

# HURON UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

## *Philosophy 2263G: Philosophy of Risk* 2018-19

Fall Term, 2018

Prerequisites: none

Wednesdays, 9:30-11:30am, W18

Fridays, 10:30-11:30am, W18

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Life is full of risks: we are constantly in danger of losing things that we value. We cannot successfully govern ourselves, personally or collectively, without effectively managing our greatest risks. Accomplishing this requires that we know what is important to us, what threatens the things we find valuable, and how probable those threats are. These are very difficult tasks! The guiding question of this course is: how do we best accomplish them? Answering this question requires that we answer many others: should we give these tasks over to expert cost-benefit analysts? What say should the public get in policies having to do with risk management? To what extent does our present knowledge allow us to mitigate the effects of future risks? These are questions whose answers must be informed by a variety of disciplines: psychology, law, economics, statistics, and, of course, philosophy. This course draws on resources from all of these areas in an effort to equip you to think productively about these questions.

**Antirequisite(s):** The former Philosophy 2030F/G.

### **COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

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

1. List and explain some of the psychological, social, and institutional features that make people good/bad at assessing risks.
2. Critically evaluate candidate strategies for managing risk.

### **CLASS METHODS**

This course consists of two lectures per week. Although much of the lecture will be delivered by the instructor, students will be expected to attend class **having done all of the readings and prepared to contribute to class discussions**. There will be regular in-class assignments, so bring a **pen and paper** with you to every class.

You are welcome to use a laptop to take notes in lecture, though you should be aware that students who do so tend to do worse on average than students who take notes with pen and paper. However, if you are caught using your laptop for any other purpose, you will be asked to leave class and forfeit the grade of any assignment you miss. When you use your laptop for social or entertainment purposes, you distract others, and do yourself a disservice. It is **NOT ACCEPTABLE** behavior and it **WILL NOT BE TOLERATED** in my classroom.

Please do not take your phone out at any point during class. If you are caught looking at your phone during lecture, you will be asked to leave class and receive a grade of 0 on any assignment you miss. If there are extenuating circumstances that necessitate you checking your phone during class, please inform me BEFORE the beginning of class.

## **TEXTS**

Available at the Western Bookstore:

Baruch Fischhoff & John Kadvany (2011). *Risk: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.

Cass Sunstein (2002). *Risk and Reason: Safety, Law, and the Environment*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.

Available online:

Dan M. Kahan, Paul Slovic, Donald Braman, and John Gastil (2006). Fear of democracy: A cultural evaluation of Sunstein on risk. *Harvard Law Review* 119: 1071-1109.

On hold at the Huron Library:

James S. Fishkin (2009). *When the People Speak: Deliberative Democracy and Public Consultation*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.

Gerd Gigerenzer (2014). *Risk Savvy: How to Make Good Decisions*. Viking: New York.

Nassim Nicholas Taleb (2007). *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*. Random House: New York.

Nassim Nicholas Taleb (2012). *Antifragile: Things That Gain From Disorder*. Random House: New York.

## **METHODS OF EVALUATION**

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.**

25% In class questions

Every lecture, you will be asked to write down answers to topical questions and hand them in at the end of lecture. All questions **must be completed in class**, so it is very important that you bring a **pen and paper** with you to every class.

30% Two short papers (~1,000 words, due January 25<sup>th</sup> and February 27<sup>th</sup>)

Each paper will require you to apply and/or respond to course material in a way that manifests your critical understanding of its content.

30% Final essay (~3,000 words, due April 10<sup>th</sup>)

In the final essay, you will be asked to formulate and defend a set of strategies for managing public risks.

LATE PENALTY: the penalty for submitting assignments late is 3% per day, including weekends, up to a maximum of 50%.

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.

