

Philosophy  
PHILOS 2X03  
Early Modern Philosophy I  
*Fall 2023*



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**HUMANITIES**

## Instructor Information

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Dr. Allauren Samantha Forbes

**Email:** forbeas@mcmaster.ca

**Office:** [REDACTED]

**Office Hours:**

[REDACTED]

## Course Information

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[REDACTED]

**Course Dates:** 09/05/2023 - 12/06/2023

**Units:** 3.00

**Course Delivery Mode:** In Person

**Course Description:** An introduction to the political, epistemological and ontological problems investigated by philosophers of the 17th and 18th centuries (Bacon, Hobbes, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Malebranche, Locke, Berkeley and Hume). Two lectures, one tutorial; one term Prerequisite(s): Registration in Level II or above

## Instructor-Specific Course Information

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Early modern philosophy was an exceptionally intellectually rich and dynamic period, and no single course could hope to cover all of the exciting debates and questions with which figures active in this period reckoned. In this course, we will ask some of these questions – what exists? How do we know? How can we know? – and examine the debate concerning the mind-body problem. So too will we consider the practical implications of

how we answer these questions and debates as are borne out in important socio-epistemic and socio-political topics, such as the status of non-humans, prejudice, freedom, and friendship. In many ways, these questions are timeless: even today, we still ask, How do we not know certain kinds of things? Who counts as a knower? And, with these questions in mind, how then should we live? Turning to how our philosophical predecessors asked and answered these questions will prove illuminating. This course features figures and texts from a wide range of philosophical traditions and lived experiences; we will explore these theories together as an epistemic community of engaged inquiry.

## Important Links

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- [Mosaic](#)
- [Avenue to Learn](#)
- [Student Accessibility Services - Accommodations](#)
- [McMaster University Library](#)
- [eReserves](#)

## Course Learning Outcomes

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- Reading: read philosophical texts for understanding and context
- Interpreting: develop your own interpretation of philosophical texts
- Communicating: communicate your understanding, interpretation, and critical evaluation of philosophical views and texts clearly
- Discussing: discuss philosophical views and texts with your peers and TA in class and in your tutorial in charitable and respectful ways, even when challenging one another
- Engaging: engage in meaningful self-reflection on your own knowledge, understanding, and experiences and how they have(n't) changed over the

semester

- Constructing: construct clear and persuasive original philosophical arguments
- Reimagining: reimagine what history is, can be, and can do for us now; revise your understanding of philosophical histories and canons.

## Required Materials and Texts

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**Textbook Listing:** <https://textbooks.mcmaster.ca>

### **Early Modern Philosophy: An Anthology**

**ISBN:** 9781554812790

**Authors:** Lisa Shapiro and Marcy Lascano

**Publisher:** Broadview Press

**Publication Date:** 2021

Other texts will be provided via pdf and URL in keeping with McMaster's Copyright Policy.

## Class Format

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In Person

## Course Evaluation

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In this course, you will be evaluated on the following measures:

1. Self-reflection assignment (10% = 5% + 5%)
2. Weekly reflections (25%)
3. Tutorial discussion (20% = 10% discussion + 10% self-assessment)
4. Exegesis assignment (15%)
5. Philosophical paper (30% = 25% paper + 2.5% draft + 2.5% peer review)

## Course Evaluation Details

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Your grade in this course will be determined by the following:

### **Self-reflection assignment (10% = 5% + 5%) DUE: 8 September 11:59pm & 6 December 11:59pm on Avenue**

In the first week of class, you will write approx. 250 words in response to questions provided by Dr. Forbes concerning (for example) your present understanding of early modern philosophy, philosophers, and your relationship to them. In the final week of class, I will return your answers to you and you will reflect on how your answers have or haven't changed. This is meant to be introspective and does not require research or prior knowledge. It is graded on the basis of effort, that is, on a pass/fail basis where pass = 5% and fail = 0%.

