

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

**PHILOSOP 2996F**  
**Special Topics: Philosophy of Race**

**INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION**

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

**PREREQUISITE CHECKING**

N/A

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**

We explore “What is Race” using the central figure in philosophy of race, WEB Du Bois to understand social construction, what problems people of mixed races and non-Black/White races pose to metaphysical theories of race. We connect the cultural definition of race to the question of what is cultural appropriation and when is it bad? We look at the mini-topic of what the role of white people should be in racial justice as well as the affect of shame. We then look at the first-person experience of being a racialized subject through Frantz Fanon and connect it to current work in critical phenomenology. We then look at Frank Wilderson’s new, book Afro-Pessimism, inspired by Fanon, on the worry there can be no end to anti-Blackness. We also look at sexual desire and its connection to race. I end this course with a timely look at Black feminist work on prison abolition.

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

**What is Race?**

Thu., Sep. 5 - - Intro (no reading)

Tue., Sep. 10 - - Intro + - Dembroff – Why Transgender isn’t like Transracial; Blum – “Race”: A Brief History, with Moral Implications (109-128)

Thu., Sep. 12 - - Mills – But What are you really?

Tue., Sep. 17 - - Du Bois “The Conservation of Races”; Appiah – “The Uncompleted Argument: Du Bois and the Illusion of Race” (B)

Thu., Sep. 19 – Taylor – Appiah’s Uncompleted Argument: WEB Du Bois and the Reality of Race

Tue., Sep. 24 - Jeffers – The Cultural Theory of Race: Yet Another Look at Du Bois’s “The Conservation of Races”

Thu., Sep. 26 – Gordon – Race, Bi-raciality, and Mixed Race – in Theory;

### **Cultural Appropriation**

Tue., Oct. 1 – Taylor – Roots and Routes: Disarming Authenticity

Thu., Oct. 3 – Matthes and Jackson on the Oppression model of Cultural Appropriation

Tue., Oct. 8 – Nguyen and Strohl – Cultural Appropriation and the Intimacy of Groups

Thu., Oct. 10 – Tuvel – Putting the Appropriator back in Cultural appropriation

### **What Should White People Do**

Tue., Oct. 15 – Mendieta on White Ignorance and Epistemic Friction

Thu., Oct. 17 – Sullivan – Good White People (1-22, 117-123)

Tue., Oct. 22 – Fall Break

Thu., Oct. 24 – Fall Break

Tue., Oct. 29 – Sullivan – Good White People (124-145, 148, 151-154, 157-160, 162)

Thu., Oct. 31 – Shotwell – Negative Affect and Whiteness (73-77, 80-97) (22 pgs); Shotwell - The problem with loving whiteness

### **Subjectivity, Racialization and Afro-Pessimism**

Tue., Nov. 5 – Du Bois – “Of our Spiritual Strivings”; Fanon – Black Skin, White Masks – Chapter 5: The Lived Experience of the Black

Thu., Nov. 7 – Wilderson - Afro-Pessimism - 9-17 top half, 19-20, 24-25, 40-48, 90-96, 102- top of 104, bottom of 201-207, 219-220, 224-229

Tue., Nov. 12 – **Hand in your reaction to Afropessimism book review**

### **Race and Desire**

Thu., Nov. 14 – Podcast on Race, dating and the nature of desire -

<https://www.npr.org/2019/04/04/709948132/a-very-offensive-rom-com> ; Zheng – Why Yellow Fever Isn’t Flattering

Tue., Nov. 19 - Selections from Srinivasan – The Right to Sex; Mills - Do Black Men have a Moral Duty to Marry Black Women

## **Prison and Police Abolition**

Thu., Nov. 21 – Classics of Prison Abolition: Alexander – The New Jim Crow; Davis – Are Prisons Obsolete?; Gilmore – Golden Gulag Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California; “13th” (Netflix Documentary)

