

Real World Ethics: Taking Philosophy Outside the Classroom

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Class meetings: TuTh 4pm-6pm, AH G127, Office Hours: Fridays 10am-12pm, AH 1156

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Undergraduate students have numerous opportunities for community engagement, mostly via volunteer-led student organizations. They also have numerous opportunities to study ethical reasoning, in Philosophy classes and beyond. *Real World Ethics* combines these two opportunities. Students in this course will discuss ethical problems and will study theories and principles that help them to analyze these problems. They will receive training in lesson design and engaged pedagogy, with a focus on understanding how to make ethical theories and philosophical skills accessible to students without academic backgrounds. With this training under their belt, students will then spend the second half of the semester coaching at a local high school as part of the [Michigan] High School Ethics Bowl program. In so doing, *Real World Ethics* students will deepen their understanding of contemporary ethical and political theory by teaching what they have learned to others, and will have the opportunity to engage in practical philosophical discussion with members of the local community at a stage in their lives at which they are especially open to calling their assumptions into question, exploring new ideas, and considering their obligations to others.

COURSE GOALS

By the end of this class, all students will have developed the following knowledge and skills:

- An understanding of three of the most historically prominent approaches to ethical reasoning – consequentialism, deontology, and virtue ethics – and of the strengths and weaknesses of each of these approaches.
- An understanding of the main philosophical positions on the nature of distributive justice.
- The ability to explain in detail how these theories apply to a set of specific practical questions (in either environmental ethics, business ethics, or public health ethics).
- An understanding of some of the main barriers to learning for members of marginalized groups.
- The ability to plan a lesson based on a set of learning objectives, to assess comprehension of class material, and to adapt teaching methods accordingly.
- The ability to mediate discussion on contentious topics between people with initially opposing views, ensuring that all voices – especially marginalized voices – are heard, and guiding groups toward a thoughtful, reasoned position on which everyone is able to agree.
- The ability to motivate young people to engage in critical reflection on pressing practical issues arising in the world around them.

In addition to these, high-achieving students will develop the ability to engage in metacognitive processes: applying their understanding of the factors that conduce to or that inhibit good learning to their own case, and identifying what is helping them to learn well and/or what would help them to learn better.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

This course has three components: learning about ethical theory, learning about pedagogy, and putting this knowledge into practice by coaching local high school students in reasoning about ethical issues. The first component will be assessed through an in-class exam. The second component will be assessed through an in-class presentation. The third component will be assessed through students' reflective journals, visits to coaching sessions, and feedback from schools.

- *Exam (20%)*

At the end of Unit 1, students will sit an in-class exam on the main ethical theories and the structure of the Ethics Bowl. Answers will be assessed for accuracy, clarity, and depth of understanding.

- *Class presentation (20%)*

At the end of Unit 2, students will deliver in-class presentations on new material from the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. They will be expected to present and discuss this material in a manner appropriate for high-school students. They will be assessed on the quality of their teaching.

- *Coaching visits (20%)*

During Unit 3, each student will deliver 12 coaching sessions at a school participating in this year's High School Ethics Bowl. I will make one visit per school in the second or third week of coaching, and a second visit in the fifth or sixth week, to observe and assess the quality of students' teaching.

- *Reflective journal (20%)*

Students will be expected to complete a reflective journal during Unit 3. The journal contains 12 writing prompts – one for each coaching session – each of which asks students to write a short entry reflecting on an aspect of the coaching process. We will also meet back in class three times over the coaching period to discuss successes and challenges that students have experienced and to collectively resolve any challenging issues.

- *School feedback (20%)*

Each participating school will be given forms on which to provide feedback on their coaches, both for students on Bowl teams and for teachers coordinating Ethics Bowl participation at each school. Students and teachers will be asked to assess their coaches' understanding of ethical theory, their understanding of the Ethics Bowl, and their coaching skills.

Assessment on the quality of teaching in Units 2 and 3 will be based on a rubric collaboratively created by myself and the students in the class during Unit 2. Students are encouraged to regularly self-assess, using this rubric, during Unit 3, to monitor their own progress and to identify areas where they can improve.

ATTENDANCE

Attendance is not a graded component of this course, but it is mandatory. The pace of the course is fast, and it will simply be impossible for students to perform adequately as coaches if they miss any sessions in either of the first two Units. Under exceptional circumstances it may be possible to arrange make-up work for a missed class session, but *you must contact me in advance to arrange this* – as far in advance as possible.

SCHEDULE & READINGS

UNIT 1: ETHICAL THEORY

Week 1

- First class: Introduction to ethical and political theory
 - *No readings*
- Second class: Consequentialism
 - *Reading: Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, “[Consequentialism](#)”*

Week 2

- First class: Deontological Ethics
 - *Reading: Larry Alexander and Michael Moore, “[Deontological Ethics](#)”*
- Second class: Virtue Ethics
 - *Reading: Rosalind Hursthouse and Glen Pettigrove, “[Virtue Ethics](#)”*

Week 3

- First class: Distributive Justice
 - *Reading: Julian Lamont and Christi Favor, “[Distributive Justice](#)”*
- Second class: Exam
 - *No readings*

UNIT 2: PEDAGOGY

Week 4

- First class: Lesson design
 - *Reading: L. Dee Fink, “[A Self-Directed Guide to Designing Courses for Significant Learning](#)”*
- Second class: Discussing contentious topics & Assessing student progress
 - *Reading 1: Gerald Graff, “[The Problem Problem and other Oddities of Academic Discourse](#)”*
 - *Reading 2: Paul Black and Dylan William, “[Inside the Black Box](#)”*

Week 5

- First class: How to discuss a Case Study
 - *Reading: [2017 National High School Ethics Bowl Case Studies](#)*
- Second class: How to prepare a team for the Bowl
 - *Reading: National High School Ethics Bowl [rules](#) and [scoring rubric](#)*
 - *Extra homework: Watch the [judges' training video](#) made by the Michigan outreach team*

Week 6

- First class: Time for group preparation of presentations
 - *Readings on [Environmental Ethics](#), [Business Ethics](#) or [Public Health Ethics](#) will be assigned to groups*
- Second class: Student presentations
 - *No readings*

UNIT 3: COACHING IN SCHOOLS

Week 7

- Students deliver two coaching sessions
 - *Homework: complete Reflective Journal*

Week 8

- Students deliver two coaching sessions
- Half of schools visited by me
- First meeting back in the classroom during our usual class time
 - *Homework: complete Reflective Journal*

Week 9

- Students deliver two coaching sessions
- Other half of schools visited by me
 - *Homework: complete Reflective Journal*

Week 10

- Students deliver two coaching sessions
- Second meeting back in the classroom during our usual class time
 - *Homework: complete Reflective Journal*

Week 11

- Students deliver two coaching sessions
- Half of schools visited by me
 - *Homework: complete Reflective Journal*

Week 12

- Students deliver two coaching sessions
- Other half of schools visited by me
- School teachers and students asked to provide feedback on their coaches
- Third and final meeting back in the classroom during our usual class time

Done! ☺