

Course delivery with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic

Although the intent is for this course to be delivered in-person, the changing COVID-19 landscape may necessitate some or all of the course to be delivered online, either synchronously (i.e., at the times indicated in the timetable) or asynchronously (e.g., posted on OWL for students to view at their convenience). The grading scheme will not change. Any assessments affected will be conducted online as determined by the course instructor.

HURON UNIVERSITY COLLEGE
Philosophy 3220G 550: Bias, Rationality, and Objectivity
2021-2022

Winter Term, 2022	Instructor: Dr. Steve Bland
Prerequisites: none	Office: A301
Tuesdays, 2:30-3:20, V207 (when in person)	Office hours: By appointment only
Thursdays, 3:30-5:20, V207 (when in person)	Email: sbland2@uwo.ca

Human beings make systematically irrational judgements and decisions. These predictable departures from rational norms are called *cognitive biases*, and they've been found to have a significant impact on nearly every domain of human inquiry and action, from law and politics, to commerce and education. The empirical literature on cognitive biases spawned a number of contentious debates in the 1980's and 1990's about the nature, causes, and extent of human rationality, known as the Rationality Wars. More recently, philosophers and psychologists have disagreed about how best to address the problem of cognitive bias. This course will delve into these debates by examining the empirical and philosophical work on biased cognition. In the process, we will address such philosophical questions as: What is the nature of human rationality? To what extent should we trust our own cognition? Can we reduce cognitive biases? If so, how?

COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Recognize and identify some of the conditions in which judgements and decisions are likely to be biased.
2. Formulate strategies for mitigating biased cognition in themselves and others.
3. Articulate consequences of the empirical literature on cognitive biases for epistemic theories.

CLASS METHODS

While this course is being delivered online, we will meet via Zoom at the appointed times. The Zoom links can be found on the course OWL site. I will deliver the lectures and facilitate discussion just as I would if we were meeting in person. The lectures will be interactive, and include PowerPoint slides, discussions, in class questions.

I ask that you arrive at the meeting on time. No one will be admitted beyond five minutes after the beginning of the class. I also ask, but do not require, that you turn your camera on, since it's easier to have an interesting, responsive conversation when every participant's face can be seen. These conversations also benefit from a lack of distractions, so please limit your access to possible sources of distraction during tutorial meetings, e.g., phone, television, roommates, social media, etc.

If we return to in-person learning, we will proceed by meeting at the appointed times and classroom. Everything else about the course delivery will remain the same.

READINGS

The course material will be drawn from the following articles. The entries with an asterisk (*) can be found on the OWL site; all others are retrievable online:

Tversky, A. & Kahneman, D. (1974). Judgement under uncertainty: heuristics and biases. *Science* 185(4157): 1124-1131.

*Stanovich, K. & West, R.F. (2011). A taxonomy of rational thinking problems. In *Rationality & the Reflective Mind* (pp. 95-119). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kunda, Z. (1990). The case for motivated reasoning. *Psychological Bulletin* 108(3): 480-498.

Roberts, R.C. and West, R. (2015). Natural epistemic defects and corrective virtues. *Synthese* 192: 2557-2576.

Samuelson, P.L. and Church, I.M. (2015). When cognition turns vicious: Heuristics and biases in light of virtue epistemology. *Philosophical Psychology* 28(8): 1095-1113.

*Ahlstrom-Vij, K. (2013). *Epistemic Paternalism: A Defense*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, Chapter 1.

Trout, J.D. (2005). Paternalism and cognitive bias. *Law and Philosophy* 24: 393-434.

Alfano, M. (2012). Extending the situationist challenge to responsibilist virtue epistemology. *Philosophical Quarterly* 62(247): 223-249.

*Alfano, M. (2014). Extending the situationist challenge to reliabilism about inference. In A. Fairweather (ed.) *Virtue Epistemology Naturalized* (pp. 103-122). Dordrecht, Holland: Springer.

*Kihlstrom, J. (2013). The person-situation interaction. In D. Carlston (Ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Social Cognition* (pp. 786-806). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

*Gigerenzer, G. (2008). Bounded and rational. In *Rationality for Mortals: How People Cope With Uncertainty* (pp. 3-19). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

*Gigerenzer, G. (2008). Fast and frugal heuristics. In *Rationality for Mortals: How People Cope With Uncertainty* (pp.20-45). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mercier, H. and Sperber, D. (2011). Why do humans reason? Arguments for an argumentative theory. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 34(2): 57-74.

Levy, N. & Alfano, M. (2020). Knowledge from vice: Deeply social epistemology. *Mind* 129(515): 887-915.

