TEACHING PORTFOLIO

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Teaching Statement

As an undergraduate, I was lucky enough to have wonderful teachers who introduced me to some of the knottiest questions of philosophy, showed me how to think deeply and rigorously about them, and, most importantly, to see both that thinking about these questions is worth doing and that *I* could do it. Now that I am a teacher myself, I want to give my students the same thing that I had when I was in their position, and I consequently regard teaching as one of the most important—and rewarding—parts of my work as a philosopher.

I have three high-level goals around which I organize my teaching. The first of my three goals is simply to help students develop the confidence and the motivation to do philosophy—inside the classroom and out of it. My second goal is to give students an understanding of a meaningful range of important philosophical questions, views, and arguments surrounding the course topic. Finally, my third goal is to help students develop a range of important content-neutral critical skills which I think of as a philosophical toolkit. The relevant skills include the ability to read difficult texts with comprehension; the ability to understand, explain, and evaluate arguments and claims from these text orally and in writing; the ability to formulate, present, and defend one's own views; the ability to engage fruitfully in philosophical discussion and debate with others; and the ability to think through novel cases and issues in a philosophical way. Developing these skills is, in my view, essential if students are to become people who can navigate, and productively participate in, an open, democratic society.

When I design my courses, my focus is always on giving students the structure and support required to realize these goals. In particular, I design my courses to help students build skills and understanding over time without getting overwhelmed. For example, most students in introductory courses are not used to having to critically engage with and challenge course material. I therefore generally begin by having them practice these skills with low-stakes classroom activities like they-say-

I-say exercises in which students have to identify a possible objection to a claim and then a response to that objection. Next, I have them do quizzes and short assignments which require, at least in part, some degree of critical engagement with particular arguments and ideas (by identifying plausible objections, for instance). Finally, I give them a larger assignment that is primarily focused on this sort of critical engagement, as well as another essay which combines critical and expository elements.

In the classroom, I emphasize active learning. While lectures play an important role in my classroom, I make sure to balance them with a range of small-group activities meant to push them to practice the skills I want them to develop and to engage with the material in an active and collaborative way. In any given class, I might ask students to discuss and answer a set of review questions, complete the they-say-I-say exercise I mentioned earlier, or analyze a particular passage. Beyond these small-group discussion activities, I also structure my lectures in order to leave space for class-wide discussions. I have found that emphasizing discussion in this way also keeps students invested in the material and the course by making them feel like active participants rather than passive receptacles for information. More mundanely, it also helps keep students alert and focused. Since the classes I have thus far taught have primarily been long, evening classes, this is something I think about a lot!

For my major assessments, I primarily rely on a mixture of in-class essays and exams, shorter quizzes, and take-home writing assignments (depending on the course). Some of my assignments are meant test effective understanding of the course material and critical skills, particularly the ability to evaluate and critically engage with arguments. Others require them to *apply* the ideas and arguments we have been discussing, and philosophical thinking more generally, in different ways. For instance, in my intro to ethics I had my students select an ethically difficult scenario or problem from a story (either a news story or a fictional story) and write a short paper analyzing it.

With my assessments, I try to provide my students with detailed feedback which engages with their work in a meaningful way. For smaller courses, I also generally require students to meet with me and discuss their papers in order to give this feedback in a more direct way. Since these meetings require students to understand and answer questions about what they wrote, it is a useful way of discouraging AI plagiarism. Indeed, this is one of the measures that has allowed me to keep using take-home essays in some classes.

Deeply engaging with student work also serves to show my students that I take their work seriously, which makes them see it as more than just another essay they have to turn in to get a grade. Indeed, part of what made me want to start studying philosophy as an undergraduate was a professor who took my work seriously in this way. This approach to feedback reflects my more general approach to getting students engaged. I frame my courses so that students see themselves as participants in a series of ongoing philosophical dialogues—with me, their classmates, and even the philosophers we are reading. Furthermore, I work to make students feel that it is worth participating in these dialogues: that their contributions will be taken seriously and that through them we can all make progress on figuring out what to think. I have had a great deal of success in creating a high level of student investment with this approach. To give an example I am particularly proud of, in the intro to ethics course I taught in the spring, I had several students who would regularly stay behind at the end of a two-and-a-half-hour class—one that ends at 8:30—to ask questions about the material and about other philosophical issues!

Teaching, like philosophy, is always a work in progress. I have been quite successful thus far in my teaching—I regularly receive strong student evaluations, and I was recently nominated for my university's graduate teaching award (the Baranger prize)—but I am always looking for ways to further develop pedagogically. I am in the process of completing an optional certificate in pedagogy offered by my university and I previously attended a seminar on teaching philosophy for graduate students

organized by the American Association of Philosophy Teachers. Furthermore, I regularly reevaluate, and if needed revise, my pedagogical practices to ensure they are aligned with my overall goals. To give a concrete example, I want students to leave my classroom with the ability to read and comprehend difficult texts. When I first began teaching, I would simply assign such texts with the assumption that students could work their way through the texts and that this practice would serve to hone the relevant ability. However, many students found this quite daunting and did not do the reading or did it without getting much out of it. Thus, I now dedicate class time to discussing how to read philosophy and working with students to break down difficult passages in class, and supply them with reading guides for harder pieces.

I think this kind of reevaluation and adaptation is particularly important in light of the emergence of generative AI. Last summer I worked as an intern for the GAINS program, an initiative in Pitt's School of Arts and Sciences focused on AI in higher education, which gave me an opportunity to think about how we should approach this issue. Like many of us, I worry about students using AI tools to offload important cognitive work. I have thus developed several measures to prevent inappropriate uses of AI on my core assignments. I have also written (in blog form) about responsible ways to use AI detection in the classroom. However, I think that AI also has promise if used in a thoughtful, critical way, and I have been working on developing assignments that encourage students to use AI in this way, including AI-assisted Socratic dialogues.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement

As an instructor, I am committed to building an inclusive classroom that respects, appreciates, and fosters diversity. All of my teaching to date has been at the University of Pittsburgh, a large, semi-public research university whose students come from a wide range of ethnicities, social classes, and religious backgrounds, and include international students, neurodivergent students, and students from non-traditional backgrounds such as veterans and first-generation college students. In one important sense, then, diversity is simply a fact of life for any instructor at an institution like Pitt. I care about building an inclusive classroom because it is the only way to do justice to the students actually in front of me.

In my view, an inclusive classroom is one in which all students feel like respected and valued members of an intellectual community, and in light of that, are able to participate fully in our shared activity of studying philosophy. In my teaching, I do several things to create such a classroom.

First, I try to show students that I am there to support them, regardless of their background. This means, among other things, demonstrating flexibility and accommodating the different needs and circumstances that students bring with them. For instance, I require attendance for my classes, but I allow students to make up absences by coming into my office hours to discuss the relevant material. I've found that this approach helps accommodate the needs of students with jobs or other responsibilities while still making sure they keep up in class. Second, I try to make students feel free to express their own views with confidence that their contributions will be taken seriously by me and by their classmates. It is, in my view, part of my job as a teacher to model this kind of engagement for students: to show them, through my own conduct, how one takes an interlocutor's view seriously even when challenging it. I also try to make clear that the particular perspective a student brings to the class adds something to our collective inquiry. No student should feel that they have to hide who

they are, or what they actually think, in order to do well in my class or be respected by me or their peers. Third, I emphasize that disagreement should be conducted civilly and charitably (and, again, I try to model this kind of disagreement). Fourth, I work to create a genuine sense of camaraderie in the classroom. I do this partly through structure: I regularly have students work together in pairs or small groups, and I rotate group composition so that they work with a range of different classmates over the course of a semester. I also often frame whole-class discussion not as a series of individual performances but as a collaborative effort—we are, through our discussions, trying to figure out what a text or argument is really saying and what we think about it.

My evaluations provide good evidence for the effectiveness of these practices: in my last two in-person classes, students, on average, rated their agreement with the statement "the instructor creates an inclusive learning environment for all students" at 4.61 and 4.67 (out of five).

This emphasis on inclusivity should not be taken to mean that my goal is to keep students comfortable. Teaching philosophy well requires challenging students and pushing them to take up unfamiliar or uncomfortable questions and to engage seriously with people (including classmates) with whom they disagree. But I think that being challenged is entirely compatible with feeling that one belongs. Indeed, I think students are more willing to take intellectual risks when they trust that they are respected as members of the class regardless of their particular position.

Beyond ensuring that students from diverse backgrounds feel included and respected, I also think it is important to actively foster diversity of thought, since genuine engagement with different perspectives is necessary to do philosophy well. One way I try to do this is through course design. I have always ensured that students in my courses are exposed to different ways of doing philosophy and, more generally, thinking through hard questions. More recently, I have also been trying to diversify my syllabi further by including work from outside the traditional canon dominant in mainstream analytic philosophy courses. My recently designed syllabus for Introduction to Political

Philosophy, for instance, includes readings from feminist, African-American, and Confucian perspectives, alongside more canonical texts, so that students encounter political questions being asked and answered from more than one vantage point. A second way I foster diversity of thought is the one already described above: creating a classroom atmosphere in which students feel able to contribute on the basis of their own distinctive perspectives and experiences.

Summary of Teaching Experience

As Teaching Assistant:

- **Concepts of Human Nature (Fall 2020)**: This was a large introductory course covering aspects of the thought of Plato, Hobbes, Marx, Rousseau, and Freud and how they draw on, and defend, ideas about human nature. The course was taught online as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. I was responsible for 3 sections of twenty students each.
- **Intro to Philosophical Problems (Spring 2021)**: This was a large introductory course covering a range of major problems in various fields of philosophy (the mind-body problem, personal identity, free will, etc.). The course was taught online as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. I was responsible for 3 sections of twenty students each.
- **Introduction to Ancient Greek Philosophy (Fall 2021)**: This was a large introductory course covering ancient Greek philosophy. I taught the special four-credit writing-intensive sections of the course (there were two sections, 16 students each). This role involved designing and implementing, in collaboration with the primary instructor (Jacob Rosen), the special writing assignments required for the students to get the writing credit and running a weekly session focused on writing alongside the standard discussion/review session.
- **Introduction to Ethics (Spring 2022; Spring 2024):** This was a large introductory course covering ethics. I taught the special four-credit writing-intensive sections of the course (there were two sections, 16 students each). This role involved designing and implementing, in collaboration with the primary instructor (Michael Thompson), the special writing assignments required for the students to get the writing credit and running a weekly session focused on writing alongside the standard discussion/review session.

As Instructor of Record:

- **Concepts of Human Nature (Summer 2024):** This was a small (16-student) online course. It was taught 3 days a week over six weeks. I designed the syllabus for the course, which focused on the role of human nature in the ethical thought of several historical thinkers (Plato, Hume, Aristotle, Kant, etc.) and ongoing debates about the ideas associated with these thinkers.
- **Social Philosophy: Identity, Diversity, and the Multicultural Society (Fall 2024):** This was a small (16-student) in-person course. It met twice a week. I designed the syllabus for the course, which covered a range of issues in ethics and social and political philosophy connected to diversity, multiculturalism, and social identity.

- **Introduction to Biomedical Ethics (Fall 2025):** This was a midsized in-person course. It met once a week. I designed the syllabus for the course, which covered a range of core issues in bioethics.
- **Introduction to Ethics (Spring 2026):** This was a midsized in-person course. It met once a week. I designed the syllabus. It was most heavily focused on debates in normative ethics (particular debates between consequentialists and deontologists) but it also covered some metaethics and several applied questions (euthanasia, abortion, eating meat).
- **Concepts of Human Nature: Human Morality (Summer 2026):** This was a small (16-student) online course. It met twice a week and lasted six weeks. I designed the syllabus, which covered a range of issues at the intersection of psychology and morality.

Evidence of Teaching Effectiveness

Below I have reproduced some quantitative and qualitative evidence that highlights my strengths as a teacher. Most of this material is from my evaluations. The full evaluations from my two most recent in-person courses can be found at the end of this portfolio. A packet with complete teaching evaluations from all of my courses, except for the online course I taught over this summer (because of a recent change in how surveys are collected, which confused many students (and myself), the response rate for that course was negligible) can be found on my website.

