

Information Ethics

An introduction to ethics with an emphasis on issues related to information and communication

DTC 338, fall semester 2008, Washington State University - Vancouver

WHAT TO EXPECT IN THIS CLASS

(6 to 9 p.m. Thursdays in VMCC 111, Aug. 28 - Dec. 11, 2008)

INSTRUCTOR

Brett Oppegaard

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brett.oppegaard@gmail.com

brett@brettoppegaard.com (urgent matters)

OFFICE HOURS:

Available 30 minutes before and after each class. Also by appointment, via e-mail.

You will get a broad overview of ethics, including introductions to major theories and perspectives related to the subject. You will examine and test your own ethical values as well as respond to those of others, including classmates. You will vigorously debate those ideas, and, in turn, you will probably change your mind, maybe many times. That is good. Through that process, we hope, you will find the essence of your true self and what you stand for as a person.

ATTENDANCE / PARTICIPATION

Every class counts. This course meets just 15 times. Students not only are expected to be in class but also to arrive on time, stay the entire session and participate. Some of the assignments will be pass / fail components of participation (such as debates). If you do them at least adequately, you are participating and get the points. If not, you don't. Because this class is primarily about ideas and thinking and sharing those thoughts, attendance and participation in this class are highly valued and worth 40 percent of the overall grade. Also, when a guest speaker comes to class, each student is expected to ask at least one informed and thought-provoking question (those who don't will be considered absent that day). One absence has no penalty. **But the second and third absences deduct 100 points each from the 200-point attendance total.** Being absent also means missing points for participation projects that day.

TEXTBOOKS? / FINALS?

No textbooks / No final exam / BUT, ...

You will be assigned readings, in the form of copied handouts. It is your responsibility, if you miss class, to get copies of what you need to read. **You also are expected to keep up with current events, particularly when ethical situations arise** -- locally, regionally and nationally -- through various media sources, including The Columbian, The VanCougar and your Fairness.com periodical.

Guide to your grade

930+ A
900-929 A-
870-899 B+
830-869 B
800-829 B-
770-799 C+
730-769 C
700-729 C-
670-699 F
630-669 F
600-629 F
599- F

EXTRA CREDIT:

Any work **created for this class** (related to ethics) that also gets published elsewhere, including in The VanCougar (online or print) receives 25 extra credit points (topic must be cleared in advance, 100 points maximum)

DEADLINES: Deadlines are not flexible. **Late assignments will not be accepted.**

WRITERS BEWARE

Even the most minor mistakes destroy the integrity of a piece. Details are extremely important. To emphasize this point, any assignment containing a misspelled name will receive an automatic 30 percent penalty. Each misspelled word will lower the overall score of an assignment 10 percent. Other fundamental errors, including mistakes in grammar and punctuation, significantly will lower scores as well.

TO DO CHECKLIST

SEPT. 4

DUE: Three ethical questions (25 points) _____

SEPT. 11

DUE: Resume (20 points) _____
Fairness.com (5 points) _____

SEPT. 18

DUE: Debate (25 points) _____
Fairness.com (5 points) _____

SEPT. 25

DUE: Quiz 1 (50 points) _____
Fairness.com (5 points) _____

OCT. 2

DUE: "Adopt a Philosopher" (200 points) _____
Fairness.com (5 points) _____

OCT. 9

Debate (25 points) _____
Fairness.com (5 points) _____

OCT. 16

DUE: Three questions (25 points) _____
Fairness.com (5 points) _____

OCT. 23

DUE: Ethical challenge (50 points) _____
Fairness.com (5 points) _____

OCT. 30

Debate (25 points) _____
Fairness.com (5 points) _____

NOV. 6

DUE: Identify ethical issue (25 points) _____
Fairness.com (5 points) _____

NOV. 13

DUE: Letter to editor (50 points) _____
Quiz 2 (50 points) _____
Fairness.com (5 points) _____

NOV. 20

DUE: Debate (25 points) _____
Fairness.com (5 points) _____

DEC. 4

DUE: Ethical benchmark (50 points) _____

DEC. 11

DUE: Ethical will (100 points) _____

TOTAL: _____

+ (attendance, 200 possible*) _____

+ (extra credit) _____

= (FINAL GRADE) _____

* Final grade will include 200 points for attendance (100 points deducted for each missed class after one absence). This column's details are subject to change but will only do so with accompanying class notification and posting on the class forum.

