

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

**PHILOSOP 4810G**  
**Special Topics: The Politics of Prison Abolition**

**INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION**

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

**PREREQUISITE CHECKING**

**Prerequisite(s):** Philosophy 2700F/G or Philosophy 2800F/G or Philosophy 2801F/G or Philosophy 2821F/G or Philosophy 2822F/G.

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**

My goals for this course are two fold: 1) Explicitly look at the practical political philosophy of Black Feminist lineage of prison and police abolition. 2) Look at this work through the methodological lens of what I am calling the “meso-level” of political philosophy. This meso-level is “above” the inter-personal/moral but “below” the structural level of explanation, it operates with a conceptual vocabulary of habits, skills, affordances, expertise and affects. Iris Marion Young and Pierre Bourdieu drew attention to this level but I think this kind of work has been abandoned since for exclusively structural or inter-personal explanations of social change. Luckily, recently, this kind of work has been revived by critical phenomenologists. 1) and 2) are interrelated because thinking about the why and how of abolition is best expressed most persuasively through the meso-level of the political but also the brilliant activist work of Black feminist prison abolitionists such as INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, Ruth Gilmore, Mariame Kaba, Ejeris Dixon, adrienne maree brown and others do a good job of exposing that there is really is a meso-level and how it works.

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

Tentative reading list will include:

Iris Marion Young – selections from “On Female Body Experience”

Pierre Bourdieu

Lisa Guenther

Mariam Kaba – We Do This til we Free Us

G5 Collective – Toward Transformative Justice

Ejeris Dixon and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha - Beyond Survival: Strategies and Stories from the Transformative Justice Movement

Anna Terwiel  
Amna Akbar

We definitely look at two new Canadian books about abolition:  
Yap and Emerick – Not Giving Up on People: A Feminist Case for Prison Abolition  
Piche Herzing – How to Abolish Prisons

### **TEXTS**

All texts will be on OWL Brightspace.

### **METHOD OF EVALUATION**

1st Paper: 30%

Final Paper/Project: 40%

Reading Responses: Throughout the semester, you will be randomly picked in class to ask the class a discussion question based on the reading that day. – 20%

Discussion cards – every other class, in lieu of participation marks, you will play discussion cards – 10%

### **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).