### **Weekly reflection papers (25%) DUE: Weekly starting 11 September 9am on Avenue**

Each week, you will write approx. 400-500 words prior to Monday's lecture (due at 9:00 am on Mondays). Your reflection should contain three parts: (1) what do you think is going on here – what is the point or main argument? (2) What is interesting and/or challenging about this text's content/methods? (3) What are 2-3 philosophical questions you have about the text? Philosophical questions are searching for nuance, ambiguity, implications, etc. See Avenue for some examples. These questions will be shared with the other members of your tutorial section. (4) bonus: what is something you didn't understand? (this last part is optional and doesn't count toward the word count – Dr. Forbes / the TAs will use these to see what needs to be further discussed/explained/etc.)

There are 12 weeks where this assignment can be completed – weeks 2-13 inclusive. You need only submit 10. This assignment is graded on the basis of effort, that is, on a pass/fail basis where each pass = 2.5% (up to 10) toward the total 25% available. Doing extra reflections will not earn bonus points (i.e., if you submit 12 passing reflections, you will still only get 25% of your final grade). Also, given the nature of this assignment, you cannot submit it late – there is no grace period for this specific assignment. If you are ill or otherwise unable to complete this task, contact Dr. Forbes asap and in advance to discuss, keeping in mind that you can miss two weeks without losing any opportunity to accrue points.

**Tutorial discussion (20% = 10% discussion + 10% self-assessment) DUE: Ongoing with the self-assessment due on 6 December 2023 at 11:59pm on Avenue**

Since philosophy is a fundamentally social activity, you will be expected to engage in charitable, respectful discussion with your peers and your TA. Each tutorial will begin with (a) a 5-minute writing activity, and (b) a discussion based on these comments and your questions from the weekly reflection assignment. It is likely that not all questions will be discussed, but if yours comes up, you will be expected to speak to the question, why it arose for you, how you were thinking about the context, etc. The group will then try to solve/respond to that question as a collective, collaborate epistemic community. Each of (a) and (b) are worth 1 point. Your total score out of 20 over the course of the semester will be weighted out of 10% of your final grade. This assignment will be based on effort, that is, on a pass/fail basis.

At the end of the semester, you will be asked to write a brief self-assessment of your participation in discussions. I will provide some prompts asking questions like, were you a present and engaged participant? What does that mean for you? Were you a collaborative and charitable co-inquirer? You will assess yourself, providing a careful explanation of your reasoning, and give yourself a score out of 10. The TA will similarly score you; should the two scores match, that is your grade. If the TA assesses your grade as higher than you graded yourself, then you will get the TA-assigned score out of ten. If your TA assesses your grade as lower than what you assigned yourself, the instructor will examine your and your TA's carefully reasoned explanations and determine the appropriate grade given the provided evidence.

Accommodation: Some students find public discussion deeply challenging. If you have an SAS-approved accommodation, email me to discuss an alternate assessment method. If you feel you should have an SAS-approved accommodation but have not yet obtained one, you should also email me to discuss an alternative. However, if public discussion is simply uncomfortable, I encourage you to participate to the best of your abilities (keeping in mind that this is one of the things you may wish to discuss in your self-assessment), and, in the meantime, to reach out to your TA and to me in office hours or via email for how we can better facilitate your participation. Philosophy is much more fun when it is social and dynamic!

**Exegesis assignment (15%) DUE: 29 September at 11:59pm on Avenue**

Because the goals of this course include developing and practicing the skills of reading, understanding, and communicating that understanding of historical texts, views, and figures, this assignment is a formal assessment of those skills. An exegesis is a kind of low-level interpretation – it is not quite a full interpretive argument, but is decidedly more than a summary.

Your assignment should include (a) a copy-and-pasted passage from the relevant assigned text, (2) a 500-750 word explanation/low-level interpretation of this passage, and (3) the student number(s) of the students who worked on the assignment. We will discuss exegeses in practice in lecture, and you will have some exegesis-writing exercises in your tutorials prior to the deadline.

Structurally, your assignment should seek to answer the following questions: what is going on in this passage? What is the argument? What are the premises of the argument? How does it work? Are there missing or suppressed premises? This assignment is not evaluative – you should not be assessing whether the argument is good or bad, only its structure and method.

Please see Avenue for detailed instructions and the rubric. This assignment will be graded out of 10 points, for 15% of your grade. Please ensure that all your student number (and not name) is on the submitted document. This assignment will be assessed on the basis of achievement, that is, demonstration of the relevant skills we've modeled and practiced in lecture and in tutorial.

