

INTEG 221 & GSJ 271: The Social Nature of Knowledge

Tuesdays & Thursdays, 2:30-3:50pm, EV2-2069

Course Instructor

Professor Katie Plaisance

Pronouns: she/her

Email: kplaisan@uwaterloo.ca

Office hours: **Tues & Thurs, 4:00-4:45pm**

Course Description

This is a course about **diverse ways of knowing**. We'll examine the nature of knowledge by studying some of the theory behind it (called "epistemology"). Traditional theories of knowledge have focused on individuals as the producers of knowledge, while ignoring the identity of those individuals (e.g., their gender, race, or cultural background), as they were believed to be irrelevant to understanding the nature of knowledge. Two fields have created alternatives to this view: **feminist epistemology** and **social epistemology**. Feminist epistemologists argue that a person's social identity *is* epistemologically relevant. They say that all knowledge is "situated knowledge" where someone's characteristics and experiences provide a lens through which they view the world. Social epistemologists argue against the traditional idea that knowledge is produced by individuals. They claim that most of our knowledge is created and transmitted through social processes, and that we should pay attention to how these processes work to understand the nature of knowledge. We will look at some of the key work in these two fields, and students will have the opportunity to apply what they are learning both to themselves and to real-world issues.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course you should be able to achieve the objectives listed below. The first two involve basic levels of understanding, while the next four sit at a higher level on [Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning](#). The last three are skills you will develop that can be applied in many other contexts, both professional and personal.

Knowledge & comprehension:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain objections to traditional epistemology • Describe feminist and social epistemology, and some of their key concepts (e.g., situated knowledge, epistemic injustice)
Application, analysis, evaluation, and/or creation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply the concept of situated knowledge to yourself • Develop and communicate your own ideas or viewpoint • Connect a concept or theory you learned in class to a real-world context • Reflect on how you have developed as a knower in this course
Transferable skills:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance your ability to read and engage with challenging material • Practice and refine your communication and critical thinking skills • Improve your ability to collaborate effectively with others

Required Texts, Materials, & Tools: What Will I Need for This Course?

All course materials, or links to them, will be posted on LEARN. You do not need to buy any texts or materials – i.e., **there are no additional costs associated with this course**. We will be using **Perusall**, a free online tool for social reading, for all assigned readings. Perusall allows you to highlight areas of a text and ask a question or leave a comment, as well as reply to others. (See LEARN for details as to how to access and use this tool.)

Assessment: How Will My Work Be Graded?

You will be assessed on a variety of activities. (See LEARN for detailed assignment instructions.)

Assignment/Activity	Weight	Due Date
Course Engagement		
• Assigned readings on Perusall	15%	Throughout the term
• Your choice of engagement activities (see below)	15%	Throughout the term
Individual Assignments		
• Who am I as a Knower?	15%	Due Friday, January 31
• Midterm Portfolio	15%	Due Friday, February 14
• Final Learning Portfolio	20%	Due Friday, April 11
Group Project		
• Draft of group project for feedback	--	Due Wednesday, March 19
• Final group project	20%	Due Friday, March 28

Course Format: What Can I Expect?

What You Can Expect from Me

My method of teaching (or “pedagogy”) aims to challenge and empower students to think critically, apply what they’re learning to real-world issues, develop valuable skills that can be used outside this course, and take an active role in their education. I ask for your help in creating a collaborative learning community where we support, affirm, and challenge one another. Each of us has different knowledge, skills, and experiences that we bring to the table, and drawing on our collective knowledge will benefit everyone. Note that:

- You will have opportunities to practice reading material that might be more difficult than you’re used to, to hone your communication skills, and to engage with other students. I am here to support you.
- It is important to me that you have some choice in the assignments and activities you do in this course. For the learning portfolios, you will have a choice regarding what you write about, and for the group project, your group will decide on the topic and the format your assignment takes.

What We Should Expect From Each Other

Given the nature this course, it is important that students engage with the course content. with each other, and with the instructor. Thus, course engagement is a substantial component of the course.

