

**Political Science 392: Ethics and Public Affairs
Course Outline, Winter Semester, 2011**

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Meeting appointments at the center by request

Course Description:

This course introduces the student to ethical decision-making in public affairs. It explores the foundations for public ethics and applications in various contexts. Contemporary ethical issues in government, business, and society will be discussed, with a focus on developing critical thinking skills. Particular emphasis will be placed on Christian approaches to public ethical issues. Students will have opportunities to reflect on ethical issues they encounter in their work experiences in Ottawa.

Objectives:

1. Students will become familiar with the major approaches to ethics and how they are used in public decision-making. These include virtue ethics, ethical intuitionism, utilitarianism, and deontology, with Christian and non-Christian examples of these.
2. Students will gain experience in analysis and comparison of different ethical approaches, with particular focus on Christian perspectives on ethical issues.
3. Through discussion and debate, students will refine and deepen their own ability to reflect on the ethical dimensions of current issues, present ethical arguments, and discern the ethical basis for decisions made by others.

Format of the course:

Seminar. Participation is essential. Students are expected to read in advance and come prepared to discuss and debate. Classes will combine conceptual analysis and practical application of the concepts to public issues.

Readings and introductory lectures with discussion will provide a basic grasp of the main concepts and methodologies used in public ethics, to achieve the first objective. To meet the second and third objectives, public ethical issues that students encounter in other aspects of the program will be discussed. Students will be invited to suggest public ethical issues to be covered during later class sessions.

Required Readings:

Essays in *Ethics and Public Affairs Course Pack*

Readings on current ethical issues, related to each session, will be assigned from contemporary materials, including websites and electronic sources.

Evaluation:

Final exam: synthesis essays; choice between topics 30%

Analytical paper on an ethical issue of student's choice: the paper will demonstrate use of at least one of the major ethical approaches in persuasive argument. Paper will be academic quality, using standard style, footnotes, bibliography, etc. 10-15 pages. 30%

Class presentation or debate on the ethical dimensions of a specific public issue. Evaluation will be based on quality of analysis, use of ethical concepts, and effective presentation. 20%

One short essay that frames an ethical issue and reflects on it, using one or more of the general approaches to ethics. 3-5 pages 10%

Class participation, active engagement as well as attendance 10%

The Trinity Western Grading Scale will be used to evaluate course work.

As Christian scholars pursuing higher education, academic integrity is a core value of the entire TWU community. TWU has a strict policy on plagiarism (see the Academic Calendar). Learning what constitutes plagiarism and avoiding it is the student's responsibility. An excellent resource describing plagiarism and how to avoid it has been prepared by TWU Librarian William Badke and is freely available for download (PPT file) or used as flash (self running) tutorials of varying lengths from:

<http://www.acts.twu.ca/lbr/plagiarism.ppt>

<http://www.acts.twu.ca/lbr/Plagiarism.swf> (14 minute flash tutorial)

http://www.acts.twu.ca/lbr/Plagiarism_Short.swf (8 minute flash tutorial)

Outline by Session

Session I: Introduction to Public Ethics

Handout will be used as basis for discussion.

Focus: what is the study of public ethics and what is it not?

Introduction to key questions that are asked in study of ethics

Overview of some of major theories and Christian approaches

Students will be asked to identify public ethical issues they are interested in, for use as examples of application in later sessions.

Session II: Major Approaches to Ethical Decision-making

Preparation:

1. Read Essay 4: "Ethical Arguments," by Robin Gill.
2. Read Essay 6: "Virtue," by Stanley Hauerwas.
3. Bring example of application to a specific issue, e.g. article, personal experience

Discussion of the basic ethical approaches and examples of current applications:

- Consequentialism/utilitarianism
- Deontology
- Personalism/ethical intuitionism
- Virtue Ethics

Session III: Christian Ethical Principles: Themes and Issues in Application

Preparatory Readings:

1. Excerpts 1 and 2 by Philip Wogaman
2. Excerpt 3 by Roger Crook
3. Excerpt 5 by Joseph Fletcher

Discussion of Christian approaches to ethics and application in a pluralistic context.

Session IV: Ethics, Economics, and Role of Government in Economics

Preparatory Readings:

1. Excerpts by Temple (7), Wolterstorff (8), and Sider (9), in course pack
2. Excerpts from “*Caritas in Veritate*” by Pope Benedict XVI, June 2009 (electronic).
3. Article by Peter Singer (electronic).

Comparison of different ethical approaches to public economic issues will pay particular attention to various Christian approaches. Interplay between approach to economics and different views on the role of the state will be discussed.

Session V: Ethics and Environment

Preparation:

1. Read essay by Lynn White, “The Theological Roots of our Ecological Crisis.”
2. Find and bring one basic statement from a Christian environmental organization that identifies the ethical assumptions behind its work.
3. Additional articles, based on issues identified by students.

Discussion of various ethical perspectives on environmental issues and assumptions behind them will focus on Christian statements and on-going debate between Christians and non-Christians regarding the environment.

Session VI: War and Peace

Preparation:

1. Read essay by Glen Stassen (electronic)
2. Read introduction to “Responsibility to Protect” (electronic).
3. Bring article on current issue that reflects ethical perspectives

Discussion of ethical perspectives will focus on relevance of traditional Christian approaches, e.g. just war and pacifism, and emerging alternative concepts, such as Just Peacemaking and Responsibility to Protect.

Session VII: Ethical Issues in Social Relationships and Communications

Preparatory Readings:

1. Article by Wolterstorff, “Speaking Up for Rights,” in course pack.
2. Articles on ethical aspects of specific issues, to be determined by issues students identify and issues that are on current public agenda.

Discussion of ethical principles involved in public social issues, such as pluralism, common good, individual and group rights, cultural diversity, will focus on particular challenges in Canada, such as cultural diversity and social cohesion. Ethical issues in communications will focus on freedom of speech, privacy, and exploitation.

Session VIII – X: Application to Specific Issues: Student Presentations

Student presentations will be used as the basis for class discussion of a range of specific issues, with a focus on discovering the ethical foundations of specific positions and exploring alternative approaches.

Session XI: Professional Codes of Ethics

Government Accountability Act as Code of Ethics

Personal Ethics and Public Service Roles

This session will depend on level of student interest in this aspect of public ethics.

Preparatory reading:

1. Article on Professional Codes of Ethics (electronics)
2. Government Accountability Act

Methodology might include: speaker from Office of Ethics Commissioner or someone willing to share experience of ethical dilemmas and/or review of ethical codes of conducts that students have encountered or identify through research.

Alternative would be to dig deeper into applied ethical issues of particular interest.

Session XII: Concluding Reflection on Worldview and Approach to Ethical Issues

Preparatory Reading:

1. Handout on intersection of personal worldview and “science” of ethics, including how one can develop a personal, consistent, ethical framework.

Discussion will review and compare major approaches to ethics, with a focus on how students can choose and apply ethical approaches in their own practice.