**Philosophical paper (30% = 25% paper + 2.5% draft + 2.5% peer review)**

**DRAFT DUE: 15 November 11:59pm on Avenue**

**PEER REVIEW DUE: 22 November 11:59pm on Avenue**

**FINAL DUE: 13 December 11:59 pm on Avenue**

Building on your skills of reading, interpreting, and communicating, you will now construct a philosophical argument in the now-traditional genre of the philosophical paper. This means you will offer a thesis – take a position on some issue – and offer an argument in support of this view – that is, reasons and reasons for reasons. I will provide some topics (though you can choose one of your own, in consultation with Dr. Forbes) and you will have some thesis workshops in your tutorials in advance of the draft deadline and a

chance to chat with your peer reviewer in your tutorial once the reviews have been returned. Please see the detailed instructions, guides, and rubrics on Avenue. While the final paper will be assessed on the basis of achievement (per the posted rubric), the draft and peer review will be assessed on the basis of effort, that is, pass/fail.

Please note that this assignment has three separate deadlines: one for the draft, one for the peer review, and one for the final paper. If you wish to opt out of the peer review, that is completely fine! In order to do so, please notify Dr. Forbes via email within 24 hours of the draft deadline so that your TA and I can assign peer review partners efficiently.

Please also note that the draft does not have to be a complete draft. Necessary components for the draft include: (a) student number, title, (b) thesis stated clearly, (c) brief summary of intended argument, and (d) any concerns, problems, etc. upon which you would like feedback from your peer reviewer.

## Grading Scale

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Grade	Equivalent Grade Point	Equivalent Percentages
A+	12	90-100
A	11	85-89
A-	10	80-84
B+	9	77-79
B	8	73-76
B-	7	70-72
C+	6	67-69
C	5	63-66
C-	4	60-62
D+	3	57-59
D	2	53-56
D-	1	50-52
F	0	0-49

## Course Schedule

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Schedule and Readings

\* indicates it is in the Broadview volume

### **Week 1 – September 5: Introduction**

- **No assigned reading**
- Optional reading:
  1. Peter K. J. Park, *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy: Racism in the Formulation of the Early Modern Canon*
  2. Eileen O’Neill, “Disappearing Ink”
  3. Thomas King, *The Truth About Stories*
- Assignment: Self-reflection assignment – Due 8 September at 11:59pm on Avenue
- Goals: Start conceiving of the canon, narratives, and the epistemic and political power therein (and our relation to it)

### **Week 2 – September 11 and 12: How do we know?**

- \*Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, “Response of the Poet...”
- \*Madeleine de Scudéry, “Of the Knowledge of Others, and of Ourselves”
- Assignment: Weekly Reflection #1, Tutorial #1

### **Week 3 – September 18 and 19: How do we know?**

- \*Margaret Cavendish, *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*
- \*Robert Hooke, *Micrographia*
- Assignment: Weekly Reflection #2, Tutorial #2

### **Week 4 – September 25 and 26: Do we know?**

- \*René Descartes, *First Meditation*



- \*René Descartes, *Second Meditation*
- \*René Descartes, *Third Meditation*
- Assignment: Weekly Reflection #3, Tutorial #3
- Assignment: Exegesis Assignment Due 29 September 11:59pm

### **Week 5 – October 2 and 3: What can we know?**

- \*René Descartes, *Fourth Meditation*
- \*René Descartes, *Fifth Meditation*
- \*René Descartes, *Sixth Meditation*
- Assignment: Weekly Reflection #4, Tutorial #4

### ***FALL BREAK - TAKE CARE!***

### **Week 6 – October 16 and 17: Minds, Bodies, and Reason**

- \*Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and René Descartes, *Correspondence*
- Assignment: Weekly Reflection #5, Tutorial #5

### **Week 7 – October 23 and 24: The Mind-Body Problem – Resolved?**

- Anton Wilhelm Amo, *On the Impassivity of the Human Mind*
- Assignment: Weekly Reflection #6, Tutorial #6

### **Week 8 – October 30 and 31: Personal Identity**

- \*John Locke, “Of Identity and Diversity”
- David Hume, “Of Personal Identity”

