

PHIL 2901 A

Truth and Propaganda



Fall 2026
Course Outline

I. Admin

Instructor: Gabriele Contessa (he/him), Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy

Instructor's Office Hours: Wednesday, 1:35pm–2:25pm or by appointment

Instructor's E-Mail: gabriele_contessa@carleton.ca

Zoom Links for Classes and Office Hours: See Admin Section of Brightspace

Wooclap Link: See Admin Section of Brightspace

Teaching Assistant: Isaac Botham

TA's Email: isaacbotham@cmail.carleton.ca

TA's Office Hours: By appointment only.

Please only contact the TA if you have questions regarding your grade on a Response Paper.

For all other questions, please contact the instructor.

II. Description

This course is an introduction to political epistemology.

Calendar Description: Ancient and modern techniques of persuasion from analytical, ethical and jurisprudential perspectives. Objectivity and bias, advertising and public relations ethics, the viability of democracy in the light of pressures on and within the modern mass media.

III. Prerequisites/Preclusions.

This course is an introduction to political epistemology

Precludes additional credit for PHIL 2900 (no longer offered).

Prerequisite(s): 0.5 credit in PHIL or second-year standing.

III. Texts

Students are not required to purchase any textbooks or materials for this course. All readings will be accessible through Brightspace.

IV. Evaluation

- **Attendance & Participation: 25%** of the final grade—plus up to **5%** extra credit for valuable contributions to class and group discussions. (See A&P section below for details).
- **Three Response Papers: 25%** each (See the Assignments section of Brightspace for deadlines)

As a matter of policy (as well as transparency and fairness to all students), these evaluation criteria will be applied to all students under all circumstances. This means that no requests for additional extra credit or for shifting grades will be entertained under any circumstances. If circumstances beyond your control are preventing you from succeeding in this course under the evaluation criteria outlined here, please

contact the instructor as soon as possible.

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

V. Course Policies

Attendance and Participation (A&P). This is a synchronous course, and regular attendance and participation are central to its design. Attendance and participation in this course will be assessed primarily through participation in Woodlap polls. Polls can be run at any time during class, and any class may include multiple polls. Half of your A&P grade (**12.5%** of your final grade) will be determined by how many polls you have **participated** in during the term. The other half of the A&P grade (**12.5%** of your final grade) will be determined by how many graded polls (which are marked with a 'Q') you have **answered correctly**. All polls are timed. You will have 1 minute to answer graded polls and 30 seconds for ungraded polls. Woodlap will not accept responses after that time. **The lowest 20% of poll results are automatically dropped** when calculating the final grade. This includes any polls missed due to occasional absences, technical issues, etc. Additional accommodations are considered only in exceptional circumstances and normally require documentation.

To log in to Woodlap, click on the link in the Admin section of Brightspace, choose the SSO sign-in option, and enter your MyCarletonOne credentials when prompted. Please do not forget to log in before the start of each class.

In addition to the regular A&P credits, you can earn up to **5% extra credit** toward your final grade by participating in **class and group discussions**. To be eligible for the extra 5% credit, you must have your camera turned on during group activities and whenever actively speaking in class.

The A&P grade on Brightspace will be updated approximately every three weeks.

Response Papers (RPs). You are required to submit **three RPs**, each addressing a required reading covered in the course (see Brightspace for deadlines). Each reading may be used for only one RP, and only readings that have already been covered in class by the deadline may be chosen. The purpose of an RP is to demonstrate **critical engagement** with a text rather than summary. Each RP requires a clearly stated thesis and a clearly stated argument in support of that thesis. The simplest format for an RP is to challenge a central claim in the reading by arguing that it is false. Because the goal of the assignment is critical analysis, submissions that primarily summarize the reading but do not critically engage with it receive no more than the minimum passing grade (**50%**).

RPs are submitted through Brightspace in .pdf, .doc, or .docx format and may not include identifying information (including in the file name) in order to allow anonymous grading. RPs cannot exceed **250 words** (including any quotations but excluding references) and must include an accurate word count. RPs that exceed the word limit are penalized at **0.1%/word**. Submissions that do not include an accurate word count will incur a **2.5%** penalty.

If circumstances beyond your control prevent timely submission, please notify the instructor by email as soon as possible and before the deadline. Late submissions are penalized at **2.5%/day**. If you do not submit an RP, you will receive a grade of **0%**.