Quantitative Evidence

	Introduction to Ethics (Phil 0300), Spring 2026			Introduction to Biomedical Ethics (Phil 0360), Fall 2025		
Question	Response Rate	Mean (out of 5)	Median	Response Rate	Mean (out of 5)	Median
I learned a lot from this course.	16/31	4.56	5	23/34	4.3	4
The instructor treated students with respect.	16/31	4.75	5	23/34	4.78	5
The instructor created an atmosphere that kept me engaged in course content.	16/31	4.44	4.5	23/34	4	4
The instructor was prepared for class	16/31	4.38	4.5	23/34	4.26	4
The instructor was available to me (in-person, electronically, or both).	15/31	4.73	5	21/34	4.71	5
The instructor evaluated my work fairly.	15/31	4.67	5	23/34	4.35	5
The instructor provided feedback that was helpful to me	15/31	4.6	5	23/34	4.35	5
Overall of all questions		4.59			4.39	

Qualitative Evidence

Below you can find two lists of selected comments from students which I think highlight my strengths as an instructor particularly well. Comments in the first list are drawn from evaluations. All of these comments are responses to the question "what did you like about how this course was taught?" and are reproduced in entirety. Comments in the second list are excerpts from correspondence with students and reproduced with their permission.

Selected Comments from Evaluations

"Overall, I thought the instructor did a really good job. I felt that he explained things well to the class and I liked that he encouraged class participation and group discussion. I thought the reading assignments were appropriate. I found it helpful to be able to read comments from other classmates, and I thought the amount of readings that we were required to comment on was very fair. I thought the exams and quizzes represented what we had been learning well, and I liked it when a study guide/ key topics were provided before the exams/ quizzes." (from Introduction to Ethics, Spring 2026)

"I really liked the range of topics we went over, it felt like a very holistic teaching of ethics. Furthermore, during class we went over the readings in an effective way and were given handouts to support our understanding. When writing essays, I received a lot of useful feedback and could easily access my professor to talk or ask questions. I appreciated also how engaged and passionate my professor was in the course." (from Introduction to Ethics, Spring 2026)

"Very discussion based by Professor created an atmosphere that prevented debates from being tense or uncomfortable. Each concept/theory was thoroughly discussed and interesting—he seems perfect for teaching this kind of class and does an amazing job making it intriguing." (from Introduction to Ethics, Spring 2026)

"I appreciated the class discussions, as well as his willingness to stay after class to answer questions and talk about content. I also enjoyed a lot of the assigned readings as I thought he put a lot of effort into choosing interesting texts that had a lot of overlap in material/content." (from Introduction to Ethics, Spring 2026)

"I really like how engaging the lectures were. The class days were very long, so having it split up into half lecture, half application groupwork was not only very helpful for understanding content, but kept you engaged during the long hours into the night time." (from Introduction to Biomedical Ethics, Fall 2025)

"I really enjoyed how the course allows discussion and debate, and he does a great job of encouraging and keeping it civil." (from Introduction to Biomedical Ethics, Fall 2025)

"The content all fit together into a very cohesive class; every new "unit" applied to all the others and built upon the previous ones." (from Introduction to Biomedical Ethics, Fall 2025)

“I liked how the readings were reviewed in class and allowed for open discussions afterward. I also liked that the slides were published. I liked how Prfessor[sic] Gabriel helped us with the essays through workshops and comments. Having some space in the gradebook for essay 1 revisions was nice too” (from Social Philosophy, Fall 2024)

From Private Correspondence

“[T]hanks for being such a great professor this semester, your class helped me to spend more time thinking about the deeper things of life which I've struggled to find the time to do while at Pitt, yet I value doing so very deeply, so really thank you very much for being a great professor and encouraging me to do what I love, even if you didn't realize it! Also thanks for indulging my conversations after class, I hope we get the chance to chat again sometime.” (from Introduction to Ethics, Spring 2026)

“I also wanted to ensure I mentioned to you how much I enjoyed your class. I think that - especially for never having taught the specific course before - you taught the class very thoroughly and clearly displayed a very extensive understanding of the course material & philosophy in general. While it is true that this is, after all, your specialty... what I mean more so is that I always felt I could approach you with any questions/concerns with the knowledge that you would have offered a thoughtful response. I really appreciate the effort you put into lectures, from your presentations to the patience you had in explaining the concepts we discussed, which - while familiar on a fundamental level to mostly everyone in the class - were presented in a way most of us had never really seen before (very enduring, redundant texts detailing unusually strong opinions on topics most people infrequently consider using very specific terminology).” (from Social Philosophy, Fall 2024)

Courses I am Prepared to Teach

Below is a list of the courses I am prepared to teach, divided into courses which I have already designed and courses which I plan to develop. Courses marked with an asterisk have a syllabus in the sample syllabi section of this portfolio. The syllabi for all other designed courses are available upon request.

Designed Courses

Introductory:

- Introduction to Ethics*
- Introduction to Biomedical Ethics*
- Symbolic Logic
- Introduction to Political Philosophy
- Digital Ethics/Ethics and Emerging Technologies

Upper-Division

- Moral Psychology*
- Liberalism, Diversity, and Social Identity

Courses in Development

Introductory

- Introduction to Philosophy
- Introduction to Ancient Greek Philosophy
- Environmental Ethics

Upper Division

- A course on Aristotle's practical philosophy
- A comparative course on early modern ethics (focused on Hobbes, Hume, and Kant)
- A course on love, partiality, and intimate relationships
- A course on sex, consent, and bodily autonomy

Sample Syllabi

Introduction to Biomedical Ethics

TBD

Instructor: Gabriel Vasquez-Peterson (GAV16@Pitt.edu)
Office: CL 1009B
Office Hours: TBD

Class Description

This course is an introduction to the ethical issues that arise in the context of medicine and health policy. Bioethics is a form of applied ethics, which means that it involves the application of general ethical theories, values, and considerations to particular issues that arise in clinical practice, research, policy-making, and other specific contexts. But this does not mean bioethics is simply a matter of top-down 'application' of pre-existing theoretical ethics. Oftentimes the particular issues we seek to address in bioethics shape our more general understanding of ethics. As such, the goal of this class is to introduce the central values, principles and approaches in bioethics AND examine these theoretical considerations in the context of particular bioethical issues like surrogate decision-making, euthanasia, and healthcare rationing.

This class is divided into four sections. In the first section, we will explore some of the basic features of bioethics, including the role of ethical theory in bioethics and the standard approaches to bioethics. In the second section, we will consider issues related to patient autonomy and decision-making, including philosophical questions about informed consent, competence, and surrogate decision-making. In the third section, we will consider some particular issues of life and death that arise in medical contexts: questions about procreation, abortion, and euthanasia. In the fourth section, we will consider what justice demands in regard to health and how we can fairly distribute scarce medical resources.

Course Objectives

This course has two broad objectives. The first is the development of content-specific understanding: understanding of the core concepts and debates in bioethics. The second is the development of a suite of content-neutral philosophical skills. These skills include the ability to comprehend and evaluate arguments and claims, the ability to apply concepts and arguments to novel contexts, the ability to formulate, present, and defend one's own views, and the ability to engage fruitfully with others. These two objectives are interrelated: you will develop these philosophical skills through engagement with course content. Thus, by the end of this class, you should be able to:

- Explain central concepts and theories in bioethics in your own words.
- Apply those concepts and theories to particular issues and cases.
- Explain what is at stake in the particular debates we will cover, and the different views in these debates, in your own words.

You should also see significant improvement in your ability to:

- Reason collaboratively and engage in productive discussion with others.
- Read, understand and explain analytically complex work.
- Interpret and evaluate the arguments and claims of others.
- Identify when ethical questions arise in medical and non-medical contexts.
- Make well-reasoned judgments about difficult questions.
- Express and defend your views in speech and writing.

Important Points

Announcements: I will primarily communicate with the class through canvas announcements. You are expected to keep up with these, so make sure you pay attention to canvas.

Reading: You are expected to have done the reading before the class we discuss it. So, a reading scheduled for the fourth week should be done before you come to class on that fourth week. I reserve the right to change readings if I feel it would be helpful, but I will always let you know more than a week in advance.

Emails: You can email me with administrative questions. I prefer not to answer substantive philosophical questions via email, since this is more effectively dealt with in office hours. You can address me as Gabriel or Mr. Vasquez-Peterson in your emails (I'm not a doctor—yet!). I try to respond to emails within 24 hours.

Office Hours: I will be accessible to answer any questions related to the course after class (if time permits), and during my office hours. If you can't make office hours, I'd be happy to schedule an alternative appointment. However, please try to email me 48 hours in advance of when you want to meet.

Discussion Etiquette: The subjects we will be discussing are complex and sensitive, and many of us have strong feelings about them. This is completely understandable and to a large extent a good thing. Yet I expect all of you to keep your minds open, and to evaluate opposing arguments and claims charitably, and to express your own position in a respectful way. This is particularly important in our in-class discussions. Even if you disagree with your classmates, you owe them respect. Balancing the value of civil contestation and debate with a concern for the sensitivities of others is difficult but it is essential in both the classroom and society at large. We'll discuss discussion etiquette more on the first day of class.

Speaking in Class: I understand that some people may feel uncomfortable speaking in class, especially when it comes to controversial topics. However, such discussions are a core part of this class, and of ethics more broadly, and thus participation in them is required by default. However, as I note in my explanation of your participation grade, I am willing to allow people to make up this portion of their participation grade through other means, if they reach out to me.

Assignments and Grade Breakdown

Attendance (7.5%): You are expected to regularly attend this course, and I will take attendance every day (except the first day). However, each of you may miss one day of class without it affecting your grade, for whatever reason. If you miss more, it will count against you unless you have a valid excuse you present to me ahead of time (excluding emergency situations, of course) and make up the absence by attending my office hours. However, this makeup must be completed within one week of the original absence (though I may make exceptions for special circumstances). I will also deduct points from your attendance grade if you arrive more than 15 minutes late or leave early without alerting me beforehand.

Participation (5%): This is a discussion-focused class, and you are expected to actively participate in class discussions and activities. Some of these discussions and activities will be class wide, but at least once every class I will also split you up into groups to analyze a particular case or argument and complete an activity based on it. Your participation grade will be based on my holistic assessment of your participation in the class, with a greater emphasis on participation in group discussions and activities.

Perusall Assignments (12.5%): These assignments are designed to promote active reading and develop your ability to understand and assess philosophical writing and are meant to be done while you do the reading. These assignments will be in Perusall, an online service (linked to canvas) which allows students to make annotations on a shared text. I will provide you with a handout explaining exactly what I expect for these assignments. **There will be twelve such assignments, one for each week of class starting in the second week (except for the week of the midterm), but I will only grade the best eight of your assignments. Thus, you only need to do eight (and you may choose which eight), though you can do more if you want to replace a grade you did not like**. This is designed to give you some flexibility with your class workload, as well as room for error. These assignments will be graded as unacceptable (0), poor (50), acceptable (75), or excellent (100). They are due by midnight the day before class. **Note that you may have to pay a small fee to access Perusall.**

Quizzes (12.5%): Through the course of the semester, you will have four quizzes (though I will drop your lowest grade). These quizzes will be based only on material we have already discussed in class. These quizzes are meant to ensure that you are keeping up with the class material. I will tell you that a quiz is coming up the week before that quiz and let you know what that quiz will cover. If you have to miss a day on which there will be a quiz, I will allow you to make that quiz up IF you let me know in advance about your absence (barring exceptional circumstances) and have a **good** reason for missing class.

Short Argumentative Paper (15%): For this assignment, you will have to respond to an argument. This involves very briefly explaining that argument, raising an objection to it, considering how a defender of that argument might respond to that objection, and ultimately determining whether that objection works, all in the space of 2-3 pages.

Case Analyses (15%): For these assignments, you will have to analyze a difficult case. This involves identifying the different values and concerns present in the case and the different courses of action

available, as well as choosing and defending a particular course of action. You will complete one part of each assignment collaboratively, in groups, and another part individually. You'll have some time to work on the group portion together in class. You will have to complete two of these assignments.

Midterm (15%): This is a pen-and-paper test that will be administered in class. It will have essay, short answer and some T/F or multiple-choice questions. I will give more details before the test.

Final Exam (17.5%): This is a pen-and-paper test that will be administered during finals week. I will give more details before the test.

Grading Policies

Grade Scale:

A	≥ 93	C	≥ 73
A-	≥ 90	C-	≥ 70
B+	≥ 87	D+	≥ 67
B	≥ 83	D	≥ 63
B-	≥ 80	D-	≥ 60
C+	≥ 77	F	< 60

(Note: I do not round up grades)

Lateness Policy: I will deduct 1/3 of a letter grade for every day a writing assignment is late (e.g., from B+ to B). I'm willing to give short (1-2 day) extensions with a reasonable excuse, but a longer extension will usually require a note from a doctor or a dean, or other appropriate paperwork. Reading assignments cannot be late.

Plagiarism: Any instance of cheating, including plagiarism, detailed in Pitt's academic integrity code (https://pitt.libguides.com/academicintegrity/) will result in a failing grade (F) for the course. You are responsible for reading the policy at the above web address and for knowing what counts as cheating and plagiarism, but if you are uncertain about some instance, feel free to ask me about it. Plagiarism includes the use of AI large language model tools like ChatGPT to write your paper (even if you make edits to the AI output). If you are uncertain if some use of an LLM counts as plagiarism, you are welcome to ask me.

