

Ethics in Health Care

Course Listing: SAR HS 422

Lecturer Information

Lecturer

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Office Location & Hours

Boston University—DCU Office
By Request

Credits: 4 BU Credits + 2 Hub Units

Class Times and Locations: Refer
to Main Schedule

General Information

Course Overview

This course aims to introduce learners to ethics and common ethical issues arising in the context and provision of healthcare. We will address topics specific to biomedical ethics, including end of life issues, reproductive technologies, and issues in biomedical research. These issues will be used to examine ethical reasoning, ethical theories and ethical principles, and cases and narratives in ethics. Special attention will be paid to developing skills of critical thinking through an examination of philosophical arguments and practical exercises. Learners are given a theoretical grounding in classical and contemporary schools of ethical reasoning. They are, in turn, expected to apply this theoretical knowledge in praxis through the analysis of case studies, participation in debates, and giving hypothetical advice in ethical matters posed for in-class debate and discussion. Learners further consider the subject matter through the prism of dramatic portrayals of ethical issues in media, such as film, news reporting, and art, as a multidisciplinary approach to engaging ethical decision-making capacity. Learners also significantly develop their faculty of critical reasoning and analysis, focusing specifically on the standards of analysis and formal features that are common to a variety of disciplines which incorporate critical thought, as well as the normative language and reasoning deployed in ethics. While the issues presented in the course transcend context, reference will be made throughout the course to the Irish context. Assessment for the course consists of class attendance and participation (10%), a case analysis (20%), an essay (40%), and a comprehensive final examination (30%).

Hub Learning Outcomes

Ethical Reasoning (One Unit):

1. Learners will be able to identify, grapple with, and make a judgment about the ethical questions at stake in **at least** one major contemporary public debate, and engage in a civil discussion about it with those who hold views different from their own.
2. Learners will demonstrate the skills and vocabulary needed to reflect on the ethical responsibilities that face nations and governments as they grapple with issues affecting both the communities to which they belong and those identified as “other.” They should consider their responsibilities to future generations of humankind, and to stewardship of the Earth.

Critical Thinking (Intellectual Toolkit/One Unit):

1. Learners will be able to identify key elements of critical thinking, **such as** habits of distinguishing deductive from inductive modes of inference, recognizing common logical fallacies and cognitive biases, translating ordinary language into formal argument, distinguishing empirical claims about matters of fact from normative or evaluative judgments, and recognizing the ways in which emotional responses can affect reasoning processes.
2. Drawing on skills developed in class, learners will be able to evaluate the validity of arguments, including their own; to cognize the ethical responsibilities of healthcare providers and administrators, as well as those engaged in any aspect of patient care and healthcare policy. Learners will be challenged to enhance their

critical faculties to identify and rebut deficiencies in the ethical evaluations of others in a respectful, cogent, and constructive manner, as well as learning to recognize the same deficiencies in their own thinking.

Instructional Format

Class time will be used for a combination of lectures, discussions, and group exercises (including peer review and writing workshop activities). Participation is very important in this module, as learners will be asked to explain readings and concepts, to offer analysis of cases and to express their opinion.

Assignments and Grading

Due	%	Assignment Title	Description
Continuous	10	Attendance and Participation (Formative/Summative Assessment)	Learners should be present in class to engage with their peers in prepared and extemporaneous debates on the issue presented in class each week. Each absence will result in an automatic 10% deduction in the mark for this area. Absences may only be excused with the approval of the programme director for a valid and compelling reason, in accordance with Boston University policies on the matter. A learner can achieve a high mark by contributing to class discussions on a regular basis in a way that progresses the discussion, seeks clarification, or responds to the viewpoints voiced by their peers. A mid-range participation mark will be given where a learner makes intermittent contributions to class, and where these contributions do not progress the discussion or respond to the substantive contributions made by other learners in a structured or sustained manner. A low mark will be awarded where a learner makes few contributions or no contributions to classroom discussions and fails to engage with her/his peers in a respectful or engaged manner. (Ethical Reasoning and Critical Thinking: All Learning Outcomes)
	20	Case Presentation and Ethical Analysis (Summative Assessment)	Learners must pick a case that interests them from the Dooley and McCarthy book. Learners will be asked to (1) identify the core ethical issues in the case (2) focus on two ethical issues and justify the reasoning for choosing those issues (3) choose one relevant ethical theory and describe it (4) apply this ethical theory to ethical issue 1 and give two reasons how this ethical theory applies to this issue and (5) repeat step 4 in respect of ethical issue 2. (Ethical Reasoning: Learning Outcomes 1&2; Critical Thinking: Learning Outcome 1) The presentation should last 10-15 minutes and learners should submit a brief, written summary (maximum 1 typed page, Arial, font size 12 or 300 words) of the presentation which will be graded, along with the presentation itself. This assessment the ability of the learning to provide a summative and succinct analysis of the issues presented in their case, including describing factual elements of the scenario presented that are relevant to a critical analysis of that case. See Presentation Guidelines document on the Loop for more details. (Annexed to this Syllabus) (Critical Thinking: Learning Outcome 1)
	40	Essay (Formative/Summative Assessment)	The topic for the essay will be chosen by each learner. The chosen topic must be one which raises serious ethical issues. The essay should provide the reader with a comprehensive background to the topic and the ethical issues it raises. The essay must include an ethical analysis of the topic using relevant ethical theories and principles. Learners must also observe normative standards of critical analysis and formatting specific to the healthcare field and academic commentary and analysis. Learners must include an Irish element to the topic. Significant emphasis is placed on referencing to ensure the authenticity of work submitted; therefore, learners are encouraged to make a conscious effort to ensure their referencing is of a good standard. See Essay Guidelines document on the Loop for more details. All essays must be submitted electronically on or before TBA. Learners are entitled to submit one draft until 48 hours before the due date

