



Philosophy 2293A (570)
CONDITIONS FOR ANALYTICAL THINKING AND DECISION-MAKING
Fall/ Winter 2025-2026

Instructor: J. Marsh
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Course Information

Calendar Description:

Students analyze the roles ideology, culture, political power, and history play in decision-making processes. Students will learn to elucidate, navigate, and apply select factors to standard decision-making and analytical processes in order to innovatively re-envision the deep conditioning factors that structure decisions and decision-making processes.

Extra Information: 3 hours.

Course Weight: 0.50
Breadth: Category B
Subject Code: PHILOSOP

Notice: Unless you have either the requisites for this course (fulfilment of pre-requisites, no anti-requisite conflicts), or special permission from your Dean to enrol 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.



Conditions for Analytical Thinking and Decision-Making
Philosophy 2293A (Section 570) - Fall of 2025 | in-person

Instructor: Dr. Jonathan P. Marsh

Office Hour: TBA

Email: jmarsh26@uwo.ca

Please allow 24 hours for replies.

Description

We make thousands of decisions per day. Most are unconscious and many are trivial, but for the more substantive ones the 'wrong' moves can be costly. How, then, can we get better at making high-stakes decisions (not to mention smaller decisions that have significance over the long run)? This will be our driving question.

Roadmap

Amid answering it, we'll explore some of the basics of classical decision theory in Unit 1. Unit 2 the considers some common decision pitfalls (e.g., choice biases, fallacies, and risk assessment errors) and the role of power and ideology in our decisions. Lastly, as decisions are only as good as the information we put into them, Units 3 and 4 move from "rational choice" to "rational belief". To this end, various epistemic norms for acquiring good information (via expert testimony) and for extending it (through reasoning) will be critically explored.

Outcomes

Whether our decision problems involve lotteries, medicine, sea explorations, religious anxieties, finances or climate change, it is my hope that, by the end of term, every committed student will have the tools to become 5% better at decision-making — an aim that, modest as it may sound, would generate a big payoff over a lifetime. To help us satisfy this aim, students will become acquainted with insights from decision theory, behavioural economics, argumentation theory, value theory, social epistemology and, time permitting, game theory. Students will also have had opportunities to put this knowledge to work in ways that draw on their own value scales and experiences, including past decision failures.

Additional Information

Extra Information: 3 hours.
B

Course Weight: 0.50.

Breadth: CATEGORY

Notice: Unless you have either the requisites for this course, or special permission from your Dean to enrol 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.

Text Info & Course-Related Expenses

Peterson, M. *An Introduction to Decision Theory* (2017). Second Edition. Cambridge University Press. ISBN-1316606201. Before ordering this, **please check the UWO library** to see if an electronic or hard copy (either edition) is still available. If not, this text may be purchased online through a seller of the student's choice. Approx. cost: \$44.95 [paperback]. All supplementary readings will be made available.

Requirements

Please bear in mind the following assignments, values, and dates:

- **1. Test #1 (20%):** We will have a short test at the beginning of class on **October 8, 2025**.
- **2. Decision Workshop #1 [Decision Matrix] (10%):** To take place on **October 15, 2025**. Attendance does not guarantee full credit for this performance-based assignment, which will have a small written component.
- **3. Decision Workshop #2 [Rules Assignment] (10%):** To take place on **November 19, 2025**. Attendance does not guarantee full credit for this performance-based assignment, which will have a small written component.
- **4. Exam (40%):** To be held in person during the **December examination period**. Date: TBA. Please carefully review the exam schedule once it is published by the College before you make any firm travel decisions as irrevocable plans (e.g. nonrefundable plane tickets etc.) or misreading/misremembering the exam date do not entitle a special exam.
- **5. Active, Informed & Critical Participation [weekly] (20%):** A successful participation grade encompasses more, though no less, than reliable class attendance. It also requires joining the conversation. Whether this occurs during ordinary lectures, workshops, or tutorials, doing this well (see grade scale below) requires reliably (i) knowing and thoughtfully engaging the assigned readings, (ii) applying tools and virtues associated with critical thinking, (iii) completing weekly classroom exercises when prompted (late submissions, or entries from home, are not permitted and, if attempted, could result in a grade of zero (0/20) and (iv) respecting the College's conduct rules and any course-specific policies, including our strict **no recording policy** (which aims to protect student privacy and confidentiality etc.) and **attendance/participation policy** (see policies below).

