PH 355 Business Ethics (3)

Rev. June, 2009

“Earth provides enough to satisfy every person’s need, but not for every person’s greed.” – Gandhi

COURSE DESCRIPTION

A critical examination of the various ethical theories and their application to concrete practical issues in today’s business environment. Emphasis is placed upon the recognition of assumptions, the application of ethical principles, the weighing of alternative solutions, and arguing substantially as well as spontaneously.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course challenges the student in the development of the following competencies:

(a) cognitive: The student will...
   1. comprehend and be able to describe the different perspectives that have been taken, and the arguments supporting them, in the field of ethics.
   2. understand how and why the practice of business is subject to ethical reflection.
   3. formulate a rationally defensible personal ethical decision-making system for responding to ethical issues in business.

(b) skills: The student will...
   1. develop a facility for articulating her thoughts about ethical issues in business as well as for formulating arguments that are rationally coherent, consistent, and persuasive.
   2. develop critical assessment skills concerning the strengths and weaknesses of the various ethical perspectives, especially as these perspectives are applied to the business environment.
   3. learn to dialogue with others of diverse ethical perspectives and exhibit leadership in responding to ethical dilemmas of common concern.

(c) affective: The student will…
1. discover her own perspective in ethical decision-making and understand its adequacy.
2. approach people with differing ethical perspectives with a more open mind.
3. discover that equally good people may find different but equally good answers to the same ethical dilemmas in business.

(d) values: The student will…
1. discover and appreciate her own values as employed in her ethical decision-making.
2. reflect on the values of others and how they may differ from her own.
3. critically appreciate the societal and cultural values underlying her own personal values.

**TEXTBOOK**


Videotapes: *Ethics in America*, “Anatomy of a Corporate Takeover”
Ethics Watch (Eaton Corp.) (permission pending)

Movies: *The Insider*; *A Civil Action*; *Erin Brockovich*; *Office Space*

Other Helpful Texts (not required):


**CRITERIA FOR ASSESSMENT**

The instructor will specify the means of assessment. The following are possible modes of assessment:
1. attendance and participation both in class activities and in small-group projects
2. quizzes and exams
3. formal and informal class presentations
4. written assignments such as research papers, personal reflection papers, analytical essays on assigned ethical issues, or annotated bibliographies
5. a culminating experience (written or oral, individual or group)

**COURSE EXPECTATIONS**

1. Students entering PH 355 already have a personal approach to ethical issues. Since one of the goals of this course is to enhance the adequacy (both in breadth and depth) of one’s reflection on ethical issues through dialogue with others, carefully read the “Ethics Statement” section of *Important Information for UCAP Students* found by clicking on *UCAP Policies*. This is especially important regarding classroom disclosures. [*UCAP Policies* are accessed by clicking on the appropriate place on the top of the webpage which lists all of the course modules.]

2. Active participation in class discussions, group collaborations, quizzes, and in-class writing
assignments requires bodily presence in class. Hence, attendance is critical to a successful completion of the course. Please pay special attention to the “Class Attendance” section of Important Information for UCAP Students, accessed by clicking on UCAP Policies. If emergency circumstances warrant an absence, it is the student’s responsibility to contact the instructor. Coverage of missed material will be at the instructor’s discretion. Similarly, each instructor will determine any penalty for a missed class or a portion of a missed class.

3. PH 355 presumes a general facility with written communication. Students are responsible for their own writing practices and are encouraged to make use of standard writing handbooks, the assistance of others (especially the writing consultants in the campus Learning Resource Center). In this respect, please consult the “Written Assignments and Workload” section of Important Information for UCAP Students (accessed by clicking on UCAP Policies). Please also see the “Characteristics of Effective Writing” at the end of the UCAP Policies.

4. The successive sessions of this course build one upon the other. As each session is completed, it is not so much an ending as it is an opening to the next session. An important aspect of the course will be your week-to-week integrating of what has been already studied into the material of the present class.

GROUP PROJECT

We will divide ourselves into groups of 3 or 4. Each group will choose an issue in contemporary advertising (visual or audio), analyze its content from various ethical points of view, and present their results to the class at the fifth session. The specific ad should be cleared with the instructor. Each group should give to the class the text (e.g., picture) of the advertising to be studied. Class time will be given for group meetings. Group meetings outside of class time are not necessary for this project.

Each member of the group will analyze the ad from a different ethical perspective using the thinking of the various theories/philosophers studied in class. Each group member will write a 2-page paper from a particular philosophical perspective on the ad. The philosophical argumentation for one’s perspective will be of primary importance in the assessment of the paper. Since this is a group project, the group’s presentation as a whole will be factored into the grade for the project. The group is a team working on a common project. Each member is expected to make a positive contribution to the common project.