			upon which they can receive feedback. (Ethical Reasoning: Learning Outcome 1; Critical Thinking: Learning Outcomes 1 & 2)
	30	Final Examination (Summative Assessment)	<p>Learners will sit for a two-hour, essay-style examination spanning the entire course. The questions are divided into two sub-groups; learners must answer one question from each sub-group.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The first sub-group engages with the ethical reasoning outcomes of the course, requiring learners to take positions in relation to ethical questions, and engage in a detailed exposition of the theoretical considerations with regard to a contemporary debate or issue within healthcare. They must also countenance in their responses the ethical responsibilities that nations face and the duty towards those perceived as the “other” in certain cases. (Ethical Reasoning: Learning Outcome 2; Critical Thinking: Learning Outcome 1) In the second of the sub-groups, learners must engage with the critical thinking learning outcomes for the course. Specifically, they must analyse factual scenarios with reference to relevant ethical frameworks and therefrom derive normative and evaluative judgments regarding the ethical theories they would pursue and the anticipated arguments of the other side of the issue; they must raise and dispose of the latter to bolster the soundness and thoroughness of their own judgment. Moreover, using the skills and tools for critical analysis that they have acquired through the course, they must critically analyse multiple perspectives on a contemporary debate. Upon completion of such analysis, the learner should offer their own sound and considered judgment on a matter and explain its virtues vis-à-vis competing viewpoints. (Ethical Reasoning: Learning Outcome 1; Critical Thinking: Learning Outcome 2)

Course Materials

Required Text (Available for Lending at BU/DCU Library):

Dooley, D. and McCarthy, J. 2012. *Nursing ethics: Irish cases and concerns*. 2nd edition. Dublin: Gill and McMillan.

Complementary Readings:

Ethical Resources (Ethical Reasoning, Critical Thinking):

Beauchamps & Childress. 2012. *Principles of Biomedical Ethics* (7th Ed). Oxford University Press.

Boylan, M. 2014. *Medical Ethics* (2nd Ed). Chichester: Wiley Blackwell

O’Mathúna, D. P. 2009. *Nanoethics: big ethical issues with small technology*. London: Continuum.

Plagiarism Notice:

It is the responsibility of every learner to read the Boston University statement on plagiarism, which is available in the Academic Conduct Code. Learners are advised that the penalty against learners on a Boston University program for cheating on examinations or for plagiarism may be “[...] expulsion from the program of the University or such other penalty as may be recommended by the Committee on Learner Academic Conduct, subject to approval by the Dean.”

N.B: Learners **MUST** retain an electronic copy of all essays submitted for assessment.

Course Schedule

For each topic, please read the specified chapter in the required text. Additional reading, from the complementary materials list, such as articles together with links to relevant websites will be made available on Moodle one week in advance of each class. PowerPoint presentations will also be available two days prior to the class and it is recommended that learners print out/access these presentations and have them electronically or physically available in class.