Methods

Teaching methods will involve lectures, dialogues, group work, informal polls, crowdsourcing and occasional videos.

Grading Information and Explanation of Grades

As demonstrated skills and understanding come in degrees, please see the following university-wide grade descriptors.

- **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

No AI: Within this course, use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools (such as **ChatGPT, translation tools, and grammar-checking tools**) is **not permitted** for written work submitted for evaluation. Unauthorized use of AI will be subject to academic discipline.

Notice of Turnitin Analysis: All written work 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>).

Missed Work: With the exception of the final exam, no assignments will be received after the last day of classes. Moreover, any missed assessments will receive a grade of zero (o) unless a student receives academic considerations. Students are permitted one (1) academic consideration for this this half (0.5) course without formal supporting documentation. Let's call this an informal academic consideration.

- **Example of A Successful Informal Consideration:** A student must miss **decision workshop #1** (value 10%) due to circumstances that they could not reasonably have been expected to have foreseen, prevented or controlled (this excludes misremembering the schedule or wanting to travel home early for Reading Week). They request academic considerations in a timely manner (**within 48 hours**, by e-mailing their instructor, from their UWO account, with "PHIL 2293 request for informal academic considerations" as the title). Because an alternative assessment cannot be given without forfeiting this assignment's essential design purpose (working together, in the classroom, to collectively advance our understanding of **unit 1**) the instructor offers them informal considerations in the form of a grade transfer to the nearest assignment: in this case the **unit 1** test (which is now worth 20% as opposed to 10%). Because this consideration request involves direct communication with the instructor, not the advisor, confidential information (e.g., medical documentation) is never shared/received/permitted.

Please note that academic considerations for a missed exam (in December) and/or midterm test (in October), in this class, always requires a **formal** recommendation from your advisor.

- Formal considerations for a missed **final exam** will come in the form of a special exam – in January and, ordinarily, if you miss that, the next time the course is offered, provided you receive separate formal considerations. Formal academic considerations for a missed **Unit 1 test** will come in the form of grade transfer to the nearest assignment – viz., the final exam (which will have some overlapping content).

Attendance/Participation Policy: Participation requirements are designed to enhance collective learning and enrich our classroom experience throughout the entire term. For this reason, any missed participation cannot be made up for with alternative assessments without this grade losing its meaning. Rather than providing academic considerations for individually missed sessions, I will require **only require 10 of 13 full participation sessions**. There's never a need to notify me of an absence unless you will be missing an in-class assignment (e.g., a test or workshop – see the missed work policy) or the final exam. Importantly, given the already flexible nature of this policy:

- Any missed sessions beyond the permitted maximum (up to 3) (which = 3 full weeks) will receive a zero (o) unless you have preregistered accommodations for attendance flexibility, or your advisor otherwise recommends this.
- Anything beyond 3 missed sessions equals **1 month+** of missed class/participation. As this (even if faultless) makes it impossible to have meaningfully contributed to the classroom learning experience of all throughout the term (the purpose of this assignment), such circumstances cannot, by their very nature, be made up for with alternative assessments. The only solution here, if considerations are received, is a grade reweighing (e.g., if you score 60/80, or 75% [B+], your final grade becomes 75/100 [B+]).
- **Late Registration Policy:** Late registration does not lower the required minimum number of 10.
- **Early Departure/Late Arrival Policy:** Arriving late, or departing early (which can distract, rather than enhance, the learning experiences of all) does not entitle participation credit (i.e., count towards the 10). Nor does forgetting to sign-in, even if the full session was attended.
- **No Hybrid Session Policy:** We will not have “hybrid” sessions (where some students join us over Zoom) for this in-person class.

