

Philosophy

Faculty

James Crooks,
B.Mus. (Mt. Allison), M.A.,
Ph.D. (Toronto); Professor
(Chair of Department, starting Jan. 2025)

Don Dombowsky,
B.A. (Concordia), M.A. (New School for Social Research), Ph.D. (Ottawa);
Professor

Bruce Gilbert,
B.A. (Toronto), M.A. (McGill),
Ph.D. (Penn State); Professor
(Chair of the Department (until Dec. 2024))

Program Overview

Human beings are filled with wonder, curiosity and awe about the world we live in and about our own beguiling lives. Philosophy quite literally asks the “big questions” about the meaning of life and death, what human fulfillment is, the parameters of a just society, cosmology, metaphysics and a host of other similar topics. We also explore the nature of reason and good arguments.

Knowledge of the philosophical tradition is essential to a sound and liberal education. It lies at the heart of what Bishop’s has understood historically and continues to embrace today as its educational mission.

In recognition of this, the Department of Philosophy offers a program designed to meet the needs of both specialists and those seeking to supplement their work in other disciplines. Honours and Majors follow a curriculum which emphasizes two broad areas: Continental European Philosophy and the Western Philosophical Tradition, including Analytic philosophy. Advanced students may also pursue independent studies of special topics in greater depth. These offerings are supplemented by a series of introductory and cross-disciplinary courses designed to provide the background, skills and tools for a thoughtful, critical approach to a wide variety of problems and issues and are delivered, for the most part, at a level accessible to the non-specialist.

Programs

Honours in Philosophy (60 credits)

HONPHI

Candidates for the Honours program must obtain at least an average of 70% on the best 60 credits in Philosophy in order to be eligible to enter the Honours program. In addition to the requirements for a major, Honours students complete two further elective philosophy courses and are required to write an Honours thesis (PHI 400 / PHI 401, 6 credits).

Major in Philosophy (48 credits)

MAJPHI

Honours and Majors in Philosophy must have the following courses:

Any 3 of:

LIB 210	Eros, Love and Desire
LIB 212	In Search of Justice
LIB 213	The Use and Abuse of Beauty
LIB 214	Ecological Crisis and the Struggle for Environmental Justice
LIB 215	Causation and Creativity
LIB 216	The Divine and Ultimate Concern
LIB 217	Space, Place & The Human Experience
LIB 218	The History and Philosophy of Science

(LIB courses beyond the three required courses for a Major and in all cases for a Philosophy Minor count only if they are taught by a member of the Department of Philosophy)

Any 3 of:

PHI 100	On the Way to the Good Life
PHI 101	On Thinking and Thinking Well
PHI 102	The Metaphysical Mysteries of Reality
PHI 103	But How Do You Know?
PHI 104	The Hopes and Conflicts of Social and Political Life
PHI 105	Freedom, Anxiety and Authenticity: Existentialist Philosophy
PHI106	Philosophy of Sex and Love

All 4 of:

PHI 271	Socrates and Plato
PHI 272	Aristotle
PHI 260	Kant
PHI 204	Analytic Philosophy

Language Requirement: All philosophy majors and honours must complete two courses in a language of their choice, modern or ancient.

The remaining 12 credits are made of philosophy electives.

Minor in Philosophy (24 credits)

A minor consists of any 24 credits in philosophy.

MINPHI

List of Courses

General Introduction

PHI 100 On the Way to the Good Life 3-3-0

Every one of us strives to live the best possible life—to achieve real happiness and fulfillment. We taste deep joy and even ecstasy, and yet we face beguiling worries. Are we tragic beings that always undermine our own projects? Is there real evil in humanity such that our happiness is an illusion? It is possible to be truly fulfilled? To really flourish? In this course students not only engage with key texts from our tradition that tackle these issues, but are also encouraged to explore and develop their own pathways to the “good life”.

