

RS 361OL: CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN ETHICS

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Office hours: Fridays 1645-1745 on Canvas chat room.

Fall 2017

Instructor: Robert Mason

On campus office: Santa Suzanna Hall Rm 418

On campus office hours are on Mondays from 1500-1550 and Thursdays from 1500-1550 by appointment through email correspondence.

Course Description: This course will emphasize the development of skills in informed and critical reasoning through the analysis of contemporary ethical issues such as scandals in business, sexual behavior, abortion, euthanasia, genetic engineering, racism, gender bias, punishment, animal rights, the environment, economics and the common good, and the relationships between religions and morality that inform all these issues.

The course will discuss concepts such as morality, ethics, rules and values; how they relate to one another and how they are different. In addition several theories of ethics will be discussed in an attempt to establish a theoretical framework from which to approach contemporary ethical issues. Further, several religious traditions will be introduced to reflect on the relationship between religion and morality and the way ethical decisions are informed by a wide range of factors. Consequently, this theoretical basis will be used to assess current ethical issues with a view to developing a critical and reasoned approach to ethical problems with which we all are confronted.

GE Student Learning Objectives

Goal: 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.

Student Learning Outcomes

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.

Principles of Sustainability

1. Students will be able to define sustainability and understand how concepts of sustainability are connected to issues of social justice, the environment, and the economy at local, regional, and global levels
2. Students will demonstrate knowledge of key concepts related to the study of sustainability, including planetary carrying capacity, climate change, and ecological footprint.
3. Students will be able to explain how sustainability relates to their lives and their values, and how their actions impact issues of sustainability at the individual, and at local, regional, and global levels.

Religious Studies Student Learning Objectives

Emphasizes the development of skills in critical thinking through analysis of such contemporary ethical issues as abortion, euthanasia, genetic engineering, sexual behavior, racism, gender bias, punishment, animal rights, the environment, and the relationships between religion and morality.

1. 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.
2. Students will demonstrate an understanding of the influence of diverse religious and secular traditions on moral attitudes and behaviors.
3. Students will be able to develop oral and written proposals for resolving current moral dilemmas in society.
4. 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.
5. 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.

This course is a GE Writing Intensive course, and in each WI course students will be required to complete writing assignments totaling a minimum of 500 words.”

Writing Intensive (GE Designation WI)

Goal: Students will develop their abilities to express themselves and the knowledge they have obtained through practicing various forms of writing within different disciplinary contexts. Writing intensive courses will build upon the skills gained in the Analytical Reading and Expository Writing section of Basic Skills. In each WI course students will be required to complete writing assignments totaling a minimum of 500 words.

Student Learning Outcomes

Students will:

1. Develop and clearly define their ideas through writing;
2. Ethically integrate sources of various kinds into their writing;
3. Compose texts through drafting, revising, and completing a finished product;
4. Express themselves through their writing by posing questions, making original claims, and coherently structuring complex ideas;
5. Revise their writing for greater cogency and clarity;
6. Utilize adopted communication modes and documentation styles of specific disciplines (MLA, APA, Chicago, CBE, etc) where appropriate.

Required Texts:

Anthony Weston, *A Practical Companion to Ethics*. 4th edition. (Oxford University Press, 2011)

Hulme, Mike, *Why We Disagree About Climate Change?* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

In addition, students will be using resources from the web and handouts in class.

Preparation: Since this is an upper-level course that requires a significant amount of reading and writing to interact appropriately in class, you are expected to be FULLY prepared for each class. Discussion of effective and efficient reading tactics and strategies will be discussed throughout the course, but you must be prepared to dedicate adequate time for preparation as you may be called upon to discuss critically and intelligently the readings for that particular class session.

I will contact you regarding important notices about the class using your CSUN email address so be sure to check your e-mail regularly.

Classwork: Preparation in terms of required and supplemental readings, punctuality in turning in assignments, argument, and interpretation are a significant part of the course. You are expected to participate every week through weekly 2 page papers and on-time submissions. Any missing assignments will significantly affect your grade.

Written weekly assignments, a midterm exam and a final exam will be used to assess critical understanding and utilization of concepts from the text and outside resources.