### **TENTATIVE SCHEDULE**

<b>Lecture</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Reading</b>
Lecture 1	Introduction	Fiscchoff & Kadwany, Ch. 2-4
Lecture 2	Risk Perception	Fiscchoff & Kadwany, Ch. 5; Sunstein, Ch. 2
Lecture 3	Technocracy and Populism	Sunstein, Ch. 3
Lecture 4	Reducing Risks Rationally	Sunstein, Ch. 5
Lecture 5	The Cultural-Evaluator Model	Kahan et al.
Lecture 6	Deliberative Democracy	Fishkin, Ch. 3-4
Lecture 7	Good Heuristics and Positive Error Cultures	Gigerenzer, Ch. 2-3
Lecture 8	Black Swans	Taleb, <i>The Black Swan</i> , Ch. 1, 3, 6, 10
Lecture 9	Antifragility	Taleb, <i>Antifragile</i> , Prologue, Ch. 3, 5, 7, 11, 12, 18, 20



## **Appendix to Course Outlines**

### **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 enrol in it without them, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. If you enrol in this course despite having already taken an antirequisite you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. Removals for these reasons 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 or for having already taken the antirequisites.

### **Conduct of Students in Classes, Lectures, and Seminars**

Membership in the community of Huron University College and the University of Western Ontario 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. The academic and social privileges granted to each student are conditional upon the fulfillment of these responsibilities.

In the classroom, students are expected to behave in a manner that supports the learning environment of others. Students can avoid any unnecessary disruption of the class by arriving in sufficient time to be seated and ready for the start of the class, by remaining silent while the professor is speaking or another student has the floor, and by taking care of personal needs prior to the start of class. If a student is late, or knows that he/she will have to leave class early, be courteous: sit in an aisle seat and enter and leave quietly.

Please see the *Code of Student Conduct* at:

<https://huronuc.on.ca/sites/default/files/pdfs/Code%20of%20Student%20Conduct.pdf>

### **Technology**

It is not appropriate to use technology (such as, but not limited to, laptops, cell phones) in the classroom for non-classroom activities. Such activity is disruptive and is 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.

### **Academic Accommodation for Medical/Non-Medical Grounds**

Students who require special accommodation for tests and/or other course components must make the appropriate arrangements with the Student Development Centre (SDC). Further details concerning policies and procedures may be found at:

[http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/ssd/?requesting\\_acc](http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/ssd/?requesting_acc)

#### **(a) Medical Grounds for assignments worth 10% or more of final grade: Go Directly to Academic Advising**

University Senate policy, which can be found at

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/accommodation\\_medical.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf),

requires that all student requests for accommodation on medical grounds for assignments worth 10% or more of the final grade be made directly to the academic advising office of the home faculty (for Huron students, the “home faculty” is Huron), with supporting documentation in the form (minimally) of the

Senate-approved Student Medical Certificate found at:

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/medicalform\\_15JUN.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform_15JUN.pdf).

The documentation is submitted in confidence and will not be shown to instructors. 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. The instructor will not normally deny accommodation where appropriate medical documentation is in place and where the duration it describes aligns with the due date(s) of assignment(s). Before denying a request for accommodation on medical grounds, the instructor will consult with the Dean. The instructor's decision is appealable to the Dean.

**(b) Accommodation on Medical Grounds for assignments worth less than 10% of final grade:  
Consult Instructor Directly**

When seeking accommodation on medical grounds for assignments worth less than 10% of the final course grade, 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. 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. The instructor will not normally deny accommodation where appropriate medical documentation is in place and where the duration it describes aligns with the due date(s) of assignment(s). Before denying a request for accommodation on medical grounds, the instructor will consult with the Dean. The instructor's decision is appealable to the Dean.

**(c) Non-medical Grounds: Consult Instructor Directly**

Where the grounds for seeking accommodation are not medical, the student should contact the instructor directly. Late penalties may apply at the discretion of the instructor. Apart from the exception noted below, academic advisors will not be involved in the process of accommodation for non-medical reasons.

