**WESTERN UNIVERSITY**
**Department of Philosophy**
Undergraduate Course Outline 2025-26

**PHILOSOP 2265A**
**Talking Philosophy**

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

## PREREQUISITE CHECKING
There are no prerequisites for this course. It introduces both philosophy and linguistics, and undergraduate students from any field should find the lectures and readings accessible.

## COURSE DESCRIPTION
A very first introduction to philosophy of language, this course will focus on fascinating social and ethical issues about "talk", such as: how language shapes perception; gender-neutral language; racist and sexist language, including slurs and "cat calls"; linguistic reform and the purported "decline of English grammar"; prohibitions on pornography and hate speech; lying and misleading; bullshitting and nonsensical speech; "fake news".

The course is focused on "talk" in another sense. Rather than mere lectures, there is a heavy emphasis on in-class discussion.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES
The twin objectives are honing of academic *skills* and enriching students' familiarity with some "touchstone" *ideas* in linguistics and philosophy. More specifically, in the present course we will focus on i) philosophical skills and ii) applied philosophy of language.

In terms of skills, the emphasis will be on: close scrutiny of arguments; oral debate; and careful, clear writing. By the end of the course, students will be able to compose a brief philosophical essay and to debate fairly and constructively the merits of philosophical techniques and philosophical positions.

In terms of ideas, the emphasis will be on: the nature of language and linguistic meaning; linguistic communication; the psychology of language; social and ethical issues surrounding language and communication.

In brief, though "the findings of linguists and philosopher about talk" will play an important role, the ability to "talk philosophically" will be stressed at least as much.

## COURSE SCHEDULE
I. Background Concepts
II. Language and Ethics
- Lying and misleading

- Bullshitting and fake news

III. On "Language Shapes Perception"

IV. Language and Social/Political Philosophy
- Racist and sexist language: "cat calls", slurs and gender-neutral language
- Restricting speech: pornography, linguistic silencing and hate speech

## REQUIRED TEXTS

**1**. Emma Borg and Sarah Fisher (2025). *Meaning: A Very Short Introduction.* Oxford: Oxford University Press. $12.99.
https://global.oup.com/academic/product/meaning-9780192866547?cc=ca&lang=en&

**2**. Harry Frankfurt (2005). *On Bullshit.* Princeton: Princeton University Press. U$10.95
https://press.princeton.edu/books/hardcover/9780691122946/on-bullshit?srsltid=AfmBOor69ftDETV_lvJhB_hj8m4kOkUenzRzeyBXUBtlEjSjyX1ozdLH

There will also be a series of articles made available on Brightspace:

James E. Mahon (2015). The Definition of Lying and Deception. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.* https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/lying-definition/

Joshua Habgood-Coote (2019) Stop Talking About Fake News! *Inquiry* 62(9/10): 1033-1065.

Chris Swoyer (2015) The Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.*
https://stanford.library.sydney.edu.au/archives/spr2015/entries/relativism/supplement2.html

Justina Diaz-Legaspe, Chang Liu and Robert J. Stainton (2020). Slurs and register: A case study in meaning pluralism. *Mind and Language* 35(2): 156-182.

Jennifer Saul and Esa Diaz-Leon, (2018). Feminist Philosophy of Language. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-language/

Sally Haslanger (2000) Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be? *Noûs* 34(1): 31–55.

David van Mill (2017). Freedom of Speech. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/freedom-speech/

## METHOD OF EVALUATION
Participation: 5%
Two Group Debates: 10% each
Two Short Essays (~500 words): 10% each
Glossary: 20%
Final Exam: 35%

• *Participation*: Because a main aim is inculcation of skills in philosophical and linguistic discussion, attendance and participation are mandatory. Students who regularly miss classes without justification will be requested to withdraw.

• *Debates*: Students will be divided into teams of about four or five, and each team will be assigned either the "pro" or "con" side of a resolution. There will be a group score which will then be modified based on peer reports of the individual student's contribution to the group. In addition to taking part in the debate in class, students will submit three items for grading: a work-plan agreed to by all team members; the group's collective outline of the arguments to be made during the live debate; a detailed peer evaluation of the other members in one's group.

• *Glossary Entries*: As the course progresses, students will be assigned as homework "glossary entries" on key linguistic and philosophical terms. An entry must be both complete and accurate. Complete means a definition, some kind of extended explication, and an example where possible. Each entry should be a few paragraphs long. A compendium of glossaries will be uploaded for grading at the end of the class, but entries should be completed before the next class.

• *Final Exam*: The exam, which will be scheduled during the formal exam period, will cover overarching themes from the entire class and will be essay-based. Its aim is to help students synthesize the material in the various readings and lectures into a coherent whole.

SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS
- All written work must be submitted electronically via Brightspace.
- Late submissions will not be accepted without explicit prior permission of the instructor and/or proper medical documentation. There is no "late penalty": unsubmitted works receive a zero. Because it is merely a compendium of homework, extensions on the Glossary will be granted only under very rare circumstances, such that the student was unable to even upload the finished assignment.

**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 the final 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, students are permitted to use AI tools exclusively for information gathering and preliminary research purposes. These tools are intended to enhance the learning experience by providing access to diverse information sources. 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.

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.

## 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

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

<u>Medical Certificate (SMC)</u> 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.

**<u>Policy on Academic Consideration – Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs</u>**

**<u>RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATION</u>**
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".

**<u>COURSE ASSIGNMENT</u>**
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.

**<u>SCHOLASTIC OFFENCES</u>**
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).

**<u>ACADEMIC ADVISING</u>**
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

**<u>MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT</u>**
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).

**<u>GENDER-BASED AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE</u>**

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.