PHI 101 On Thinking and Thinking Well 3-3-0

Thinking well is absolutely necessary to your freedom, for if we think poorly we are vulnerable to the manipulation and ideological coercion of others. Indeed, thinking permeates our lives, and poor thinking can undermine or even sabotage our most important and valued projects and activities. Whether we try to discern rhetoric from argument in political debate, solve a conflict in our personal lives or prove a scientific hypothesis, we must become good at the art of both discovering and giving good reasons for what we hold to be true. In this course we carefully study the art of good reasoning and argument in a manner directly oriented to strengthening each student's capacity to thrive as a student in the university, as a citizen of his or her community and in his or her personal life.

PHI 102 The Metaphysical Mysteries of Reality 3-3-0

Is reality fundamentally “one”, such that humanity and nature are unified and interdependent, sharing a common purpose that we are only just starting to grasp? Or are we fragmented individuals adrift in a chaotic or even absurd and surreal universe in which, if there is to be meaning at all, it must be simply created by our will? Is some other notion of reality yet more convincing? In this course we will explore the great metaphysical mysteries of being and reality.

PHI 103 But How Do You Know? 3-3-0

From personal questions like “How do I know I am in love?” to scientific problems like “How do we know the universe began with a ‘Big Bang’?”, the problem of how do we know saturates our experience. Surely “seeing is believing”, and yet so much intellectual and artistic experience requires that we posit ideas and images that are impossible to perceive with our senses. Moreover, is there still a way in which we can say there is Truth, or is truth really just disguised power? In this course we will explore great puzzles of knowing that animate problems from the Scientific Method to claims about religious knowledge.

PHI 104 The Hopes and Conflicts of Social and Political Life 3-3-0

We live in a time of great social and political turmoil. On the one hand, there is widespread consensus that democracy is the only form of governance adequate to the dignity of human freedom. Yet on the other hand, we are plagued by worries that enormous gaps of wealth and power make authentic democratic participation next to impossible. Or we worry that the state or large corporations are robbing citizens of their genuine liberty. Is our society dominated by the “1%”, or are current inequalities of wealth and power actually of mutual benefit to everyone? This course will focus on concrete social and political conflicts and struggles in our own time, and trace the way that these raise fundamental philosophical and political problems about freedom, rights, gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, economic justice and other important themes.

PHI 105 Freedom, Anxiety and Authenticity: Existentialist Philosophy 3-3-0

Beneath our freedom is nothing but an abyss, for there is no God or metaphysical foundation for humanity to lean upon. Freedom is thus less a liberty “to do what we want” than an anxiety-laden imperative to either create meaning for ourselves or flee from that responsibility. So said the larger than life existentialist philosophers of the 20th century, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Martin Heidegger and others. In this course we introduce this dynamic philosophical movement that continues to have enormous influence over our culture by studying not only its main writers but also by exploring the many vital human themes it raises.

PHI 106 Philosophy of Sex and Love 3-3-0

What is gender? What is sexuality, and how is it different from eroticism? Is love just expression of reproductive drives or a higher calling to the Beautiful, the Good and the True? This course explores traditional and contemporary theories of love, desire and sexuality as problems at the heart of the human journey.

Independent Studies

PHI 207 Independent Study I 3-3-0

PHI 208 Independent Study II 3-3-0

PHI 307 Independent Study III 3-3-0

PHI 308 Independent Study IV 3-3-0

Thesis

PHI400 Honours Thesis I 3-3-0

Each student researches, writes and publicly defends a comprehensive thesis proposal under the supervision of one member of the Department. Students must receive a grade of 75% or higher in this course in order to be permitted to register for PHI 401.

PHI 401 Honours Thesis II 3-3-0

Based on the proposal completed in PHI 400, students draft, revise and defend an honours thesis, as examined by all members of the Department of Philosophy. *Prerequisite: PHI 400*

The History of Western Philosophy

PHI 200 / CLA 273 Ancient Philosophy 3-3-0

Exploration of key themes and problems in ancient Greek philosophy, including the Pre-Socratic and Hellenistic philosophers, but with special emphasis on the thought of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Ancient philosophers inaugurated our scientific and philosophical tradition, and this course will thus address vital themes like existence of pure ideas of the Good, the Beautiful and the Just, the nature of a human longing to fulfill or realize our nature, as well as the character of eros, friendship and dialogue (logos).

