



Reasoning and Critical Thinking

PHIL 1230A, Section 550, Summer Evening of 2023 | Online | May 8-June 16 [6 Weeks]

Dr. Jonathan P. Marsh jmarsh26@uwo.ca

Zoom Sessions: Tu and Th at 6:30 pm (see comment box at the bottom of this page)

Weekly Virtual Office Hours: TBA

Description

We humans are, in the familiar ancient slogan, “rational animals”. Yet there are systematic problems with the way we reason — routed in unconscious biases, fallacies, illusions, inconsistencies, misinformation and a multitude of intellectual vices.

The goal of this course is to help us get better at mitigating these cognitive shortcomings and, in turn, enhance our ability to reason. We pursue this aim with an eye towards forming more accurate beliefs and making better decisions.

Prerequisite(s): None

Antirequisite(s): PHILOSOPHY 1000E, PHILOSOPHY 1200

Methods

Teaching methods will involve pre-prepared slides, with brief recordings, and online class discussions and exercises.

Text

There is no textbook for this course. All readings will be made available via OWL.

Technical Requirements



Stable internet connection

(for accessing assignment instructions and submitting assignments via OWL etc.)



Laptop or desktop computer



Working microphone



Working webcam

(for participating in Zoom meetings and podcast recordings etc.)



(**Privacy:** To respect the privacy and confidentiality of all members of PHIL 1230, videos, pictures, or voice recordings, during any of our online classes, are prohibited.)



This fully online course will contain a mixture of synchronous and asynchronous learning methods. All synchronous (i.e., live Zoom) sessions will take place at the Tuesday and Thursday start times above. Zoom meetings will never last a full 3 hours. As an alternative, students will be given material to prepare for those sessions, asynchronously, at their own discretion. A **weekly schedule** (with Zoom links) will be made available on OWL. **Lastly, if you are working outside of Huron’s local time zone, and are unable to attend our Zoom meetings, please see the red note below (p. 2).**

Aims

By the end of term, every committed student will know how to do four things:

1. categorize, diagram and assess arguments from virtually any discipline,
2. spot and, to some extent, mitigate common forms of human irrationality (e.g., biases, fallacies and inconsistencies), and the various harms they can cause,
3. look for good sources of information and distinguish these from bad sources
4. employ various techniques and principles for rationally updating their beliefs (SKILLS) (KNOWLEDGE, 1-4),



Students will also get opportunities to

5. construct intellectual rules or guidelines that improve their thinking and/or decision-making (PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT).

Evaluative Requirements

Assignments	Values	Due Dates	Corresponding Aims
1. Active and Informed Participation	20 %	Weekly	1-5 (above)
2. Rationality Podcast (in groups)	20 %	May 24 (recorded on May 23)	2,4 & 5
3. Rules Assignment	20%	June 1	2, 4 & 5
4. Final Exam	40 %	June 15	1,2 & 3

Participation: Good philosophy requires conversation. Consequently, in addition to prepared materials/slides/recordings that you will review on your own time, this course contains weekly live sessions which will take place over Zoom. A successful participation grade requires taking active measures to advance the discussion. These include:

- (i) knowing and thoughtfully engaging the relevant materials (viz., the readings and/or prep slides listed on your weekly checklist),
- (ii) applying the tools and virtues associated with critical thinking,
- (iii) submitting written answers (1-2 sentences) Forum Qs, which will be released during the session. Forum Qs must be accessed— and answers must be submitted— within the small classroom window that is provided. No exceptions.
- (iv) respecting the College’s conduct rules and any course-specific policies (see OWL), including our strict **no recording policy** (which helps protect student privacy and confidentiality).

Note: if you are working outside of Huron’s local time zone, and are unable to attend our live online sessions, please note this in OWL’s DropBox, by May 16 by simply writing “Opt-Out Request for Online Participation” in the subject title. I would be pleased to fully accommodate you. Also, I will post slides corresponding to the tutorials.



Podcast: For this assignment, you will work, virtually, in small groups, including a moderator, that your instructor will assign. After receiving instructions and a group number, each group will record a video (or audio) podcast, over Zoom, and submit it for a grade. Detailed instructions will be provided via OWL.

Rules assignment: You will construct your own concrete rule(s) for mitigating bias and/or avoiding common fallacies. Detailed instructions, with a sample assignment, will be provided via OWL prior to the deadline.

Exam: To take place on **June 15, 2023** at 6:30 PM. Students will have 2 hours to complete — and properly submit — the exam, unless they formally qualify for extra time; in that case, it will automatically be provided. As this exam will be “open book”, and written from home, its purpose is to test the student’s understanding of course material and procedural knowledge of course techniques etc. As answers to such questions cannot be unreflectively pasted from the slides, advanced preparation is strongly recommended. The exam will likely have a mixture of longer answer questions and shorter questions, though nothing that a student could cut-and-paste from the slides. More details will be provided during our review session.

