

WESTERN UNIVERSITY
Department of Philosophy
Undergraduate Course Outline 2025-26

PHILOSOP 2300F
Philosophy of Science

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

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

PREREQUISITE CHECKING

No prerequisites.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores philosophical questions about the nature of science, and the status and impact of science. Over the course of the semester, we will look at examples of successes and failures in science and reflect on issues such as: What are the aims of science? Does science make progress? Is scientific knowledge objective? How do historical and social contexts affect the work of scientists, and how does science shape culture? These questions will be explored through a wide range of topics in the natural and social sciences. No prior background in these scientific fields will be assumed.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

This course has three main objectives. First, students will reflect on the nature of scientific inquiry from a philosophical perspective, including a critical assessment of the methods of science, their rationale, and the nature of scientific progress. Second, the course will invite students to reflect on the relation of science to other aspects of our culture, including ethical questions related to the conduct of research, and the broader implications of scientific research. Third, the assignments for the course will help students to develop their ability to identify and evaluate arguments, to assess different viewpoints fairly and critically, to develop their own positions, and to present clear arguments in writing.

COURSE SCHEDULE [OPTIONAL]

A detailed course schedule will be published later, prior to the start of fall term classes.

TEXTS

We will have one required book:

- Michael Strevens, *The Knowledge Machine* (New York: Liveright / WW Norton, 2020; [webpage](#)). This book will be available through Dellelce family bookstore. Price as listed on [amazon.ca](#) (paperback edition): \$24.95.

Other readings will be posted on the Brightspace website for the course.

METHOD OF EVALUATION

1. Attendance and participation (5%)
2. Short Assignments (15%): 9 assignments over the term. This is a flexible assessment: no late assignments are accepted, but the two lowest scores will be dropped. These assignments will include argument mapping exercises and brief written reflections (incorporating peer review).
3. Papers (50%): two papers of roughly 1200 - 1500 words, due on Oct. 17th and Nov. 21st. Rubrics, suggested topics, and detailed guidelines will be distributed as the term progresses. The late penalty is 3% per work day and 5% for the weekend, with a maximum penalty of 20%. Supporting documentation is required for accommodation for this assessment.
4. Final exam (30%): cumulative essay exam.

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, if used appropriately, can enhance the learning experience by providing access to diverse information sources. However, it is essential that students critically evaluate the outputs and use of this tool, 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. If the students use generative AI tools, these research records must include a transcript of their interactions with the LLM or other tool they have used. 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>

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;
 - 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.