Dates & Topics

GROUNDWORK

Week of September 10

- Why Decision Theory?

UNIT 1: CLASSICAL DECISION THEORY

Week of September 17

- 1.1. The Decision Matrix
- 1.2. Deciding Under Ignorance

Week of September 24

- 1.3. Deciding Under Risk /Expected Value Theory

Week of October 1

- 1.4. Puzzles & Paradoxes
 - 1.4.1 The St. Petersburg Paradox
 - 1.4.2. Transformative experiences: Would you become a vampire?

UNIT 2: COMMON DECISION PITFALLS

Week of October 8

- 2.1. Heuristics & Biases

There will be a Unit 1 test, on October 8, at the beginning of class.

Week of October 15

- 2.2. The Role of Ideology & Power in Decision-Making

There will be a Decision Workshop during class on October 15.

Week of October 22

- 2.2. Fallacies

UNIT 3. FROM RATIONAL CHOICE TO RATIONAL BELIEF

Week of October 29

- 3.1. The Nature, Purpose & Appropriate Domains of Argumentation

Week of November 5

Reading week. No class

Week of November 12

- 3.2. Argument Mapping

UNIT 4. LEAVING THE ISLAND: SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF RATIONALITY

Week of November 19

- 4.1. Testimony, Trust & Expertise

You'll receive instructions and group members in connection with your decision rule workshop assignment (value = 10%) on November 19.

Week of November 26

- 4.2. Game Theory & Social Choice Theory

Week of December 3

- Concluding Remarks + Exam Review Q&A

KING'S UNIVERSITY COLLEGE
GENERAL COURSE POLICIES
2025-2026

1. Academic Accommodations, Consideration for Absences

Academic Accommodation (Accessibility)

Accessibility Services works to ensure that academic programs are accessible to all students, and supports students who may have a condition related to, but not limited to, vision, hearing, mobility, different ways of learning, mental health, chronic illnesses, chronic pain, autism spectrum disorder, ADD/ADHD, and temporary conditions (beyond short-term academic consideration). Accessibility Services provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive assessment. The accommodation policy can be found here [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#). Information on Accessibility Services at King's can be found [here](#).

Academic Consideration for Student Absence

If a student is unable to meet a course requirement due to substantial but temporary extenuating circumstances (medical or compassionate), they should follow the procedures below.

In some cases, where instructors have built flexibility into their assessments, this flexibility will already address consideration needs.

Requests for academic consideration should be directed to the Academic Advising Office of your faculty/college of registration. Requests must be made as soon as possible and no later than 48 hours after the missed assessment.

As a rule, documentation is required for academic consideration. For academic consideration requests on medical grounds, the Student Medical Certificate is available at https://www.kings.uwo.ca/kings/assets/File/currentStudents/courses_enrollment/exams_and_tests/SMC-Feb-2025.pdf.

Students are permitted one academic consideration request without supporting documentation per term per course.

Instructors may designate one assessment per half-course weight as requiring formal supporting documentation. Please refer to the course outline for each course.

For further information, please see:

https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration_Sep24.pdf

Absences from Final Examinations

If you miss the Final Exam, contact the Academic Advising Office of your faculty/college of registration as soon as you are able to do so. They will assess your eligibility to write the Special Examination (the name given by the University to a makeup Final Exam).

You may also be eligible to write the Special Exam if you are in a “Multiple Exam Situation” (e.g., more than 2 exams in 23-hour period, or more than 3 exams in a 47-hour period).

If a student fails to write a scheduled Special Examination, the date of the next Special Examination (if granted) normally will be the scheduled date for the final exam the next time this course is offered. The maximum course load for that term will be reduced by the credit of the course(s) for which the final examination has been deferred. See the Academic Calendar for details (under Special Examinations).

