
PHIL 2901 A
Truth and Propaganda



Winter 2026
Course Outline

I. Admin

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

Instructor's Office Hours: Monday, 2:35pm–3:25pm or by appointment

Virtual Classroom: See Admin section in Brightspace

Instructor's Email: gabriele_contessa@carleton.ca

Wooclap: app.wooclap.com/PHIL2901W2026

Teaching Assistant: Evan Mackie

TA's Office Hours: By appointment only.

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

Please only contact the TA if you have questions regarding your grade on a reflection paper.

For all other questions, please contact Prof Contessa.

II. Description

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.

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

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

IV. Texts

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

V. Evaluation

- **Attendance & Participation: 45%** of the final grade
 - (or 30% for students approved for an Oral Exam, with the Oral Exam accounting for the remaining 15%).
- **Three Response Papers: 55%** of the final grade
 - (Best RP: 25%; the other two RPs: 15% each; see Brightspace for deadlines).

Please note that, 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 “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.

VI. Course Policies

Format. This course is taught as a seminar. Rather than relying primarily on lectures, seminars emphasize guided discussion and active student engagement. Students are expected to complete the assigned readings, come prepared with questions or comments, and contribute constructively to class discussion. Research in higher education suggests that active participation promotes deeper understanding and longer-term retention than passive listening. The seminar format is therefore intended to support meaningful learning, but it depends on the preparation and engagement of all participants.

Attendance and Participation (A&P). This is a synchronous course, and regular attendance and participation are central to its design. To participate fully, students must have access to a working webcam and microphone and are expected to keep their camera on during group activities and plenary class discussions.

The A&P grade is calculated as follows:

- **Poll participation** (completion of graded or ungraded polls): **15%**
- **Poll performance** (correct answers to graded polls): **15%**
- **Quality of contributions to class discussion: 15%** (*replaced by an Oral Exam for approved students*)

Students may be invited to speak during class, sometimes as representatives of their group. Students who prefer not to participate in this way may request to substitute the discussion component with an optional Oral Exam (see Section 6). Requests must be submitted by email by the Friday following the first day of classes. Because availability is limited, requests without supporting documentation are considered on a first-come, first-served basis.

Participation is assessed primarily on the **relevance, clarity, and thoughtfulness** of contributions rather than their frequency. Contributions that do not engage with the readings, themes, or questions under discussion typically receive minimal credit. Contributions made through the chat will not typically count for much toward the A&P grade. While the chat can be useful for brief clarifications or sharing references, seminar discussion is designed to be interactive and conversational. Spoken contributions allow for follow-up questions, collective engagement, and sustained discussion, all of which are central to the learning goals of the course. Because participation is best discussed in conversation, feedback or questions about A&P performance should be raised during office hours rather than by email. If circumstances beyond your control (such as illness or a family emergency) interfere with regular attendance, please notify the instructor as soon as possible. Accommodations beyond those built into the course structure are considered in exceptional cases and normally require documentation. If you have registered late for this course, please contact the instructor as soon as possible by email to avoid losing A&P points.

Polls. Wooclap is used during class to pose questions related to the readings and discussion. Students should log in before the start of each session using their MyCarletonOne credentials. All polls will be timed. Students will have 1 minute to answer graded polls and 30 seconds for all other polls. Responses submitted after the time limit will not be counted. To allow for occasional technical difficulties or brief absences, the **lowest 20% of poll results are automatically dropped** when calculating the A&P grade. Additional accommodations are

considered only in exceptional circumstances and normally require documentation.

Response Papers (RPs). Students are required to submit **three Response Papers**, each addressing a required reading covered in the course (see Brightspace for deadlines). A reading may be used for only one RP. 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 effective approach is to challenge a central claim or premise in the reading and explain why it is problematic or unconvincing. In all cases, students should accurately describe the author's position before offering their own critique. RP cannot exceed 250 words (including quotations but excluding references and must include an accurate word count. RP will be submitted through Brightspace in .pdf, .doc, or .docx format and should not include identifying information (including in the file name) to allow anonymous grading. 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%**). Response Papers that are not submitted receive a grade of **0%** unless a valid reason is provided. Late submissions are penalized at **2.5 points per day**. Late RPs do not receive written comments; students seeking feedback may discuss their work during office hours. Papers that exceed the word limit are penalized at **0.1 point per word**. Submissions without an accurate word count incur a **2.5-point penalty**. If circumstances beyond your control prevent timely submission, please notify the instructor by email as soon as possible.