METHODS OF EVALUATION

10% Participation

The bulk of this grade will be determined on the basis of class attendance, but a perfect attendance record, by itself, will not earn a perfect participation grade. In addition, you will be expected to make informed contributions to the class by way of asking questions, interpreting texts, and offering arguments. **Any student with an attendance record of less than 70% will receive a grade of 0% for participation.** A lack of attendance or participation **cannot be accommodated**, since there is no alternative for evaluating your engagement with the course material and classmates in real time.

10% Participation Questions

Most lectures will include questions that you will be asked to answer **in class**. The purpose of these questions is to stimulate your interest and involvement in discussions, and to reveal some of the principles that govern the way you think. All questions must be completed in class in real time. Answers submitted outside of class **will not be accepted**, and missed questions **cannot** be made up or accommodated for **any** reason.

10% Forum Posts

You are responsible for posting at least one question or comment in the Forum section of OWL **by the end of every week**. These posts should engage the material covered in class. They can be questions about something that is unclear to you, objections to any of the views discussed, suggestions about how to extend a theory, comments about where to find other relevant information on the topics under consideration, or responses to something that someone else has said. Forum posts will be evaluated on the basis of their relevance, insight, and capacity to generate discussion. **You will not receive credit for forum posts about lectures you did not attend**, and missed posts **cannot** be made up or accommodated for **any** reason.

30% 3 Small Assignments (due dates TBA)

These assignments will require you to extend and apply the material discussed in Lectures 3, 4, and 8.

5% Essay proposal (due March 25th)

Proposals will include: an essay question; thesis; main argument; and annotated bibliography. Your graded proposal will be returned to you at least one week before the due date of the essay.

30% Essay (due April 8th)

You will be responsible for submitting an essay of approximately 3,000 words on a topic of your choosing and my approval.

5% Essay comments (due 3 days after the essays are returned)

I will return your graded essays, having filled out a rubric and commented on the first half only. You will then be responsible for commenting on the second half of your essay, pointing out mistakes, weaknesses, and ways in which your essay could be improved.

LATE PENALTY: the penalty is 3% per day, including weekends. If you have recognized grounds for academic accommodation for an applicable assignment, present them to Academic Counselling as soon as possible; if your request for accommodation is accepted by Academic Counselling, it is then your responsibility to make alternative arrangements with the instructor before the due date. If either of these conditions are not met, an accommodation will not be made.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

***Please note:** this is a **provisional** schedule: one or more lectures may need to be deleted due to time constraints or external circumstances; no new topics will be introduced.

Lecture	Topic	Reading
1	Heuristics and biases	Kahneman & Tversky, "Judgement under uncertainty: heuristics and biases"
2	Causes of bias	Stanovich & West, "A taxonomy of rational thinking problems" Kunda, "The case for motivated reasoning"
3	Virtue epistemology	Roberts & West, "Natural epistemic defects and corrective virtues" Samuelson & Church, "When cognition turns vicious: Heuristics and biases in light of virtue epistemology"
4	Epistemic paternalism	Ahlstrom-Vij, <i>Epistemic Paternalism: A Defense</i> , Ch. 1 Trout, "Paternalism and cognitive bias"
5	Epistemic situationism	Alfano, "Extending the situationist challenge to responsibilist virtue epistemology" Alfano, "Expanding the situationist challenge to reliabilism about inference"
6	Interactionism	Kihlstrom, "The person-situation interaction"

7	Fast and frugal heuristics	Gigerenzer, “Bounded and rational” Gigerenzer, “Fast and frugal heuristics”
8	Collectivism	Mercier & Sperber, “Why do humans reason?”
9	Extreme epistemic deference	Levy & Alfano, “Knowledge from vice: Deeply social epistemology”



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

Mandatory Use of Masks in Classrooms

Students will be expected to wear triple layer non-medical masks at all times in the classroom as per Huron policy and public health directives. Students are now permitted to drink water in class by lifting and replacing the mask each time a drink is taken. Students will be able to eat and drink outside of the classroom during scheduled breaks.

Students unwilling to wear a mask as stipulated by Huron policy and public health directives will be referred to the Dean's Office, and such actions will be considered a violation of the Huron Student Code of Conduct.

Pandemic Contingency

In the event of a COVID-19 resurgence during the course that necessitates the course delivery moving away from face-to-face interaction, all remaining course content will be delivered entirely online, typically using a combination of synchronous instruction (i.e., at the times indicated in the timetable) and asynchronous material (e.g., posted on OWL for students to view at their convenience). Any remaining assessments will also be conducted online at the discretion of the course instructor. In the unlikely event that changes to the grading scheme are necessary, these changes will be clearly communicated as soon as possible.

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:

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>
Academic Support & Engagement: <http://academicssupport.uwo.ca/>
Huron University College Student Council: <https://huronatwestern.ca/student-life/beyond-classroom/hucsc/>
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/>.