PHI 201 Medieval Philosophy 3-3-0

Exploration of the treatment of a range of philosophical issues prior to the Renaissance including: arguments for the existence of God, the relation between reason and revelation, the question of the eternity of the world, and the status of the universals. Text will be drawn from Augustine, Boethius, Eriugena, Anselm, Alfarabi, Avicenna, Averroes, Bonaventure, Siger of Brabant and Aquinas.

PHI 202 Modern Philosophy 3-3-0

Explores key themes, problems and debates in the rationalist and empiricist tradition in the Modern period of European philosophy. This includes especially the thought of rationalist philosophers like Descartes, Leibniz and Spinoza as contrasted with that of the great empiricists - Locke, Berkeley and Hume. This course will address topics such as the relationship of body and mind, of ideas to sensation, of necessity and freedom as well as the nature of human happiness.

PHI 203 Continental Philosophy 3-3-0

Explores key themes and problems in contemporary continental philosophy. Beginning with the transcendental philosophy of Kant, the continental tradition has focused on themes such as freedom, the body, emotion, and our concrete relationships with other people. Authors in this study include Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Sartre, Heidegger, de Beauvoir, Merleau-Ponty, and Derrida.

PHI 204 Analytic Philosophy 3-3-0

Introduction to 20th century analytic philosophy drawing on works of Frege, Russell, Wittgenstein, Ayer, Schlick, Carnap, Moore, Ryle, Austin, Quine, Davidson and Putnam.

The Western Philosophical Tradition

PHI 250 Ethics on the Cutting Edge 3-3-0

To what degree and in what way are we responsible for other people? For nature? What is the relationship of our freedom to those profound experiences in which we sacrifice much of our liberty—like friendship, love, and family? Is love truly the path to fulfillment, as so many have claimed over the centuries? This course will deal with these and other issues crucial to the lives of all people, and do so in a way that does not require any prior philosophical training. Our main sources will not only be contemporary philosophers, but also poets, novelists, painters and other artists.

- PHI 260 Kant 3-3-0**
Consideration of epistemological and/or ethical issues in Kant's first two Critiques.
- PHI 271 / CLA 271 Socrates & Plato 3-3-0**
A study of the character and teaching of Socrates as portrayed in Plato's early and middle dialogues. Emphasis will be on theory of education.
- PHI 272 / CLA 272 Aristotle 3-3-0**
A study of selected works of Aristotle with special emphasis on logic, metaphysics, and the concept of substance.
- PHI 374 Spinoza 3-3-0**
An in-depth study of Spinoza's Ethics with reference especially to the novelty of its method, its relation to philosophies of the tradition and its subsequent influence.

Continental European Philosophy

- PHI 263 Hegel 3-3-0**
A study of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit with reference especially to the dialectical method and the origin of the philosophy of history.
- PHI 265 Nietzsche 3-3-0**
This course examines the development of Nietzsche's aesthetic, ethical and political views. Texts include The Birth of Tragedy, The Gay Science, Beyond Good and Evil and The Genealogy of Morals.
- PHI 267 Heidegger 3-3-0**
This course surveys the long career of Martin Heidegger with special attention to his analysis of human being, his articulation of a post-metaphysical philosophy and his pioneer work in environmental philosophy.
- PHI 324 / POL 324 The Philosophy and Politics of Karl Marx 3-3-0**
A study of the philosophy and political theory of Karl Marx, with emphasis on Marx's theory of society, political economy and history. The course will consider a variety of Marx's texts, but focus on Capital, Volume 1.
- PHI 362 Topics In Existentialism and Phenomenology 3-3-0**
An in-depth study of one of the major contributions to phenomenology (e.g. Husserl's Logical Investigations, Heidegger's Being and Time, Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception).
- PHI 364 Topics in Postmodern Philosophy 3-3-0**
Discussion of recent philosophical critiques of modernity with reference especially to the question of whether the intellectual and social/political movements which have shaped the modern world give that world the resources for understanding itself genuinely. Texts will be drawn from Heidegger, Foucault and Deleuze and Derrida.
- PHI 366 / POL 325 Topics in Critical Theory 3-3-0**
This seminar course will explore the development of Critical Theory from its roots in dialectical philosophy (especially Hegel and Marx), to its appropriation of psychoanalysis (especially Freud), to its engagement with contemporary politics, society and art. Authors studied may include Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse.
Prerequisite: POL 228 or POL 229, or one course in Philosophy.

