

**WESTERN UNIVERSITY**  
**Department of Philosophy**  
Undergraduate Course Outline 2024-25

**PHILOSOPHY 1040G**  
**Ethics, Law, and Politics**

**INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION**

Information including instructor contact details and course location can be found on the course Owl BrightSpace: <https://westernu.brightspace.com/>

**PREREQUISITE CHECKING**

*No prerequisites.*

It is your responsibility to ensure that you have the prerequisites for this course or have special permission to take the course without the prerequisites. [Student Responsibility for Course Selection](#)

**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? Our answers to these questions are important – they will guide our actions and we may use them to evaluate the actions of others.

Politics and law sometimes generate very similar experiences – we ask ourselves whether an action is legal or illegal, whether a law is consistent the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, whether the government has done something to violate our rights, and so on. There are many instances where ethics, law and politics intersect.

In this class, we will consider the following topics:

- Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID)
- Abortion
- Freedom of Expression
- Marriage as a legal institution
- Public Health
- Digital Ethics / Social Media

What do all of these issues have in common? Each has an ethical, legal, and political dimension. You will develop an understanding of 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. In Canada,

our Constitution sets the framework in which law and politics played – 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 and on-line 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

### **LEARNING OUTCOMES**

By the end of the course, if you have done the readings, completed the assignments, attended class, and participated in classroom activities/discussions, you will be able to:

- Explain, orally and in writing, the difference between an ethical, legal, and political approach to issues.
- Identify key sections of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and their application in significant Charter challenges and Supreme Court of Canada decisions.
- 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, you will develop your written, oral, and critical skills in these ways:

- By doing in-class assignments and activities through the term, you 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), you will become stronger and more confident speakers.
- Through philosophical essays designed to promote the synthesizing and consolidating of course material, you will sharpen your critical writing and critical thinking skills.

### **COURSE SCHEDULE**

A detailed week-by-week schedule of topics, readings, and assignments will be available by the first day of class.

### **CLASS SUCCESS**

You will achieve your most successful outcome in this class, and we will all have a great experience as a class, if do the readings for each week by Tuesday and come with an open mind, ready to participate in discussion. Not everyone will feel comfortable speaking in front of the large group, but there will be opportunities discussion in pairs and small groups. In philosophy we learn to develop, defend, and analyze arguments to support well-reasoned conclusions. We learn from one another – your voices are important and will contribute to a positive learning environment. Please see the Statement below on the use of Generative AI an

and other AI tools, which is strongly discouraged because it interferes with the learning objectives of this course.

### **TEXTS**

Assigned readings will include a combination of scholarly journal articles and internet resources to be made available to you at no cost through the course website on OWL. Some of the readings may require that you be logged into the Western Libraries for access.

### **METHOD OF EVALUATION**

1. **One** 1000-word philosophy essays (25%)

For this 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 by January 30<sup>th</sup> through the Assignments tool in OWL.

**DUE DATE: DUE DATE:** February 13<sup>th</sup> 11:59 p.m. (48-hour grace period will be in effect until February 15<sup>th</sup> 11:55 p.m. after which, in the absence of supporting documentation submitted to and approved by your academic advising office, a late penalty of 3 points per day will be deducted from your essay grade)

2. **One** 1000-word philosophy essay (25%)

For this 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 by March 13<sup>th</sup> through the Assignments tool in OWL.

**DUE DATE:** April 3<sup>rd</sup> 11:59 p.m. (48-hour grace period will be in effect until April 5<sup>th</sup> 11:55 p.m. after which, in the absence of supporting documentation submitted to and approved by your academic advising office, a late penalty of 3 points per day will be deducted from your essay grade)

3. In-class quizzes and assignments (10%)

There will be a very short written assignment or quiz **in class every week (12 weeks)**, graded as PASS or FAIL. Since these short assignments are designed to help consolidate learning, it is recommended that you complete all of them. Satisfactory completion (i.e. PASS) of at least 8 of the 12 makes you eligible for the 10%. You have the latitude/flexibility to miss 4 of these assignments/quizzes without impact on your grade.

4. Final Examination (40%)

To be held in person on campus during the final examination period (April 7-30, 2025). The date, time, and location to be announced when the Office of the Registrar releases the examination schedule. Please do not arrange travel between April 13-30 until you know when your exams are scheduled and can be sure to be present for any in-person examinations.