Generative Artificial Intelligence. You may not use generative AI tools to produce any part of the graded work for this course. This applies to all graded work, in whatever form it is submitted—including short in-class work such as poll responses.

Academic Integrity. You are responsible for ensuring that you understand the nature of academic offenses (such as plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration), as defined in the [Undergraduate Calendar](#), and for avoiding both committing them and aiding or abetting academic offenses perpetrated by other students. Please be aware that the instructor is required to report all suspected academic offenses directly to the Office of the Dean.

Copyright. Carleton University is committed to compliance in all copyright matters. Noncompliance is a violation of the Canadian Copyright Act. In addition to any actions that might be taken by any copyright owner or its licensing agent, the University will take steps against any breach of this policy. For more information, please see Carleton's Fair Dealing Policy and the library's copyright website: www.library.carleton.ca/copyright.

VI. Course Calendar

<i>Week</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Readings</i>
1	Political Ignorance	Somin (2013) 'Do Voters Know Enough?' [Extract]
2	Scientific Testimony	Anderson (2011) 'Democracy, Public Policy, and the Lay Assessment of Scientific Testimony' Contessa (2023) 'It Takes A Village to Trust Science'
3	Fake News	Mukerji (2023) 'What is Fake News?' Grundmann (2020) 'Fake News: The Case of A Purely Consumer-Oriented Explication'
4	Conspiracy Theories	Napolitano (2021) 'Conspiracy Theories and Evidential Self-Insulation' Dentith (2022) 'Suspicious Conspiracy Theories'
5	Political Polarization	Talisce (2019) 'The Problem of Polarization' Sharp (2022) 'Democratic Citizenship and Polarization'
6	Partisanship	Joshi (2020) 'What are the Chances That You're Right About Everything?' Hedden (forthcoming) 'The Rational Partisan'
7	Political Cognition	Nguyen (2023) 'Hostile Epistemology' Williams (2023) 'The Case for Partisan Motivated Reasoning'
8	Echo Chambers	Nguyen (2020) 'Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles' Begby (2024) 'From Belief Polarization to Echo Chambers: A Rationalizing Account'
9	Post-Truth	McIntyre (2018) 'What is Post-Truth?' Habgood-Coote (2019) 'Stop Talking About Fake News!'

10	Propaganda	Stanley (2015) 'Propaganda in Liberal Democracy' Taiwo (2018) 'The Empire Has No Clothes'
11	Social Location	Fricker (2007) 'Testimonial Injustice' Toole (2020) 'Demarginalizing Standpoint Epistemology'
12	White Ignorance	Medina (2012) 'Epistemic Responsibility and Culpable Ignorance' Martín (2021) 'What is White Ignorance?'

*The course calendar is provisional and subject to change.
Please check this Course Outline regularly for updates.*

Department of Philosophy and Carleton University Policies (Fall/Winter 2026-27)

Assignments:

Please follow your professor's instructions on how assignments will be handled electronically. We no longer allow hard copies to be placed in the department's essay box.

Evaluation:

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

Deferrals for Term Work:

If students are unable to complete term work because of illness or other circumstances beyond their control, they should contact their course instructor no later than *three working days* after the due date. Normally, any deferred term work will be completed by the last day of the term. Term work cannot be deferred by the Registrar.

Deferrals for Final Exams:

Students are expected to be available for the duration of a course including the examination period. Occasionally, students encounter circumstances beyond their control where they may not be able to write a final examination or submit a take-home examination. Examples of this would be a serious illness or the death of a family member. If you miss a final examination and/or fail to submit a take-home examination by the due date, you may apply for a deferral no later than *three working days* after the exam date or original due date (as per the University Regulations in [Section 4.3 of the Undergraduate Calendar](#)). Visit the [Registrar's Office](#) for further information.

Plagiarism:

The University Academic Integrity Policy defines plagiarism as '*presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one's own.*' This includes reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else's published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one's own without proper citation or reference to the original source.