Tue., Nov. 26 – Classics of Police Abolition: Harcourt – The Illusion of Order: The False Promise of Broken Window Policing; Guenther – Seeing Like a Cop: A Critical Phenomenology of Whiteness as Property; Wang – Carceral Capitalism; Podcast – Cops have no special duty to protect us - <https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/radiolab/articles/no-special-duty> ; Podcast – “For Harriet Youtube” – “No the Police cannot be reformed w/ Prof. Alex Vitale”  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rBazDnubwwA>

Thu., Nov. 28 – Transformative Justice (Mix of Black Feminist Abolitionists and my paper on “Practical Abolition”)

Tue., Dec. 3 – Tyson – Experiments in Responsibility: Pocket Parks, Radical Anti-violence work and the Social ontology of Safety; G5 Collective – Toward Transformative Justice; Youtube video of Sexual Abuse survivor and abolitionist Kathrin

Thu., Dec. 5 - TBA

## **TEXTS**

All texts will be on OWL Brightspace.

## **METHOD OF EVALUATION**

Weekly Reading Responses – 20% - The student will email me 3 discussion questions the night before class every week. (One can be a question about the text). It must engage with a specific page in the text. Discussion questions can include: something the student agrees/disagrees with in the text, something they found interesting, offer a new reason to accept a claim in the text, offer a case for or against a claim in the text, identify a further implication, identify an assumption or put one text into conversation with another.

Discussion Cards – 10%: I will be handing out cards every other class with “Clarify”, “Agree-but”, “Disagree”. You must play your card before the end of class.

Assignment – (In-lieu of an in-class midterm) – “What is Race?” – 15%

1500 Critical Response to either “What Should White People Do?”, “Race and Desire” or “Cultural Appropriation” – 20%

2000 word final essay on “Abolition Unit” – 31%

Reaction to Afro-Pessimism Review – 4%

## **OWL Brightspace**

Students are responsible for checking the course site on a regular basis for news and updates. This is the primary method by which information will be disseminated to all students in the class. Students may access the OWL Brightspace Learner Support site for assistance: <https://brightspacehelp.uwo.ca/> For IT related issues, they may contact Western Technology Services Helpdesk directly: <https://wts.uwo.ca/helpdesk/>.

## **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 this exam. Electronic devices of any kind (including calculators, cell phones and smart watches) are not permitted.

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

“In this course, the use of AI (automatic translation tools, grammar checkers, ChatGPT...) is prohibited. If plagiarism or unauthorized AI use is suspected, the instructor will ask for research notes and/or drafts of assignments after the assignment has been submitted. Students must keep all notes and first drafts until the assignment is returned to them.”

“For me, grading was never about grades; it was about the intensive feedback, the ongoing revisions of drafts, the individual conversations with students, that went into doing good work. Good work was never about writing good papers. It was about being able to order your world, to take the confusion that one is confronted with, and turn it into something meaningful and coherent. And to know that that doesn't just happen spontaneously or instinctively; it's a practice, requiring, well, work.

That's not simply a skill for college classes. That's a life-long practice, of being able to see a situation, pick out those elements that matter and lend it significance, and bring clarity out of chaos...

The only thing, in my life, that has even come close to what writing forces me to do is psychoanalysis, not therapy, but five days on the couch, with your analyst behind you saying almost nothing. Only on the couch have I been led to externalize myself, to throw my thoughts

and feelings onto a screen and to look at them, to see them as something other, coldly and from a distance, the way I do when I write.”

- Corey Robin <https://coreyrobin.com/2023/07/30/how-chatgpt-changed-my-plans-for-the-fall/>

Personally, I think the importance of writing your own work is threefold: 1) Writing is not discovering or uncovering fully formed ideas and arguments you already have. Writing itself generates the knowledge, helps us think through an idea. Writing *is* thinking. 2) Writing *should* allow us to manifest our own point of view, but this can only happen if we work to develop our own “voice”. 3) Just as it is going from a novice to an expert in any craft, becoming a writer is a self-transformative experience. I think using ChatGPT and other AI writing tools as a crutch when things get hard robs you of these three learning experiences and so, to that end:

### **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.

## 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>).

### **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).