Grading Information and Explanation of Grades

Each assignment will be accompanied by grading criteria and clear instructions. Students will be evaluated in accordance with how well they follow them. What follows is a university wide grade explanation:

A+	90-100	One could scarcely expect better from a student at this level
A	80-89	Superior work which is clearly above average
B	70-79	Good work, meeting all requirements, and eminently satisfactory
C	60-69	Competent work, meeting requirements
D	50-59	Fair work, minimally acceptable
F	below 50	Fail

Class-specific policy on AI (e.g. Chat GPT) use: Use of Chat GPT or other AI services is strictly prohibited in all assessments, including essays and examinations. Unauthorized use of AI will be subject to academic discipline. Cheating-detection software(s) will be employed.

COURSE MAP

Please note: the schedule below is approximate, and may be revised during the semester.

See our Zoom schedule and weekly checklists on OWL.

Unit 1. Groundwork

Week 1

- 1.1. "The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters"
- 1.2. Writing Your Book of Beliefs

Unit 2. Obstacles to Reasoning Well

- 2.1. Inconsistencies



Week 2

- 2.2. Biases

Week 3

- 2.3. Vices
- 2.4. Fallacies

Unit 3. Reasoning & Argumentation

Weeks 4 & 5

- 3.1. The Nature, Purpose & Appropriate Domains of Argumentation
- 3.2. Argument Mapping
- 3.3. Constructing & Evaluating Arguments

Unit 4. Social Dimensions of Rationality & Irrationality

Week 6

- 4.1. Testimony & Trust [Novices & Experts]
- 4.2. Echo Chambers & Epistemic Bubbles

Unit 5. Rational Choice (time permitting)

- 5.1. Decisions Under Ignorance / Decisions Under Uncertainty
- **Final exam June 15 [Final day of class]**



Appendix to Course Outlines: Academic Policies & Regulations Summer 2023

Student Code of Conduct

Membership in the community of Huron University College and Western University implies acceptance by every student of the principle of respect for the rights, responsibilities, dignity and well-being of others and a readiness to support an environment conducive to the intellectual and personal growth of all who study, work and live within it. Upon registration, students assume the responsibilities that such registration entails. While in the physical or online classroom, students are expected to behave in a manner that supports the learning environment of others. Please review the Student Code of Conduct at:

<https://huronatwestern.ca/sites/default/files/Res%20Life/Student%20Code%20of%20Conduct%20-%20Revised%20September%202019.pdf>.

Prerequisite and Antirequisite Information

Students are responsible for ensuring that they have successfully completed all course prerequisites and that they have not completed any course antirequisites. Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Attendance Regulations for Examinations

A student is entitled to be examined in courses in which registration is maintained, subject to the following limitations:

- 1) A student may be debarred from writing the final examination for failure to maintain satisfactory academic standing throughout the year.
- 2) Any student who, in the opinion of the instructor, is absent too frequently from class or laboratory periods in any course will be reported to the Dean of the Faculty offering the course (after due warning has been given). On the recommendation of the Department concerned, and with the permission of the Dean of that Faculty, the student will be debarred from taking the regular examination in the course. The Dean of the Faculty offering the course will communicate that decision to the Dean of the Faculty of registration.

Review the policy on Attendance Regulations for Examinations here: [Academic Calendar - Western University \(uwo.ca\)](#)

Statement on Academic 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 website: [Academic Calendar - Western University \(uwo.ca\)](#). The appeals process is also outlined in this

policy as well as more generally at the following website:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/appealsundergrad.pdf.

Turnitin.com

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>).

Statement on Use of Electronic Devices

It is not appropriate to use electronic devices (such as, but not limited to, laptops, tablets, cell phones) in the classroom for non-classroom activities. Such activity is disruptive and distracting to other students and to the instructor, and can inhibit learning. Students are expected to respect the classroom environment and to refrain from inappropriate use of technology and other electronic devices in class.

Statement on Use of Personal Response Systems (“Clickers”)

Personal Response Systems (“clickers”) may be used in some classes. If clickers are to be used in a class, it is the responsibility of the student to ensure that the device is activated and functional. Students must see their instructor if they have any concerns about whether the clicker is malfunctioning. Students must use only their own clicker. If clicker records are used to compute a portion of the course grade:

- the use of somebody else’s clicker in class constitutes a scholastic offence
- the possession of a clicker belonging to another student will be interpreted as an attempt to commit a scholastic offence.

Academic Consideration for Missed Work

All students pursuing academic consideration, regardless of type, must contact their instructors no less than 24 hours following the end of the period of absence to clarify how they will be expected to fulfill the academic responsibilities missed during their absence. **Students are reminded that they should consider carefully the implications of postponing tests or midterm exams or delaying submission of work, and are encouraged to make appropriate decisions based on their specific circumstances.**

Students who have conditions for which academic accommodation is appropriate, such as disabilities or ongoing or chronic health conditions, should work with Accessible Education Services to determine appropriate forms of accommodation. Further details concerning policies and procedures may be found at: <http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/>.