Where a student seeks accommodation on non-medical grounds where confidentiality is a concern, the student should approach an academic advisor with any documentation available. The advisors will contact the instructor after the student's request is received, and will outline the severity and duration of the challenge without breaching confidence. The student will be informed that the instructor has been notified that significant circumstances are affecting or have affected the student's ability to complete work, and the student will be instructed to work as quickly as possible with the instructor on an agreement for accommodation. Before denying a request for accommodation where documentation has been submitted to an academic advisor, the instructor will consult with the Dean. The instructor's decision is appealable to the Dean.

**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 Web site:

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_undergrad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf)

### **Statement on Academic Integrity**

The International Centre for Academic Integrity defines academic integrity as "a commitment, even in the face of adversity, to five fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. From these values flow principles of behaviour that enable academic communities to translate ideals to action." (CAI Fundamental Values Project, 1999).

A lack of academic integrity is indicated by such behaviours as the following:

- Cheating on tests;
- Fraudulent submissions online;
- Plagiarism in papers submitted (including failure to cite and piecing together unattributed sources);
- Unauthorized resubmission of course work to a different course;
- Helping someone else cheat;
- Unauthorized collaboration;
- Fabrication of results or sources;
- Purchasing work and representing it as one's own.

### **Academic Integrity: Importance and Impact**

Being at university means engaging with a variety of communities in the pursuit and sharing of knowledge and understanding in ways that are clear, respectful, efficient, and productive. University communities have established norms of academic integrity to ensure responsible, honest, and ethical behavior in the academic work of the university, which is best done when sources of ideas are properly and fully acknowledged and when responsibility for ideas is fully and accurately represented.

In the academic sphere, unacknowledged use of another's work or ideas is not only an offence against the community of scholars and an obstacle to academic productivity. It may also be understood as fraud and may constitute an infringement of legal copyright.

A university is a place for fulfilling one's potential and challenging oneself, and this means rising to challenges rather than finding ways around them. The achievements in an individual's university studies can only be fairly evaluated quantitatively through true and honest representation of the actual learning done by the student. Equity in assessment for all students is ensured through fair representation of the efforts by each.

Acting with integrity at university constitutes a good set of practices for maintaining integrity in later life. Offences against academic integrity are therefore taken very seriously as part of the university's work in preparing students to serve, lead, and innovate in the world at large.

A university degree is a significant investment of an individual's, and the public's, time, energies, and resources in the future, and habits of academic integrity protect that investment by preserving the university's reputation and ensuring public confidence in higher education.

**Students found guilty of plagiarism will suffer consequences ranging from a grade reduction to failure in the course to expulsion from the university. In addition, a formal letter documenting the offence will be filed in the Dean's Office, and this record of the offence will be retained in the Dean's Office for the duration of the student's academic career at Huron University College.**

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.

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.

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.

### **Policy on Special Needs**

Students who require special accommodation for tests and/or other course components must make the appropriate arrangements with the Student Development Centre (SDC). Further details concerning policies and procedures may be found at:

[http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/ssd/?requesting\\_acc](http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/ssd/?requesting_acc)

### **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.

### **Class Cancellations**

In the event of a cancellation of class, every effort will be made to post that information on the Huron website, <https://huronuc.on.ca/about/accessibility> (“Cancellations and Closures”).

### **Mental Health @ Western**

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.

### **Academic Advising**

For advice on course selections, degree requirements, and for assistance with requests for medical accommodation [see above], students should contact an Academic Advisor in Huron’s Student Support Services ([huronsss@uwo.ca](mailto:huronsss@uwo.ca)). An outline of the range of services offered is found on the Huron website at: <https://huronuc.ca/student-life-campus/student-services/academic-advising>

Department Chairs and Program Directors and Coordinators are also able to answer questions about their individual programs. Their contact information can be found on the Huron website at:

<https://huronuc.ca/student-life-campus/art-social-science>