Evaluation:

1. **Classwork (each 2 page essay= 20 points):** Preparation, argument, and interpretation are a significant part of the grade.
2. **Midterm (50 points):** The midterm may be comprised of two analytic essays dealing with ethical issues discussed in class and in the readings.
3. **Final (100 points):** The final may be comprised of two analytic essays dealing with topics discussed in class and the readings assigned from the second half of the course.
4. **Final grades will be assigned based on an average of the total points possible over the course of the whole semester.**

Grade Range:

94-100 = A	77-79 = C+
90-93 = A-	74-76 = C
87-89 = B+	70-73 = C-
84-86 = B	60-69 = D
80-83 = B-	<60 = F

Plagiarism/Cheating: The CSUN Religious Studies Department is committed to the highest standards of academic excellence, honesty, and integrity. Students are expected to do their own work. Plagiarism and other forms of cheating will not be tolerated. Anyone caught cheating or helping someone else cheat will be subject to disciplinary action which could result in suspension, expulsion, or other disciplinary actions. For more information about the behavior defined as academic dishonesty, and a more detailed discussion of disciplinary procedures, consult the CSUN catalog. Remember, also, that much of the information posted on the Internet is protected by US copyright laws. Passing off this information as your own is plagiarism as well.

Accommodation for Disabilities: 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 (DCOD). 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.

CLASS SCHEDULE:

(Note: Reading assignments and the dates of exams and written assignments are subject to revision as needed. I will announce all revisions on Canvas and do my best to make sure that everyone knows about revisions. You must submit assignments according to any revisions that we make to the schedule.

Week 1, Aug 28: Introductions, Syllabus. Update Moodle info.

Week 2, Sept 5 (the 4th is Labor Day): Read Weston chapter 1.

Assignment: 1. Post on Moodle forum how you would define two terms: ethics, morals, laws commandments. Also include at least one comment about another student's submission. 2. Write a two-page essay describing how the views of dogmatism, rationalism, and relativism affect ethical thinking?

Week 3, Sept 11: Discussion of Weston chapter 2. Utilitarianism, Personhood, and the ethics of Virtue.

Assignment: 1. Using the pragmatic format discussed in the power point, write a 2 page essay on either of the two following topics: gun control or the death penalty.

Week 4, Sept 18: Discussion of Weston, chapter 3. BBC ethics guide: Euthanasia and physician assisted suicide.

Assignment: 1. Using the pragmatic format discussed in the power point, write a 2 page essay on either of the two following topics: physician assisted suicide or euthanasia.

Week 5, Sept 25: Discussion of Weston, chapter 4. Getting beyond dilemma-ism. When values clash. Georges Alexandre's article on homosexuality and abortion.

Assignment: 1. Continuing to develop the pragmatic format discussed so far, write a 2 page essay on either of the two topics: abortion or legalizing marijuana.

Week 6, Oct 2: Discussion of Weston, chapter 5. When values clash.

Week 7, Oct 9: Mid-term

The midterm will be two written discussions using the pragmatic format from class. The topics will be chosen from the topics already discussed in the previous weeks.

Week 8, Oct 16: Lynn White's two short articles and environmental issues.

Assignment: 1. Complete the question sheet that accompanies the articles. 2. Post on a Canvas forum the key issues that White raises regarding the problems involved in the Ecology Crisis and their solutions. Make sure you also comment on at least one other students post.

Week 9, Oct 23: Hulme, Ch. 1: "The Social Meanings of Climate" and Ch. 2: "The Discovery of Climate Change." Assignment: A 2-page pragmatic essay on the amount of trash we produce.

Week 10, Oct 30: Hulme, Ch. 3: "The Performance of Science" and Ch. 4: "The Endowment of Value." Assignment: A 2 page pragmatic essay on our over-dependency on oil and oil based products.

Week 11, Nov 6: Hulme, Ch. 5: "The Things We Believe" and Ch. 6: "The Things We Fear" Assignment: A 2-page pragmatic essay on the use of plastic water bottles.

Week 12, Nov 13: Hulme, Ch. 7: "The Communication of Risk" and Ch. 8: "The Challenges of Development." Assignment: A 2-page essay on the problem of overpopulation and urban sprawl.

Week 13, Nov 20: **THANKS GIVING BREAK:** Watch film *Forks over Knives* and post comments.

Week 14, Nov 27: Hulme, Ch. 9: "The Way We Govern" and Ch. 10: "Beyond Climate Change" Assignment: A 2-page essay on our disregard for animal rights; either farm animals, lab animals, or wild animals.

Week 15, Dec 4: Film and discussion through posting.

Assignment: 1. Review. The review of Willis Jenkins' reading will be important for the final exam.

Week 16, Dec 11: Final