

Course # | Ethics and Public Policy

Description

This course helps students develop their capacity to exercise genuine moral agency in their professional lives and to understand how moral considerations are deployed in political contexts. It teaches students how to engage in strategic ethics while practicing public service and creating public value throughout their careers. Specifically, the course equips students to:

- Articulate and defend moral arguments in the context of public service;
- Tolerate and appreciate moral disagreements and ambiguities;
- Make nuanced moral judgments in professional settings;
- Interrogate and assess the values and principles that guide one's own thinking;
- Understand and critically evaluate the ethical perspectives of multiple stakeholders;
- Collaboratively deliberate with others about moral problems;
- Expand one's literacy of different moral theories, frameworks, and reasoning;
- Effectively evaluate public policies and procedures from the moral standpoint;
- Integrate moral considerations with economic, managerial, political, and other considerations to arrive at decisions about what ought to be done in specific professional cases;
- Learn how to successfully engage colleagues, superiors, subordinates, and the public in advancing one's moral agenda.

Assignments

- (1) *Three Response Essays*: The readings for each class are accompanied by two or three reflection questions. Sign up for three classes for which you will compose a 1000-word response paper to one question for that date. Papers are due by 11:59 PM one week after the class to which you are responding.
- (2) *Pre-class Polling*: Regardless of whether you are writing a response essay for the meeting, everyone will be asked to record their tentative position on all the reflection questions for each class meeting. Responses will not be shared in a publicly identifiable way and will only be used to help set the stage for each class discussion.
- (3) *Simulations*: Three in-class simulation will take place throughout the semester. In addition to participating in these activities, you will be asked to respond to several short reflection questions about the experience.
- (4) *Practical Decisionmaking Exercise*: Each lecture is accompanied by a case study. Each week, a different team of students will be tasked with developing a response to the case and publicly defending the ethical and practical merits of their proposal. Each group will present twice over the course of the semester.
- (5) *Original Op Ed*: Write a 700-1000-word essay appropriate for the op-ed or "guest essay" genre. The editorial should address a contemporary political or policy controversy, and it should offer an analysis that draws on one of the ethical concepts studied so far. Use key features of the op-ed genre that we have discussed in class, including a strong opening, short and punchy paragraphing, an acknowledgment of alternative points of view, and a "should" statement near the end of your essay. Essays are graded on their rhetorical force as well as their analytical rigor.
- (6) *Final Exam*: A 24-hour take home exam in which you will be asked to evaluate a challenging case and defend what you believe to be the ethical response. (1000 – 1500 words.)

Course Schedule

An Introduction to Ethics

01. ▪ Holstein and Gordana Dodig-Crnkovic, “Ethical and Social Aspects of Self-Driving Cars”
▪ Brennan et al., “Ethics Isn't Law,” in *Business Ethics for Better Behavior*
▪ D. Thompson, “What is Practical Ethics?”
-

Political Realism and Idealism

02. ▪ L. Valentini, “Ideal vs. Non-ideal Theory: A Conceptual Map”
▪ C.A.J. Coody, “Morality, Moralism, and Realism,” in *Messy Morality*
-

Why Do Good People Do Bad Things?

03. ▪ Brennan et al., “Why Aren't We All Saints?” in *Business Ethics for Better Behavior*
▪ M. Nussbaum, “The Costs of Tragedy: Moral Limits of Cost-Benefit Analysis”
-

Making Defensible Decisions: Principles or Prudence?

04. ▪ T.M. Scanlon, “Contractualism and Utilitarianism”
▪ R. McDougall, “Acting Parentally: An Argument Against Sex Selection”
▪ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 6
-

Public vs. Private Ethics

05. ▪ D. Thompson, “Political Ethics,” in the International Encyclopedia of Ethics
▪ M. Walzer, “Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands”
▪ T. Nagel, “Ruthlessness in Public Life”
-

The Public Interest and Paternalism

06. ▪ B. Douglass, “The Common Good and the Public Interest”
▪ D. Thompson, “Paternalistic Power,” in *Political Ethics and Public Office*
▪ J. Waldron, “It's All For Your Own Good,” *New York Review of Books*
-

Rule-Based Decisionmaking

07. ▪ S. Schapiro, “The Rationality of Rule-Guided Behavior: A Statement of the Problem”
▪ J. Rawls, “Two Concepts of Rules”
▪ A. Applbaum, “The Rules of the Game and Fair Play,” in *Ethics for Adversaries*
-

Role Morality

08. ▪ K. Gibson, “Contrasting Role Morality and Professional Morality”
▪ A. Applbaum, “The Remains of the Role,” in *Ethics for Adversaries*
-

Authority and Official Discretion

09. ▪ J. Brennan, “Just Say No: The Ethics of Following Unjust Orders”
▪ D. Estlund, “On Following Orders in an Unjust War”
▪ A. Applbaum, “Democratic Legitimacy and Official Discretion,” in *Ethics for Adversaries*
-

Responsibility and Collective Wrongs

10. ▪ D. Thompson, “The Moral Responsibility of Many Hands,” in *Political Ethics and Public Office*
▪ M. Hourdequin, “Climate, Collective Action and Individual Ethical Obligations”
-

Conflict of Interest and Corruption

11. ▪ N. Luebke, “Conflict of Interest as a Moral Category”
-

-
- E. Ceva and M.P. Ferreti, “Political Corruption”

Transparency, Secrecy, and Deception

- 12.
 - Fung et al., “Governance by transparency,” in *Full Disclosure: The Perils and Promise of Transparency*
 - C.A.J. Coady, “Politics and Lying,” in *Messy Morality*
 - W.H. Harwood, “Secrecy, Transparency and Government Whistleblowing”

Civil Disobedience and Its Limits

- 13.
 - J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, §§55-59
 - C. Korsgaard, “Taking the Law Into Our Own Hands: Kant on the Right to Revolution”

Ethical Leadership

- 14.
 - S. Dovi, “Who is a Good Representative?” in *The Good Representative*
 - R. Weisberg, “The Politics of Compromise,” in *In Praise of Intransigence*
 - Brennan et al., “Managing for Ethics,” in *Business Ethics for Better Behavior*

Ethics and Public Policy

- 15.
 - M. Lilla, “Ethos, Ethics, and Public Service”
-