

PHIL 2062G*
Power, Oppression, and Privilege

Instructor

*This course is blended, meaning it will occur partly online (on OWL) and partly in-person. The lectures will be delivered asynchronously online. There will be 90 minutes of in-person class time.

Note: this outline is tentative and is therefore subject to change.

PREREQUISITES

None.

DESCRIPTION

To say our society is racist, sexist, or the like is to say that it is marked by systems and relationships of power that are oppressive to certain groups of people. This course examines these systems and relationships and considers what philosophers have said about them. We will explore their answers to questions including the following: What does it mean to be oppressed or be the target of something like homophobia or ableism? How should we understand power as it occurs in relationships of both oppression and privilege? How do different systems of oppression intersect and inform one another? How do tools of oppression (e.g., microaggressions, stereotyping) work? How can people be empowered to resist their own oppression or the oppression of others? How can they act in solidarity with one another to achieve this goal?

The above questions fit under categories that correspond to different ways that power can manifest itself in society: as domination (oppress others), as resistance (resist), and as solidarity (stand with others). The course will be divided up according to these three topics. We will also apply the theories we learn to cases, where examples may include police violence against Black people, reproductive justice against Indigenous peoples, and the misgendering of trans people.

TEXTS

All course material will be available on our OWL site. There is nothing you need to purchase for this course.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of the course, you, the students, should be able to:

- Appreciate better what it means to have power in society and to be oppressed and/or privileged
- Understand philosophical theories about power, oppression, privilege, and related concepts such as stereotyping, microaggressions, and moral deference
- Learn how to apply these theories to cases and how to think critically about both the theories and the cases
- Imagine how you could translate what you learn in the course into political action

In addition, through your assignments, you will develop or hone skills that include the following:

- Interpreting and applying philosophical theories or concepts
- Critical analysis and writing
- Thoughtful engagement with others on controversial political or moral issues

METHOD OF EVALUATION

- 1) Quizzes: 15%
- 2) Class Participation: 10%
- 3) Essay Assignment: 35%
- 4) Midterm Test: 15%
- 5) Final Exam: 25%

A NOTE ON COURSE CONTENT

In this course, we will be dealing with issues that may be deeply personal for members of the class. While rigorous debate across differing perspectives is expected and encouraged, it is crucial that all members of the class participate respectfully and in a non-dogmatic way. In other words, you will need to be charitable toward others and their views, be open to the fact that your own views may be mistaken, and never express hatred or prejudice. If, at any point, you find that what we are discussing is distressing to you, then I encourage you to speak with me. Should your needs exceed my professional capacities, then I will do my best to help you find the support you need.

ETIQUETTE FOR EMAIL AND CLASSES

Please be sure to be professional when sending emails. When emailing, put the course number in the subject line (Phil 2062F), include an appropriate greeting (e.g., “Dear Professor McLeod” or “Dear Carolyn”), and sign your name at the end so that I know who is emailing me (!). Please also avoid emailing on Saturdays.

The expectation for our in-person classes is that you will be alert, prepared, and actively participating. To that end, you should minimize distractions (e.g., from your cell phone—silence it and keep it out of sight—and from your computer—turn off alerts that might pop up on your screen). You should have copies of the readings and lecture slides at hand and be prepared to ask and/or answer questions about them.

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>.

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 Mental Health@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> 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.