Google Doc Policy: To prevent the use of LLMs and other forms of plagiarism, I require you to write your short papers in Google Docs so you can share that document with me with editor privileges and allow me to see the previous versions of the document if needed. This will allow me to see that you wrote your essay yourself, and it thus protects you from any suspicion of plagiarism. This is a required part of my assignments, and I reserve the right to give you a zero for the paper if you do not fulfill this requirement. If you have any concerns about this policy, I invite you to speak to me, as we may be able to come to an alternative arrangement. For this course, this policy applies to the evaluative paper and the case studies.

Paper Quizzes: You are expected to be able to explain and defend your writing if called upon. Thus, I reserve the right to give you an oral quiz on the contents of any of your take-home writing assignments. How you perform on this quiz will affect your grade on the writing assignment: poor performance will lead to point deductions, and a failure on the quiz will lead to a failing grade on the paper. If I believe you have plagiarized your paper, your performance on this quiz may also be used as evidence to demonstrate that you did not write your paper. Failure to sit for the quiz in a reasonable amount of time will also lead to a failing grade on the relevant writing assignment.

Blind Grading: I practice blind grading of writing assignments to avoid any possibility of bias. You should only put your student ID number on your assignments, and not your name.

Readings

Assigned Text: Bonnie Steinbock and Paul Menzel, *Bioethics: What Everyone Needs to Know*

This is an introductory text that covers the big questions and controversies of bioethics. I ask that you get the Perusall copy, which is less than five dollars to rent.

Other Readings: All other readings will be available via canvas. The schedule includes required readings, which you are expected to read, but also background readings, which provide useful context for the other readings but will not be the main focus of discussion and further readings for anyone who wishes to further explore a particular issue.

Schedule

Week 1: Syllabus; Discussion Etiquette; Introduction to Philosophy and Ethics

Optional Reading: James Rachels, "Can Ethics Provide Answers?"; Thomas Metcalfe, "What is Philosophy?"

Week 2: Bioethics and Ethical Theory

Reading: Selections from chapter 1 of *Bioethics*; Matthew Pianoalto, "W. D. Ross's Ethics of Prima Facie Duties"

Optional Reading: Shane Gronholz, "Consequentialism"; Andrew Chapman, "Kantian Deontology"; David Merry, "Virtue Ethics"; Spencer Case "Because God Says So" (All 1000-word philosophy)

Week 3: Distinctive Features of Bioethics

Background: Selections from chapter 1 of *Bioethics*; The Hippocratic Oath

Reading: Tom Beauchamp, "The Four Principles Approach to Healthcare Ethics" from *Standing on Principles*; Rosamond Rhodes, "Why not Common Morality?"

Optional Reading: Ezekiel and Linda Emanuel, "Four Models of the Patient-Physician Relationship"

Week 4: Autonomy, Paternalism, and Informed Consent

Quiz 1
Reading: Selections from chapter 2 of *Bioethics*; Atul Gawande, "Whose Body is it, Anyway?"; Sandeep Jauhar, "When Doctors Need to Lie"; Onora O'Neill, "Some Limits of Informed Consent"
Optional Reading: David Archard, "Informed Consent: Autonomy and Self-Ownership"

Week 5: Autonomy and Decision-Making Capacity

Reading: Jennifer Hawkins, "Affect, Values and Problems Assessing Decision Making Capacity"; Mark Navin and Jason Wasserman, "Prudence, Preferences, and Power"
Optional Reading: Neil Levy, "Forced to be Free? Increasing Patient Autonomy by Constraining it"

Week 6: Advanced Directives and Surrogate Decision-Making

Quiz 2; Case Analysis Activity 1
Reading: Rebecca Dresser and John Robertson, "Quality of Life and Non-Treatment Decisions for Incompetent Patients"; "AI for Surrogate Decision-Making?!?" (GeriPal podcast)
Optional Reading: Norman Cantor, "On Avoiding Deep Dementia"; Daniel Brudney, "The Different Moral Bases of Patient and Surrogate Decision-Making"

Week 7: Euthanasia

Background: Selections from chapter 6 of *Bioethics*
Reading: Frances Kamm, "A Right to Choose Death?" (Sections I-IV); J. David Velleman, "Against the Right to Die"; Ian Austen, "Is choosing medically assisted death too easy in Canada?"
Optional Reading: Ronald Dworkin et. al., "Assisted Suicide: The Philosopher's Brief" (intro and conclusion); Velleman, "A Right to Self-Termination?"; Alexander Raikin, "No Other Options"

Week 8: Midterm

Week 9: Abortion

Reading: Judith Jarvis Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion"; Gina Schouten, "Fetuses, Orphans, and a Famous Violinist: On the Ethics and Politics of Abortion" (part 1 only)
Optional Reading: John Paul II, "The Unspeakable Crime of Abortion"; Don Marquis, "Why Abortion is Immoral"; Moira Stephens et al., "Religious Perspectives on Abortion and a Secular Response"

Week 10: Screening for Disability

Reading: Selections from chapter 8 of *Bioethics;* "The Next Parenting Trend Starts Before Conception" (Interesting Times Podcast); Jeff McMahan, "The Morality of Screening for Disability"
Optional Reading: Melody Petersen, "A startup says it helps parents pick healthier embryos. Experts say it's not that simple"; Julian Savulescu, "Procreative Beneficence: Why We Should Select the Best Children"; Rebecca Bennett, "The Fallacy of the Principle of Procreative Beneficence"

Week 11: Healthcare Justice and Rights to Health

Quiz 3
Background: WHO constitution
Reading: Selections from chapter 10 of *Bioethics*; Amartya Sen, "How and Why is Health a Right?"; Onora O'Neill, "The Dark Side of Human Rights"
Optional Reading: Norman Daniels, "Justice, Health and Healthcare"; Allan Buchanan, "The Right to a Decent Minimum of Health Care"; Nicole Hassoun, "The Human Right to Health"

Week 12: Health Disparities; Healthcare Rationing (Part I)

Case Analysis Activity 2
Reading: Dorothy Roberts, "Debating the cause of health disparities: implications for bioethics and racial equality"; Selections from Chapter 11 of *Bioethics*
Optional Reading: John Broome, "Fairness"

Week 13: Healthcare Rationing (Part II)

Quiz 4
Reading: Jack Harris, "QALYfying the value of a life" (with response); Govind Persad, Alan Wertheimer and Ezekiel Emanuel, "Principles for Allocation of Scarce Medical Interventions"; Daniela Lamas, "Who Deserves a Lifesaving Organ?"
Optional Reading: Ezekiel Emmanuel et al., "An Ethical Framework for Global Vaccine Allocation"; Yvonne Denier, "On Personal Responsibility and the Human Right to Healthcare"; Jin Park and Ben Davies, "Rationing, Responsibility and Vaccination During Covid-19"

Week 14: Student Choice—Organ Markets OR Human Enhancement

Reading: Gerald Dworkin, "Markets and Morals: the Case for Organ Sales"; Phil Cox and Donald Joralemon, "Body Values: The Case against Compensating for Transplant Organs"; Dylan Walsh, "Let People Sell Their Kidneys. It Will Save Lives." OR Julian Savulescu, "Genetic Interventions and The Ethics of Enhancement of Human Beings"; Michael Sandel, "The Case Against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering"
Optional Reading: Simon Rippon, "Imposing Options on People in Poverty"; Anya Adair and Stephen Wigmore, "Paid Organ Donations: The Case Against" OR Ingmar Persson and Julian Savulescu, "The Perils of Cognitive Enhancement and the Urgent Imperative to Enhance the Moral Character of Humanity"; Nick Bostrom, "Transhumanist Values"

General Philosophy Resources

Reading and Writing

- Jim Pryor's Guides to Reading and Writing Philosophy
- David Concepción on Reading as a Philosopher (We'll be talking about this a bit in class)
- Daniel Weltman's Glossary of Common Terms in Philosophy

Encyclopedias and Overviews

- The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy
- The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy
- Philosophy Compass
- Crash Course Philosophy (Videos)

Other

- Minorities and Philosophy Resource Page
- American Philosophical Organization Resources for Undergraduates

Disability Services

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both me and the Office of Disability Resources and Services, 140 William Pitt Union, 412-648-7890, as early as possible in the term. Disability Resources and Services will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

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Introduction to Ethics

Instructor: Gabriel Vasquez-Peterson (GAV16@Pitt.edu)
Office: CL 1009B
Office Hours: TBD

Course Description

This course is an introduction to philosophical ethics. Ethics, as a discipline, engages with questions about what we should do and how we should live. In philosophical ethics, we find several distinct traditions which all purport to provide systematic answers to these questions and, ultimately, a more-or-less unified theory of the moral domain. This class will be devoted primarily to investigating some of the main traditions in analytic ethics. However, we will also directly engage with debates over particular issues, including abortion and the ethics of eating meat. In so doing, we will be able to think more about the complex relation between ethical theory and the pressing, difficult problems we face as we try to live well, in various senses of the term.

It is also worth noting that you will not only be learning about ethics. This course is also meant to provide you with an introduction to core elements of philosophical methodology, particularly the construction and analysis of rigorous arguments.

Course Objectives

This course has two broad objectives. The first is the development of content-specific understanding: understanding of the core concepts and debates the class covers. The second is the development of a suite of content-neutral philosophical skills. These skills include the ability to comprehend and evaluate arguments and claims, the ability to apply concepts and arguments to novel contexts, the ability to formulate, present, and defend one's own views, and the ability to engage fruitfully with others. These two objectives are interrelated: you will develop these philosophical skills through engagement with course content.

Thus, by the end of this class, you should be able to:

- Explain central concepts and theories in ethics and moral philosophy in your own words.
- Explain what is at stake in the debates we will cover, and the different views in these debates, in your own words.
- Recognize when ethical questions arise in everyday life.

You should also see significant improvement in your ability to:

- Reason collaboratively and engage in productive discussion with others.
- Read and understand analytically complex work.
- Interpret and evaluate the arguments and claims of others.
- Come to well-reasoned judgments about difficult questions.
- Express and defend your views in speech and writing.

Important Points

Announcements: I will primarily communicate with the class through canvas announcements. You are expected to keep up with these, so make sure you pay attention to canvas.

Reading: You are expected to have done the reading before the class we discuss it. So, a reading scheduled for the fourth week should be done before you come to class on that fourth week. I reserve the right to change readings if I feel it would be helpful, but I will always let you know more than a week in advance.

Emails: You can email me with administrative questions. I prefer not to answer substantive philosophical questions via email, since this is more effectively dealt with in office hours. You can address me as Gabriel or Mr. Vasquez-Peterson in your emails (I'm not a doctor—yet!). I try to respond to emails within 24 hours.

Office Hours: I will be accessible to answer any questions related to the course after class (if time permits), and during my office hours. If you can't make office hours, I'd be happy to schedule an alternative appointment. However, please try to email me 48 hours in advance of when you want to meet.

Discussion Etiquette: The subjects we will be discussing are complex and sensitive, and many of us have strong feelings about them. This is completely understandable and to a large extent a good thing. Yet I expect all of you to keep your minds open, and to evaluate opposing arguments and claims charitably, and to express your own position in a respectful way. This is particularly important in our in-class discussions. Even if you disagree with your classmates, you owe them respect. Balancing the value of civil contestation and debate with a concern for the sensitivities of others is difficult but it is essential in both the classroom and society at large. We'll discuss discussion etiquette more on the first day of class.

Speaking in Class: I understand that some people may feel uncomfortable speaking in class, especially when it comes to controversial topics. However, such discussions are a core part of this class, and of ethics more broadly, and thus participation in them is required by default. However, as I note in my explanation of your participation grade, I am willing to allow people to make up this portion of their participation grade through other means, if they reach out to me.

Assignments and Grade Breakdown

Attendance (7.5%): You are expected to regularly attend this course, and I will take attendance every day (except the first day and the day of the midterm). However, each of you may miss one day of class without it affecting your grade, for whatever reason. If you miss more, it will count against you unless you have a valid excuse you present to me ahead of time (excluding emergency situations, of course) and make up the absence by attending my office hours. However, this makeup must be completed within one week of the original absence (though I am willing to make exceptions for special circumstances). I will also count you as absent if you arrive more than 15 minutes late or leave early without clearing it with me beforehand.