- You will get to choose some of your engagement activities, depending on what interests you. The goal of these activities is to contribute to a supportive and collaborative learning environment for everyone.

- I am committed to creating a positive learning environment where diverse perspectives are recognized and valued as a source of strength. Let's work together to create a classroom culture based on open communication, mutual respect, and inclusion. Disagreements and dissenting views are welcome—and encouraged—but personal attacks and oppressive discourse will not be tolerated.
- I strive to ensure an opening and welcoming classroom for all students. If I ever miss the mark, or if you have other suggestions for enhancing our learning community, please don't hesitate to come and talk to me. We are all learning together.

Communication with the Course Instructor and Teaching Assistant

There are multiple ways for you to communicate with me (and the course TA).

- You can **post questions in the LEARN Discussion Forum** entitled "Course Q&A for Katie." Anonymous posts are allowed. If you think your question might apply to other students (e.g., if it's about assignment guidelines or course policies), this is the best platform to use so that other students can see the question and response(s). You're also welcome to respond to other students' questions!
- You can speak with me during the **student drop-in hours** ("office hours") on Tuesdays and Thursdays, 4:00-4:45pm. If that time doesn't work for you, you can book an appointment with me via email.
- **You can also [email me](#) directly.** UW policy requires that students and instructors use official UW email addresses for all email communications, so **be sure to email me from your UW account.**
- Please note that I am usually offline after 5pm and on weekends. Also, my inbox can get quite full, so if you don't hear back from me within two business days, feel free to send a follow up email – I appreciate friendly reminders! **It's also helpful if you add '221' to the subject line so I don't overlook your email.**

Required Assignments: What Will I Need to Do?

Course Engagement

Active engagement is a crucial part of this course. We will take a philosophical approach to examining diverse ways of knowing. Just as many scientific fields require hands-on laboratory practice for deep learning, doing philosophy also requires practice. This involves **actively engaging with texts** (e.g., identifying an author's thesis, uncovering the structure of an argument, or raising objections to an argument), as well as **participating in thoughtful dialogue with others**. Course engagement is also important for creating a collaborative learning community where we can all learn from one another.

A significant portion of your course grade will be based on your engagement with course material, with other students, and with the instructor. This includes (1) assigned readings/videos on Perusall, and (2) your choice of engagement activities. Anyone should be able to get a high mark on engagement with enough time and effort!

Assigned Readings/Videos on Perusall (15%)

- This part of your grade will be based on **completing assigned readings on Perusall**. Completion means doing the reading and annotating the text (i.e., highlighting text and adding comments or questions, or replying to others' comments or questions) by the due date on LEARN.
- It is important that you do the assigned readings on time as most of the class sessions will focus on the specific reading assigned for that day.

Your Choice of Course Engagement Activities (15%)

- In addition to the readings, you will be expected to complete **your choice of engagement activities that contribute to a collaborative learning environment**. Activities might include posts or replies in LEARN Discussion Forums, contributing to collaborative class notes, participating in class discussions, doing an optional reading and posting a short reflection on LEARN, sharing how you've applied course material (e.g., in another course or in conversation with a friend or family member), or something else!
- You are also expected to attend class on a regular basis. You can miss up to two class sessions for any reason without it negatively affecting your Course Engagement grade. If you miss additional classes due to illness, be sure to declare them on Quest (see the Absence Policy below for more information).
- At the end of the course, you will be asked to **write a summary & reflection** on how you contributed to the learning community and suggest a grade range that you think best reflects the work you did.

"Who Am I as a Knower" Assignment (15%)

For this assignment, you will have the opportunity to apply the concept of situated knowledge to yourself to reflect on who *you* are as a knower. There are three main things you need to do: (1) explain the concept of situated knowledge and how it differs from traditional theories of knowledge, (2) apply the concept to yourself by expressing various characteristics that you think are epistemically relevant, (3) discuss cases in which these characteristics affect what you know, how you know it, or how your knowledge is received by others.