Religious Accommodation

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give notice in writing to the instructor and Academic Advising Office if a course requirement will be affected by a religious holiday/observance. Notice must be given as early as possible, and no later than two weeks prior to an examination, and one week prior to a midterm test date. It is the responsibility of such students to inform themselves concerning the work done in classes from which they are absent and to take appropriate action.

2. Support Services

Accessibility, Counselling and Student Development at King's University College:
<https://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/student-services/>

Students experiencing emotional or mental health distress can access services at King's University

College: <http://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/campus-services/student-supportservices/personal-counselling/>

Good2talk is a good online and phone 24/7 resource for students and is available in English, Mandarin, and French: <https://good2talk.ca>, 1-866-925-5454

MentalHealth@Western provides a complete list of options about how to obtain help:
https://www.uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/

Academic Support Services at King's University College:
<https://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/academic-resources/>

GBSV Support:

King's is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you have experienced sexual or gender-based violence (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at:
<https://www.kings.uwo.ca/about-kings/safe-campus/gender-and-sexual-violence/>

You can reach someone supports at Kings by emailing Care@kings.uwo.ca or calling 519-930-4640 to reach a social worker who can offer help.

You can also reach Western's Gender-Based Violence & Survivor Support Case Manager by email or by calling 519-661-3568.

Further supports can be found on this website: <https://www.kings.uwo.ca/about-kings/safecampus/gender-and-sexual-violence/>

See also https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html

University Students' Council offers many valuable support services for students, including the health insurance plan: <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

3. Statement on Use of Electronic Devices

Use of Electronic Devices: Unless explicitly stated otherwise, you are not allowed to have a cell phone, or any other electronic device, with you during tests or examinations. Unauthorized possession of such a device during a test or examination constitutes an academic offence.

Use of Laptops, Tablets, and Smartphones in the Classroom: King's University College at Western University acknowledges the integration of new technologies and learning methods into the curriculum. The use of electronic devices such as laptop computers, tablets, or smartphones can contribute to student engagement and effective learning. At the same time, King's recognizes that instructors and students share jointly the responsibility to establish and maintain a respectful classroom environment conducive to learning.

The use of electronic devices by students during lectures, seminars, labs, etc., shall be for matters related to the course at hand only. Students found to be using electronic devices for purposes not directly related to the class may be subject to sanctions under the Student Code of Conduct; see <https://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/student-affairs/code-of-student-conduct1/>

Inappropriate use of electronics (e.g., laptops, tablets, smartphones) during lectures, seminars, labs, etc., creates a significant disruption. As a consequence, instructors may choose to limit the use of electronic devices in these settings. In addition, in order to provide a safe classroom environment, students attending in-person class sessions are strongly advised to operate laptops with batteries rather than power cords.

4. Statement on Academic Offences

King's is committed to academic integrity. Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, is posted at

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

It is expected that students will submit work that is truly their own, completed without external assistance (human or artificial) except as explicitly permitted by the course instructor. Check with you instructor on what tools, including generative AI (ChatGPT, translation tools, grammarchecking tools) are permitted in the course. Because a tool is permitted in one course, that does not mean it is permitted in other courses.

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; see <https://elearningtoolkit.uwo.ca/tools/Originality Reports - TurnItIn.html>.

Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

5. Copyright of Course Material

Lectures and course materials, including PowerPoint presentations, tests, outlines, and similar materials are protected by copyright. Faculty members are the exclusive owner of copyright in those materials they create. Students may take notes and make copies for their own use. Students may not allow others to reproduce or distribute lecture notes and course materials publicly (whether or not a fee is charged) without the express written consent of a faculty member. Unauthorized sharing of class content is subject to academic discipline.

Similarly, students own copyright in their own original papers and exam essays. If a faculty member wishes to post a student's answers or papers on the course website, they should ask for the student's written permission.

6. Use of Recordings

Participants in this course are not permitted to record the sessions, except where recording is an approved accommodation and/or the participant has the prior written permission of the instructor. Unauthorized recording and/or sharing of class content is subject to academic discipline.

7. Policy on Attendance

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.