

Western Student Experience

UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO

SCHOLAR'S ELECTIVES 1100F/002
FALL 2025

Tuesdays 6:30-8:30

Professor Jan Plug

jplug@uwo.ca: I will usually respond within 24 hours; emails that find me on a Friday or over the weekend will normally receive a response the following Monday

Office: UC 2220 (within the Academic Advising suite on the main floor of University College)

Office hours: Tuesdays 10-12; but it's best to email me to set up an appointment, if possible (I sometimes get called to meetings at the last minute). You can also just pop by my office – I'm there a lot and my door is usually open.

Prerequisites: 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. *It is students' responsibility to ensure that they have the proper requisites.*

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course we will explore some big questions and wicked problems together. We'll start with a brief exploration of some theories of the nature of reality and of time, and we will then move to explore how we know that reality. What is the nature of knowledge? And what are **we** as beings that know and think? What makes us different from machines – if anything? Finally, how do we express all of this? What is the nature of language – understood in the broadest sense – that allows us to formulate these very questions and to formulate a sense of ourselves?

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- To develop the critical skills to unpack authors' biases, presuppositions, and the implications of their arguments, how claims are made, and what purchase they have.
- To examine questions of broad interest critically and to express yourself clearly and concisely in writing and orally.

- For you to discover something completely unexpected—for you and for me—about literature, how we approach it, what it means, how it means, etc. This is a lofty goal, but I think we should be open to it.

COURSE MATERIALS

All course materials will be circulated in class or available through the course site. No cost.

ELECTRONIC DEVICES

Please leave your phones turned off and put away.

Also, I much prefer it when students take notes with pen and paper – all the studies show that doing so improves your learning and creates a better classroom atmosphere for others to learn in.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Participation	20%
Summary	20%
Short Essay 1	25%
Final Essay	35%

All work will be submitted through the course site.

Participation: It is my ardent wish that this course be a discussion about the texts, films, lectures, etc., we will be reading and watching and listening to. For it to be that, you need to prepare the material in advance of class – not just read it or watch it or listen to it, but do these while taking notes, jotting down ideas, questions, etc. Bring these ideas to class. Share them with your classmates and me. Disagree. Debate. Discuss.

That said, what I'm interested in is your engagement, and I understand that some show this differently from others. So, if you're on the quieter side, not to worry: be engaged in the way that makes sense for you. I'll notice.

Summary: This will be an early chance for you to work through some ideas and to have me engage with your thinking – and your writing. Another ardent wish: that you improve your writing over the course of the semester. So, I'll use this first piece of writing to get a sense of where your strengths are and of where you can still improve.

Assignment: Write a summary of one of the works on the syllabus up to and including September 23. Discuss one or more key point or points. **300-400 words**. Due: **September 29**

Short Essay: An essay on a topic of your choosing, based on the material from October through to Reading Week.

Topics are due by **October 14**: describe what you would like to discuss and what some of your initial ideas are. The topic should be written in sentences and paragraphs. 2-3 paragraphs should suffice (say, a page).

600-700 words

Essay due: **November 10**

Topic: 5%.

Essay: 20%

Final Essay: As for the short essay, except on material from Reading Week to the end of the course. You may bring this material into conversation with a work we haven't read that resonates with you and with the work we have covered.

750-1000 words

Topics due: **November 25**

Essay due: **December 8**

Topic: 5%

Essay: 30%

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 [here](#).

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 follow this link: [Student Absence Portal](#). **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.

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, [here](#).

Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

One of the main questions we'll be discussing this semester concerns the nature of thinking and its relationship to language.

I'll say quickly here, then, that I'm interested in **your** thinking and writing, not that of a large language model. You must that you complete all your work without the use of AI.

If I suspect you have used AI, I might ask for research notes, rough drafts, essay outlines, and other materials used in preparing assignments. You 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, you may be asked to produce these materials; an inability to do so may weigh heavily against you.

Plagiarism:

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence.

Plagiarism Checking:

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>.

All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Chair of Undergraduate Studies. Proven cases of plagiarism will result in a grade of zero for the assignment. Subsequent offences will result in failure for the course.

POLICY ON ACCOMMODATION FOR RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS

Students should review the [policy for Accommodation for Religious Holidays](#) . Where a student will be unable to write examinations and term tests due to a conflicting religious holiday, they should inform their instructors as soon as possible but **not later than two weeks** prior to writing the examination/term test. In the case of conflict with a midterm test, students should inform their instructor as soon as possible but not later than one week prior to the midterm.

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” ([Academic Policies](#)). 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” ([Accessible Education](#)).

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/studentsupport/survivorsupport/get-help.html>. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

SUPPORT SERVICES

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Student Development Centre <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western: <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

September 9 Introductions

Time, Space, Reality

September 16: Richard Feynman, Lecture on probability and uncertainty
(Those wanting more science reading might want to read “Probability and Uncertainty”:
https://www.feynmanlectures.caltech.edu/I_06.html)

Carlo Rovelli, selections from *Seven Brief Lessons on Physics*;
For more Rovelli, see his lecture at **Western**:
“Come With Me Inside a Black Hole”
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qiNDTVewyAs>)

September 23: Rovelli, from *Seven Brief Lessons on Physics*
Hannah Arendt, “The Conquest of Space and the Stature of Man”
Max Tegmark, <https://share.google/eDMPeZm3SG9VuCp7a> – People I
(Mostly) Admire podcast, episode 51

September 30: National Day for Truth and Reconciliation
NO CLASS

Thinking, Human: Human Thinking

October 7: René Descartes, selection from *Meditations*
Alan Turing, “Can Machines Think?”

October 14: Special Guest
Professor Mark Daley, Professor of Computer Science and Chief AI
Officer

Daniel Dennet, from *Consciousness Explained*

Geoff Hinton (18 minutes):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6fvXWG9Auyg>

Mark Daley
<https://noeticengines.substack.com/p/ai-isnt-running-water>

<https://noeticengines.substack.com/p/what-if-intelligence-were-free>

- October 21:** SAFETalk
Rebecca Smith
- October 28** *Bladerunner*
- November 4** Reading Week
NO CLASS
- November 11** Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto"
Hooks, selection from *Ain't I a Woman?*

Imitation, Meaning, Language

- November 18:** Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto"
Kafka, "Report to an Academy"
- November 25:** Ferdinand de Saussure, selections from *Course in General Linguistics*
Heinrich von Kleist, "On the Gradual Completion of Thought While Speaking"
- December 2:** Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in a Non-moral Sense"
- December 9:** Odds and ends
Last Day of Classes