Examples of sources from which the ideas, expressions of ideas or works of others may be drawn from include but are not limited to books, articles, papers, literary compositions and phrases, performance compositions, chemical compounds, artworks, laboratory reports, research results, calculations and the results of calculations, diagrams, constructions, computer reports, computer code/software, material on the internet and/or conversations

Examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to:

- any submission prepared in whole or in part, by someone else, including the unauthorized use of generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT);
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, paraphrased material, algorithms, formulae, scientific or mathematical concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- using another's data or research findings without appropriate acknowledgement;
- submitting a computer program developed in whole or in part by someone else, with or without modifications, as one's own;
- failing to acknowledge sources with proper citations when using another's work and/or failing to use quotations marks.

Plagiarism is a serious offence that cannot be resolved directly by the course's instructor.

The Associate Dean of the Faculty follows a rigorous [process for academic integrity allegations](#), including reviewing documents and interviewing the student, when an instructor suspects a violation has been committed. Penalties for violations may include a final grade of “F” for the course.

It is the responsibility of each student to understand the full meaning of ‘plagiarism’ as defined in the Undergraduate or Graduate Calendars, and to avoid both committing plagiarism and aiding or abetting plagiarism by other students. ([Section 10.1 of the Undergraduate Calendar Academic Regulations](#))

Statement on AI:

As our understanding of the uses of AI and its relationship to student work and academic integrity continue to evolve, students are required to discuss their use of AI in any circumstance not described in the course outline with the instructor to ensure it supports the learning goals for the course.

Mental Health:

As a student you may experience a range of mental health challenges that significantly impact your academic success and overall well-being. If you need help, please speak to someone. There are numerous resources available both on- and off-campus to support you. For more information, please consult <https://wellness.carleton.ca/>.

Academic Accommodation:

Carleton is committed to providing academic accessibility for all individuals. You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. The accommodation request processes, including information about the Academic Consideration Policy for Students in Medical and Other Extenuating Circumstances, are outlined on the Academic Accommodations website (<https://carleton.ca/accessibility/accommodations/>). Examples of special arrangements include:

- *Pregnancy or religious obligation:* write to your professor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details visit the [EIC](#) website.
- *Academic accommodations for students with disabilities:* The [Paul Menton Centre](#) for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class test or exam requiring accommodation. After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with your professor to ensure accommodation arrangements are made.
- *Survivors of Sexual Violence:* As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and where survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per [Carleton’s Sexual Violence Policy](#).
- *Accommodation for Student Activities:* Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist.

Important Dates:

Sept. 9 Fall term begins.

Sept. 22	Last day for registration and course changes for fall term and fall/winter (two-term) courses.
Sept. 30	Last day for entire fee adjustment when withdrawing from fall term or two-term courses.
Oct. 12	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Oct. 26-30	Fall Break – no classes.
Nov. 15	Last day for academic withdrawal from fall term courses. Last day to request Formal Examination Accommodations for December examinations and two-term midterm examinations.
Nov. 27	Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade, before the official examination period.
Dec. 11	Last day of fall term classes. <i>Classes follow a Monday schedule.</i> Last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for term work for a fall term course.
Dec. 12-23	Final examinations for fall term courses and mid-term examinations in two-term courses. Examinations are normally held all seven days of the week.
Dec. 23	All take-home examinations are due.
Jan. 6	Winter term begins.
Jan. 19	Last day for registration and course changes in the winter term.
Jan. 31	Last day for a full fee adjustment when withdrawing from winter term courses or from the winter portion of two-term courses.
Feb. 15	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Feb. 15-19	Winter Break – no classes.
Mar. 15	Last day for academic withdrawal from fall/winter and winter courses. Last day to request Formal Examination Accommodations for April examinations.
Mar. 25	Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade, in winter term or fall/winter courses before the official examination period.
Mar. 26	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Apr. 9	Last day of two-term and winter term classes. Last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for two-term and for winter term courses.
Apr. 10	No classes or examinations take place.
Apr. 11-23	Final examinations for winter term and two-term courses. Examinations are normally held all seven days of the week.
Apr. 23	All take-home examinations are due.

Addresses:

Department of Philosophy:
www.carleton.ca/philosophy
 520-2110

Registrar's Office:
www.carleton.ca/registrar
 520-3500

Academic Advising Centre:
www.carleton.ca/academicadvising
 520-7850

Writing Services:
<https://carleton.ca/csas/support/>
 520-3822

MacOdrum Library
<http://www.library.carleton.ca/>
520-2735