Problems, Special Interests and Service Courses

- PHI 279 Between Transcendentalism and Pragmatism 3-3-0**
Inspired by the European romantics and idealists but charting a distinctly New World path, the great philosophical and literary authors of the 19th century New England Renaissance gave birth to Transcendentalist philosophy – especially in authors like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. Spurning the elitism and dualistic battles of European thought, this movement affirmed the wisdom of emotion and sensuality but without spurning reason. The transcendentalists prepared the ground for the birth of Pragmatism in the late 19th century, especially in philosophers like Charles Sanders Peirce, William James and, in the next generation, John Dewey. Temporarily eclipsed by the rise of analytic philosophy in the mid-twentieth century, a new wave of pragmatism in authors like Hillary Putnam and Robert Brandom is becoming enormously influential on both sides of the Atlantic. This course will follow the development of pragmatism from its earliest roots right into the most important contemporary debates.
- PHI 343 Topics in Philosophy of Language and Hermeneutics 3-3-0**
This course will focus on the development of the hermeneutic philosophy of language whose origin dates to the late 18th century. The major figures studied will include Wittgenstein, Heidegger and Gadamer.

- PHI 345 Topics in Philosophy of Film 3-3-0**
This course will explore key philosophical themes through film. Students will combine viewing and discussion of film with the study of related philosophical texts.
Pre- or Co-Requisite: Any course in philosophy or any course in the Film Studies minor.
- PHI 346 Topics in The Philosophy of Art 3-3-0**
A look at some attempts by major thinkers to account for the nature of art and beauty, focusing on texts of Plato and Aristotle, Kant and Hegel, Nietzsche and Heidegger.
- PHI 347 Topics in Philosophy of Literature 3-3-0**
From the time of Plato's engagement with Homer to the contemporary philosophical dialogue with poetry and the novel, philosophy and literature have had a rich and sometimes controversial relationship. This course will explore this dynamic interaction through the careful study of philosophically significant works of literature and related works of philosophy.
- PHI 348 / POL 348 Topics in Social and Political Philosophy 3-3-0**
This course will typically consist of a detailed study of a great work of Western social and political philosophy. Students will be expected to present seminars and do research on the text itself, the social and political context in which it emerged and its implications for all serious inquiry into questions of society and politics.
- PHI 349 Topics in Feminist Philosophy 3-3-0**
An introduction to feminist thought from the Enlightenment to the present, looking at some feminist discussions in ethics, theory of knowledge, philosophy of language, and philosophy of science.
- PHI 352 Topics in Philosophy of Being 3-3-0**
A detailed study of key themes in metaphysics and ontology, including topics like the nature of first philosophy, the nature of the philosophical God, the notion of Spirit and the character of our being in the world.
Prerequisite: at least one course in Philosophy
- PHI 353 Topics in the Philosophy of Knowledge 3-3-0**
A detailed study of key themes in epistemology, including topics like the nature of a priori concepts, empiricism, scientific method, knowledge as self-transcendence and the self-withdrawal of Being.
Prerequisite: at least one course in Philosophy
- PHI 354 The Philosophy of Contemplation 3-3-0**
When Plato said that "philosophy begins in wonder" he inaugurated a tradition in the West in which contemplation and the awe that accompanies it were elevated to among the richest and most sublime of human experiences. Here West joined East, which already had a centuries-old devotion to contemplation in the Hindu, Buddhist and Taoist traditions, among others. This course will develop not just a familiarity with the philosophical theories of contemplation but also cultivate precisely the kinds of contemplative experiences that draw us towards transcendence.
- PHI 355 Analysis Seminar 3-3-0**
An in-depth study of one of the major contributions to analytic philosophy (e.g. Strawson's Individuals, Quine's Word and Object, or Geach's Reference and Generality).
Prerequisite: PHI 204
- PHI 387 Topics in World Philosophy 3-3-0**
Explores one or more of the world's great philosophical traditions, such as Buddhist, Taoist, Hindu, African and North American philosophy.
Prerequisite: at least one course in Philosophy

