

WESTERN UNIVERSITY
Department of Philosophy
Undergraduate Course Outline 2025-26

PHILOSOP 2715F
Health Care Ethics

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Prof. Charles Weijer
Departments of Philosophy and Medicine
cweijer@uwo.ca
Office hours: By appointment

Sara Varón Echeverri
Department of Philosophy
svaron@uwo.ca
Office hours: By appointment

PREREQUISITE CHECKING

None

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Ethical issues in health care represent some of the most pressing issues faced by Canadians. In this course, students will learn about the most important bioethical issues across the human life span, from conception to death. At what point in development do human beings acquire moral status? Is it ethical to select human embryos for desirable features? When patients and physicians disagree about treatment, who has the final say? Should COVID-19 vaccinations be mandatory? And can we harvest organs for transplantation from the dead? Diverse philosophical approaches to these—and other—bioethical problems will be considered with an emphasis on the role of moral reasoning. Readings and online video lectures will be supplemented with discussion of real-world bioethics cases. The course is recommended for students considering a career in the health professions, or those who seek a deeper understanding of contemporary social issues. No prior background in philosophy is assumed.

The course has three main objectives. First, the course will familiarize students with important topics in bioethics across the human lifespan. Second, it will expose them to a variety of philosophical approaches to key bioethical problems. Third, it will give students the opportunity to apply these differing philosophical approaches to real cases in bioethics.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Define key concepts in bioethics relevant to contemporary ethical issues.
- Identify and defend intuitions about ethical issues in real-world cases by structuring

valid and sound arguments.

- Analyze the central arguments of bioethics articles by reconstructing them.
- Apply arguments or approaches from the bioethics literature to a real-world case.
- Develop comprehensive analyses of complex ethical questions by working in interdisciplinary teams.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Orientation (September 4–7, 2025)

Introduction (September 8–12, 2025)

Conception and embryos (September 15–19, 2025)

Fetuses (September 22–26, 2025)

Procreation and child rearing (September 29–October 3, 2025)

Adults and decision making (October 6–10, 2025)

Conflicts about appropriate treatment (October 13–17, 2025)

Equipoise and clinical research (October 20–24, 2025)

Obligations to the global poor (October 27–31, 2025)

READING WEEK (November 3–7, 2025)

Justice and access to health care (November 10–14, 2025)

Medical assistance in dying (November 17–21, 2025)

Defining death (November 24–28, 2025)

Harvesting organs from the dead (December 1–5, 2025)

COURSE MATERIAL

Required: Weijer C., Skelton A. (eds.). *Bioethics in Canada* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press, 2019. This textbook costs \$116.99 CAD and can be found in the Oxford University Press website included [here](#). Students need to purchase this edition; older editions are not sufficient.

Students are responsible for checking the course OWL site (<https://westernu.brightspace.com/>) regularly for news and updates. This is the primary method by which information will be disseminated to all students in the class.

If students need assistance with the course OWL site, they can seek support on the [OWL Brightspace Help](#) page. Alternatively, they can contact the Western Technology Services Helpdesk. They can be contacted by phone at 519-661-3800 or ext. 83800.

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, the use of AI (automatic translation tools, grammar checkers, ChatGPT...) is prohibited. If unauthorized AI use is suspected, the instructor will ask for research notes, rough drafts, argument analyses and/or case analyses outlines, and other materials used in preparing assignments. Students are expected to retain these materials until after final grades have been

entered. In the unlikely event of concerns being raised about the authenticity of any assignment, students may be asked to produce these materials; an inability to do so may weigh heavily against them.

METHOD OF EVALUATION

Your grade for the course will be based on quizzes, argument analyses, case analyses, and a final exam. All assessments are due at 12:00 PM (NOON) on their respective due dates. Responses to questions must observe the word limit stipulated in the assessment. Responses that exceed the stated word limit will receive a grade of 0.

1. Quizzes

When: Fives quizzes are given during the term (September 19, October 3, October 17, October 31, November 21)

Format: Multiple choice and short answer questions based on the lectures and assigned readings. You will be asked questions about key concepts and arguments. Quizzes are time limited (20 minutes) and closed book. Responses to questions must observe the stated word limit. Responses that exceed the word limit will receive a grade of 0.

Value: The lowest quiz grade will be dropped from the average. 20% of final grade

Late penalty: Late quizzes are not accepted. If you miss a quiz, you cannot take it later and you will receive a grade of 0%.

2. Argument analyses

When: Three argument analyses are assigned during the term (September 26, October 10, November 14)

Format: Short answer questions based on the lectures and assigned readings. You will be asked to explicate and critically evaluate arguments. Argument analyses do not have a time limit, other than the due date and time. Responses to questions must observe the stated word limit. Responses that exceed the word limit will receive a grade of 0.

Value: 20% of final grade (the first two argument analysis are worth 5% and the last one is worth 10%)

Late penalty: Late argument analyses are accepted but there is a late penalty of 5% per day, including weekend days.

3. Case analyses

When: Two case analyses are assigned during the term (October 24, November 28)

Format: Write an analysis of an assigned contemporary ethics case, drawing on course lectures and readings. Case analyses do not have a time limit, other than the due date and time. Responses to questions must observe the stated word limit. Responses that exceed the word limit will receive a grade of 0.

Value: 30% of final grade

Late penalty: Late case analyses are accepted but there is a late penalty of 5% per day, including weekend days.

4. Final exam

When: During exam period

Format: 2-hour exam covering the entire course. Multiple choice questions.

Value: 30% of the final grade

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT MISSED COURSEWORK

Students must familiarize themselves with the *University Policy on Academic Consideration – Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs* posted on the Academic Calendar:

https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration_Sep24.pdf

This policy does not apply to requests for academic consideration submitted for **attempted or completed work**, whether online or in person. The policy also does not apply to students experiencing longer-term impacts on their academic responsibilities. These students should consult: [Accessible Education](#).

For procedures on how to submit Academic Consideration requests, please see the information posted on the Office of the Registrar's webpage:

https://registrar.uwo.ca/academics/academic_considerations/

All requests for Academic Consideration must be made within 48 hours after the assessment date or submission deadline.

All academic consideration requests must include supporting documentation; however, recognizing that formal documentation may not be available in some extenuating circumstances, the policy allows students to make one Academic Consideration request **without supporting documentation** in this course. However, the following assessments are excluded from this, and therefore always require formal supporting documentation:

- Examinations scheduled during official examination periods (Defined by policy)

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 any of the quizzes or the final exam. Electronic devices such as calculators, cell phones and smart watches are not permitted when responding to these assessments.

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/academic_policies/appeals/Academic%20Accommodation_disabilities.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/accessible_education/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:

https://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>).

Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

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](mailto:contact.support@uwo.ca).

LEARNING DEVELOPMENT AND SUCCESS

Counsellors at the Learning Development and Success Centre <https://learning.uwo.ca> are ready to help you improve your learning skills. They offer presentations on strategies for improving time management, multiple-choice exam preparation/writing, textbook reading, and more. Individual support is offered throughout the Fall/Winter terms in the drop-in Learning Help Centre, and year-round through individual counselling.

USC

Additional student-run support services are offered by the USC, <https://westernusc.ca/services/>.