Weekly Summaeries:

Week	Description	Assessment (Release/ Return)
<u>One</u>	In this initial week, we will cover introductions to the course, including to the Hub learning outcomes for the course. We will take a brief, cursory look at two of the ethical schools of thought, of which we will make a more expensive examination later in the course. These schools of ethics are deontological and consequentialist ethics. We will also briefly look at the aims of criminal law and professional regulation, including the ethical regulation of professionals. Will also look at the acceptability, vel non, of criminalizing individuals based on their health status. We'll also look at whether the aims of public health initiatives can ever be compatible with the aims of criminal law. Next, we will look at the topic of informed consent, including the modes by which consent can be given what constitutes valid and informed consent, identifying individuals who have the capacity to consent, and what information must be furnished to patients in advance of treatment. We will also look at the liability that can arise where valid consent is not sought or obtained. We will also look at what ethical considerations apply to research scenarios involving human persons. Possible Media Considered: The Children Act (Film)	Case presentation topics chosen by students.
Two	In this week of study, we examine in detail two concepts which loom large in the field of medical ethics, namely, autonomy and beneficence. In terms of autonomy, we will look at both the Kantian and Millian Derivations of autonomy as a philosophical and ethical concept. We will also examine what import these have in the field of health care, and what practical limitations might exist on patient autonomy. We will then move to examine the concept of beneficence in both the strong and the weak sense. We then turn our attention to traditional moral theories in terms of the concept of "right" action. Specifically, we revisit our discussion of utilitarianism/consequentialist ethics versus deontological ethics, examining considerations particular to each. We will also examine virtue ethics, which brings an examination of the motives, habits, and character of the moral actor to the fore in an examination of the ethical quality of action. Possible Media Considered: Me Before You (Film)	Essay topics chosen by students.
Three	In this week of study, we turn from our traditional moral theories to examine, in greater consideration, ethical theories that are of more recent vintage. These include Principlism as conceived by Beauchamps and Childress, which seeks to strike a fine balance between 4 principles which are: autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice. We then examine narrative ethics, the ethic of Care, and feminist ethics. In continuation, we examine the duty of confidentiality. This discussion includes why health care confidentiality is Important in terms of the relationship between patience and medical professionals, what information must be kept confidential, and what might happen in case of a breach of confidentiality. We will also look at where confidentiality as a principle finds expression in professional codes of conduct and ethics. Finally, we will examine when disclosure can take place with or without the consent of the patient. Possible Media Considered: Bespoke Dublin Tour.	Student presentation summaries are submitted and presentations take place.
Four	In this week, we will examine issues related to vital decisions, both beginning- and end-of-life, including differing perspectives on when life begins the obligation of health care professionals to participate in procedures which they find morally objectionable, including in their professional codes of conduct and ethics. Next, we will examine end of life issues, including changes in the legislative landscape globally in terms	Student presentation summaries are submitted and presentations take place.

	of the permissive stance taken by some jurisdictions to allow individuals to seek assistance in dying, both in the context of palliative care and medical interventions that precipitate dying. On a separate topic, as a matter of general knowledge, we will look at how to analyze a legal judgment, as these inform the context and delivery of care by medical professionals in statutory professions. Possible Media Considered: Dallas Buyers Club	
Five	This week is reserved for materials we did not get a chance to review in class as well as guest speakers.	Final essays due.
Six	The final class will be a review of materials related to the final examination.	Final Examination.

Detailed Schedule:

Class	Topic/Preliminary Reading	To Complete:
1	Introduction to Ethics and Ethical Argumentation	Choose case study from core text for individual presentation.
2	Ethics in Research; Norms of Critical Analysis of Ethical Proposals	Dooley, pages 24-43, 140-156; Belmont Report Summary
3	Ethical Theory: Narrative Ethics; Coherence as a Critical Mode of Analysis	Dooley, pages 1-23; O'Mathúna, Chapter 3
4	Ethical Decision-Making: Theory and Praxis	Dooley, pages 181-211
5 and 6	Ethical Theory: Autonomy and Paternalism Ethical Theory: Deontology and Utilitarianism Critical approaches to Patient Autonomy and Legitimate Restriction	Dooley, 87-110; Dooley, 111-135
7	Ethical Theory: Virtue Ethics; Framing and Conceiving of the Habit and Aim of Virtuous Action as an Element of Critical Thinking	Dooley, 44-84
8	Case Presentations	N/A
9	Case Presentations	N/A
10	Ethics Through Film; Normativity as a Dramatic and Critical Concept	Dallas Buyers Club/Me Before You (In-Class Film)
11	Ethical Responsibilities and the Legal Framing of Ethical Issues	Moot Court In-Class Activity
12	Healthcare as Performative Ethics	Case Scenarios for Performance and Review
13	Final Examination	Venue: TBA