Midterm Learning Portfolio (15%)

The midterm portfolio has three parts. In part one, you will choose one of the major theories we have discussed so far – standpoint theory, feminist empiricism, or black feminist epistemology – and write a short, critical reflection that summarizes the theory, along with your analysis of it. In part two, you will communicate a key aspect of reflection through a creative medium (such as an infographic). Finally, in part three, you should write a brief check-in about your course engagement thus far, including your goals for the second half of the course.

Final Learning Portfolio (20%)

At the end of the course, you will create a learning portfolio that documents your development in this course as a learner, knower, collaborator, and/or aspiring ally, and how you will apply what you've learned in this course to other contexts. You must draw on at least one concept, theory, or framework from the course (e.g., situated knowledge, standpoint theory, epistemology of ignorance) to inform your reflection. Note that there is no final exam in this course, so the Learning Reflection is your capstone assignment.

Group Project (20%)

For your group project, you will research and present one real-world example or issue related to epistemic injustice or epistemology of ignorance, along with ideas as to how the injustice or ignorance can be combatted.

- Your group should submit a draft of your project by the date listed above (and on LEARN). You will also be asked to look at other groups' draft projects and provide constructive feedback.
- Each group will then have an opportunity to incorporate feedback on their projects and revise their projects before the final due date (listed above and on LEARN).
- After the project has been submitted, each student will fill out a peer evaluation of each of their group members, including themselves.

Late Policy & Grace Days

Assignments are **due by 11:59pm** on the dates listed above. You must submit your work to the appropriate dropbox on LEARN. If you have technical problems submitting your work, please **email me immediately and attach** your assignment before the deadline to avoid late penalties.

- Each student will be automatically given a total of **4 grace days** for submitting late work (excluding the group project). Grace days can all be used for one assignment or broken up over several assignments.
- After the grace days are applied, there will be a **5-point penalty** for each day or part of a day an assignment is late, including weekends.
- **You do not need to inform me when you use a grace day.** I will track late days throughout the term and apply them after the final assignment is in. I will first apply grace days to the late assignments that are weighted most heavily in the overall course grade; if you have more than three late days, I will then apply the 5-point late penalty for each additional day an assignment was late.
- Because of these grace days, **no other extensions will be given**, except when an accommodation is warranted (see below).
- All course work must be submitted no later than Tuesday, April 15.

Academic Accommodation: Absences & Late Assignments

Excused Absences & Academic Accommodations

There are four types of absences that are *excused* and entitle students to academic considerations.

- *Self-declared absence*: Students can [self-declare one 48-hour absence](#) for any reason [via Quest](#).
- *COVID-related absences*: students can self-declare up to one COVID absence per term [via Quest](#).
- *Other absences*: For illnesses other than COVID, or for other documented circumstances (e.g., funerals), students should submit documentation to absence.uwaterloo.ca. (These will be approved or denied on a case-by-case basis.) *Please do NOT submit documentation to the instructor.*
- *Religious absences*: students can request religious absence accommodations [via Quest](#). If a student will miss an assignment due date or exam due to a religious observance, they must submit their accommodation request at least two weeks in advance of the due date.

If your ability to complete components of the course are affected by short-term extenuating circumstances, you must contact the instructor. See the [Academic Regulations](#) section of the Undergraduate Calendar for details.

University Policies

Generative AI

Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) trained using large language models to produce text or images, such as ChatGPT, may be used to a limited extent for the learning portfolios, but *only* with proper citation and documentation. **GenAI is not allowed for Perusall assignments.** Permitted uses of and expectations for using GenAI will be outlined in assignment instructions.

- Recommendations for how to cite GenAI may be found through the [UW Library guide on ChatGPT & AI](#).
- Be aware that GenAI has been known to falsify references to other work, fabricate facts, and inaccurately express ideas. GenAI generates content based on the input of other human authors and may therefore contain inaccuracies or reflect biases.
- You should also be aware that the legal/copyright status of GenAI inputs and outputs is unclear. Exercise caution when using large portions of content from AI sources, especially images. More information is available from the [UW Copyright Advisory Committee's overview on GenAI](#).
- **You are accountable for the content and accuracy of all work you submit in this class, including any supported by GenAI. If GenAI plagiarizes and you use that output, then you will have plagiarized.**

Intellectual Property

This course contains the intellectual property (IP) of the instructor and the university. IP includes items such as lecture content, both written and spoken (including videos), lecture notes, and other course materials.

