

WESTERN UNIVERSITY
Department of Philosophy
Undergraduate Course Outline 2025-26

PHILOSOP 2062F
Power, Oppression, and Privilege

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

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

PREREQUISITES

None.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

To say that our society is racist, sexist or the like is to say that it is marked by systems and relationships of power that are oppressive to certain groups of people. This course examines these systems and relationships and considers what philosophers have said about them. We will explore their answers to questions including: What does it mean to be oppressed or be the target of something like homophobia or ableism? How should we understand power as it occurs in relationships of both oppression and privilege? How do different systems of oppression intersect and inform one another? How do tools of oppression (e.g., microaggressions, stereotyping) work? How can people be empowered to resist their own oppression or the oppression of others? How can they act in solidarity with one another to achieve this goal?

The above questions fit under categories that correspond to different ways that power can manifest itself in society: as domination (*power over* others), as resistance (*power to* resist), and as solidarity (*power with* others). The course will be divided up according to these three topics. We will also apply the theories we learn to cases, where examples may include police violence against Black people, reproductive justice against Indigenous peoples, and the misgendering of gender non-conforming people.

Two final notes about the course are that it is blended, meaning that it will occur partly online and partly in-person, and it involves active-learning. You, the students, will view lectures online (on OWL) before coming to our in-person class, where you will engage in activities that will solidify your learning of the material.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the course, you should be able to:

- Appreciate better what it means to have power in society and to be oppressed and/or privileged
- Understand philosophical theories about power, oppression, privilege, and related concepts such as stereotyping, microaggressions, and moral deference

- Learn how to apply these theories to cases and how to think critically about both the theories and the cases
- Imagine how you could translate what you learn in the course into political action

In addition, through your assignments, you will develop or hone skills that include:

- Interpreting and applying philosophical theories or concepts
- Critical analysis and writing
- Thoughtful engagement with others on controversial political or moral issues

TEXTS

All course material will be available on our OWL site. There is nothing you need to purchase for this course.

METHOD OF EVALUATION

- 1) Weekly Quizzes: 10%
- 2) Class Participation: 10%
- 3) Scaffolded Essay Assignment (with a part or outline of the essay due in class in week 8* and the final essay due in class in week 10): 35%
- 4) Midterm Test (occurring in class in week 5): 15%
- 5) Final Exam (occurring in person during the final exam period): 30%

*Please note that there are 12 weeks in the course, not including the fall reading week.

Full details on these assignments will appear on OWL. But here are details that concern requests for academic consideration (and that adhere to Western's [Policy on Academic Consideration – Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs](#)).

Quizzes: they will occur in weeks 2-4 and 6-12 for a total of 10 quizzes. The lowest 3 quiz grades, including missed quizzes, will be dropped from consideration when calculating your final overall grade for quizzes. As such, requests for academic consideration for quizzes will be denied.

Class participation: Your participation will be based on exit surveys performed in class and you leading small group discussions twice in the term. Only 10 out of a possible 12 exit surveys will count toward your final grade and you will have some choice of what weeks you will lead discussions. Please be aware that requests for academic consideration for class participation will be denied.

Scaffolded essay assignment: since this assignment is scaffolded, it has parts (no more than 3) that build on one another and not all of them may be graded. For the graded components, including the final essay submission, students must request academic consideration to hand them in late without penalty.

Midterm test: requests for academic consideration for this assignment must be accompanied by

formal supporting documentation.

COURSE-SPECIFIC POLICIES

A Note on Course Content

In this course, we will be dealing with issues that may be deeply personal for members of the class. While rigorous debate across differing perspectives is expected and encouraged, it is crucial that all members of the class participate respectfully and in a non-dogmatic way. In other words, you will need to be charitable toward others and their views, be open to the fact that your own views may be mistaken, and never express hatred or prejudice. If, at any point, you find that what we are discussing is deeply distressing to you, then I encourage you to speak with me. Should your needs exceed my professional capacities, then I will do my best to help you find the support you need.

Etiquette for Email and Classes

Please be sure to be professional when sending emails. When emailing, put the course number in the subject line (Phil 2062F), include an appropriate greeting (e.g., “Dear Professor McLeod” or “Dear Carolyn”), and sign your name at the end so that I know who is emailing me (!). Please also avoid emailing on Saturdays.

The expectation for our in-person classes is that you will be alert, prepared, and actively participating. To that end, you should minimize distractions (e.g., from your cell phone—silence it and keep it out of sight—and from your computer—turn off alerts that might pop up on your screen). You should have copies of the readings and lecture slides at hand and be prepared to ask and/or answer questions about them.

Statement on the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Plagiarism includes but is not limited to the use of generative AI (e.g., ChatGPT) to create content submitted as your own. In this course, you are permitted to use such tools only for information gathering and preliminary research purposes. You must critically evaluate the obtained information, exercise independent thinking, and engage in original work that develops your own arguments. In other words, you can use generative AI only as a starting point for exploration. Overall, you are expected to uphold academic integrity by appropriately attributing all sources and avoiding plagiarism.

If plagiarism or unauthorized AI use is suspected in your written assignments, then you will be asked to produce research notes or drafts after the assignment has been submitted. Be sure, therefore, to keep all notes and first drafts until the assignment is returned to you.

Electronic Devices

No aids are permitted during tests or exams, and that includes electronic devices such as cell phones and smart watches.

Statement on the use of plagiarism-checking software

All required written work will 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>).

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.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION AND ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION

Academic Accommodation is “a means of adjusting the academic activities associated with a course or program of student in order to permit students with disabilities to participate in those activities at the University and to fulfill the essential requirements of a course or program.” <https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academicpolicies/appeals/Academic%20Accommodationdisabilities.pdf>. Students with disabilities are encouraged to register with Accessible Education at the earliest opportunity. “Accessible Education plays a central role in Western's efforts to ensure that its academic programs are accessible for all students” <http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessibleeducation/index.html>

SPECIAL EXAMINATIONS

A Special Examination is any examination other than the regular examination, and it may be offered only with the permission of the Dean of the Faculty in which the student is registered, in consultation with the instructor and Department Chair. Permission to write a Special Examination may be given on the basis of compassionate or medical grounds with appropriate supporting documents. To provide an opportunity for students to recover from the circumstances resulting in a Special Examination, the University has implemented Special Examinations dates. These dates as well as other important information about examinations and academic standing can be found [here](#).

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; and
- 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 ASSIGNMENTS

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

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.