Participation (5%): This is a discussion-focused class, and you are expected to actively participate in class discussions and activities. Some of these discussions and activities will be class wide, but at least once every class I will also split you up into groups to analyze a particular case or argument and complete an activity based on it. Your participation grade will be based on my holistic assessment of your participation in the class. If you participate in group activities and do not engage in any disruptive or disrespectful behavior during class (i.e. having conversations during lecture, being rude to fellow students), you are guaranteed at least a B+ for your participation grade. To get an A, you should regularly participate in whole-class discussions OR fix an alternative way of fulfilling the participation requirements with me. Coming to my office hours or going above and beyond with your Perusall assignments are both possible ways of getting participation points, but you should speak with me beforehand to know exactly what you have to do.

Perusall Assignments (10%): These assignments are designed to promote active reading and develop your ability to understand and assess philosophical writing and are meant to be done while you do the reading. These assignments will be in Perusall, an online service (linked to canvas) which allows students to make annotations on a shared text. I will provide you with a handout explaining exactly what I expect for these assignments. **There will be twelve such assignments, one for each week of class starting in the second week (except for the week of the midterm), but I will only grade the best six of your assignments. Thus, you only need to do six (and you may choose which six), though you can do more if you want to replace a grade you did not like**. This is designed to give you some flexibility with your class workload, as well as room for error. These assignments will be graded as unacceptable (0), poor (50), acceptable (75), or excellent (100). They are due by midnight the day before class. **Note that you may have to pay a small fee to access Perusall.**

Comprehension Quizzes (15%): Through the course of the semester, you will have five quizzes (though I will drop the lowest grade). These quizzes will be based only on material we have already discussed in class. These quizzes are meant to ensure that you are keeping up with the class material. I will tell you that a quiz is coming up the week before that quiz and let you know what that quiz will cover. If you have to miss a day on which there will be a quiz, I will allow you to make that quiz up IF you let me know in advance about your absence (barring exceptional circumstances) and have a good reason for it.

Ethics IRL Assignment (12.5%): For this assignment, you will find a piece of media (this can be fiction or a (recent) news article (but NOT an op-ed) that addresses an ethically significant issue and write a short (1-2 page) paper about it. You will then briefly meet with me to discuss this issue and your paper (barring special circumstances, you must meet with me within a week of submitting the assignment. **Different students will have different due dates for this paper depending on the group you are in. You can see the due dates for each group on the schedule, and the group you belong to on canvas.**

Midterm (15%): This is a pen-and-paper test that will be administered in class during the eighth week of class. It will involve a short essay, some short-answer questions, and some true/false questions. I will give more details before the test.

Short Argumentative Paper (15%): This is a take-home paper. For it, you must respond to and critically evaluate an argument from the course readings. This involves very briefly explaining that argument, raising an objection to it, considering how a defender of that argument might respond to that objection, and ultimately determining whether that objection works, all in the space of 2-3 pages. **After this paper is graded, I will give you a chance to boost your grade on this assignment by writing a short paper evaluating the paper in light of my feedback.**

In-class Final Essay (20%): For this assignment, you will have to write an in-class essay. I will give you some information on the topic beforehand to allow you to prepare before class. This will be the final for the class, and you will write it during the time scheduled for our final exam.

Grading Policies

Grade Scale:

A	≥ 93	C	≥ 73
A-	≥ 90	C-	≥ 70
B+	≥ 87	D+	≥ 67
B	≥ 83	D	≥ 63
B-	≥ 80	D-	≥ 60
C+	≥ 77	F	< 60

(Note: I do not round up grades)

Lateness Policy: I will deduct 1/3 of a letter grade for every day a writing assignment is late (e.g., from B+ to B). I'm willing to give short (1-2 day) extensions with a reasonable excuse, but a longer extension will usually require a note from a doctor or a dean, or other appropriate paperwork. Reading assignments cannot be late.

Plagiarism: Any instance of cheating, including plagiarism, detailed in Pitt's academic integrity code (https://pitt.libguides.com/academicintegrity/) will be dealt with according to university policy (which means, at minimum, failure on the relevant assignment). You are responsible for reading the policy at the above web address and for knowing what counts as cheating and plagiarism, but if you are uncertain about some instance, feel free to ask me about it. Plagiarism includes the use of AI large language model tools like ChatGPT to write your paper (even if you make edits to the AI output). If you are uncertain if some use of an LLM counts as plagiarism, you are welcome to ask me.

Google Doc Policy: To prevent the use of LLMs and other forms of plagiarism, **I require you to write your short papers in Google Docs so you can share that document with me with editor privileges and allow me to see the previous versions of the document if needed.** This will allow me to see

that you wrote your essay yourself, and it thus protects you from any suspicion of plagiarism. This is a required part of my assignments, and I reserve the right to give you a zero for the paper if you do not fulfill this requirement. If you have any concerns about this policy, I invite you to speak to me, as we may be able to come to an alternative arrangement. For this course, this policy applies to the evaluative paper and the ethics IRL assignment.

Paper Quizzes: You are expected to be able to explain and defend your writing if called upon. Thus, I reserve the right to give you an oral quiz on the contents of any of your take-home writing assignments. How you perform on this quiz will affect your grade on the writing assignment: poor performance will lead to point deductions, and a failure on the quiz will lead to a failing grade on the paper. If I believe you have plagiarized your paper, your performance on this quiz may also be used as evidence to demonstrate that you did not write your paper. Failure to sit for the quiz in a reasonable amount of time will also lead to a failing grade on the relevant writing assignment.

Blind Grading: I practice blind grading of writing assignments to avoid any possibility of bias. You should only put your student ID number on your assignments, and not your name.

Readings and Schedule

All readings will be made available through canvas.

Week 1: Introductions

Required Reading: Syllabus; Introduction to the Course; Ethical Theorizing
Optional Readings: Thomas Metcalfe, "What is Philosophy?"

Week 2: Argumentation; Reading Philosophy; Subjectivism and Relativism

Required Reading: James Rachels, "Can Ethics Provide Answers?"; Anthony Weston, "Short Arguments: Some General Rules" from *A Rulebook for Arguments*
Optional Reading: Jim Pryor, "Philosophical Arguments"; Mary Midgley, "Trying out One's New Sword"; Jim Pryor, "Guidelines for Reading Philosophy"

Week 3: Argumentation; Moral Realism; Religion and Ethics

Required Reading: Thomas Metcalfe, "Ethical Realism"; Spencer Case, "Because God Says So"; Thomas Metcalfe, "Arguments"
Optional Reading: Jeffrey Morgan, "Can We Have Ethics without Religion?" from *Introduction to Philosophy: Ethics*; Mustafa Aykol, "Where Islam and Reason Meet"; "Reasons for Divine Commands"; Michael Klenk, "Evolution and Ethics"; Anthony Weston, "Deductive Arguments" from *A Rulebook for Arguments*

Week 4: Utilitarianism

Quiz 1

Required Reading: J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Chapters 1 & 2)
Optional Reading: J. S. Mill, Utilitarianism (Chapter 3); James and Stuart Rachels, "The Utilitarian Approach" from *The Elements of Ethics*; Shane Gronholz, "Consequentialism and Utilitarianism"

Week 5: Utilitarianism

Ethics IRL assignment due for Group 1 by Friday
Required Reading: J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Chapter 4); Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"

Week 6: Critics of Utilitarianism

Quiz 2; Ethics IRL assignment due for Group 2 by Friday
Required Reading: Ursula Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas"; Bernard Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism" (selections)
Optional Reading: James and Stuart Rachels, "The Debate Over Utilitarianism" from *The Elements of Ethics;* Peter Railton, "Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality"; Robert Nozick, "The Experience Machine" from *The Examined Life*

Week 7: Absolutism and Deontology

Ethics IRL assignment due for Group 3 by Friday
Required Reading: Elizabeth Anscombe, "Mr. Truman's Degree"; James and Stuart Rachels, "Are There Absolute Moral Rules?" from *The Elements of Ethics*
Optional Reading: Thomas Nagel, "War and Massacre"

Week 8: Midterm

Week 9: Deontology and Absolutism; Other Approaches to Ethics

Ethics IRL assignment due for Group 4 by Friday; Short Essay Assigned
Required Reading: Philippa Foot, "Abortion and the Doctrine of Double Effect"; Onora O'Neill, "A Simplified Account of Kant's Ethics"
Optional Reading: Anthony Weston, "Extended Arguments" from *A Rulebook for Arguments*; Jim Pryor, "Guidelines for Writing Philosophy"; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (selections); Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (selections)

Week 10: Other Approaches to Ethics; Euthanasia

Quiz 3; Ethics IRL assignment due for Group 5 by Friday
Required Reading: Matthew Pianoalto, "W.D. Ross's Ethics of "Prima Facie" Duties"; David Merry, "Virtue Ethics"; David Velleman, "A Right to Self-Termination?"
Optional Reading: Kant, *Groundwork* (selections); Frances Kamm, "A Right to Choose Death?"; Rachels and Rachels, "Kant and Respect for Persons"

Week 11: Abortion

Short Essay due Sunday
Required Reading: Judith Jarvis Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion"; Gina Schouten, "Fetuses, Orphans, and a Famous Violinist: On the Ethics and Politics of Abortion" (selections)
Optional Reading: Don Marquis, "Why Abortion is Immoral"; Moira Stephens et al., "Religious Perspectives on Abortion and a Secular Response"; Rosalind Hursthouse, "Virtue Ethics and Abortion"

Week 12: Obedience and Political Obligation

Quiz 4
Required Reading: Plato, *Crito*; Martin Luther King Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail"
Optional Reading: Bernard Boxill, "Self-Respect and Protest"

Week 13: Eating Meat; The Good Life

Required Reading: Victor Kumar and Joshua May, "Eating Less Meat: in Defense of Reducetarianism"; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (selections)
Optional Reading: Cora Diamond, "Eating Meat and Eating People"; Tristram McPherson, "Why I am a Vegan (and You Should be, too)"; Nick Zangwill, "Our Moral Duty to Eat Meat"

Week 14: The Good Life

Quiz *5*
Required Reading: Susan Wolf, "The Meanings of Lives"

General Philosophy Resources

Reading and Writing

- Jim Pryor's Guides to Reading and Writing Philosophy
- David Concepción on Reading as a Philosopher
- Daniel Weltman's Glossary of Common Terms in Philosophy

Encyclopedias and Overviews

- The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy
- The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy
- Philosophy Compass
- Crash Course Philosophy (Videos)

Other

- Minorities and Philosophy Resource Page
- American Philosophical Organization Resources for Undergraduates

Disability Services

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Moral Psychology

Instructor: Gabriel Vasquez-Peterson (GAV16@Pitt.edu)
Office: CL 1009B
Office Hours: TBD

Course Description

This course is an introduction to some of the most important issues in the interdisciplinary field of moral psychology. Ethicists traditionally investigate abstract, normative questions: questions about our values and moral practices, about what we ought to do and how we ought to live. But, as we will see, these questions cannot be properly answered without consideration of our actual nature as agents with a particular kind of psychology. Thus, the goal of this class is to explore the connections between the mind (as we understand it) and ethics. We will do this by engaging with a range of questions that arise at the intersection of moral philosophy and psychology. For example: Are moral judgments emotional or rational in nature? What is the relationship between morality and well-being? What kind of moral significance do our emotions have? These questions are not new. As such, in this class we will read both work by modern philosophers (many of whom are informed by contemporary psychology) and selections from historical classics of ethics.

Course Objectives

This course has two broad objectives. The first is the development of content-specific understanding: understanding of the core concepts and debates the class covers. The second is the development of a suite of content-neutral philosophical skills. These skills include the ability to comprehend and evaluate arguments and claims, the ability to apply concepts and arguments to novel contexts, the ability to formulate, present, and defend one's own views, and the ability to engage fruitfully with others. These two objectives are interrelated: you will develop these philosophical skills through engagement with course content. Thus, by the end of this class, you should be able to:

- Explain central concepts and theories in moral psychology in your own words.
- Explain what is at stake in the debates we will cover, and the different views in these debates, in your own words.
- Recognize when empirical psychology raises philosophical issues, and vice-versa.

You should also see significant improvement in your ability to:

- Reason collaboratively and engage in productive discussion with others.
- Read and understand analytically complex work.
- Interpret and evaluate the arguments and claims of others.
- Come to well-reasoned judgments about difficult questions.
- Express and defend your views in speech and writing.

Assignments and Grade Breakdown

Attendance (5%): You are expected to regularly attend this course, and I will take attendance every day (except the first day). However, each of you may miss two days of class without it affecting your grade, for whatever reason. If you miss more, it will count against you unless you have a valid excuse you present to me ahead of time (excluding emergency situations, of course) and make up the absence by attending my office hours. I will also deduct points from your attendance grade if you arrive more than 15 minutes late.