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OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION

DEPARTMENT (AND CLASS) GOALS

One of the primary goals of this department, and class, is to help students learn to "think critically about digital media and the ways humans interact and engage with them." At the subterranean core of that discussion are information and ethics, and in that regard, this course will focus on:

- * Recognition and awareness of ethical issues related to information and modern media.
- * An understanding of the various approaches one can take to ethics as well as the contextual history of the field needed to understand those perspectives.
- * Developing an individualized game plan for dealing with ethical situations.
- * Questioning the ways in which "digital media functions in multiple cultural contexts."
- * Recognizing "various forms of language processing and their implications for media authoring."
- * Using "an interdisciplinary perspective in order to understand the basics of social, economic, and educational changes brought about by digital media."
- * Being "a practiced and capable communicator in all media."

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY / PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism (claiming another person's work as your own) and fabricating research will not be tolerated. Anyone who submits false work, violates the academic integrity policy or cheats in any other way, will fail the assignment in question and possibly the course as well as be reported to the school's administration, the Office of Student Conduct, for further discipline, including possible expulsion. Academic integrity is the cornerstone of the university and will be strongly enforced in this course. For additional information about WSU's Academic Integrity policy / procedures please contact 360-546-9781.

ASSESSMENT

A detailed assessment form will be provided for each graded component of this course to ensure our goals are aligned and expectations are met.

DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION

Accommodations may be available if you need them in order to fully participate in this class because of a disability. Accommodations may take some time to implement, so it is critical that you contact Disability Services as soon as possible. All accommodations must be approved through Disability Services, located in the Student Resource Center on the lower level of the Student Services Center 360-546-9138.

EMERGENCY NOTIFICATION SYSTEM

WSU has made an emergency notification system available for faculty, students and staff. Please register at myWSU with emergency contact information (cell, email, text, etc). You may have been prompted to complete emergency contact information when registering for classes on RONet. In the event of a building evacuation, a map at each classroom entrance shows the evacuation point for each building. Please refer to it. Finally, in case of class cancellation campus-wide, please check local media, the WSU Vancouver web page and/or <http://www.flashalert.net/>. Individual class cancellations may be made at the discretion of the instructor. Each individual is expected to make the best decision for their personal circumstances, taking safety into account.

METHODOLOGY

This course will offer its material in a combination of hands-on activities, small and large group sessions, one-on-one interactions, independent study and lectures.

Course bibliography

Chapters from various texts (no more than three chapters from any one source) and academic articles will be used in this course, anthology style, instead of a specific textbook.

This will help give students a wider breadth of knowledge of the subject, introduce more perspectives and allow more flexibility. It also will keep costs low for students. These sources, of course, would be worthwhile to read in full as well. Here is a list of the featured materials:

Baggini, Julian. *The Pig That Wants to be Eaten*. New York: Plume, 2006.

Baines, Barry K. *Ethical Wills*. New York: Da Capo Press, 2006.

Callahan, David. *The Cheating Culture*. San Diego: Harvest Books, 2004.

Cohen, Randy. *The Good, The Bad & The Difference: How to Tell Right from Wrong in Everyday Situations*. New York: Broadway, 2003.

"Ethics," *Opposing Viewpoints Series*. Farmington Hills: Greenhaven Press, 2006.

Freeman, Lee & Pearce, Graham. *Information Ethics: Privacy and Intellectual Property*. Hershey: IGI Publishing, 2004.

Holloway, Richard. *Godless Morality: Keeping Religion Out of Ethics*. New York: Canongate U.S., 2002.

Kidder, Rushworth. *Moral Courage*. New York: Harper Paperbacks, 2006.

Severson, Richard J. *The Principles of Information Ethics*. New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1997.

CELL PHONES / PAGERS:

Reserve use of electronic devices for breaks; otherwise, they will be confiscated until the end of class.

GENERAL DISCLAIMER:

Dates, assignments and other information contained in this syllabus could change with the flow of the class. Therefore, I reserve the right to make alterations.