



PHILOSOPHY 2293A (570)
Conditions for Analytical Thinking and Decision-Making
Fall 2026

Instructor: Dr. Jonathan P. Marsh
Email: jmarsh26@uwo.ca

Course Information

Class Times:

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.

Prerequisite(s):

Antirequisite(s):

Extra Information: 3 hours

Course Weight: 0.5

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 2026 | in-person

Instructor: Dr. Jonathan P. Marsh

Office Hour: TBA

Email: jmarsh26@uwo.ca

Please allow 24 hours for email replies (Monday–Friday). Weekend messages will be answered starting Monday.

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

To help us answer it, we’ll explore some of the basics of classical decision theory in Unit 1. Unit 2 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 the term, every committed student will have the tools to become 5% better at rational 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 opportunities to put this knowledge to work, in groups, in real-time, in ways that draw on their own value scales and experiences, including past decision failures.

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 the electronic version is still freely available. If not, this text may be purchased online through a seller of your choice (not in campus bookstore). Approx. cost: \$46.95 [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 6, 2026**.

- **2. Decision Workshop #1 [Decision Matrix] (10%):** To take place on **October 20, 2026**. 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 17, 2026**. 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 and elevating the class conversation. Whether this takes place during ordinary lectures, workshops, or tutorials, achieving this fundamental collective learning outcome requires reliably (i) knowing and thoughtfully engaging the assigned readings, (ii) applying tools and virtues associated with critical thinking, (iii) respecting the College's conduct rules and any course-specific policies, and (iv) completing weekly classroom exercises (typically forum entries) when prompted. Please note: late submissions, or entries from home, are not permitted and, if attempted, could result in a grade of zero (0/20).

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. Fancy cheating-detection measures, and a careful eye, will be employed.

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 (0) 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. 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 30% as opposed to 20%). 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 while the same policy holds for workshop 2, only the grade transfer applies to a different nearest assessment (in this case the final exam). Also, a student cannot receive informal considerations for both workshops.

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 typically 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** or **workshop #2** (if workshop #1 was missed), will come in the form of grade transfer to the nearest solo assessment – viz., the final exam.

Attendance/Participation Flexibility: 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 **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:

- **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.
- Any missed sessions beyond the permitted maximum (up to 3) (which = 3 full weeks) will receive a zero (0) unless you have formal considerations for additional absences, with specific dates, via your advisor (who will typically require documentation, e.g., medical documentation, which cannot go to your instructor).
- There are **no (course-imposed) limits** to how many formal considerations (e.g., medical considerations) a student may receive from their advisor. Even so, 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 solution here, if formal considerations are received, is a grade reweighting, where the value of the missed assessments is transferred to the final exam.

Recording Policy

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.

Dates & Topics

GROUNDWORK

Week of September 15

- Why Decision Theory?

UNIT 1: CLASSICAL DECISION THEORY

Week of September 22

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

Week of September 29

- 1.3. Deciding Under Risk /Expected Value Theory
- 1.3.1. Transformative experiences: Would you become a vampire?

Week of October 6

There will be a Unit 1 test, on October 6, at the beginning of class.

- 1.4. Puzzles & Paradoxes
- 1.4.1 The St. Petersburg Paradox

UNIT 2: COMMON DECISION PITFALLS

Week of October 20

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

There will be a Decision Workshop during class on October 20.

Week of October 27-November 3

- 2.2. Heuristics & Biases

Week of November 10

- 2.2. Fallacies

UNIT 3. FROM RATIONAL CHOICE TO RATIONAL BELIEF

Week of November 17

- 3.1. The Nature, Purpose & Appropriate Domains of Argumentation
- **There will be a Decision Workshop during class on November 17.**

Week of November 24

- 3.2. Argument Mapping

UNIT 4. LEAVING THE ISLAND: SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF RATIONALITY

Week of December 1

- 4.1. Testimony, Trust & Expertise

Week of December 8

- 4.2. Game Theory & Social Choice Theory
- Concluding Remarks + Exam Review Q&A

**KING'S UNIVERSITY COLLEGE
GENERAL COURSE POLICIES
2026-27**

1. Academic Accommodations (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](#).

2. Academic Consideration for Student Absences

Students must be approved to write a makeup exam or for an extension of the assignment deadline. If you need to miss an exam or the deadline for the assignment, please follow these instructions.

There are two ways to seek academic consideration:

(i) Academic consideration based on medical or compassionate grounds

If a student is unable to meet a course requirement due to substantial but temporary extenuating circumstances (medical or compassionate grounds), they should contact the Academic Advising Office. As a rule, documentation is required for academic consideration.

For academic consideration requests on medical grounds, the Student Medical Certificate (SMC) is the appropriate documentation. The SMC is available at <https://registrar.uwo.ca/academics/pdfs/student-medical-certificate.pdf>

- King's students: The Academic Advising Office website is located in DLH 104. The Academic Advising website is <https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/academics/academic-advising>.
- If your home faculty is Huron or at Western, please submit your documentation to your faculty's academic counselling office.
- Requests must be made as soon as possible and no later than 48 hours after the missed assessment.

You may submit requests for academic consideration through the **Student Absence Portal**, linked on this website: <https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/academics/academic-advising/academic-consideration-requests-and-student-absence-portal>

(ii) Academic consideration through an undocumented absence

Students are permitted one academic consideration request without supporting documentation per term per half-course (0.5) weight.

- Note that instructors may designate one assessment per half-course weight as requiring formal supporting documentation. Please refer to the course outline to confirm this assessment.
- If instructors have built flexibility into their assessments, this flexibility will already address consideration needs. (For example, if students need to submit X of Y assignments, this flexibility already provides consideration.)
- Undocumented absences can not be used as the basis for academic consideration for December or April exams.

For further information on the academic consideration policy, please see https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration_Sep24.pdf

c) Absences from Final Exams

If you miss the Final Exam, **contact your Academic Advising Office** 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 (i.e., you are scheduled to write 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](#)).

d) Religious Accommodations

Students should consult the University’s list of recognized religious holidays, and should give notice in writing to the instructor and their 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.

3. Support Services

Accessibility, Counselling and Student Development at King’s University College:
<https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/student-supports-and-services/accessibility-services>

Students experiencing emotional or mental health distress can access services at King’s University College: <https://kings.uwo.ca/campus-life/student-supports/>

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

Western’s Mental Health Services site provides a complete list of options on how to obtain help: <https://www.uwo.ca/health/mental-health/index.html>

Academic Support Services at King's University College: <https://kings.uwo.ca/academics/academic-supports/>

4. Statement on Gender-Based Sexual Violence

King's and Western are committed to reducing incidents of gender-based 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: [Mental Health and Wellness at King's](#).

You can reach supports at King's 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 (health@uwo.ca) or by calling 519-661-3568. Additional support services can be found <https://www.uwo.ca/health/gbsv/support/index.html>

5. 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://kings.uwo.ca/sites/2025/assets/files/campus/Kings_Code_of_Student_Conduct.pdf

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.

6. 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 https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_offences.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 to check which tools, including generative AI (ChatGPT, translation tools, grammar-checking tools) are permitted in each course.** Note that although some courses may permit the use of such tools, it does not mean use of such tools 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.

7. 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.

8. 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.

9. 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.