Participation (5%): This is a discussion-focused class, and you are expected to actively participate in class discussions and activities. Some of these discussions and activities will be class-wide, but I will also regularly split you up into groups to complete an activity or discuss a particular issue or question. Your participation grade will be based on my holistic assessment of your participation in the class, with a greater emphasis on participation in group discussions and activities.

Reading Assignments (15%): These assignments are designed to promote active reading and develop your ability to understand and assess philosophical writing and are meant to be done while you do the reading. These assignments will be in Perusall, an online service (linked to canvas) which allows students to make annotations on a shared text. I will provide you with a handout explaining exactly what I expect for these assignments. **There will be thirteen such assignments, one for each week of class starting in the second week, but I will only grade the best 9 of your assignments. Thus, you only need to do 9 (and you may choose which 9), though you can do more if you want to replace a grade you did not like**. This is designed to give you some flexibility with your class workload, as well as room for error. These assignments will be graded as unacceptable (0), poor (50), acceptable (75), or excellent (100). They are due by midnight the day before class. **Note that you may have to pay a small fee to access Perusall.**

In-Class Commentary (20%): Once during the semester, you will give a short (5-6 minute) presentation during class on an aspect or part of a reading you find particularly interesting (not the full reading). For this presentation, you will briefly explain/summarize the aspect of the reading you have chosen and then give some comments on it. These comments should be the main focus on the presentation. For them, you have broad latitude: you could critique the text/the aspect of it you are focusing on, raise further questions about it, apply it to a particular real-life issue or situations, or draw connections with other relevant material. The only requirement is that these comments represent engagement with the text that goes beyond mere summary. Since this is an upper-level course, I expect something which deeply engages with the relevant material. For your presentation, you are expected to use some kind of aid to present your work (a powerpoint, handout, etc.) After your presentation, you'll be expected to field questions from me and your peers. You will be graded on the quality of a) your presentation, b) your aid and c) your engagement with the questions and comments raised by myself and others. I will provide a rubric. **You will select the day on which you plan to present during our first week. One person presents per day. You are expected to meet with me no later than three days prior to your presentation** so we that we can coordinate and I can give you feedback and guidance. Reach out to me well in advance to schedule a meeting. You should come

to this meeting with a clear idea about what you will discuss, though you do not need to have all the specifics worked out.

Essay Workshop (2.5%): We will have an essay workshop on the 18th day of class (during week 9). To get a full grade for this, you will need to bring in a satisfactory plan and participate in the workshop.

Take-Home Essay (20%): This is a 5-7 page essay with an expository and an argumentative component. For it, you will be able to choose from several different prompts. This essay will primarily focus on specific texts and concepts from the class itself and not require further research beyond required class materials. It will be assigned at the end of week seven, and due on the Friday of week ten. Once I have graded the paper, you will have an opportunity to get some extra credit by writing a reflection on it.

Oral Review of Take-Home Essay (7.5%): After you submit your first essay, you will meet with me to discuss it. During this meeting, I will ask you a range of questions of questions about your essay and your arguments, present objections and ask how you might respond to them, and more generally offer you feedback. This meeting will function like a miniature version of a thesis defense, and it should last about 15-20 minutes. Your grade will be based on how you respond to my questions.

In-Class Essay (25%): For this assignment, you will have to write an in-class essay. I will give you some information on the topic beforehand to allow you to prepare before class. This will be the final for the class, and you will write it during the time scheduled for our final exam.

Grading Policies

Grade Scale:

A	≥ 93	C	≥ 73
A-	≥ 90	C-	≥ 70
B+	≥ 87	D+	≥ 67
B	≥ 83	D	≥ 63
B-	≥ 80	D-	≥ 60
C+	≥ 77	F	< 60

(Note: I do not round up grades)

Lateness Policy: I will deduct 1/3 of a letter grade for every day a writing assignment is late (e.g., from B+ to B). I'm willing to give short (1-2 day) extensions with a reasonable excuse, but a longer extension will usually require a note from a doctor or a dean, or other appropriate paperwork. Reading assignments cannot be late.

Plagiarism: Any instance of cheating, including plagiarism, detailed in Pitt's academic integrity code (https://pitt.libguides.com/academicintegrity/) will result in a failing grade (F) for the course. You are responsible for reading the policy at the above web address and for knowing what counts as cheating and plagiarism, but if you are uncertain about some instance, feel free to ask me about it. Plagiarism includes the use of AI large language model tools like ChatGPT to write your paper (or parts of it). If you are uncertain if some use of an LLM counts as plagiarism, you are welcome to ask me.

Anti-Plagiarism Policies: To prevent the use of LLMs and other forms of plagiarism, **I require you to write your paper in Google Docs or Sharepoint so you can share that document with me with editor privileges and allow me to see the previous versions of the document if needed.** This will allow me to see that you wrote your essay yourself, and it thus protects you from any suspicion of plagiarism. This is a required part of my essay assignments, and I reserve the right to give you an F if you fail to comply with it. If you have any concerns about this policy, I invite you to speak to me, as we may be able to find an alternative arrangement.

Blind Grading: I practice blind grading of writing assignments to avoid any possibility of bias. You should only put your student ID number on your assignments, and not your name.

Office Hours, Appointments and Emails

I will be accessible to answer any questions related to the course after class (if time permits), and during my office hours. If you can't make office hours, I'd be happy to schedule an alternative appointment. However, please try to email me 48 hours in advance of when you want to meet.
You can email me with administrative questions. I prefer not to answer substantive philosophical questions via email, since this is more effectively dealt with in office hours. A note on email etiquette: you can address me Gabriel or Mr. Vasquez-Peterson in your emails (I'm not a doctor—yet!).

Readings

All readings will be available through canvas, with the exception of Valerie Tiberius' *Moral Psychology*, which can be freely accessed online via the UPitt library system. You are expected to have read the day's required reading before you come to class.

Schedule

Unit 1: Introduction to Moral Psychology

Week 1

Day 1
Syllabus Discussion; Introduction

Day 2
The Nature of Morality

Read: T. M. Scanlon, "What is Morality?"

Week 2

Day 3

The Fact/Value Distinction

Watch: Sam Harris, "Science Can Answer Moral Questions" (TED talk)

Read: Whitley R. P. Kaufmann, "Can Science Determine Moral Values?"

Day 4

Moral Psychology

Read: Valerie Tiberius, "What is Moral Psychology?" (Chapter One)

Optional Reading: John Doris, Stephen Stitch & Edouard Machery, "Can Psychologists Tell Us Anything About Morality?"

Unit 2: Reason, Sentiment, and Morality

Week 3

Day *5*

Hume: The Classic Sentimentalist

Read: David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (II.3.3 and III.1.1-2. You can find them at https://davidhume.org/texts/t/)

Optional Reading: Tiberius, "Emotion and Moral Judgment" (Chapter Six)

Day 6

Kant: The Classic Rationalist

Read: Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (Selections)

Optional Reading: Tiberius, "Sentimentalism and Rationalism" (Chapter Seven)

Week 4

Day 7

The Aristotelian View

Read: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Selections)

Optional Reading: Victor Kumar and Joshua May, "Moral Reasoning and Emotion" from the *Routledge Handbook of Moral Epistemology*; Kristjan Kristjansson, "Reason and Intuition in Aristotle's Moral Psychology"; Susan Stark, "Virtue and Emotion"

Day 8

Moral Worth

Read: Nomy Arpaly, "Moral Worth"

Week *5*

Day 9
Empirical Arguments for Sentimentalism
Read: Jonathan Haidt, "The Emotional Dog and its Rational Tail"
Optional Reading: Jesse Prinz, "The Emotional Basis of Moral Judgements"

Day 10
An Empirical Argument for Rationalism?
Read: Jeanette Kennett, "Autism, Empathy, and Moral Agency"

Week 6

Day 11
Affect and Rationality
Read: Peter Railton, "The Affective Dog and its Rational Tale"

Unit 3: Being Happy, Being Good

Day 12
Why be Moral?
Read: Plato, *Republic* (Selections)

Week 7

Day 13
Why be Moral?
Read: Tiberius, "Why be Moral: Moral Reasons and Well-Being" (Chapter 4); Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (selections)
Optional Reading: J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Chapter 4); Eden Lin, "Against Welfare Subjectivism"

Day 14
Virtue and Well-Being
Read: Christine Tappolet and Mauro Rossi, "Virtue, Happiness, and Well-Being"
Optional Reading: Stephen Finlay, "Too Much Morality"

Week 8

Day 15
Limits of Morality
Read: Susan Wolf, "Moral Saints"

Day 16
Moral Saints Revisited
Read: Vanessa Carbonell, "What Moral Saints Look Like"

Unit 4: Virtue and Situations

Week 9

Day 17

Virtue Ethics and the Situationist Critique

Read: Tiberius, "Virtue" (Chapter 9--selections); John Doris, "Person, Situations and Virtue Ethics"

Day 18

Essay Workshop (Plan due)

Week 10

Day 19

A Virtue-Ethical Response

Read: Rachana Kamtekar, "Situationism and Virtue Ethics on the Content of our Characters"

Optional Reading: Gopal Sreenivasan, "Errors About Errors"; Edward Slingerland, "The Situationist Critique and Early Confucian Virtue Ethics"

Day 20

Further Implications

Read: Dana Nelkin, "Freedom, Responsibility and the Challenge of Situationism"

Optional Reading: Mark Alfano, "A Plague on Both Your Houses: Virtue Theory After Situationism and Repligate"

Unit 5: The Emotions in Moral Life

Week 11

Day 21

Reactive Attitudes

Read: P. F. Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment"

Day 22

Gratitude

Read: Fred Berger, "Gratitude"

Optional Reading: Barbara Hermann, "Being Helped and Being Grateful"

Week 12

Day 23
Anger pt. 1
Read: Glenn Pettigrove, "Meekness and 'Moral' Anger"; Martha Nussbaum, "Beyond Anger"
Optional Reading: Seneca, *On Anger* (Book I)

Day 24
Anger, pt. 2
Read: Amia Srinivasan, "The Aptness of Anger"; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (IV.5)
Optional Reading: Sam Reis-Dennis, "Anger: Scary Good"; Audre Lorde, "The Uses of Anger"

Week 13

Day 25
Love, pt. 1
Read: Harry Frankfurt, "On Love and its Reasons" in *The Reasons of Love*
Optional Reading: Robert Nozick, "Love's Bond"

Day 26
Love, pt. 2
Read: Monique Wonderly, "Love and Attachment"
Optional Reading: Niko Kolodny, "Love as Valuing a Relationship"

Week 14

Day 27
Emotional Obligations?
Read: Mario Attie-Picker, "Obligations of Feeling"
Optional Reading: Michael Stocker, "The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories"

Day 28
FREE

General Philosophy Resources

Reading and Writing

- Jim Pryor's Guides to Reading and Writing Philosophy
- David Concepción on Reading as a Philosopher (We'll be talking about this a bit in class)
- Daniel Weltman's Glossary of Common Terms in Philosophy

Encyclopedias and Overviews

- The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy
- The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy
- Philosophy Compass
- Crash Course Philosophy (Videos)

Other

- Minorities and Philosophy Resource Page
- American Philosophical Organization Resources for Undergraduates

Disability Services

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both me and the Office of Disability Resources and Services, 140 William Pitt Union, 412-648-7890, as early as possible in the term. Disability Resources and Services will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

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Sample Teaching Materials

Reading Guide: Bernard Williams, A Critique of Utilitarianism

This piece is part of a longer critique of utilitarianism and consequentialism. It's quite a difficult piece, full of subtle distinctions and ideas. Moreover, Williams takes a somewhat meandering route to his main point. However, two things are really central for our purposes. First, his main point: that utilitarianism, in large part because of its commitment to what Williams calls a doctrine of 'negative responsibility,' threatens to alienate us from our central projects and commitments. It is because of this that he sees utilitarianism as incompatible with integrity. Second, the two cases (of Jim and George) which Williams uses to make his point. With that in mind, I want to provide some definitions that might be helpful, and then some points and questions to keep in mind for each of the three chapters we are reading.

Definitions:

- Consequentialism—Williams has in mind act-consequentialism. On this view, "the right action is that which out of the actions available to the agent brings about or represents the highest degree of whatever it is the system in question regards as intrinsically valuable – in the central case, utilitarianism, this is of course happiness."
- States of affairs—when Williams speaks of 'states of affairs', he means something like 'a way things are' or a 'situational condition.' Consequentialists evaluate actions in terms of the states of affair they produce—i.e. their consequences/effect on the world.