- [Sharing IP without the owner's explicit permission is a violation of IP rights.](#)
- For this reason, ***you must receive permission from the instructor (via email) before recording any lecture content*** or sharing course materials with anyone not enrolled in the course.

Respectful Behavior

Policy 33, Ethical Behavior, addresses expectations for all members of the university. Policy 33 states that “each member of the University endeavor to contribute to the existence of a just and supportive community based on equality and respect for individual differences.” Disrespectful or offensive behavior will not be tolerated.

- For more information about what constitutes discrimination, harassment, or a poisoned environment, see [Policy 33, Ethical Behavior](#). Furthermore, Policy 71, Student Discipline, covers academic *and* non-academic offenses, such as disrupting other students' learning. This policy prohibits “disruptive, dangerous, aggressive or threatening behavior, including by electronic means.”
- **As the instructor, I am committed to creating a safe, respectful, and supportive learning environment.** If you have been the target of hostile or disrespectful behavior, or you think you have witnessed another student engaging in such behavior towards others in class, please email me.

Academic Integrity

In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the UWaterloo community are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. (See [the Office of Academic Integrity website](#).)

- **Turnitin.com:** Text matching software (Turnitin®) may be used to screen assignments in this course. Turnitin® is used to verify that all materials and sources in assignments are documented. If you do not wish to have your work uploaded to Turnitin, you must email the instructor at least one week before the due date to arrange an alternative (this may include a brief in-person exam with the instructor).

Discipline

A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity to avoid committing an academic offence, and to take responsibility for their actions. (Check [the Office of Academic Integrity website](#) for more information.) A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about “rules” for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the

course instructor, academic advisor, or undergraduate associate dean. For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students should refer to [Policy 71, Student Discipline](#). For typical penalties, check the [Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties](#).

- **NOTE from the instructor:** *Students who plagiarize or cheat on an assignment will typically receive a 0 on that assignment plus 5 marks off the final course grade; they will also be placed on probation. Students who impersonate others, distribute confidential academic materials, or use such materials will typically receive a 0 on the assignment and a suspension. Penalties become more severe after the first offence.*

Grievance

A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of their university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read [Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4](#) for details. When in doubt, contact the Undergraduate Advisor for further assistance.

Appeals

A decision made or penalty imposed under Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances (other than a petition) or Policy 71, Student Discipline may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes they have grounds for an appeal should refer to [Policy 72, Student Appeals](#).

University Resources: What Supports are Available to Help Me Succeed?

The University of Waterloo provides several resources and support services to help students achieve the academic success they are truly capable of. Most students access some of these services at some point in their degree. **I strongly encourage you to make use of any services that might be beneficial to you.** I have provided a list of UW's support offices below and on LEARN (click on "Content" and scroll to the bottom).

Mental health issues & Counseling Services

The University of Waterloo, the Faculty of Environment, and the Department of Knowledge Integration consider students' well-being to be extremely important. We recognize that students may face health challenges – physical and/or emotional. **Please note that help is available.** Mental health is a serious issue for everyone and can affect your ability to do your best work. [Counselling Services](#) is an inclusive, non-judgmental, and confidential space. They offer confidential counselling for a variety of areas including anxiety, stress management, depression, grief, substance use, sexuality, relationship issues, and more.

- **NOTE from the course instructor:** I encourage you to check out the [wellness programs and student groups](#), most of which are free.

AccessAbility Services

[AccessAbility Services](#), located in Needles Hall Room 1401, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the AccessAbility Services at the beginning of each academic term.

- **NOTE from the course instructor:** AccessAbility Services can offer support for a variety of disabilities such as ADHD, chronic pain, etc. If you think you might benefit from accommodations, even for temporary issues, I *strongly* encourage you to contact Accessibility Services ASAP.
- Note that **INTEG 221 has no exams**, thus no testing accommodations will be needed. I will also ask for volunteers to contribute to collaborative class notes; this will be useful to all students, including those who require a note-taking accommodation.