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT PROVISION

Students with documented disabilities, including those with learning disabilities, may be entitled to reasonable accommodations for this course. Students who would like to request testing or other accommodations because of a disability need to make an appointment with the instructor as soon as possible to discuss their situation and possible needs, including the use of the Learning Resource Center, if necessary, to arrange for an appropriate response.

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

During class sessions and in written assignments every attempt will be made to use inclusive language, in terms of gender, race, societal classes, disabilities, etc. Great care will also be taken to avoid the ways we sometimes tend to communicate about people (and indeed all of reality) in terms of an implied and unwarranted domination.
PLEASE NOTE: This module, revised June 2009, is based on the 11th edition of Shaw and Barry’s Moral Issues in Business. In contrast with earlier editions, the 11th edition contains a significant organizational shift in material. The former Part Three is now Part Four in the 11th edition, and the former Part Four is now Part Three in this new 11th edition.
SESSION 1

TO BE COMPLETED PRIOR TO THE SESSION:

1. Please review the entire module packet, paying particular attention to the Important Information for UCAP Students section found at the end of the module.

2. Read Shaw & Barry, Part One: Moral Philosophy and Business

   Chapter 1: The Nature of Morality, pp. 2-54

   Chapter 2: Normative Theories of Ethics, pp. 56-110

As you read these three chapters:

   a) use the “Key Concepts” in the Study Corner as guides for emphasis on important points.
       [ p. 30 for Chapter 1; p. 85 for Chapter 2 ]

   b) apply your reading of each chapter to the Case Studies which follow it.

   c) assess the arguments in the Readings which follow the Case Studies.

3. In no more than 2-3 pages, respond to the 7 questions at the conclusion of “It’s Good Business” by Robert C. Solomon (pages 36-45). These responses will be collected, graded, and returned with feedback. The focus of this assignment is on your ability to read an article, comprehend its contents, and assess its strengths and weaknesses from an ethical point of view. The responses are to be typed, double-spaced, 12-font, proofread, and of “publication quality.” If some emergency prevents attendance at the first class session, this assignment should be emailed to the instructor before or on the day of the class.
SESSION 1

MORAL PHILOSOPHY AND BUSINESS

OUTCOMES

Upon completion of this session, the student is expected to:

1. understand the various components of the course syllabus.
2. define the major traditions of ethics and their application to business.
3. identify ethical values and perspectives in the reading and analysis of case studies.
4. recognize ethical values and disvalues in one’s daily work experience.

ACTIVITIES

1. The facilitator and class members introduce themselves.
2. The facilitator leads a communal conversation on the course syllabus, inviting clarifying questions and comments from the class members.
3. Class discussion of the reality of each student’s personal viewpoint on issues and how this reality impacts on the notion of ethics. The Alligator River story may be used to illustrate this notion.
4. The assigned readings are explored each in turn, with discussion of the major ideas contained in each chapter. Examples from personal experience are elicited to make the ideas concrete.
5. Class discussion of the writing assignment on Solomon’s article “It’s Good Business.”
6. Discussion of examples of ethical issues in business taken from the personal experiences of class members.
7. Initial discussion of group project on the ethics of advertising (due Session 5).
SESSION 2

TO BE COMPLETED PRIOR TO THE SESSION:

1. Read Shaw & Barry,
   
   Part One: Chapter 3: Justice and Economic Distribution, pp. 112-160
   
   Part Two: *American Business and Its Basis*
   
   Chapter 4: The Nature of Capitalism, pp. 161-220
   
   Chapter 5: Corporations, pp. 222-289
   
   As you read these three chapters:
   
   a) use the “Key Concepts” in the *Study Corner* as guides for emphasis on important points.
      [p. 137 for Chapter 3; p. 185 for Chapter 4; and p. 247 for Chapter 5]
   
   b) apply your reading of each chapter to the Case Studies which follow it.
   
   c) assess the arguments in the Readings which follow the Case Studies.

2. Read Case 3.3 (pages 141-143) and respond to the 6 questions following the case study. Also, read Case 4.6 (pages 197-198) and answer the 5 questions at the end of that case study. The responses to the cases should not exceed 2 pages for each case, or a maximum of 4 pages for the entire assignment. The responses are to be typed, double-spaced, 12-font, proofread, and of publication quality. If some emergency prevents attendance at this class session, this assignment should be emailed to the instructor before or on the day of the class. This assignment will be graded and returned with feedback both on content and on composition.

3. Obtain and bring to class a corporate or professional code of ethics. This can be done in several ways: requesting one in person, consulting the index of books on corporate or professional ethics (codes are often reprinted as appendices), finding one on the internet and downloading it. One can “Google” to search for the code of professional ethics for a particular profession. This will not be handed in, but will be used as part of class discussion on the emergence of professional codes of ethics in the past several years.