### **STATEMENT ON THE USE OF GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)**

Generative AI (such as, but not limited to, Chat GPT, Microsoft Co-Pilot, Google Gemini products, Anthropic's Claude products) are powerful and exciting, but their misuse will undermine academic values and learning outcomes of this course.

**Prohibited uses and the rationale:** Because this course aims to develop your philosophical skills of exposition, critical analysis and argument, creative thinking, and writing, you **may NOT use Generative AI tools for brainstorming or for drafting / writing your essays, in-class assignments, or any discussion posts you make to the course website unless the assignment instructions specifically ask you to do so.**

**Permitted uses:** You may use AI tools for grammar-checking and spell-checking. If you do so, you must indicate that you have used AI in that way (as a footnote/endnote or part of your references), identify the tool, and retain the version of your paper that you ran through the tool for grammar and spell-checking.

**In the event of unauthorized use:** Unauthorized use of AI will be treated as a scholastic offence and handled through Western's Scholastic Discipline Policy. In any case where your submitted work is suspected of such unauthorized use, the instructor will ask for research notes and/or drafts of assignments, essay outlines, and other materials used in preparing your essay after the assignment has been submitted. Students must keep all notes, outlines, and first drafts until after the release of final grades for the course.

### **DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY POLICIES**

The Department of Philosophy policies that govern the conduct, standards, and expectations for student participation in Philosophy courses are available in the Undergraduate section of the Department of Philosophy website <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.

### **AUDIT**

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

### **ELECTRONIC DEVICES**

No aids are permitted for tests and exams. Electronic devices of any kind (including calculators, cell phones and smart watches) are not permitted.

### **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

[https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/academic\\_consideration.pdf](https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration.pdf)

The Student Medical Certificate is available at

[https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf)

### **ACADEMIC CONSIDERATION**

Students may request academic consideration in cases of extenuating circumstances – that is, personal circumstances beyond the student’s control that have a substantial but temporary impact on the student’s ability to meet essential academic requirements.

1. Requests for academic consideration are made to the Academic Advising office of Faculty in which the student is registered.
2. Requests for academic consideration include the following components:
  - a. Self-attestation signed by the student;
  - b. Indication of the course(s) and assessment(s) relevant to the request;
  - c. Supporting documentation as relevant

Requests without supporting documentation are limited to one per term per course.

Documentation for medical illness, when required, includes the completion of a [Western Student Medical Certificate \(SMC\)](#) or, where that is not possible, equivalent documentation, by a health care practitioner. Requests linked to examinations scheduled by the Office of the Registrar during official examination periods as well as practice laboratory and performance tests typically scheduled in the last week of term always require formal supporting documentation.

For the detailed Senate Policy, see: [Policy on Academic Consideration – Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs](#)

### **RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATION**

Western’s Policy on Accommodation for Religious Holidays can be found here:

[https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/accommodation\\_religious.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_religious.pdf).

In the case of mid-term tests, notification is to be “given in writing to the instructor as early as possible, but not later than **one week** prior to the writing of the test”.

### **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.

## **SCHOLASTIC 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 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>).

### **Statement on plagiarism**

Plagiarism is defined in Western's Scholastic Discipline Policy as "The act or an instance of copying another's words or ideas and attributing them as one's own" (from *Black's Law Dictionary*, West Group, 1989, 7<sup>th</sup> edition, p. 1170). It is a scholastic offence. If plagiarism is suspected, the instructor will ask for research notes and/or drafts of assignments, essay outlines, and other materials used in preparing your essay after the assignment has been submitted. Students must keep all notes, outlines, and first drafts until after the release of final grades for the course.

[see also the [Statement on the Use of Generative AI](#), above]

## **ACADEMIC ADVISING**

Your Home Faculty's Academic Advising Office will support or refer whenever you have an issue that is affecting your studies, including information on adding/dropping courses, academic considerations for absences, appeals, exam conflicts, and many other academic related matters. Do not hesitate to reach out to them if you are struggling and unsure where to go for help. Contact info for all Faculties is here:

[https://registrar.uwo.ca/faculty\\_academic\\_counselling.html](https://registrar.uwo.ca/faculty_academic_counselling.html)

## **MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT**

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western (<https://uwo.ca/health/>) 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 (24/7 availability).

## **GENDER-BASED AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE**

Western University [is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence](#) (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has

gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website:

[https://www.uwo.ca/health/student\\_support/survivor\\_support/get-help.html](https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html). To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact [support@uwo.ca](mailto:support@uwo.ca).