemic injustice, misinformation and how false beliefs are spread.

## **TEXTS (REQUIRED)**

(1) *Epistemology: An Anthology*. Second edition. Edited by Ernest Sosa, Jaegwon Kim, Jeremy Fantl, Matthew McGrath. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008.

This book will be available in the bookstore. It is also available for purchase online. Make certain to buy the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of this book, as the readings have changed significantly since the first edition and we will be reading many of the newly added papers.

(2) Some PDFs of journal articles for those topics not covered in the textbook.

## **OBJECTIVES**

Students who successfully complete this course will have developed:

- (1) a detailed understanding of foundational issues at the heart of debates in contemporary epistemology
- (2) the ability to critically evaluate arguments that have been put forward in context of these debates, and
- (3) the analytic skills requisite to participate effectively in these debates in the context of several formal argumentative papers.

## **REQUIREMENTS**

There are 4 paper assignments for this course that in combination are worth 100% of the grade. Here is the breakdown:

- (1) Paper 1: (15%)
- (2) Paper 2: (20%)
- (3) Paper 3: (32%)
- (4) Paper 4: (33%)

The ability to write a strong paper for each assignment will depend crucially on you having done the assigned readings for the course and having watched the recorded (VoiceThread) and live (Zoom) lectures each week. I will pass out questions for these writing assignments at least 2-3 weeks before each paper is due. I will provide explicit directions as to how the papers should be structured and the grading rubric.

Papers submitted after the due date will lose 5 points/day and will not be accepted past the 6th day after the due date. There are NO EXCEPTIONS to this rule; you are responsible to plan your schedules accordingly. Paper 3 will not be accepted after the last day of class. NO EXCEPTIONS. Papers are to be submitted via the “Turn It In” link on the OWL course website.

The instructor will provide explicit directions as well as topics for each paper. I will set aside class time to talk about the papers—how they are to be structured and what the precise requirements are.

## **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](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](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](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf)

### **PLAGIARISM CHECKING**

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.