4. Read the code you have obtained and assess it from your personal ethical perspective. Put your assessment into a one-page summary of the strengths and weaknesses of the document as you see it. (will not be turned in, but will be useful in the class discussion)

5. Be prepared to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the code in class.
SESSION 2

AMERICAN BUSINESS AND ITS BASIS

OUTCOMES

Upon completion of this session, the student will:

1. Encounter and analyze the different ethical theories concerning the notion of a fair/just distribution of economic resources.

2. Understand the features of, philosophical justifications for, and criticisms of, capitalism and how it differs from other economic systems.

3. Explain the complex reality of a modern corporation, especially with respect to the issue of the ethical responsibilities of a corporation from both the narrow and broad points of view.

4. Identify moral strengths and weaknesses of present-day corporations as they present themselves to us by their activities.

ACTIVITIES

1. Discussion of the major issues in the assigned chapters of the text, including: the major ethical theories of just economic distribution; the key features of capitalism; justifications and criticisms of capitalism; and, the notions of corporate moral agency and responsibility in both their narrow and broad forms.

2. Pair-share comparing and contrasting the codes of ethics that each has obtained.

3. Large group discussion on the various similarities and differences highlighted in the “pairs” sharing.

4. Large group discussion of E.F. Schumacher’s “Buddhist Economics” (pp. 185-189) focusing on the ways in which capitalism can be better understood by seeing it in contrast to a very different approach to economics.

5. Discussion of class members’ personal experiences of capitalism, as well as any experiences of a different economic system.

6. Class discussion of the format of the quiz (Week 3) covering chapters 1-5 in the textbook. The quiz could assume a multiple choice format, a short answer format, or a combination of multiple choice and short answer questions.
SESSION 3

TO BE COMPLETED PRIOR TO THE SESSION:

1. Read Shaw & Barry, **Part Four: The Organization and the People in It**
   
   Chapter 8: The Workplace (1): Basic Issues, pp. 414-470
   
   Chapter 9: The Workplace (2): Today’s Challenges, pp. 472-534

   As you read these two chapters:
   
   a) use the “Key Concepts” list in the Study Corner to assist you in identifying important ideas. [p. 441 for Chapter 8; and, p. 497 for Chapter 9]
   
   b) apply your reading of each chapter to the case studies which follow it.
   
   c) assess the arguments in the Readings which follow the case studies

2. Prepare for a quiz on chapters 1-5. This will be best done by reviewing the key concepts from chapters 1-5 as well as your own personal notes taken in class on these chapters.
SESSION 3
THE WORKPLACE

OUTCOMES

After completing this session the student will have competency to:

1. explain the basic ethical issues of the workplace, including questions of civil liberties, personnel policies and procedures, and the role of unions in the U.S. economic system.

2. articulate the challenges that one can expect to encounter in today’s workplace, including personal privacy issues, questions of what personal information is appropriate to the company and how that information is obtained, issues surrounding working conditions, and the question of how the workplace will look in the 21st century.

3. identify areas of ethical concern in her own workplace and respond when it is appropriate

4. assume a leadership role in recognizing potential ethical problems in the workplace and assist others in coming to effective and appropriate solutions

ACTIVITIES

1. Class takes a quiz covering the material from chapters 1-5 in the textbook.

2. The facilitator leads a communal conversation on the various issues studied in the reading assignment including civil liberties, personnel policies and procedures, challenges to personal privacy, and working conditions.

3. Large group discussion of personal experiences of students who may have had their privacy challenged by a potential or actual employer.


5. Large group discussion of the results of the small group discussions.

6. Class discussion of the treatment of these ethical issues in recent or current movies and/or novels. Sharing of this information among all in the class.
SESSION 4

TO BE COMPLETED PRIOR TO THE SESSION:

1. Read Shaw & Barry, **Part Four**: *The Organization and the People in It*

   Chapter 10: Moral Choices Facing Employees, pp. 536-605

   Chapter 11: Job Discrimination, pp. 606-657

As you read these two chapters:

   a) use the “Key Concepts” list in the *Study Corner* to assist you in identifying important ideas.
      [p. 561 for Chapter 10; and, p. 629 for Chapter 11]

   b) apply your reading of each chapter to the case studies which follow it.

   c) assess the arguments in the Readings which follow the case studies

2. Depending on the particular syllabus for the course, obtain (rent or borrow from public library) and View one of the following movies: *The Insider, A Civil Action,* or *Erin Brockovich.* Write a two-page critical analysis of the movie based on your reading and comprehension of the textbook concerning the issue of whistle blowing (see especially pages 553-561). This analysis paper is a project governed by the typical criteria for written assignments in the course (typed, double-spaced, 12-font, proofread) and will be handed in for feedback and assessment. Note well: the paper is **not** to be a “plot summary” of the movie, but an analysis of the ethics of whistle blowing as depicted in the actions of the movie’s main character(s). Our textbook’s discussion of whistle blowing provides the perspective for your analysis.

