

Course Title: *Contemporary Moral Issues*
Semester: Spring 2012
Instructor's Name: Mark Holcombe

Class Day/Time: M-W-F 9:00 – 9:50; 11:00 – 11:50

Office Location: HB414

Office E-Mail: mholc@uab.edu

Office Mailbox: HB414A

Office Hours: By appointment only

Website: <http://www.philosophicalturn.net>

Course Description

This course analyzes the components of moral decision making via an examination of case studies.

Course Objectives

1. The development of moral reasoning skills:
 - a. The ability to identify the elements within a moral issue upon which people may be disagreeing.
 - b. To be able to construct a moral argument within a range of cases.
 - c. To identify which normative theory/theories are being utilized in defense of a position or utilized to critique a position.
 - d. Identify the type of dispute and what method, if any, can resolve that dispute.
2. A basic familiarity with various normative theories.

Non-Course Objectives

1. This course is *not* concerned with attempting to resolve the moral status of the various issues under analysis.
2. This course is *not* concerned with establishing which normative theory is correct or incorrect even though criticisms will be offered for most if not all.

Textbooks and Course Materials

1. Course packet available in my office.
2. Other supplemental materials posted on-line
3. A “blue book” for each test. *You will not be allowed to take tests without one.*

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Grading

An A indicates comprehension and application; a B indicates comprehension; a C indicates recognition of relevant materials but insufficient comprehension and application; a D is unpersuasive work or minimal recognition of relevance; an F indicates unpersuasive work or non-recognition of relevance.

Grades are determined by how students reflect a mastery of the material and how competitive the student is with his/her peers.

At the end of the semester when tallying your grade I will consider only the quality of your work, attendance, and effort. Principles of fairness include equal opportunity, consideration, and treatment for everyone with no exceptions. In tallying your final grade, I will not take into account your negotiating skills. You are advised to apply that effort to the assignments throughout the course rather than mustering all you have at the end to sway me to give you preferential treatment and consideration.

Grading Criteria for Course		Grading System
Tests	Designated On Each	A: 90% or higher of total points available B: 80 – 89% C: 70 – 79% D: 60 – 69% F: 59% and below
Short essays	10 Points Each	
Project	100 Points	
Final Grade Calculation	Total Points Earned divided by Total Points Available	

Short Essays

For each section you will write a short essay discussing a case study in the course packet.

The specific case study will be assigned in class in advance. The short essay must be typed, double-spaced, stapled, 12-point font (Cambria or Times New Roman only). You must analyze the case by formulating a moral argument.

Testing Format

Tests will consist of short answer questions measuring basic concepts (definitions of terms, etc.) and one essay analyzing a case study.

You will need a blue book for each exam. You must write clearly and legibly; if I cannot read your handwriting (either due to sloppy script or incomprehensible spelling and/or grammar), you will not receive credit!

You cannot make-up more than one test without a legitimate reason or the final exam at all. I do NOT accept assignments via e-mail. Make-up tests must be conducted within one week of the original testing date when I am available to administer the test. This is for your benefit!

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Class Participation

Classroom participation is essential to the student's viability in this course. Participation affords the instructor an opportunity to assess each student's comprehension of the course material and crosscheck that against performance on written assessments. Class participation is not only required but it is also necessary to the student's developmental understanding as well as the student's ability to convey the same orally.

Each week one class will be devoted to clarifying the material if need be. This will be driven by questions from you all. Each week one class, at minimum, will be devoted to discussing a case.

Project

The project for this course is to find real life cases that relate to the various topic(s) of the course. You must discuss each topic. You must analyze the case by writing a moral argument establishing the ethical status of the case.

You will need a minimum of 3 cases. Ideally, each case should pertain to a different topic (such as abortion, euthanasia, pornography). I want to see diversity. You must provide the source(s) for each case. You may use personal experiences but you must anonymize them. However, do not use any cases pertaining to pornography without first consulting with me.

Classroom Policies

Kindly switch all cell-phones off prior to entering the classroom. All cell phones, pagers, mp3 players, etc. must be completely turned off and stored away.

If I catch you texting in class, surfing the net, etc. you will be removed from class. Do not listen to headphones in class or while waiting for class to start.

You may record the class session but *not using your cell phone/iPhone*.