Chapter 3:

Here Williams formulates the idea that consequentialism endorses a doctrine of negative responsibility, because it is only interested in things being "consequences of what I do" in a very broad sense of the term. He also introduces two famous thought experiments (i.e. cases)—we can call them "Jim" and "George." Utilitarians, he thinks, are committed to saying certain implausible things about both of these cases. As you read, consider the following questions:

- What is the doctrine of negative responsibility?
- What exactly is happening in each of the two cases he introduces?
- What does utilitarianism say Jim and George should do?

- Williams thinks that part of the problem is that utilitarianism gives particular answers we might find questionable (particularly in "George"). But beyond that, the utilitarian also says that the right answer/course of action in both cases is obvious. Do you agree that this is a problem?

Chapter 4:

This is the least important of the three chapters, but still worth looking at. Here Williams looks at one way in which a utilitarian could agree that the right course of action in the cases he proposed in the last chapter is less obvious than it might initially seem without abandoning utilitarianism. The basic idea is that taking the 'obvious' course of action might have indirect consequences we need to take into account. The two he considers are the effect on the agent himself (i.e. the effects the 'obvious answer' would have on George or Jim in their respective cases) and the precedent it sets.

- Why does Williams think appealing to the psychological effects on the agent himself doesn't do much in these cases?
- Why does Williams think the utilitarian has to see hesitation on Jim's part as a kind of irrational squeamishness? Why does he say that this means "utilitarianism alienates one from one's moral feelings"? What might a utilitarian say in response to this criticism?
- Why does Williams think the precedent effect is not relevant to these cases?

Chapter 5:

In this chapter, Williams criticizes utilitarianism's doctrine of negative responsibility. In particular, he suggests that utilitarianism does not allow us, as agents, to have the right kind of relationship with our projects and commitments.

- Why does Williams think utilitarianism has to take people's projects and commitments seriously?
- What does Williams mean when he says it is "absurd to demand of... a man, when the sums come in from the utility network which the projects of others have in part determined, that he should just step aside from his own project and decision and acknowledge the decision which utilitarian calculation requires"?
- Why does Williams think that utilitarianism undermines the value of integrity? Do you agree with him?

Ethics IRL Assignment

For this assignment, you will analyze and respond to a piece of media from an ethical perspective. You can choose either a piece of fiction (this can be a short story, part or all of a novel, an episode of a TV show, or a movie) or a news story. Whichever you pick, it must discuss or describe an issue or situation which you think raises interesting ethical questions and problems (or at least has some kind of interesting and complex ethical dimension). You will then write a short paper discussing these ethical questions and problems. After submitting this paper, you will meet with me to briefly discuss the issue and your paper.

The instructions are below. Note that I give some word counts as targets, but these are just meant for guidance—I will be grading based on how well you answer each part of the prompt, not based on how much or little you write (though I think that going below the word count will make it hard to properly address each part of the prompt).

Instructions

For News Stories: The story you pick should:

1. Discuss an issue or situation that raises ethical questions or problems. These questions or problems should be to some degree difficult, complex and controversial. In other words, they should be questions or problems that are the subject of ongoing debate in society and about which reasonable people make competing claims.
2. Be relatively substantive; you should not submit a short piece that only briefly discusses the issue.
3. Be from the past two years.
4. NOT be an opinion piece.

Ideally, the news story will also include a discussion of the different perspectives on the issue. This is not an absolute necessity, but it will help you when writing your analysis/reaction.

For Fiction: The piece of fiction you choose should include a description/depiction of a situation or issue that raises ethical questions or problems. These questions or problems should be to some degree difficult, complex and controversial. In other words, they should be questions or problems which reasonable people either might disagree about or actually do disagree about, and which put different values and ethical relevant considerations into conflict with one another.

Importantly, your discussion will be focused on the particular situation/issue, not the whole book/movie/story/show, but you will need to provide the relevant context needed to understand the situation.

Once you pick the piece of media you want to analyze, you should submit it to me to make sure it is acceptable. Do this at least **four days before your due date**.

After I give you the go-ahead on your media, you should write your paper. The **first step** will be to briefly explain the facts of the issue. Make sure you explain it in your own words. Around 150 words should be sufficient; the summary can be fairly general. The one exception would be if you are discussing something from a book or movie and need to give a little more context.

The **second step** is to explain the ethical question (you could discuss multiple questions, but I recommend focusing primarily on one). You should focus on the particular form the question takes in this situation, but you should also consider and discuss any more general questions that you think lie behind this particular question (or are at least are relevant to this question). Then, explain why the particular question(s) is controversial and difficult to resolve. Here you're trying to describe the different positions on this issue and the associated question(s) and explain what motivates people to adopt these positions (or what might motivate people to do so), as well as what is overall at stake when we take up this issue and question(s). One way to do this is to first start by thinking about the different positions in the debate and then trying to identify the different arguments or values that might move people to take up each position. Another is to start by thinking about what ethically significant considerations or values are involved/implicated in the issue and question(s) you are addressing and then considering what sorts of positions these values/considerations might push us. Whichever of these routes you take, it will be useful to say something about debates over the more general questions you considered, and how they relate to this particular debate, but your primary focus should be on be on the more particular question. It may also enhance your discussion to refer to any relevant material from the class, if possible. This second step should be about 300-450 words, though the most important thing is to make sure you discuss all the relevant positions and considerations.

The third and final step is to explain where you land on the relevant issue and question(s). Don't just state your position—give your reasons for adopting it. You can also say something about the more general questions you considered, but make sure you are first and foremost providing a clear position on the particular question. Around 200 words should be sufficient for this, though again the more important thing is to sufficiently explain and defend your own position.

Make sure you write your paper in google docs and share it (with editor permissions) with my google account (gvasquezpeterson@gmail.com). Failure to do so will affect your grade. After you submit your paper, send me an email to schedule a meeting in the next week to discuss your paper. These meetings will be about ten minutes and involve answering some questions about what you said in the paper. Part of your grade for this assignment will be based on your participation in the meeting.

The due dates for the paper are different based on which group you are in. You should be able to see what group you are in on canvas but let me know if you cannot. Here are the dates for each group:

Group 1: 2/13

Group 2: 2/20

Group 3: 2/27

Group 4: 3/20

Group 5: 3/27

Grading

Here is how I will grade your assignment:

- 10% of your grade will be based on how well you explain the situation or issue you are discussing. Your goal is to be sure that someone who has not read the relevant piece of media can understand the central facts of this situation or issue (not necessarily the whole piece of media) just by reading your summary. Also make sure that you briefly explain the perspectives of the main characters/people involved.
- 15% of your grade will be based on your explanation of the relevant question(s). Your goal is to clearly articulate both the particular question that arises in the situation you are discussing (something like "is it permissible for X to do Y in this situation?") and any more general questions this question in turn raises (questions like "is Y-ing generally okay to do?" and "what kind of responsibilities does a person have in this type of situation?") that you think are important for answering the more particular question. Of course, a question might raise multiple more general questions, and you don't have to find them all—just try to identify one or two that seem especially relevant and important when considering your particular question. You should also try to briefly explain why we should care about these questions and demonstrate their broader relevance.
- 25% of your grade will be based on your explanation of why the particular question(s) is difficult to resolve. Your goal is to explain the different answers people might give to this question, the reasons and motivation behind these different answers, and ultimately to capture, in brief, what is overall at stake when we take up this question.
- 20% of your grade will be based on your statement of your own opinion. Your goal here is to explain where you land on the question, as it arises in this particular situation, and to give good reasons for your answer.
- 25% of your grade will be based on your discussion with me, and how well you answer my questions about your paper.
- 5% of your grade will be based on your writing mechanics. Your goal is to ensure that the writing is clear, free from major mistakes (a few small typos are fine if the paper remains clear, but anything beyond this will lose you points), and structured in a coherent way.

Handout: Judith Jarvis Thomson on Violinists, Fetuses, and Abortions

I. Velleman on Euthanasia (review)

Q : Velleman denies "that one may end one's life simply because one isn't getting enough out of it." Why does he think it is wrong to do so?

II. Thomson's argument

Thomson's main claim: Even if we grant that a fetus is a person with a right to life, it doesn't follow that abortion is always morally impermissible.

Why not? Having a right to life does not imply having the right to use another person's body to sustain one's life for nine months.

More specifically, Thomson argues that even if we grant that the fetus has a right to life from conception, Abortion is morally permissible in a range of cases. She begins by arguing that abortion is permissible in cases where (i) it is required to save the mother's life and (ii) the pregnancy is due to rape. These, she thinks, are the cases for which the argument for permissibility is strongest. However, she also argues it is generally permissible in cases where (iii) pregnancy is due to contraceptive failure and seems to be sympathetic to the idea that it is permissible even when contraception was not used. However, she does note that late-term abortions may be impermissible (especially if they are not cases of (i) and (ii)).

III. The "Right to Life" Argument and the Famous Violinist (pp. 47-49)

The "Right to Life" Argument (p. 48)

P1. The fetus is a person from the moment of conception.

P2. Every person has a right to life.

P3. The right to life is stronger than a mother's right to decide what happens in and to her body and thus always supersedes it.

C1. So, abortion is not permissible.

Q: What does Thomson say about **P1**?

Q: What premise/part of the argument does Thomson plan to challenge?

Q: What is happening in the violinist case? How is it meant to undermine the right to life argument?

V. **The Extreme View (pp. 50-54)**

We'll return to this objection to the right to life argument, but at this point in the text Thomson shifts her attention to a question about how we should interpret the right to life argument when the mother's life is in danger. One might think that, in cases where the mother's life is at risk, her right to life can override the fetus' and thus make abortion permissible in at least these situations. But what Thomson calls the extreme view would deny that abortion is permissible even here.

Thomson argues that it would obviously be okay, if it was possible, for a mother to perform an abortion on herself to save her own life.

- Analogies: Unplugging the violinist; Expanding Baby

Objection: Mothers don't perform abortions on themselves. How is a third party supposed to choose between the life of the mother and the life of the fetus?

Q: How does she respond to this objection? Do you think her response is strong?

VI. What Does the Right to Life Entail? (pp. 54-57)

"For we should now, at long last, ask what it comes to, to have a right to life. In some views having a right to life includes having a right to be given at least the bare minimum one needs for continued life. But suppose that what in fact is the bare minimum a man needs for continued life is something he has no right at all to be given? If I am sick unto death, and the only thing that will save my life is the touch of Henry Fonda's cool hand on my fevered brow, then all the same, I have no right to be given the touch of Henry Fonda's cool hand on my fevered brow. It would be frightfully nice of him to fly in from the West Coast to provide it. It would be less nice, though no doubt well meant, if my friends flew out to the West Coast and carried Henry Fonda back with them. But I have no right at all against anybody that he should do this for me. Or again, to return to the story I told earlier, the fact that for continued life that violinist needs the continued use of your kidneys does not establish that he has a right to be given the continued use of your kidneys. He certainly has no right against you that you should give him continued use of your kidneys. For nobody has any right to use your kidneys unless you give him such a right...This is a kindness on your part, and not something he can claim from you as his due. Nor has he any right against anybody else that they should give him continued use of your kidneys" (p. 55).

Q: What is Thomson trying to say about the right to life here? What do the cases she has in mind tell us about this right?

Q: Do you think the cases she describes are truly analogous to the violinist case?

VII. Two Objections (pp. 57-59; pp. 64-65)

Responsibility: Perhaps this shows that abortions are permissible when a pregnancy results from sexual assault. But surely in most cases, the pregnant woman who wishes to have an abortion got pregnant as a result of consensual sex, with knowledge that pregnancy was a risk. In such cases we might say, then, that the pregnant woman knowingly and willingly put the fetus in a position in which it is entirely dependent on her. Doesn't this mean she has a responsibility to the fetus?

Q: Look at pp 58-59. How does Thomson reply?

Special Relationship: Don't parents have a special responsibility to their children? If this is right, the relationship between the mother and the fetus is radically different, in a morally meaningful way, than the relationship between someone and a people-seed or a famous violinist.

Thomson's reply: "Surely we do not have any such "special responsibility" for a person unless we have assumed it, explicitly or implicitly. If a set of parents do not try to prevent pregnancy, do not obtain an abortion, and then at the time of birth of the child do not put it out for adoption, but rather take it home with them, then they have assumed responsibility for it, they have given it rights, and they cannot now withdraw support from it at the cost of its life because they now find it difficult to go on providing for it. But if they have taken all reasonable precautions against having a child, they do not simply by virtue of their biological relationship to the child who comes into existence have a special responsibility for it. They may wish to assume responsibility for it, or they may not wish to. And I am suggesting that if assuming responsibility for it would require large sacrifices, then they may refuse" (pp. 65).

VIII. Good and Decent Samaritans (pp. 59-64)

> *The One-Hour Violinist*: Suppose the violinist only needs your kidneys for one hour. Is it okay for you to disconnect yourself, killing him?