- Assignment: Weekly Reflection #7, Tutorial #7

### **Week 9 – November 6 and 7: Humans, Animals, and Other Beings: Minds and Matter**

- \*Margaret Cavendish, “A Dialogue between an Oak, and a Man cutting him down”
- \*Julien Offray de la Mettrie, *Man a Machine*
- OPTIONAL: \*David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Section IX)
- OPTIONAL: Walda Heywat, *Second Treatise* (excerpt)
- Assignment: Weekly Reflection #8, Tutorial #8

### **Week 10 – November 13 and 14: Prejudice**

- Marie de Gournay, *The Ladies Complaint*
- Anton Wilhelm Amo, *Treatise on the Art of Soberly and Accurately Philosophising* (excerpt)
- Assignment: Weekly Reflection #9, Tutorial #9

### **Week 11 – November 20 and 21: Freedom**

- Benjamin Banneker, Letter to Thomas Jefferson
- Phillis Wheatley, “Poem on Tyranny and Slavery”
- \*Madame de Maintenon, “On Constraint”
- Assignment: Weekly Reflection #10, Tutorial #10

### **Week 12: November 27 and 28: Love and Friendship**

- Mary Astell and John Norris, *Letters Concerning the Love of God* (excerpt)

- Allaren Samantha Forbes, “Friendship as a Means to Freedom”
- Assignment: Weekly Reflection #11, Tutorial #11

### **Week 13: December 4 and 5: Happiness & Wrap-up**

- \*Émilie du Châtelet, *Discourse on Happiness*
- Assignment: Weekly Reflection #12, NO TUTORIALS

## **Late Assignments**

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Extensions can be granted by the instructor or your TA, and will be granted at their discretion. To request one, email more than 24 hours in advance of the deadline. SAS accommodations operate independently of extensions.

If you want to use an MSAF, recall that they apply only to work under 25% and must be filed within three days of the deadline. An MSAF will not excuse you from the work. All MSAFs will result in a seven-day extension from the original due date.

Late penalties:

When uploading assignments to Avenue, make sure to allow a couple of minutes before the deadline in case of internet/Avenue issues. Everyone receives a 24-hour flexible deadline on all assignments without needing to email for an extension. If it looks like there’s going to be a technical issue with Avenue, email it to Dr. Forbes before the deadline to ensure that your submission isn’t late.

Otherwise – that is, when no extension has been obtained in writing, and no MSAF has been filed – every 24 hrs after the flexible deadline you will lose 5% off the top of the final grade of the paper. So, if you turn in a paper that scores an 83% two days late, it becomes a 73% paper. There is no upper limit on this penalty.

## **Absences, Missed Work, Illness**

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Absences:

**If you are sick, do not come to class/tutorial.** Email me (or your TA for tutorial) saying that you are ill and cannot attend. There is no need to provide details or documentation on this matter. If your absence impedes your ability to turn work in on time, please email Dr. Forbes to discuss an alternate timeline or submit an MSAF for an automatic seven-day extension.

Missed work:

Any work which does not have an extension or accommodation obtained in writing (via email)/SAS-approved accommodation, and which remains unsubmitted more than 5 calendar days after the deadline, will receive a zero.

## Turnitin.com

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Some courses may use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an online learning platform (e.g. A2L, etc.) using plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through the plagiarism detection software must inform the Instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software. All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). For more details about McMaster's use of Turnitin.com please go to [www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity](http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity).

## Course Modification

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Mutual Support

In this class, we are an epistemic community, and communities ought to support one another. I have created collective note-taking documents for each TA's set of students. These notes are intended to be a space for you to collectively build your notes, explore your understanding, ask each other questions, and share epistemic resources more

broadly. Please keep in mind that the student code of conduct is still in effect in this document, that you should feel free to comment on (but not insult or delete) others' notes and that it is not anonymous; the TAs and I can see the version history. Participation in this note-taking document is voluntary but encouraged; no grades depend on this.