****Do not email me via Blackboard!**

****Your grades will not be posted to Blackboard!**

Attendance Policy

You are expected to attend my classes. We will cover issues that arise outside the scope of the readings and will have discussions that will modify the focus of the assignments beyond the textbook alone. If you are not a part of these discussions, you will be unable to address issues on graded work adequately. If you find that sickness or other personal problems prevent you from attending classes regularly, you should expect your grade to be adversely affected. You will not pass if you do not attend classes regularly and do the reading assignments.

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Incompletes

Incomplete grades may be awarded if and only if factors outside the student's control prevent the student from completing coursework in any course (evidence required) and the student has a grade of B or higher in the course at the time of request. Requests must be made prior to the second to last week of classes. The Chair, the Dean, and I must approve all requests by University policy. Refer to the UAB Student Handbook.

Students with Disability Statement

If you are registered with Disability Support Services, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible to discuss accommodations that may be necessary. If you have a disability but have not contacted Disability Support Services, please call 205-934-4205 or visit DSS at 516 Hill University Center.

Students who may need course accommodations are welcome to make an appointment to see me during office hours. Students with disabilities must be registered with Disability Support Services, HUC 516 or 205-934-4205, and provide an accommodation request letter before receiving academic adjustments.

Plagiarism Policy

Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty

Plagiarism is defined as the following:

- using the exact words of another person's work/writing without acknowledgment of your source through the use of quotation marks *and* correct citation/documentation;
- to claim as one's own the ideas or words of another is plagiarism.
- rephrasing a passage by another writer without giving proper credit;
- using someone else's facts or ideas without acknowledgement;
- using a piece of writing for one course that was already used in a previous course (or in courses in which you are simultaneously enrolled) without express permission from both instructors to do so; and
- presenting fabricated or falsified citations or materials.

Please consult with the instructor of this course if you are unsure about how to document sources. Cheating on exams is also an affront to the principle of academic honesty. At the very least, an assignment on which plagiarism or cheating has occurred will receive no credit, i.e., a "zero," and an Academic Dishonesty Incident Form concerning the incident will be kept on file in the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs. A plagiarist/cheater is also subject to failure in the course and/or appearance before the Justice Council.

(Approved by Faculty Senate, Spring 2000)

Plagiarism will result, at minimum, in no credit on the assignment if not failure for the course. At maximum, you could be expelled from the university.

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Schedule	Required Assignments	Additional Materials
Day 1.	Syllabus Overview	
Day 2.	Legality vs. Morality	
Day 3.	Formulating Moral Arguments	
	TEST 1	
<i>Subjectivist Ethics</i>	Subjectivism Egoism Emotivism Cultural Relativism	
	TEST 2	
<i>Religion and Morality</i>	Divine Command Theory	
	Natural Law Theory	
	TEST 3	
<i>Defining the Moral Community</i>	Abortion	Case Study 1: <i>Star Trek TNG</i> : "Measure of a Man"
	Animal Rights	
	TEST 4	
<i>Social Justice: Responsibility to Others</i>	Utilitarianism	
	Rawls' Justice as Fairness	
	TEST 5	
<i>Responsibility to Oneself</i>	Kantian Deontology	
	Virtue Ethics	

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	Test 6 Last Day of Class	
	Project Due May 7 by 11:00 am	

My Pet Peeves

You are hereby forewarned:

- Not performing the required tasks such as the reading assignments.
- Assignments that are not stapled will be returned immediately and considered late.
- Asking me your grade in the course. I give you the exact same spreadsheet and formulas I use for everyone, use that spreadsheet. It is your grade not mine so you keep track for yourself *and by doing so you can double-check my record keeping.*
- Demanding from me privately a crash course before the test when you have not attended class or put forth little to no effort on your own. I am not your private tutor.
- Emails without subject lines are automatically sent to the junk email folder as a result of UAB spam filters. No subject line means I do not read the email at all.
- Emails written like Twitter posts: Emails should be written with proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation. I don't care if you are emailing me from your "smart" phone. If you need assistance with writing skills, the English Department maintains a Writing Center located in Sterne Library.
- "I never know when the test will be" comment on IDEA evaluations. This comment is very informative to me; it means you did not attend class on a regular basis and/or were not paying attention in class. I always give at least a week's notice with reminders.
- Coming to me at the end of the semester begging for a higher grade than what you earned, and this doubly annoys me off if crying is added, which further exacerbates my annoyance if I have never or rarely seen you either in class or in my office throughout the semester. I will not change your grade!