

# Business Ethics

## Syllabus

### Course Description

This course is an introduction to business ethics. Ethics, broadly construed, is the study of how we *should* behave, or of what we *should* do. There is no shortage of ethical questions that arise in the context of business. Given the power that businesses wield in a free market society, the choices that businesses make can have drastic consequences for large numbers of people, making issues in business ethics especially pressing. Questions we will address may include: Is price gouging morally wrong? Do we have a moral obligation not to purchase sweatshop-produced goods or work for companies that contract with sweatshops? What makes for wrongful discrimination? Might some Big Data-based algorithms be discriminatory? When are advertisements wrongfully manipulative? What moral limits do markets have? Topics range from very broad ethical questions about the nature of autonomy and discrimination in business contexts to very narrow, specific real-world case studies involving particular companies (e.g. Facebook, H&M, Microsoft, Enron, Ford).

### Course Goals

This course is an introduction to business ethics and will cover a wide array of topics from a philosophical perspective. As a result, students will become familiar with many of the core topics and issues in business ethics. Additionally, by the end of the course students will be able to:

- Become familiar with basic analytical tools of philosophical inquiry and use them to *critically examine* and *assess* arguments involving ethical issues.
- To facilitate your skill to clearly express arguments and objections to ethical claims.
- To understand existing problems, theories, and positions concerning business ethics. Ideally, this will also help you to clarify and/or develop your own views on these issues.
- Address ethical dilemmas in real-world business contexts using the skills you developed in this course, with the aim of improving, even in a small way, the ethical conduct of the business world.

### Readings

There are no required textbooks for this course. All required readings will be posted to the course webpage as PDFs and if you have access to a printer you can print them out. Other required course materials, such as videos or podcasts, will likewise be available on the course webpage.

### Grading

Letter grades (corresponding to a 4-point scale: A=4, A-=3.7, B+=3.3, etc.) will be based on the following:

Reading Responses	20%
Unit Quizzes	50%
Group Presentation	20%
Attendance and Participation	10%

## Assignments

### *Reading Responses*

Students will complete short responses of various types throughout the semester, usually one for each reading. Some of these are reading questions, some are open-ended invitations for thoughts on a topic, and some are requests for questions about something you didn't understand in the reading. Collectively, these are worth 20% of your grade. They will be graded on a 3-point scale. Complete and submit your responses on the course webpage.

### *Unit Quizzes*

The bulk of the final grade will come from four unit quizzes, collectively worth 50% (12.5% each). There will be one due the week after each unit. Quizzes are take-home, open book and will consist in a variety of short, medium, and long (essay-type) questions that focus on the readings and class discussion for each unit. Each unit is three weeks long and include a variety of reading materials and case studies which will be the central focus of the quizzes. The goal is to test your understanding and grasp of the issues, arguments, and topics covered.

### *Group Presentation*

In assigned 4- or 5-person groups, you and your classmates will choose a real-world business ethics problem, examine arguments on two different sides of the issue, and ultimately make a policy recommendation as to how an organization involved should respond to the ethical problem raised. Presentations and Q&A will take place during the last week of classes. Presentations are worth 20% of the final grade.

### *Attendance and Participation*

There is also an attendance and participation grade. Your showing up and being attentive and engaged in lecture will be reflected in your attendance and participation grade. This grade will start off at 100%, but can be negatively affected by unexcused absences from lecture (I will regularly take attendance; you have two 'freebies'), if you regularly violate the electronics policy or if you are disruptive in lecture (wearing headphones, regularly coming in late, doing homework for other classes, etc.). Attendance and participation are jointly worth 10% of the final grade.

## Class Expectations

- **Course Readings:** Students should do all the assigned readings *before* the class in which they're discussed. All readings are available on the course webpage. There is no textbook, but students should print articles so they can bring them to class.
- **Attendance and Participation:** Attendance in class is expected. I will take attendance and keep track of student contributions in class. You can miss up to 2 classes without penalty and without notifying me. Any further absences will need to be justified.
- **Electronics Policy:** Laptops, tablets, and phones are not permitted during class. Using electronics is distracting to both yourself and others, and studies have shown that it lowers grades of the user and those around them. If you require a special accommodation regarding electronics please come see me to request an exemption.

- **Late Work Policy:** Late assignments without an extension will be downgraded by 1/3 of a letter grade per day after the due date, up to a penalty of 2 full letter grades (after which they won't be accepted). Consult with me to request an extension.
- **Classroom Etiquette:** Students are expected to respect each other, allow others the chance to speak, and be open-minded to views different from their own. The topics covered are difficult and controversial and many of your classmates have struggled with them in their own lives. Please be aware of, and sensitive to, the feelings and experiences of others.
- **Syllabus:** Readings and schedule are subject to change. Any changes will be announced in class and on the course webpage.

### **Academic Honesty**

Students should not plagiarize their work. I will follow official policies when handling cases of academic dishonesty.

### **Accessibility**

I am committed to making this class accessible and welcoming for all students. Students with documented disabilities are encouraged to contact Disability Services to register and request any accommodations you might need. If you anticipate receiving accommodations from Disability Services, but are still waiting on paperwork, please come tell me as soon as you can so that we can put necessary accommodations in place.

### **Provisional Course Schedule**

#### **Unit 1: Normative and Business Ethics**

##### Week 1

- Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism"
- Friedman, "The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase Its Profits"

##### Week 2

- Chapman, "Deontology: Kantian Ethics"
- Wolff, "Rawls' Theory of Justice"
- Driver, "Contemporary Consequentialism"

##### Week 3

- Snyder, "What's the Matter with Price Gouging?"
- Carns, "When Good Drivers Pay More for Insurance than Bad Ones"
- Unit 1 Quiz

#### **Unit 2: The Moral Limits of Markets and Corporations**

##### Week 4

- Anderson, "The Ethical Limits of the Market"
- Wang, "Surrogate Pregnancy Battle Pits Progressives Against Feminists"

- Caron, “Surrogacy is Complicated. Just Ask New York”

#### Week 5

- Satz, “Noxious Markets”
- Manning, “Corporate Responsibility and Corporate Personhood”

#### Week 6

- Sepinwall, “Corporate Piety and Impropriety”
- Blair, “Of Corporations, Courts, Personhood, and Morality”
- Unit 2 Quiz

### **Unit 3: Privacy and Manipulation**

#### Week 7

- Marmor, “What is the Right to Privacy?”
- O’Neil, “Propaganda Machine”

#### Week 8

- Arrington, “Advertising and Behavior Control”
- Susser, Roessler, and Nissenbaum, “Technology, Autonomy, and Manipulation”

#### Week 9

- Crisp, “Persuasive Advertising, Autonomy, and the Creation of Desire”
- Aylsworth, “Autonomy and Manipulation: Refining the Argument Against Persuasive Advertising”
- Unit 3 Quiz

### **Unit 4: Discrimination, Hiring, and Labour**

#### Week 10

- Campbell, “The Supreme Court Puts a Baker’s Business – and Artistic Freedom – on the Line”
- Corvino, “Drawing a Line in the ‘Gay Wedding Cake’ Case”

#### Week 11

- Thomson, “Preferential Hiring”
- Dattner et al., “The Legal and Ethical Implications of Using AI in Hiring”

#### Week 12

- Maitland, “The Great Non-Debate Over International Sweatshops”
- Zwolinski, “Sweatshops, Choice, and Exploitation”
- Unit 4 Quiz

#### Week 13

- Group Presentations; No readings