Many people would say no, and Thomson agrees. She doesn't think that the violinist has a *right* to use your kidneys (though she doesn't think this point matters that much), but it would be self-centered and callous of you to unplug him. You ought to lend him your kidneys for an hour.

- Another analogy: Sharing your chocolates with your little brother (p. 60).

Two kinds of Samaritans: Good and Minimally Decent. We ought to be *Minimally Decent Samaritans*, but we are not morally required to be *Good Samaritans* (it might be morally better, but we aren't required).

Q: What is the difference between a good Samaritan and a decent Samaritan?

Thomson thinks supporting a person with your body for nine months is good Samaritan territory. Furthermore, Thomson thinks it's wrong to legally compel people to be good Samaritans, and finds it striking that in the US, no man is required to be even a minimally decent Samaritan, but women are required to be good Samaritans (this was written pre-Roe).

Q: What does this mean for late-term abortions?

Activity: They Say, I Say

This is an exercise meant to capture, in a simple way, the process of argumentative back-and-forth your paper should aim for. In groups, select two claims from the list below. For each claim, you should consider an objection and a response to that objection. Then, discuss whether we should accept or reject the initial claim and why.

An example:

1. **Claim**: we should make it legal to sell our organs to other people who need them.
2. **Objection**: the human body should not be made into a commodity—it is an affront to human dignity.
3. **Response:** respecting human dignity means respecting bodily autonomy, which entails allowing people to do whatever they want with their own bodies, including selling them.
4. **My view**: I don't think the response succeeds in defeating the worry about making bodies into commodities. This is because I think that respecting human dignity sometimes requires us to actually prevent people from doing whatever they want with their bodies and lives when what they want to do would be disrespectful to themselves. I don't, for instance, think it would be acceptable or respectful to allow people to sell themselves into slavery or overdose on heroin, even if they really want to.

Options

- In a democracy, we have a moral duty to vote.
- Eating meat is wrong when it is not necessary to survive.
- Prostitution should be legal.
- We have a responsibility to preserve our own culture and traditions.
- We as individuals are not responsible for global warming.

Appendix: Teaching Evaluations

Below, you can see my teaching evaluations for my last two in-person classes. A packet with complete teaching evaluations from all of my courses, except for the online course I taught over this summer (because of a recent change in how surveys are collected, which confused many students (and myself), the response rate for that course was negligible) can be found on my website.

University of Pittsburgh

2264 - Teaching Survey Spring 2026

Spring 2026 - Gabriel Vasquez-Peterson PHIL 0300 - INTRODUCTION TO ETHICS - 7010 - Lecture

Created **Wednesday, May 06, 2026**

Courses Audience: 31
Responses Received: 16
Response Rate: **51.61%**

Report Comments

Teaching Surveys

Included in this report:

- Summary of responses to scaled questions
- Response breakdowns
- Student comments
- Results to instructor added custom questions (if applicable)

Understanding and using student feedback:

- We have resources to help you interpret and use results including our faculty worksheet with guided prompts and space to record summaries of feedback, actions, and outcomes.
- Members of our Pedagogy, Practice, & Assessment team are available for consultations and can help with:
  - Interpreting OMET results and developing a course of action if necessary.
  - Exploring various methods of assessment to improve teaching.
- In the future:
  - Discuss, teach, and model giving meaningful feedback with your students and give them multiple opportunities to practice giving feedback.
    - Gather important information about students at the beginning of the term by giving a pre-course survey.
    - Check in with students half way through the term by giving a midterm course survey.
- The Teaching Center offers multiple resources to support teaching and learning.

Office of Measurement and Evaluation of Teaching (OMET)
Contact us

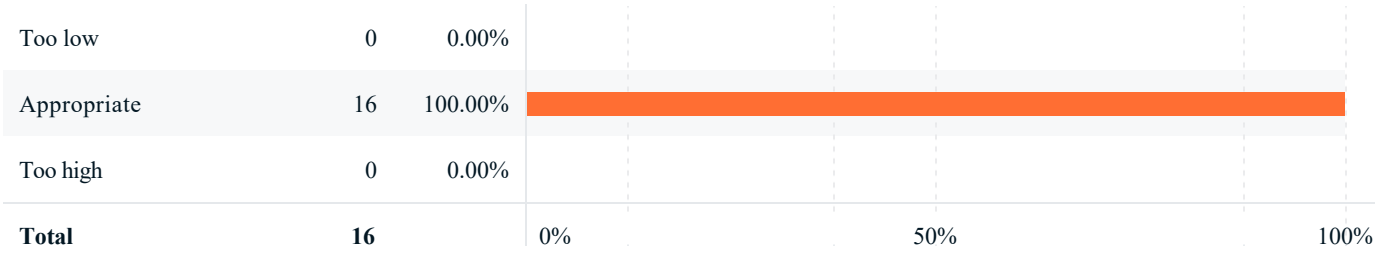
Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences Questions

Summary table

	Invited Count	Response Count	Response Rate	Mean	Median	Mode	SD
The instructor created an atmosphere that kept me engaged in course content.	31	16	51.61%	4.44	4.50	5	0.63
The instructor was prepared for class.	31	16	51.61%	4.38	4.50	5	0.72
The instructor treated students with respect.	31	16	51.61%	4.75	5.00	5	0.45
The instructor was available to me (in-person, electronically, or both).	31	15	48.39%	4.73	5.00	5	0.46
The instructor evaluated my work fairly.	31	15	48.39%	4.67	5.00	5	0.49
The instructor provided feedback that was helpful to me.	31	15	48.39%	4.60	5.00	5	0.83
I learned a lot from this course. If there is no basis to judge or not applicable, answer N/A.	31	16	51.61%	4.56	5.00	5	0.51
Overall of All Questions	217	109	50.23%	4.59	-	-	0.60

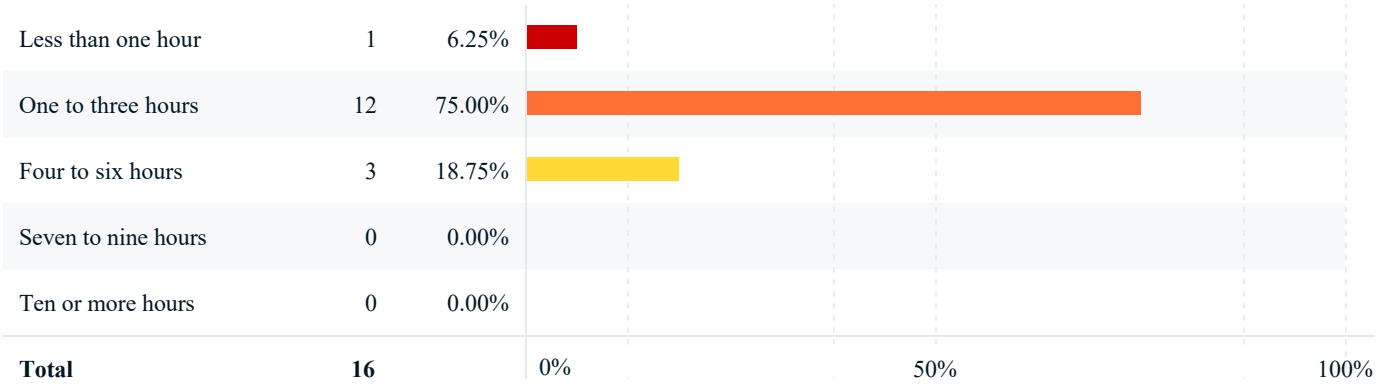
The standards the instructor set for me were:

The standards the instructor set for me were:



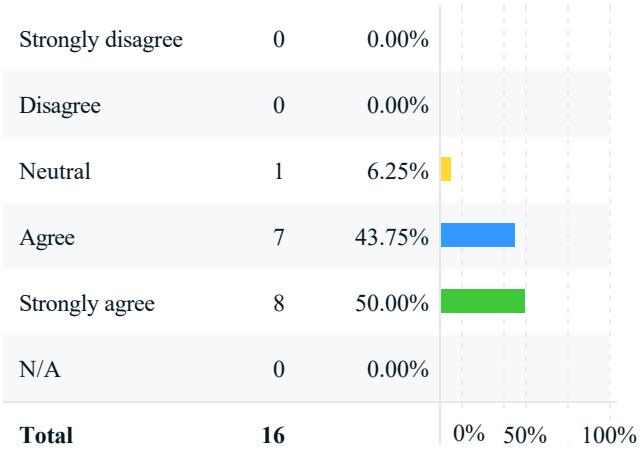
How many hours per week did you usually spend working on this course outside of classroom time?

How many hours per week did you usually spend working on this course outside of classroom time?

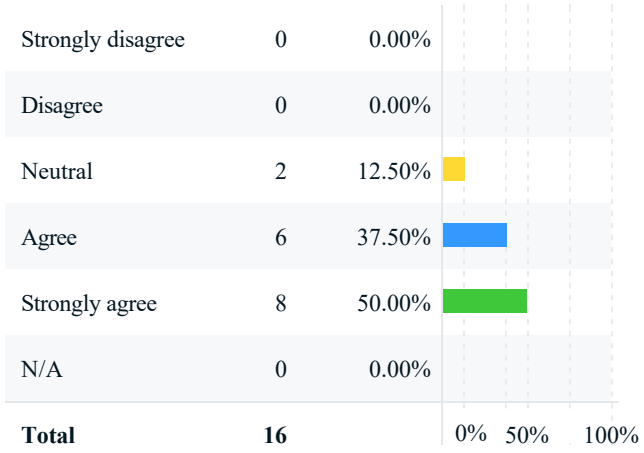


Response breakdown

1. The instructor created an atmosphere that kept me engaged in course content.

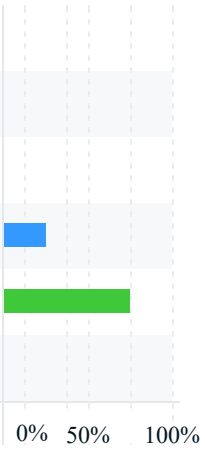


2. The instructor was prepared for class.



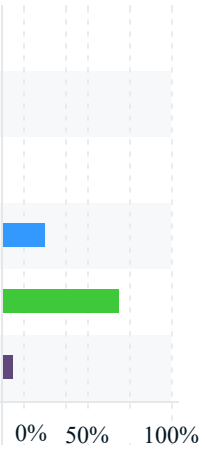
3. The instructor treated students with respect.

Strongly disagree	0	0.00%
Disagree	0	0.00%
Neutral	0	0.00%
Agree	4	25.00%
Strongly agree	12	75.00%
N/A	0	0.00%
Total	**16**	



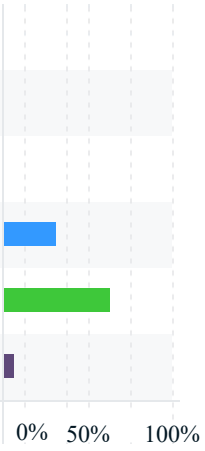
4. The instructor was available to me (in-person, electronically, or both).

Strongly disagree	0	0.00%
Disagree	0	0.00%
Neutral	0	0.00%
Agree	4	25.00%
Strongly agree	11	68.75%
N/A	1	6.25%
Total	**16**	



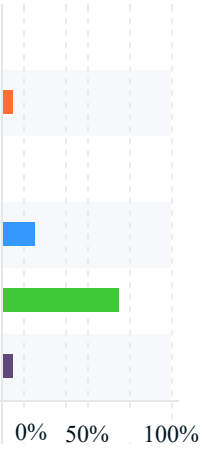
5. The instructor evaluated my work fairly.

Strongly disagree	0	0.00%
Disagree	0	0.00%
Neutral	0	0.00%
Agree	5	31.25%
Strongly agree	10	62.50%
N/A	1	6.25%
Total	**16**	



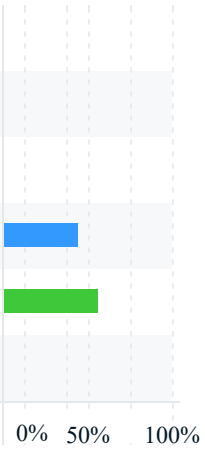
6. The instructor provided feedback that was helpful to me.

Strongly disagree	0	0.00%
Disagree	1	6.25%
Neutral	0	0.00%
Agree	3	18.75%
Strongly agree	11	68.75%
N/A	1	6.25%
Total	**16**	



7. I learned a lot from this course. If there is no basis to judge or not applicable, answer N/A.

Strongly disagree	0	0.00%
Disagree	0	0.00%
Neutral	0	0.00%
Agree	7	43.75%
Strongly agree	9	56.25%
N/A	0	0.00%
Total	**16**	



DSAS Comments

What did you like best about how the course was taught?