Academic Support Services

- The [Writing and Communication Centre](#) (WCC) at UW offers writing workshops, online resources, and virtual appointments to assist students with all aspects of the writing process.
- UW's [Student Success Office](#) (SSO) has created several resources to help students develop good learning strategies, such as time management, note-taking, and reading critically.
- The [Centre for Career Action](#) (CCA) advises students regarding further education and career paths.

Land Acknowledgement: On What Traditional Territory is This Course Located?

This course is being taught on the traditional territory of the Neutral, Anishinaabeg, and Haudenosaunee peoples. As I'm sure most of you know, the University of Waterloo is situated on the Haldimand tract, land promised to the Six Nations that includes ten kilometres on each side of the Grand River. This land was promised to the Six Nations of the Grand River in 1784, but today the Six Nations have less than 5% of this land. To learn more, see: [The Haldimand Tract and Land Back](#).

- If you would like to know more about the role of land acknowledgements, and/or more about the particular Indigenous peoples on whose land many of us live, work, and study, see: <http://www.lspirg.org/knowtheland>.
- For information about steps that UW is taking related to Indigenization, see <https://uwaterloo.ca/faculty-association/information-faculty/faculty-guide-working-waterloo/indigenization-waterloo>.

How Can I Take Steps Towards Reconciliation?

- I invite you to create a land acknowledgement on LEARN in your own words and/or share information, ideas, or resources with other students that might be useful in further educating ourselves about Indigenous issues and/or taking steps towards Reconciliation.
- I also recommend reading more about the work of the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#) (TRC), including the [TRC's 94 Calls to Action](#).

Schedule of Course Topics, Readings, & Assignments (Subject to Change)

Readings & annotations must be **completed** by 11:59pm the night before class. See Perusall for official due dates.

Week 1: Introduction & Course Overview (Jan 6-10)

- No reading assignment – course introduction and overview
- Read Course Syllabus

Week 2: Feminist Epistemology & Situated Knowledge (Jan 13-17)

- Read handouts on doing philosophy & reading charitably
- Read Code, “Is the Sex of the Knower Epistemologically Significant?”

Week 3: Standpoint Theory & Disability Studies (Jan 20-24)

- Read Wylie, “Why Standpoint Matters”
- Read Dolmage, “An Archive and Anatomy of Disability Myths”

Week 4: Feminist Empiricism & Diversity (Jan 27-31)

- Read Longino, “Subjects, Power, and Knowledge”
- Read Phillips, “How Diversity Makes Us Smarter”

Week 5: Black Feminist Epistemology & Intersectionality (Feb 3-7)

- Read Hill Collins, “Black Feminist Epistemology”
- Watch Crenshaw’s TED video, “The Urgency of Intersectionality”

Week 6: Implicit Bias: What it is and How to Mitigate it (Feb 10-14)

- Read Cherry, “Implicit Bias: Definition, Causes, Effects, and Prevention”
- Read Onyeador et al., “Moving Beyond Implicit Bias Training: Policy Insights”

(READING WEEK BREAK, FEBRUARY 17-22)

Week 7: Epistemic Injustice (Feb 24-28)

- Read McKinnon, “Epistemic Injustice”
- Read Dotson, “Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing”

Week 8: Epistemology of Ignorance (Mar 3-7)

- Read Alcoff, “Epistemologies of Ignorance: Three Types”
- Read McHugh, “Telling Her Own Truth: June Jordan, Standard English, & the Epistemology of Ignorance”

Week 9: Epistemic Bubbles & Echo-Chambers (Mar 10-14)

- Read Nguyen, “Escape the Echo Chamber”
- Reading TBD

Week 10: Creative Group Projects (Mar 17-21)

- *No reading due – time in class to work in groups!*
- *No reading due – time in class for design charrette*

Week 11: Creative Group Projects (Mar 24-28)

- *Presentations*
- *Presentations*

Week 12: Course wrap-up (March 31-April 4)

- No reading – find and post a resource for enacting positive change
- Course wrap-up