Foundations of Professional Ethics, Fall 2015

Instructor Information: Stefan Sencerz, Ph.D.
Office: Faculty Center 261; phone 825-2392; hours: MW 4:45 – 5:15, TR 1-3; 4:45-5:15 and BA.
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Course Description: This course is an introduction to contemporary ethical theories and their applications to practical issues. We will begin with an overview of ethics, including the nature ethical reasoning and some basic ethical theories. We will apply this basis to explore some current ethical debates; such as the morality of suicide and euthanasia, capital punishment, legalization of recreational drugs, animal rights and social and environmental responsibilities of professionals.

Learning Outcomes: Students taking the course will be expected to
1) demonstrate (on test questions) the understanding of ethical theories and principles;
2) apply those theories and principles to professional ethics issues, in essays and case study analyses;
3) develop their reasoning skills, and demonstrate that development on test questions;
4) construct and evaluate ethical arguments in papers and essays.

Additional readings will be provided on the web site for the course http://ethics.tamucc.edu [W], or distributed in class as handouts [H]. If you miss a class, make sure that you have copies of all additional handouts distributed in the class. Please remember that outlines and handouts do not cover all of the material on which you may be tested, and they do not contain complete accounts of the topics that are covered in lectures and readings. Merely memorizing the handouts will not enable you to pass the course.

Attendance & Participation: All materials discussed in the lectures and covered in the readings are the potential basis for test and exam questions. Students are therefore expected to attend all class meetings and keep up with assigned readings. In general, if you don’t attend class or don’t read required texts, don’t expect to pass.
You can miss 2 classes without penalty. Please use your free passes wisely. Each additional unexcused absence will result in the loss of credit you would have earned during that class. Except for the cases of demonstrable emergency I do not accept late work. However, in the cases of emergency, you can submit your work via e-mail.

Make up tests & Incompletes: Students who miss a test for a good (e.g. medical) reason will have a chance to take a make-up test, during a few days after the original test, at a time arranged with the instructor. An incomplete for the course is possible only in cases where course work is nearly complete, and the student has a legitimate reason for not completing the course work by the end of the semester.

Graded Assignments:
Three tests each 20% of your overall grade = 60%
Attendance-participation, quizzes and homework (there will be 5-7 short quizzes and case studies testing your understanding of the assigned material; one worst grade will be dropped) = 10%
November 17 -- the first draft of term paper -- 10%
December 02 -- the final draft of the paper -- 20%
All grades will be assigned on the standard scale: 90%-100%=A, 80%-89%=B, 70%-79%=C, 60%-69%=D, 59% and below=F.

Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty: As a student at TAMU-CC, you are bound by the student code of conduct. Cheating, plagiarism or any other form of academic dishonesty is grounds for failing the course.

Freedom of Speech and Classroom Etiquette: You are free to ask any question you please about the material. In many cases if you did not understand something, this is because it was not explained clearly to
you, so you will be doing your colleagues and yourself a service if you request clarification. You are also free to argue for any ethical position you find plausible, as long as you provide reasons for your point of view. It is inevitable that during discussions individual points of view will differ. When they do, our reaction will always be to patiently listen to the reasons offered for a particular ethical conclusion and cooperatively evaluate those reasons.

E-etiquette: Please turn off all cell phones, pagers, etc. If your cell phone rings (or sings) during class, I will stop the lecture and answer it for you. If you feel the urge to text message or make a call, please leave the classroom and do not return (until next class). The lectures are for lecturing and discussion. Any student who disrupts a lecture by using a personal electronic device will be asked to leave.

Academic Advising: The College of Liberal Arts requires that students meet with an Academic Advisor as soon as they are ready to declare a major. Degree plans are prepared in the CLA Academic Advising Center. The University uses an online Degree Audit system. Any amendment must be approved by the Department Chair and the Office of the Dean. All courses and requirements specified in the final degree plan audit must be completed before a degree will be granted. The CLA Academic Advising Office is located in Driftwood #203. For more information please call 361-825-3466.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please call or visit Disability Services at (361) 825-5816 in Corpus Christi Hall, Room #116. If you are a returning veteran and are experiencing cognitive and/or physical access issues in the classroom or on campus, please contact the Disability Services office for assistance at (361) 825-5816.

Grade appeal process: Students who feel that they have not been held to appropriate academic standards as outlined in this class syllabus, equitable evaluation procedures, or appropriate grading, may appeal the final grade given in the course. A student with a complaint about a grade is encouraged to first discuss the matter with the instructor. For complete details on the process of submitting a formal grade appeal, please visit the College of Liberal Arts website, cla.tamu.edu/students/studentinfo.html. For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Associate Dean’s Office.

The fine print: For all matters concerning course withdrawal, appeal of grades, academic misconduct, etc, students are strongly advised to consult the rules outlined in the Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Student Handbook and on the web at: http://studentaffairs.tamucc.edu/.

Important dates
August 26, W, Classes begin
September 07, M, Labor Day Holiday
September 21 (M), the first test – 20%
October 18 (M), the second test – 20%
November 06, F, last day to drop a class
November 17 -- the first draft of term paper -- 10%
November 26-7, RF, Thanksgiving Holidays
December 01, T, last day of classes; the final draft of the paper – 20%
December 03-04/7-9, Finals week

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE: This schedule is provisional and subject to change. All readings refer to The Elements of Moral Philosophy, 8th ed.

08/26 (W): Classes begin: organization and general introduction

09/07  What is Morality? (continued)  
Cultural Relativism. Readings: Chapter 2

09/14  Ethical Egoism. Readings: Chapters 5

09/21 (M) Test #1 (20%), in sections

09/28  Debate about utilitarianism 
Readings: Chapters 7-8

10/05  Deontology and Kantian Ethics of respect for persons 
Readings: Chapters 8-10.

10/12  Deontology (continued); Ethics and Religion

10/18 (M) Test #2 (20%) in sections

10/20  Some issues related to Ethical Relativism and Religious Ethics  
Rachels, Chapters 2 and 4 (again); Harris, “The Ethics of Natural Law” [W]

11/02  Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide 
Rachels, Chapter 1 and 7.2 (again); additional readings [W]

11/09  Legalization of recreational drugs 
Rachels, Chapter 7:4

1/16  Capital Punishment 
Rachels, Chapter 10; Justice Stevens, “On Death Sentence” 

23  Environmental Ethics and Animal Rights 
Rachels, Chapter 7.4; Sencerz, http://ethics.tamucc.edu/extended_examples_nonhuman_animals 
(Read essays by Peter Singer and Tom Regan, linked to this page)  
W. O. Stephens, “Five Arguments for Vegetarianism,”  
Philosophy in the Contemporary World 1, no. 4, 1994: 25–39 (link above)

11/30-12/01 TBA

12/07 (M) 4:30 – 7:00 p.m, The Final Test (20%)