Policy on Academic Consideration for a Medical/ Non-Medical Absence

- (a) **Consideration on Medical Grounds for assignments worth *less than 10%* of final grade: Consult Instructor Directly and Contact Academic Advising**

When seeking consideration on **medical grounds** for assignments worth *less than 10%* of the final course grade, the student should contact the instructor directly. The student need only share broad outlines of the medical situation. The instructor **may** require the student to submit documentation to

the academic advisors, in which case she or he will advise the student and inform the academic advisors to expect documentation. If documentation is requested, the student will need to complete and submit the [Student Medical Certificate](#). The instructor may not collect medical documentation. The advisors will contact the instructor when the medical documentation is received, and will outline the severity and duration of the medical challenge as expressed on the Student Medical Certificate and in any other supporting documentation. The student will be informed that the instructor has been notified of the presence of medical documentation, and will be instructed to work as quickly as possible with the instructor on an agreement for accommodation.

b) Medical Grounds for assignments worth 10% or more of final grade: Go Directly to Academic Advising

University Senate policy, which can be found at [Academic Calendar - Western University \(uwo.ca\)](#) requires that all student requests for accommodation on medical grounds for assignments worth 10% or more of the final grade be made directly to the academic advising office of the home faculty (for Huron students, the “home faculty” is Huron), with supporting documentation in the form (minimally) of the Senate-approved Student Medical Certificate found at: https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf.

The documentation is submitted in confidence and will not be shown to instructors. The advisors will contact the instructor when the medical documentation is received, and will outline the severity and duration of the medical challenge as expressed on the Student Medical Certificate and in any other supporting documentation. The student will be informed that the instructor has been notified of the presence of medical documentation, and will be instructed to work as quickly as possible with the instructor on an agreement for accommodation. The instructor will not normally deny accommodation where appropriate medical documentation is in place and where the duration it describes aligns with the due date(s) of assignment(s). Before denying a request for accommodation on medical grounds, the instructor will consult with the Dean. The instructor’s decision is appealable to the Dean.

c) Consideration on Non-Medical Grounds: Consult Huron Support Services/Academic Advising, or email huronsss@uwo.ca.

Students seeking academic consideration for a **non-medical** absence (e.g. varsity sports, religious, compassionate, or bereavement) will be required to provide appropriate documentation. All consideration requests must include a completed [Consideration Request Form](#). Late penalties may apply at the discretion of the instructor.

Please review the full policy on Academic Consideration for medical and non-medical absence at: [accommodation_medical.pdf \(uwo.ca\)](#). Consult [Huron Academic Advising](#) at huronsss@uwo.ca for any further questions or information.

Support Services

For advice on course selections, degree requirements, and for assistance with requests for medical accommodation, students should email an Academic Advisor in Huron’s Student Support Services at

huronsss@uwo.ca. An outline of the range of services offered is found on the Huron website at: <https://huronatwestern.ca/student-life/student-services/>.

Department Chairs, Program Directors and Coordinators are also able to answer questions about individual programs. Contact information can be found on the Huron website at: <https://huronatwestern.ca/contact/faculty-staff-directory/>.

If you think that you are too far behind to catch up or that your workload is not manageable, you should consult your Academic Advisor. If you are considering reducing your workload by dropping one or more courses, this must be done by the appropriate deadlines. Please refer to the Advising website, <https://huronatwestern.ca/student-life/student-services/academic-advising/> or review the list of official Sessional Dates on the Academic Calendar, available here: <http://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/SessionalDates.cfm>.

You should consult with the course instructor and the Academic Advisor who can help you consider alternatives to dropping one or more courses. Note that dropping a course may affect OSAP and/or Scholarship/Bursary eligibility.

Huron Student Support Services: <https://huronatwestern.ca/student-life/student-services/> Office of the Registrar: <https://registrar.uwo.ca/>
Student Quick Reference Guide: <https://huronatwestern.ca/student-life/student-services/#1> Academic Support & Engagement: <http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/>
Huron University College Student Council: <https://huronatwestern.ca/student-life/beyond-classroom/hucsc/>
Western USC: <http://westernusc.ca/your-services/#studentservices>

Wellness and Health Supports at Huron and Western

University students may encounter setbacks from time to time that can impact academic performance. Huron offers a variety of services that are here to support your success and wellbeing. All Huron staff and faculty have received training on responding to disclosures of Gender-Based Sexual Violence (GBSV); students should know that the Community Safety Office is a resource for survivors, providing support and, if desired, guidance while referring them to the further supports that they may require. Please visit <https://huronatwestern.ca/student-life-campus/student-services/wellness-safety> for more information or contact staff directly:

Wellness Services:

huronwellness@huron.uwo.ca Community

Safety Office: safety@huron.uwo.ca

Additional supports for Health and Wellness may be found and accessed at Western through, <https://www.uwo.ca/health/>.

Western Calendar - Policy Pages -
[Academic Calendar - Western University \(uwo.ca\)](#)