

California State University Northridge
RS 361: Contemporary Ethical Issues
Fall Semester 2014

Instructor: Mary Jane O'Donnell
Ticket Number: 14221
Course Day/Time: M-W/2:00-3:15 p.m.
Location: Juniper Hall, Room 1206
Office Hours: M-W: 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon
Office: Room 233, Santa Susana Hall
Email: mjod@csun.edu

Course Description: This course will take both a practical and philosophical approach to the study of ethics, especially ethical decision-making. Its focus will not be on *what* to think, but rather on *how* to think about ethical issues you are likely to confront personally in everyday life as well as those confronting society as a whole. It will emphasize the development of critical thinking skills in ethics through analysis of contemporary ethical issues.

<i>Student Learning Outcomes:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students will be able to articulate, orally and in writing, the diversity and distinctiveness of the moral values implicit in and the ethical arguments currently employed within various religious and secular traditions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students will demonstrate an understanding of the influence of diverse religious and secular traditions on moral attitudes and behaviors.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students will be able to develop oral and written proposals for resolving current moral dilemmas in society.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students will be able to recognize and critically evaluate their own and others' assumptions and biases as they play a role in—and sometimes distort—their thinking.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students will demonstrate oral communication skills and mindful listening through conversations in the classroom about the moral values and forms of ethical thinking of fellow students.

Student Learning Outcomes for Arts and Humanities: Students will understand the rich history and diversity of human knowledge, discourse and achievements of their own and other cultures as they are expressed in the arts, literatures, religions, and philosophy. Students will:

1. Explain and reflect critically upon the human search for meaning, values, discourse and expression in one or more eras/stylistic periods or cultures;
2. Analyze, interpret, and reflect critically upon ideas of value, meaning, discourse and expression from a variety of perspectives from the arts and/or humanities;
3. Produce work/works of art that communicate to a diverse audience through a demonstrated understanding and fluency of expressive forms;
4. Demonstrate ability to engage and reflect upon their intellectual and creative development within the arts and humanities;
5. Use appropriate critical vocabulary to describe and analyze works of artistic expression, literature, philosophy, or religion and a comprehension of the historical context within which a body of work was created or a tradition emerged;
6. Describe and explain the historical and/or cultural context within which a body of work was created or a tradition emerged.

Required Texts:

- *A Practical Companion to Ethics* (4th ed.) by Anthony Weston. Oxford University Press, 2011
- *Defining Moments: When Managers Must Choose Between Right and Right*. Harvard Business School Press, 1997.
- *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* by Michael J. Sandel

Instructor Consultation: My “office hours” are both virtual and in my office at the times listed above. I look forward to working with each of you. I am happy to discuss any aspect of this course with you, and help you with the assignments. I especially urge you to contact me if you are confused about the course or an assignment. Really successful students ask questions!

Technological Information: This course will employ the Moodle web-based format for posting assignments. For instruction on how to use this technology, go to <http://www.csun.edu/it/student-moodle-help/>

Many of the issues discussed under the heading of “ethics” (corporate malfeasance, cloning, abortion, the death penalty, cyberethics, privacy, affirmative action, medical ethics, end of life issues, and such) are frequently discussed in the media, political campaigns, religious settings, and even at home. You probably already have opinions about each. However, many of the discussions surrounding these issues are often heated and, quite frankly, emotional and uninformed. I want to make clear that this course will not be an ethical bull session. I, of course, want you to develop your opinions, but I want them to be truly informed opinions, not gut emotional responses.

I think that the process one uses to make ethical decisions is itself an ethical matter. Ethical decisions must be informed decisions. This requires research and gathering a range of information and opinions about a topic, not just those with which you already agree. I think that only after objective analysis of all information can you make a truly “moral” ethical decision.

Course Assignments:

- **Reading:** Students will complete all assigned readings *before* the first class of the week. The reading assignments are listed in the Course Schedule;
- **Exams:** On Mondays, you should be prepared for a pop mini-exam, which will cover the assigned readings for the week. There will be seven (7) such exams, however, only six (6) exams with the highest grades will be included in your final grade. YOU MUST BRING A SMALL SCANTRON TO EACH CLASS. (If you do not have a Scantron, you will not be allowed to take the exam);
- **Student Presentations:** Students will work in groups assigned by the instructor to prepare a class presentation about a current ethical issue in the news.
- **Two Reflection Papers:** Students will write two reflection papers on ethical issues. More information on RS 361 Moodle site.

Course Requirements:

- Attendance is mandatory. Any absence must be excused in advance, or if that is not possible, must be accompanied by a documented explanation. If a student has three (3) or more unexcused absences or six (6) absences altogether—both excused and unexcused, the student’s grade will be lowered by 20%.

