

**THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
Undergraduate Course Outline 2023**

Philosophy 2265B: Talking Philosophy

Fall Term

Instructor: N/A

DESCRIPTION

A very first introduction to philosophy of language, this course will focus on fascinating social and ethical issues about “talk”, such as: how language shapes perception; gender-neutral language; racist and sexist language, including slurs and “cat calls”; linguistic reform and the purported “decline of English grammar”; prohibitions on pornography and hate speech; lying and misleading; bullshitting and nonsensical speech; “fake news”.

The course is focused on “talk” in another sense. Rather than mere lectures, there is a heavy emphasis on in-class discussion.

I. Background Concepts

II. Language and Ethics

- Lying and misleading
- Bullshitting and fake news

III. On “Language Shapes Perception”

IV. Language and Social/Political Philosophy

- Racist and sexist language: “cat calls”, slurs and gender-neutral language
- Restricting speech: pornography, linguistic silencing and hate speech

REQUIRED TEXTS

All readings may be found under Resources on the OWL site or at the links noted below:

James E. Mahon (2015). The Definition of Lying and Deception. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/lying-definition/>

Harry Frankfurt (1986) On Bullshit. *Raritan Quarterly Review* 6 (2): 81-100 Available at: http://www2.csudh.edu/ccauthen/576f12/frankfurt_harry_-_on_bullshit.pdf

Joshua Habgood-Coote (2019) Stop Talking About Fake News! *Inquiry* 62(9/10): 1033-1065.

Chris Swoyer (2015) The Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <https://stanford.library.sydney.edu.au/archives/spr2015/entries/relativism/supplement2.html>

Justina Diaz-Legaspe, Chang Liu and Robert J. Stainton (2020). Slurs and register: A case study in meaning pluralism. *Mind and Language* 35(2): 156-182

Jennifer Saul and Esa Diaz-Leon, (2018). Feminist Philosophy of Language. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-language/>

Sally Haslanger (2000) Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be? *Noûs* 34(1): 31–55.

Rae Langton (1993) Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 22(4): 293–330.

John Stuart Mill (1859). *On Liberty*. Chapter 2: Of the Liberty of Thought and Discussion. Available at: <https://socialsciences.mcmaster.ca/econ/ugcm/3ll3/mill/liberty.pdf>

David van Mill (2017). Freedom of Speech. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/freedom-speech/>

OBJECTIVES

The stress in this class is not on memorization of lectures, but on self-directed learning, honing of transferable skills, and mastery of useful concepts. The skills include: close scrutiny of arguments; oral debate; and careful, clear writing. The concepts include tools from philosophy generally (such as fallacies to avoid, conceptual analysis, and kinds of reasons), but also from the humanistic and scientific study of human language.

In brief, though “philosopher’s findings about talk” will play an important role, the ability to “talk philosophically” will be stressed at least as much.

REQUIREMENTS

Two Short Essays (~750 words): 20% each

Two Group Debates: 5% each

Glossary: 20%

Participation: 5%

Take-Home Exam: 25%

SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

- All written work must be submitted electronically to OWL.
- Late submissions will not be accepted without explicit prior permission of the instructor and/or proper medical documentation. There is no “late penalty”: unsubmitted essays receive a zero.

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.

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is given in the Western Multicultural Calendar.

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.

USE OF RECORDINGS

Participants in this course are not permitted to record the sessions, except where recording is an approved accommodation, or the participant has the prior written permission of the instructor.

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

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.