Oral Exam (By Approval Only). students may request to replace the in-class discussion component of A&P with an Oral Exam. This option is only by approval. Students who wish to apply for this option must email the instructor by the Friday following the first day of classes. Because the oral exam involves individual meetings, availability is limited. When requests are not supported by documentation, places are allocated on a first-come, first-served basis. Approved students will schedule a one-on-one Zoom meeting with the instructor during the Exam Period. Oral Exams consist of questions covering course content, including readings and class discussions. Students must have a working camera, microphone, and reliable internet connection and are expected to keep their camera on for the duration of the exam.

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 to avoid 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. In Canada, copyright for a work is given automatically to the creator of the work. The work does not need to be marked or declared as copyrighted in order to be copyrighted. The majority of works in Canada are copyrighted. It is important for students to understand and respect copyright. Copyright determines your usage rights for a particular work, which includes textbooks, web pages, videos and images, both electronic and hard copy. Students may not photocopy entire or major portions of books or other works, even if it is only for their personal use. Fair dealing makes some allowances for copying small portions of works. See Carleton's Fair Dealing Policy for more information. If journal articles or portions of works are available through the library, either as hard copies or electronically, students may make a single copy for their personal use. Students may not distribute copies of works that are under copyright. For more information, please see the Carleton's Fair Dealing Policy and the library's copyright website: www.library.carleton.ca/copyright.

VII. Course Calendar

<i>Week</i>	<i>Readings</i>
0	Somin (2013) 'Do Voters Know Enough?'
1	Anderson (2011) 'Democracy, Public Policy, and the Lay Assessments of Scientific Testimony' Contessa (2023) 'It Takes A Village to Trust Science'
2	Napolitano (2021) 'Conspiracy Theories and Evidential Self-Insulation' Dentith (forthcoming) 'Suspicious Conspiracy Theories'
3	McIntyre 'What is Post-Truth?' Hannon (2023) 'The Politics of Post-Truth'
4	Mukerji (2023) 'What is Fake News?' Habgood-Coote (2019) 'Stop Talking About Fake News!'
5	Begby (2024) 'From Belief Polarization to Echo Chambers: A Rationalizing Account' Joshi (2020) 'What are the Chances That You're Right About Everything?'
6	Nguyen 'Epistemic Bubbles and Echo Chambers' Coady 'Stop Talking About Echo Chambers and Filter Bubbles'
7	Talisse (2019) 'The Problem of Polarization' Sharp (2022) 'Democratic Citizenship and Polarization'
8	Tosi & Warmke (2016) 'Moral Grandstanding' Levy (2021) 'Virtue Signalling is Virtuous'
9	Williams 'The Case for Partisan Motivated Reasoning' Nguyen 'Hostile Epistemology'
10	Stanley (2015) 'Propaganda in Liberal Democracy' Taiwo (2018) 'The Empire Has No Clothes'
11	Fricker (2007) 'Testimonial Injustice' Toole (2020) 'Demarginalizing Standpoint Epistemology'
12	Medina (2012) 'Epistemic Responsibility and Culpable Ignorance'

	Martín (2021) 'What is White Ignorance?'
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*Please note that 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 2025-26)

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* of 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 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 (students.carleton.ca/course-outline). 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. 3	Classes start.
Sept. 16	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. Withdrawals after this date will result in a permanent notation of WDN on the official transcript.
Oct. 13	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Oct. 20-24	Fall Break – no classes.
Nov. 21	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. 5	Last day of fall term classes. <i>Classes follow a Monday schedule.</i> Last day for academic withdrawal from fall term courses. Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for term work for a fall term course.
Dec. 6-7	No classes or examinations take place.
Dec. 8-20	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. 20	All take-home examinations are due.
Jan. 5	Classes begin.
Jan. 16	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. Withdrawals after this date will result in a permanent notation of WDN on the official transcript.
Feb. 16	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Feb. 16-20	Winter Break – no classes.
Mar. 15	Last day for academic withdrawal from fall/winter and winter courses.
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.
Apr. 3	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Apr. 8	Last day of two-term and winter term classes. <i>Classes follow a Friday schedule.</i> Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for two-term and for winter term courses.
Apr. 9-10	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

