



Reasoning and Critical Thinking

PHIL 1230A, Section 550, Summer Evening of 2021 | Online | **May 3-June 11** [6 Weeks]

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

Weekly 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 live virtual class discussions (e.g., tutorials, workshops and various exercises).

Text

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

Technical Requirements



Stable internet connection



Laptop or desktop computer



Working microphone



Working webcam



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. Weekly checklists and a Zoom schedule 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 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 21 (recorded on May 20)	2,4 & 5
• 3. Rules Assignment	20%	June 2	2, 4 & 5
• 4. Final Exam	40 %	June 10	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. Every student is expected to submit one (1) written answer (1-2 sentences) to a weekly Forum Q. Forum Qs must be accessed—and answers must be submitted—within the small classroom window that is provided. No exceptions. Students will also be rewarded for their verbal contributions, which will take place in relaxing (i.e., small group) settings.

- *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, during the first week of class, by simply writing "Opt-Out Request for Online Participation and/or Podcast" in the subject title. I would be pleased to fully accommodate you for missing assignments 1 and/or 4, upon request. Please indicate your choices in DropBox.*

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. See schedule below. Detailed instructions will be provided via OWL. **Note:** if you are uncomfortable with facial presentation, you may mute your webcam. Also see the red note above.

Rules assignment: This assignment is designed to encourage you to think carefully about how to think better in the midst of applying course techniques and concepts. You will be constructing 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 in June (date: TBA). As this exam will be be "open book", and written from home, its purpose is to test the student's understanding of major themes, arguments and positions etc. As answers to such questions cannot be unreflectively pasted from the slides, advanced preparation is strongly recommended.

All written assignments, including your exam, must be submitted through the assignments tab (on OWL).

Grading Information and Explanation of Grades

Each assignment will be accompanied with 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

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 Part I (Novices & Experts)
- 4.2. Testimony & Trust Part II (Echo Chambers, Media & Advertising)

Unit 5. Rational Decision-Making (time permitting)

- 5.1. Assessing Risk & Reasoning Under Uncertainty
- **Final exam June 10 [Final day of class]**

Appendix to Course Outlines: Academic Policies & Regulations 2021 - 2022

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.

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>.

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:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/exam/attendance.pdf.

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: https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf. 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, 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

Students who are seeking academic consideration for missed work during the semester may submit a self-reported absence form online provided that the absence is **48 hours or less** and the other conditions specified in the Senate policy at

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_illness.pdf are met.

Students whose absences are expected to last **longer than 48 hours**, or where the other conditions detailed in the policy are not met (e.g., work is worth more than 30% of the final grade, the student has already used 2 self-reported absences, the absence is during the final exam period), may receive academic consideration by submitting a Student Medical Certificate (for illness) or other appropriate documentation (for compassionate grounds). The Student Medical Certificate is available online at https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf.

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, and if the student has exceeded the maximum number of permissible Self-Reported absences, 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) 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 where the conditions for a Self-Reported Absence have not been met, including where the student has exceeded the maximum number of permissible Self-Reported. 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: https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_illness.pdf. 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>
Learning Development and Success: <https://www.uwo.ca/sdc/learning/>
Accessible Education: <http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/>

Western USC: <http://westernusc.ca/your-services/#studentservices>

Mental Health & Wellness Support 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. 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

Chaplaincy: gthorne@huron.uwo.ca

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