

UCOR 2910-04: Ethical Reasoning in Business (Fall 2018)

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Office hours: Tuesday 2:30-3:30 and by appointment

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Course description: Content, learning outcomes, and methodology

This course will cover some of the central themes in theoretical ethics, including utilitarian (cost-benefit), Kantian, and social contract approaches, and also the application of these approaches to business practice and economic activity. We will explore the limits of economic thinking. Many of these limits are created by ethical concerns; our goal will be to make sense of these concerns, and to understand how these ethical concerns interact with purely economic considerations.

The readings, material presented in class, and written assignments are designed to match the following course objectives:

- Understanding a set of frameworks/theoretical approaches to ethics and applying those approaches to concrete problems/cases
- Heightening our sensitivity to ethical claims/social issues in the space of business and economics
- Refining our sense of argument with respect to these claims and issues
- Beginning to think critically (or thinking more critically) about our own responsibilities as economic agents (as workers, managers and consumers) and as citizens.

One central theme in this course is that philosophy is about noticing, in this context noticing that we are surrounded by ethical/social claims even in the space of business and economic activity. This conception of philosophy is suggested in Ludwig Wittgenstein’s comment, “Philosophy is not a theory but an activity” (*Tractatus*, 4.112).

There are few right—or at least obviously right—answers in much of what we will discuss, and you shouldn’t expect to come away from this course with neat, tidy answers. The material should complicate your lives by opening up questions, and the questions should be welcome.

Re. method, we will emphasize the place of reasons and argument with respect to ethical issues. Often we say that everyone is entitled to his or her opinion; in this course, however, no one is entitled to an opinion without some reason or justification. Our goal is to engage with reasons. Carefully distinguishing between claims/opinions and arguments, as well as determining the force of argument, are central critical reasoning skills that have broad application outside of this course.

Also re. method, much of our work in class will take place in discussion. In the space of ethical/social issues, learning and progress take place in dialogue with others. (In philosophical language, this is the performative aspect of the course.) Separate from the content of the course, learning how to articulate positions and, in particular, how to disagree are important process skills with applications much broader than thinking about ethics.

In order to encourage careful preparation for class, there will be a written assignment due many class periods. Some will be short homework assignments, others will be more in-depth papers. This course requires consistent effort.

Students are expected to participate and to be actively responsible for their own learning. At a minimum, this means asking questions when necessary.

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Core learning objectives

1. Understand key philosophical foundations of the Jesuit intellectual tradition, particularly insofar as that tradition has addressed issues of ethics.
2. Understand, use, and assess the strengths and weaknesses of ethical theories.
3. Become effective writers, including writers of high quality academic prose.
4. Learn to use ethical theories to analyze situations and inform judgments about actions.

This course addresses all four of these objectives, and in particular the fourth. The core curriculum guidelines add the following, further description of that fourth objective for ethics courses:

Students should learn habits of mind that lead them to identify where ethical dilemmas lie, to question and reflect on their own behavior (both collectively and individually), and to reflect on issues of justice and values as members of society. This course is designed to integrate theory and practical application so as to prepare students for a life of ethical practice, service, and leadership.

This requires that we appreciate the importance of issues of justice, such as social justice, environmental justice, and human rights, and also that we address the role of ethical behavior in everyday life.

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Course materials

Most readings are available through the Library’s electronic databases, some are available on the web. The first day of class we will practice using the Library’s electronic databases.

Three of the readings will be available for purchase as a course-pack through Xanadu.com. I will provide instructions for buying the course-pack via e-mail.

Note 1: The Library provides support via phone, e-mail, chat, and in person.

Note 2: We might not discuss all of the readings in class. Please be in touch if we don’t discuss a reading you find interesting or thought-provoking.

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Assignments/ grading

- Graded work (percentage of the final grade): first paper (15%), presentation (20%), second paper (due at the end of the quarter, 20%) take-home final exam (25%).
- The remaining 20% of the final grade is for participation. Students will get all 20 points by turning in all of the homework assignments (which are designed to help students prepare for class and practice writing). Five points will be deducted from the participation grade for each missed homework. In addition, homework assignments that show little or no reasonable effort will also result in a point deduction.
- Late papers will be penalized 10% per day. No late homework will be accepted without prior approval except in extraordinary circumstances.
- Homework and papers are due in class, on paper.
- No further points are assigned for participation, but points could be added to final grades for active and constructive participation (at my discretion).
- Note re. all written work: Careful writing is an important part of every assignment. Poor grammar, confusing writing, and incorrect English usage could significantly reduce grades. *And for all written assignments: No quotations permitted, no rhetorical questions.*

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Course policies / Academic resources. Please contact me if you have any questions.

