WESTERN UNIVERSITY
Department of Philosophy
Undergraduate Course Outline 2024-25

PHILOSOP 4900G
Honours Capstone

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

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

PREREQUISITE CHECKING

Third or fourth year standing in the Honours Specialization in Philosophy. Students completing the Specialization or Major in Philosophy may be admitted with permission from the instructor. 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

There are two versions of the Honours Capstone course in Philosophy: a regular seminar (Phil 4900F/G) and a community-engaged learning (CEL) course (Phil 4901F/G). One of these is available each year and students enrolled in the Honours Specialization in Philosophy must take at least one. This year we are offering the seminar version, in which students will read and present on material recently published either in the instructor's areas of expertise or on student's particular interests. Students will be guided through the process of identifying paper topics that could contribute to active research in philosophy. Projects are generally individual, but collaborations will be permitted given sufficient justification and instructor permission. Note that for group work, group members will receive identical grades for all assignments.

For winter 2025 the course will focus on the conflict between the scientific and manifest image. Contemporary scientific theories describe humans and nature in ways that challenge, and even undermine, various aspects of the manifest image -- our intuitive picture of the world and our place in it. This course will pursue several independent topics related to this overall theme, such as the changing conception of time within physics and the impact of these developments on metaphysical accounts of the nature of time, and how to reconcile our self-conception as agents capable of free decisions with a scientific descriptions of our bodies as governed by deterministic laws. I expect to cover 3-4 topics along these lines, to be determined in part based on the student's interests.

Throughout the term, students will be guided through the process of identifying and refining an important research question, finding their way through the research literature, and developing their own position and argument. Their topic may either directly address the topics we have discussed, or build on the insights drawn from the cases we have studied to consider other related issues.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Through their experience in this course, students should be better able to:

- Conduct research in philosophy: through comprehending and assessing research literature, identifying significant questions, and developing their own positions
- Participate effectively in discussions of philosophical topics
- Communicate philosophical ideas to a broader audience, both orally and in writing

TEXTS

All course material will be available on our OWL site. There are no texts that will need to be purchased.

METHOD OF EVALUATION

The main assessments for the course are the following:

- Research proposal: 30%
- Research paper: 60%
- Participation: 10%

Further details about the timeline, evaluation rubric, format of the paper, and so on will be available at the start of the seminar. The penalty for late assignments is 2% per day (including weekends), for up to 5 days; after which they will not be accepted.

Research Proposal: 30%

Students will identify a research topic, present their proposal to the seminar, receive and provide peer evalution, and submit a proposal and preliminary bibliography. The proposal will be evaluated based on clarity, feasibility of the proposed work, and the quality of the research done leading up to the proposal.

Research Paper: 60%

Students will write a philosophical research paper of roughly 3000-3500 words on a theme that they have chosen and developed (as described above). It will be based on the fluency and clarity of the writing, quality of the argument, and level of engagement with the philosophical literature.

Participation: 10%

Students will be asked to describe and assess their own participation at the end of the course, in a 2-page self-assessment. This document should justify assigning a score out of 10, reflecting the quality of participation, based on factors such as: coming prepared for discussions with the class as a whole or with their group, engaging in active listening, providing constructive

feedback, and work done outside of class (such as meeting with peers). The participation score will be based on this assessment, attendance, and the instructor's evaluation.

If students are not able to come to class because of illness or for some other legitimate reason, then they can make up their absence by writing a 750 word reflection on the reading(s) assigned for the relevant week. They can receive credit by doing so at most two times.

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.

STATEMENT ON THE USE OF GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

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.

In this course, students are permitted to use AI tools exclusively for information gathering and preliminary research purposes. However, it is essential that students critically evaluate the obtained information, exercise independent thinking, and engage in original research to synthesize and develop their own ideas, arguments, and perspectives. The use of AI tools can serve as a starting point for exploration; however, students are expected to uphold academic integrity by appropriately attributing all sources and avoiding plagiarism. **Assignments should reflect the students' own thoughts and independent written work.** By adhering to these guidelines, students contribute to a responsible and ethical learning environment that promotes critical thinking, independent inquiry and allows them to produce original written contributions.

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

The Student Medical Certificate is available at 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. 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

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

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. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.