## Behaviour

It is deeply important that we maintain an attitude of respect for one another and for the subjects we cover in this class, especially because many of them are quite personal/sensitive/important. Philosophy is, at its core, a practice of critical thinking. This often consists in making arguments and responding to one's interlocutors in ways that interrogate their positions and claims; we will consider reasons for and against views in a way that incorporates an underlying commitment to trust, empathy, and cooperative inquiry. Throughout our discussions of some sensitive issues and concerns, we will maintain an attitude of respect even – especially – when we disagree with the views at hand. We will discuss specific practices of class conduct in the first class.

## Email

I will communicate with you via email and Avenue Announcement, particularly if something changes in the course. Please ensure that you are receiving these notifications. My general policy is to respond to emails within 48 hours of receiving them, not including weekends; however, I will not discuss grades over email, and would prefer that longer questions about assignments are addressed in office hours. Please check the syllabus and the (forthcoming) detailed instructions on assignments, etc. before emailing me about them.

## Grades

I am committed to a fair and unbiased grading process. As such, all assignments must be submitted with no identifying information other than your student number. This allows the teaching team to grade anonymously. If you have concerns about this process, please contact me and we will discuss possible solutions. If you are unsatisfied with your

grade and would like to appeal it, the process is as follows. Between 24 and 72 hours after the grades are posted, explain in writing – in a way that responds to every single comment – how you think the grade/comments are inappropriate for your assignment. I promise to consider these appeals and, if the appeal is accepted, to re-examine your assignment. Please note, however, that a successful request for regrading can result in your mark going up or down.

### Accessibility and Support Services

I want all of you to succeed and flourish philosophically. There are, of course, many ways to learn; I will strive to adapt to your needs, but this means that you must tell me how you learn best. Please feel free to contact me via email or in office hours to let me know what works for you.

Students with disabilities or relevant diagnoses are strongly encouraged to make use of services here at the University. If you require any accommodations in light of any diagnoses or disabilities, please contact Student Accessibility Services. You do not need to disclose any details of any of these matters with me; once you've been in contact with SAS, we will only discuss how to accommodate your needs given practical details of the class.

### Generative AI: Use Prohibited

Students are not permitted to use generative AI in this course. In alignment with [McMaster academic integrity policy](#), it “shall be an offence knowingly to ... submit academic work for assessment that was purchased or acquired from another source”. This includes work created by generative AI tools. Also state in the policy is the following, “Contract Cheating is the act of “outsourcing of student work to third parties” (Lancaster & Clarke, 2016, p. 639) with or without payment.” Using Generative AI tools is a form of contract cheating. Charges of academic dishonesty will be brought forward to the Office of Academic Integrity.

### APPROVED ADVISORY STATEMENTS

#### **Academic Integrity**

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. **It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty.**

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the [Academic Integrity Policy](https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-proceduresguidelines/), located at <https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-proceduresguidelines/>

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- improper collaboration in group work.
- copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

## **Authenticity / Plagiarism**

**Some courses may** use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an online learning platform (e.g. Avenue to Learn, etc.) using plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through the plagiarism detection software must inform the Instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software. **All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld** (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). For more details about McMaster's use of Turnitin.com please go to [www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity](http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity).

## **Courses with an On-line Element**

*Some courses may* use on-line elements (e.g. e-mail, Avenue to Learn, LearnLink, web pages, capa, Moodle, ThinkingCap, etc.). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of a course using these elements, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in a course that uses on-line elements will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

## **Online Proctoring**

*Some courses may* use online proctoring software for tests and exams. This software may require students to turn on their video camera, present identification, monitor and record their computer activities, and/or lock/restrict their browser or other applications/software during tests or exams. This software may be required to be installed before the test/exam begins.

## **Conduct Expectations**

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the [Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities](#) (the “Code”). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, **whether in person or online.**

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online



platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students' access to these platforms.

## **Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities**

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact [Student Accessibility Services](#) (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or [sas@mcmaster.ca](mailto:sas@mcmaster.ca) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University's [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#) policy.

## **Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work**

In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the [Policy on Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work](#).

## **Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous, or Spiritual Observances (RISO)**

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the [RISO](#) policy. Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office *normally within 10 working days* of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

## **Copyright and Recording**

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, **including lectures** by University instructors.

The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

### **Extreme Circumstances**

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, Avenue to Learn and/or McMaster email.