- No electronic submission of work (without prior approval).
- Use of computers in class is not allowed, because computers inhibit face-to-face interaction and hurt academic performance (allowances will be made for students with disability-related accommodations; please come talk to me).
- Use of cell phones during class is also not allowed.

• **Re. Academic Honesty:**

Seattle University is committed to the principle that academic honesty and integrity are important values in the educational process. Academic dishonesty in any form is a serious offense against the academic community. Acts of academic dishonesty will be addressed according to the Seattle University Academic Honesty Policy. The University's policies and procedures with respect to academic honesty are available on the registrar's web site, here:

<https://www2.seattleu.edu/registrar/academic-policies/>

All quoted or paraphrased material, or borrowed ideas, must be cited or noted as such in written papers. This includes online material. "Unintentional" plagiarism is still plagiarism. Consequences of ignoring this standard rule of scholarship are very serious. Also, presenting work from other students as your own is a serious breach of academic honesty. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please contact me, talk to your academic advisor, or see the University's policy—which can be found at the address above.

- Requests for grade changes will only be accepted in writing.

Academic Resources

- Library and Learning Commons (<http://www.seattleu.edu/learningcommons/>)
(This includes: Learning Assistance Programs, Research [Library] Services, Writing Center, Math Lab)
- Academic Integrity Tutorial (found on Canvas and SU Online)

Academic Policies on Registrar website (<https://www.seattleu.edu/redhawk-axis/academic-policies/>)

- Academic Integrity Policy
- Academic Grading Grievance Policy
- Professional Conduct Policy (only for those professional programs to which it applies)

Notice for Students Concerning Disabilities

If you have, or think you may have, a disability (including an 'invisible disability' such as a learning disability, a chronic health problem, or a mental health condition) that interferes with your performance as a student in this class, you are encouraged to arrange support services and/or accommodations through Disabilities Services staff located in **Loyola 100, (206) 296-5740**. Disability-based adjustments to course expectations can be arranged only through this process.

Office of Institutional Equity

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX) prohibits discrimination based on sex in educational programs or activities that receive Federal financial assistance. This prohibition includes sexual misconduct, which encompasses sexual harassment and sexual violence. Seattle U remains committed to providing a safe and equitable learning, living, and working environment. Seattle U offers emergency, medical, and other support resources, as well as assistance with safety and support measures, to community members who have experienced or been impacted by sexual misconduct.

Seattle U requires all faculty and staff to notify the University's Title IX Coordinator if they become aware of any incident of sexual misconduct experienced by a student.

For more information, please visit <https://www.seattleu.edu/equity/>. If you have any questions or concerns, you may also directly contact the Title IX Coordinator in the Office of Institutional Equity (email: oi@seattleu.edu; phone: 206.296.2824).

UCOR 2910-04 (Fall 2018), Summary schedule

Note that this schedule is subject to change and—in fact—it likely will change.

	Tuesday	Thursday
Week 1		Sept 27: Introduction
Week 2	Oct 2: Starting points, moral reasoning (are we prepared to listen, to avoid rationalization, to avoid name-calling?)	Oct 4: Utilitarianism I (Peter Singer's application and theory) [HW #1]
Week 3	Oct 9: Utilitarianism 2 (Michael Pollan's application) [Paper #1]	Oct 11: Paper conferences
Week 4	Oct 16: Paper conferences	Oct 18: Kant (applications, with Thomas Nagel) and virtue ethics [HW #2]
Week 5	Oct 23: Philosophical approaches to ethics and economics (why we want markets, David Colander on market failures, Mark Sagoff on markets)	Oct 25: Ethics and business: Ethics framework and the basics of stakeholder theory [HW #3]
Week 6	Oct 30: Cases/ examples 1: Student presentations [Presentations]	Nov 1: Cases/ examples 2: Student presentations
Week 7	Nov 6: Cases/ examples 3: Student presentations Debrief the examples;	Nov 8: Debrief the examples; Alternative ways of thinking about the interaction of ethics and economics/ business [HW #4]
Week 8	Nov 13: The environment as a special consideration; <i>180-degrees South</i> [HW #5]	Nov 15: Moral psychology (David Hume, Adam Grant, the assumptions of economic and management theory)
Week 9	Nov 20: Crash course in organizational design, trust, psychological safety, procedural justice	Nov 22: No class, Thanksgiving
Week 10	Nov 27: Reflection, individual responsibility (Sadhu case as an example) [HW #6]	Nov 29: Can you buy a friend?—Michael Sandel and David Dick disagree [HW #7]
Week 11	Dec 4: Catch-up day	Dec 6: Conclusions [HW #8]
Finals Week	Tuesday Dec 11: Take home final exam due at noon Final reflection due at noon	