3. Search through several magazines and or newspapers for advertisements that trigger a response within that causes you to wonder whether these advertisements are ethically appropriate or not. Find and bring to class 2-3 ads for discussion. If possible, make 3 copies of the ads to be distributed to your group members with whom you will work on this project.
SESSION 4

MORAL CHOICES FACING EMPLOYEES

OUTCOMES

Upon completing this session, the student will:

1. recognize actual and potential conflicts of interests which may put an employee’s personal interests into conflict with the interests of the company.

2. understand the various moral dimensions involved in a situation which might involve whistle blowing by oneself or by another, and argue effectively whether whistle blowing would or would not be morally appropriate.

3. identify situations in which job discrimination and/or sexual harassment is occurring and take the appropriate steps to help resolve those situations when possible.

ACTIVITIES

1. Class discussion of the major issues addressed by the reading assignment, including: conflict of interest situations, obligations to third parties, whistle blowing, facts concerning job discrimination, affirmative action, and sexual harassment.

2. Small group discussion of the various movies viewed from the perspective of the issue of whistle blowing and its moral appropriateness.

3. Large group discussion of the insights gained in the small group discussions of the movies.

4. Option of viewing and/or discussing the movie Office Space.

5. Lottery selection of group membership. Group work on the “ethics and advertising” group project due Session 5. This group work will involve discussion of the various ads brought to class by the group members. This discussion will lead to a group decision concerning which one ad the group will use as its “text” for the final presentation and paper. In addition, the group members will need to decide among themselves how they will distribute the four ethical perspectives to be taken: Kant, Mill, Rawls, and Libertarianism. Each member of the group must take a different perspective. It will be up to the group to make these decisions.
SESSION 5

TO BE COMPLETED PRIOR TO THE SESSION:

1. Read Shaw & Barry, **Part Three: Business and Society**
   
   - Chapter 6: Consumers, pp. 292-363
   - Chapter 7: The Environment, pp. 364-411

   As you read these two chapters:
   
   a) use the “Key Concepts” list in the *Study Corner* to assist you in identifying important ideas.
      [ p. 326 for Chapter 6; and p. 387 for Chapter 7 ]
   
   b) apply your reading of each chapter to the case studies which follow it.
   
   c) assess the arguments in the Readings which follow the case studies.

2. Formally prepare your part of the group project on “ethics and advertising.” This involves the preparation and submission of a two-page paper written from the perspective of one of the major traditions of ethics which we have studied in the course (Kant, Mill, Rawls, Libertarianism). The textbook material on the ethics of advertising (pages 313-326) should be integrated into your analysis of the advertisement. This paper will serve as the basis for a verbal presentation given by each group concerning the specific piece of advertising selected by the group. The paper will then be handed in. Both the verbal presentation as well as the written paper will be assessed according to the criteria in the syllabus.

3. Prepare a one-page assessment of learning which reflects back over the course and focuses on: (1) areas of growth in learning, and (2) areas where you wish to pursue additional learning in this subject.
SESSION 5

BUSINESS AND SOCIETY

OUTCOMES

Upon completion of this session, the student is expected to:

1. understand the multiple dimensions of ethical issues surrounding product safety, the moral responsibility of business in product safety, and the ethical aspects of advertising.

2. explain the relationship between business and the environment, highlighting the various perspectives taken concerning the ethical responsibility of business for the environment.

3. identify situations where inappropriate damage is being done to the environment by a business and initiate appropriate responses to these situations.

4. assume a leadership position in the education of others concerning the relationship of business and the environment.

5. assess advertisements from an ethical point of view and share these assessments with others.

ACTIVITIES

1. Class discussion on the assigned readings, with emphasis on the major ideas contained in each chapter. This discussion will include an exploration of the topics of: product safety, the responsibilities of business for product quality, the ethics of advertising, and the relationship of business and the environment.

2. The various small groups will make oral presentations concerning their respective topics concerning the ethics of advertising.

3. Each small group will elicit and respond to questions from the class concerning their topic.

4. Discussion of the following readings: “The Place of Nonhumans in Environmental Issues,” by Peter Singer (pp. 398-403) and “Business and Environmental Ethics” by W. Michael Hoffman (pp. 404-411).

5. Class discussion of insights developed and new questions raised by this course.

6. Completion of course and instructor evaluation forms.