- You must be fully prepared for each class. All assignments must be read prior to the class they are assigned, and all readings must be brought to class.
- You must fully participate in the class by asking/answering questions, fully participating in discussions, and fully engaging in any other activity of the class.
- If you are absent from class on a day in which there is a pop mini-exam, you will only be able to make up for this by writing a three-page detailed analysis of the central concepts in the material covered by the exam.
- Please be on time for each class and make sure you attend to your personal needs before or after the class. You may not leave during class. No cell phones, texting, or Internet use for anything other than class work.
- All papers must be written according to basic scholarly standards appropriate for university level work. Not only does this include proper grammar, punctuation, and syntax, but also serious reflection on your topic. There are many sources to help you with your writing assignments. The most important is the Writing Program at CSUN's Learning Resource Center, Oviatt Library, 3rd Floor, East Wing, 818-677-2033 or go to: <http://www.csun.edu/undergraduate-studies/learning-resource-center>
- All assignments must be turned in or posted on Moodle on the date listed. Unless students present a written and documented reason why an assignment is late or will be late, which is accepted by the instructor, the grade will be deducted one letter grade per day.
- Any evidence of plagiarism will result in a failing grade, certainly for the item plagiarized, but also for the course.

Grading: Plus-Minus System will be used

- Class participation and attendance: 20%
- Six Exams: 30% (5% each)
- Class Presentation: 10%
- Two Papers: 40% (20% each)

Letter Grades:

- 95-100 A
- 90-94 A-
- 87-89 B+
- 83-86 B
- 80-82 B-
- 77-79 C+
- 73-76 C
- 70-72 C-
- 60-69 D

Course Schedule:

Week 1: August 25-27

- Introduction
- Read: Ethics and Ethical Reasoning, 3-14 (Download from RS 361: Moodle site)

Week 2: September 1-3

- September 1: Labor Day/No Class
- Read: Weston, 3-44

Week 3: September 8-10

- Read: Weston, 45-85

Week 4: September 15-17

- Read: Weston 86-128

Week 5: September 22-24

- Read: Badaracco, ix-40

Week 6: September 29-October 1

- Read: Badaracco, 41-84

Week 7: October 6-8

- Read: Badarraco, 85-131

Week 8: October 13-15

- *First Paper Due October 15 to be posted on Moodle by 11 p.m.*

Week 9: October 20-22

- Read: Sandel, 3-51

Week 10: October 27-29

- Read: Sandel, 59-102

Week 11: November 3-5

- Read: Sandel, 103-166

Week 12: November 10-12

- Read: Sandel, 167-207

Week 13: November 17-19

- Read: Sandel, 208-243

Week 14: November 24-26

- Thanksgiving: No class.

Week 15: December 1-3

- Read: Sandel, 244-269

Week 16: December 8

- *Final Paper Due December 8 to be posted on Moodle by 11 p.m.*

Possible sources for issues involving ethics:

- **BBC Religion and Ethics:** <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/0/>
- **Religion and Ethics Newsweekly:** <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/>
- **Business Ethics Blog:** <http://businessethicsblog.com>
- **Practical Ethics/Ethics in the News:** <http://blog.practicaethics.ox.ac.uk>

Other Possible Websites to use for research for presentations:

- *Los Angeles Times: <http://www.latimes.com/>

- *New York Times: <http://www.nytimes.com/>
- *Washington Post: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/>
- Huffington Post: <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/news/ethics/>
- *Newsweek: <http://www.newsweek.com/>
- *Time: <http://www.time.com/time/>

**These websites now allow only limited access without a subscription. For example, you may read 10 articles a month on the LA Times' site, 20 on the Washington Post's, and 10 on the NY Times'. However, there is good news for students. The Washington Post has a free student subscription. I urge you to sign up. It has a very good "Religion" section. One way to make up for the other above publications is to use LexisNexis Academic on the Oviatt Library's Website. This database allows you access to the most recent articles from major world publications, including newspapers, magazines, wire services, broadcast transcripts, and blogs. It also allows you to filter articles according to subject.*

Important to note: This syllabus is subject to change. I will make every effort to notify you in advance about any changes.

DRES: If you have a disability and need accommodations, please register with the Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES) office or the National Center on Deafness (NCOD). The DRES office is located in Bayramian Hall, room 110 and can be reached at 818-677-2684. NCOD is located on Bertrand Street in Jeanne Chisholm Hall and can be reached at 818-677-2611. If you would like to discuss your need for accommodations with me, please contact me to set up an appointment.