Cognate Courses

ESG 366

LIB 210, LIB 211, LIB 212, LIB 213, LIB 214,

LIB 215, LIB 216, LIB 217, LIB 218

POL 100, POL 228, POL 229, POL 324,

POL 325, POL 348, POL 420

PSY 342

SOC 320

RSC 232

Pre-Law

Program Overview

The Pre-Law Minor and Certificate programs are designed to ground students in the concepts of justice, law, and equity, civic governance and responsible citizenship, while also building a knowledge-base in a wide array of related disciplines, such as literature, history, politics, and criminology. The program will also expose students to core competencies – such as problem solving, critical reading, oral and written communications, research, organization and time-management, leadership, and team-building – that enhance capacities for success in law school or other careers within the justice system.

This program is interdisciplinary and offers students the opportunity to develop and/or hone their skills in the areas of logic and critical thinking, argumentation and debate, time-management, and group dynamics. The program aligns with the vision and values of Bishop's University, and seeks to enhance the mission to provide students with an exemplary undergraduate experience in the classroom and beyond. To develop these competencies, students will choose from a list of Humanities, Social Sciences, and other courses provided and will take one capstone course, to be offered annually during the Winter term. Participants should note that the program does not guarantee admission to law school but seeks rather to help in their success once admitted.

Course selection from a select list is based on LSAT criteria and disciplinary knowledge: Content, Reading Comprehension, Analytical Reasoning, Writing proficiency, and Logical Reasoning.

Programs

Pre-Law Minor

(24 credits)

MINPRL

For the minor, students will take two courses each from the Logical and Analytical Reasoning lists, three from the Reading and Writing categories, and the capstone course.

For the minor, double counting will be allowed on the same basis as the certificate and students may not take more than two 100 level courses. Double counting of courses between the certificate and a student's major or honours program should be set at a maximum of two courses or six credits. To receive the certificate, students may not take more than three 100 level courses.

Pre-Law Certificate

(30 credits)

CONPRL

For the certificate, students will be obliged to take one course from the Content list, two courses from each of the Analytical and Logical Reasoning lists and four courses from the Writing and Reading category, plus the capstone course, in order to complete the program.

In order to ensure that this is a selective program for students, the minimum average required for admission into the certificate will be 80%/25 R score.

Please note also: Courses taken within the Pre-Law Certificate program cannot be counted as courses towards a university degree. Students currently enrolled in an undergraduate program at Bishop's should therefore take the minor, the courses for which can be counted towards their degree.

List of Courses

(Please refer to other sections of the Academic Calendar for full course descriptions)

1. Content

BMG 221	Business Law
CLA 321	Laws and Outlaws in Ancient Rome
DRA 131	Acting I
DRA 132	Acting II
DRA 212	Theatre and the State
FIH 240	Art Popular and Mass Culture
HIS 228	Memory, Truth and Reconciliation
HIS 229	Human Rights and Humanitarian Organizations
HIS 300	The Law of the Land: Indigenous Treaties with Canada
HIS 393	Inquisitions, Law and Society
LIB 370	Social Movements and Social Change in Brazil
RSC 200	Politics and Religion
ECO 217	International Economics
ECO 237	Economics of the Environment
SOC 207	Sociology of Indigenous-Settler Relations
SOC 209	Young Offenders
SOC 235	Women and the Penal System
ESG 354	Environmental Impact Assessment
POL 101	Introduction to Comparative Politics
POL 112	Introduction to Canadian Politics
POL 118	Constitutional Law and Canadian Government
POL 214	Public Administration
POL 344	The Politics of International Trade and Investment
POL 345	Introduction to Public International Law
PSY 356	Forensic Psychology