Comments
Overall, I thought the instructor did a really good job. I felt that he explained things well to the class and I liked that he encouraged class participation and group discussion. I thought the reading assignments were appropriate. I found it helpful to be able to read comments from other classmates, and I thought the amount of readings that we were required to comment on was very fair. I thought the exams and quizzes represented what we had been learning well, and I liked it when a study guide/ key topics were provided before the exams/ quizzes.
I liked the breakdowns before exams or quizzes of what exactly would be on them
I liked that he gave us handouts that would summarize the main points we would talk about in class.
I liked that we had papers about real–world applications! It made the class really interesting.
I really liked the range of topics we went over, it felt like a very holistic teaching of ethics. Furthermore, during class we went over the readings in an effective way and were given handouts to support our understanding. When writing essays, I received a lot of useful feedback and could easily access my professor to talk or ask questions. I appreciated also how engaged and passionate my professor was in the course.
It was genuinely taught great.
I like how it started with a very broad paper that a lot of people agreed with and went from there almost like a story. Each paper kind of disproved the one before and gave you a knew way of thinking.
I think that the way it was discussion based was a way to stay engaged, because of lecture heavy days seemed much more less engaging.
I appreciated the class discussions, as well as his willingness to stay after class to answer questions and talk about content. I also enjoyed a lot of the assigned readings as I thought he put a lot of effort into choosing interesting texts that had a lot of overlap in material/content.
I liked how interactive the course was, and how it was more of a discussion than a lecture.
Very discussion based by Professor created an atmosphere that prevented debates from being tense or uncomfortable. Each concept/theory was thoroughly discussed and interesting—he seems perfect for teaching this kind of class and does an amazing job making it intriguing.
I like how we talked about different perspectives on a single topic and ways of arguing them.
small group discussions kept students engaged, weekly readings were required to comment on 5 times

If you were teaching this course, what would you do differently?

Comments
I think it would have been helpful to have a pre–set schedule for the quizzes that were given and that they were more spaced out (felt like we had a lot more quizzes at the end). I also think it would have been helpful to have a sample essay of what is expected for each of the writing assignments. I liked that the final essay had a more outlined guide for what was expected (specific questions to answer), so that would have been helpful for the other essays. I found it challenging to come up with my own objections to the arguments we talked about, so I think a few more conversations about that in class of how to formulate your opinions would have been helpful.
Maybe not do the perusall, it didn't often help me because I wasn't reading to understand I was more reading to comment on it.
I would make sure assignments are spread out more because having a lot of papers to write in a minimum amount of time results in poor quality work.
I would probably put less words on the slideshow, just because it is hard to follow along sometimes.
Possibly to have a more engaging way of teaching at times that was interactive. For example, making students debate each other.
More quizzes to be honest, as they actually make us learn.
Make it slightly less open discussion.
I think that more ability to maybe practice writing maybe shorter pieces that can receive feedback because going into like the ethics IRL assignment was a little challenging, or maybe giving example writings to show how you can do it.
Nothing
Being a little bit more organized, and making sure that we are able to get through the content and stay on track.
N/A
I would create more oppurtunities for whole class discussions where people can openly debate.
nothing

Diversity and Inclusion

Question	Response Count	Response Rate	Mean	Mode	Median	SD
The instructor creates an inclusive learning environment for all students.	15	48.39%	4.67	5	5.00	0.49

University of Pittsburgh

2261 - Teaching Survey Fall 2025

Fall 2025 - Gabriel Vasquez-Peterson PHIL 0360 - INTRO TO BIOMEDICAL ETHICS - 7010 - Lecture

Created **Tuesday, January 06, 2026**

Courses Audience: 34
Responses Received: 23
Response Rate: **67.65%**

Report Comments

Teaching Surveys

Included in this report:

- Summary of responses to scaled questions
- Response breakdowns
- Student comments
- Results to instructor added custom questions (if applicable)

Understanding and using student feedback:

- We have resources to help you interpret and use results including our faculty worksheet with guided prompts and space to record summaries of feedback, actions, and outcomes.
- Members of our Pedagogy, Practice, & Assessment team are available for consultations and can help with:
  - Interpreting OMET results and developing a course of action if necessary.
  - Exploring various methods of assessment to improve teaching.
- In the future:
  - Discuss, teach, and model giving meaningful feedback with your students and give them multiple opportunities to practice giving feedback.
    - Gather important information about students at the beginning of the term by giving a pre-course survey.
    - Check in with students half way through the term by giving a midterm course survey.
- The Teaching Center offers multiple resources to support teaching and learning.

Office of Measurement and Evaluation of Teaching (OMET)
Contact us

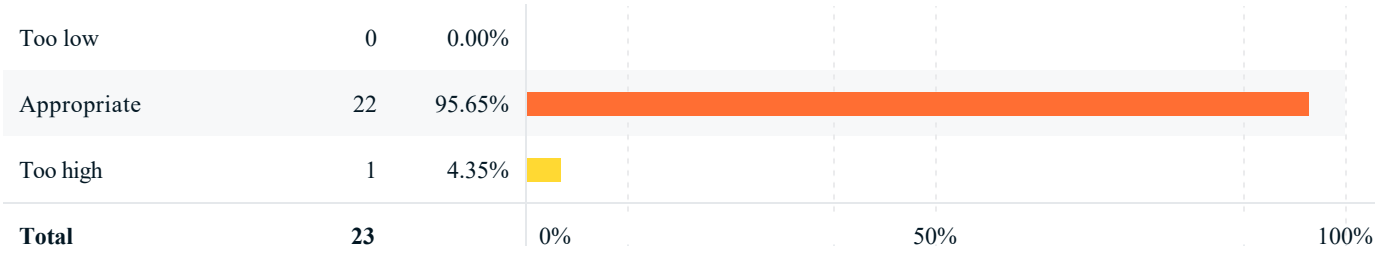
Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences Questions

Summary table

	Invited Count	Response Count	Response Rate	Mean	Median	Mode	SD
The instructor created an atmosphere that kept me engaged in course content.	34	23	67.65%	4.00	4.00	5	0.95
The instructor was prepared for class.	34	23	67.65%	4.26	4.00	4	0.86
The instructor treated students with respect.	34	23	67.65%	4.78	5.00	5	0.52
The instructor was available to me (in-person, electronically, or both).	34	21	61.76%	4.71	5.00	5	0.56
The instructor evaluated my work fairly.	34	23	67.65%	4.35	5.00	5	0.93
The instructor provided feedback that was helpful to me.	34	23	67.65%	4.35	5.00	5	1.03
I learned a lot from this course. If there is no basis to judge or not applicable, answer N/A.	34	23	67.65%	4.30	4.00	4	0.63
Overall of All Questions	238	159	66.81%	4.39	-	-	0.81

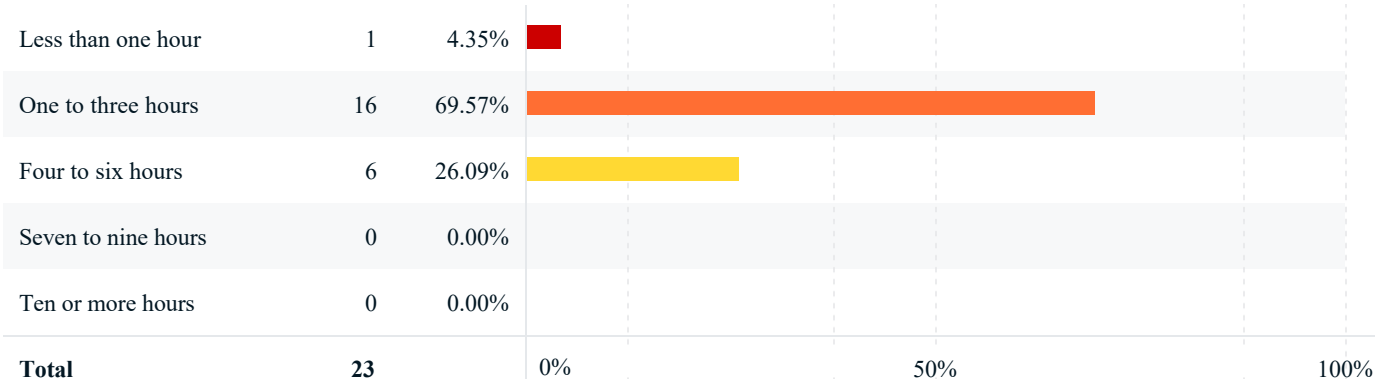
The standards the instructor set for me were:

The standards the instructor set for me were:



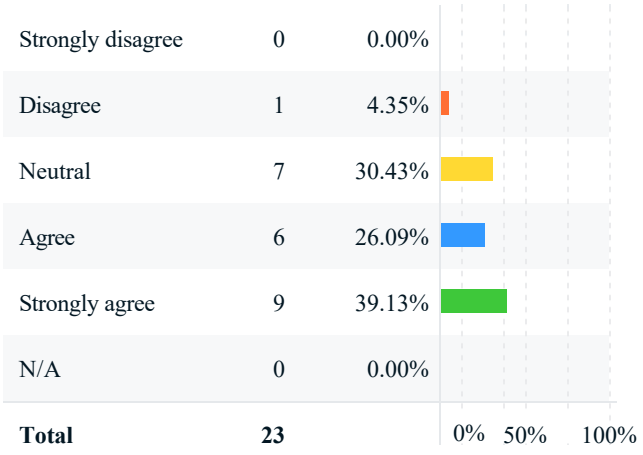
How many hours per week did you usually spend working on this course outside of classroom time?

How many hours per week did you usually spend working on this course outside of classroom time?

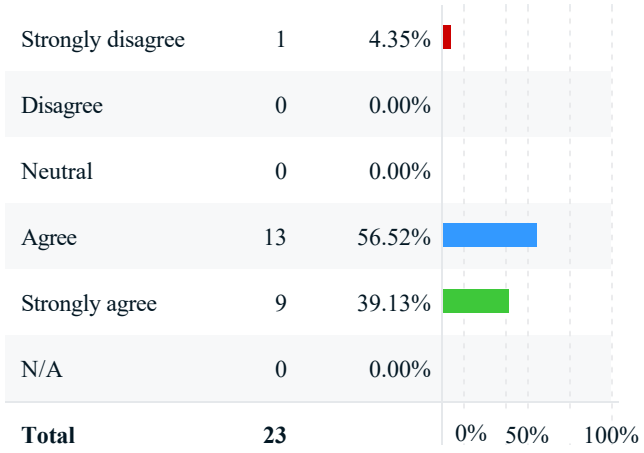


Response breakdown

1. The instructor created an atmosphere that kept me engaged in course content.

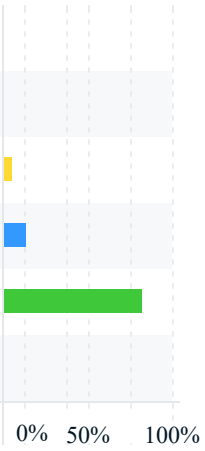


2. The instructor was prepared for class.



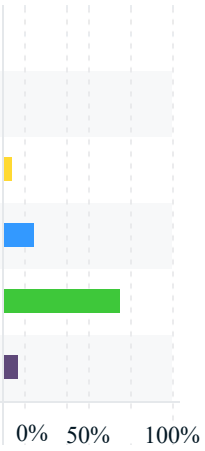
3. The instructor treated students with respect.

Strongly disagree	0	0.00%
Disagree	0	0.00%
Neutral	1	4.35%
Agree	3	13.04%
Strongly agree	19	82.61%
N/A	0	0.00%
Total	**23**	



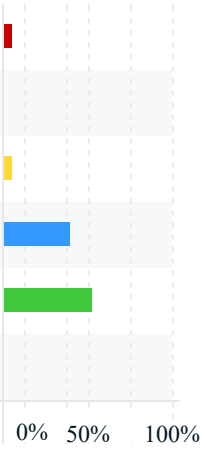
4. The instructor was available to me (in-person, electronically, or both).

Strongly disagree	0	0.00%
Disagree	0	0.00%
Neutral	1	4.35%
Agree	4	17.39%
Strongly agree	16	69.57%
N/A	2	8.70%
Total	**23**	



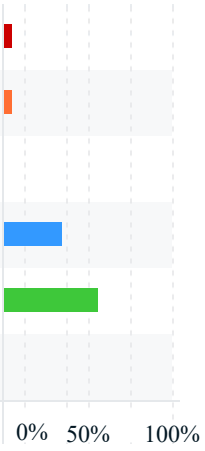
5. The instructor evaluated my work fairly.

Strongly disagree	1	4.35%
Disagree	0	0.00%
Neutral	1	4.35%
Agree	9	39.13%
Strongly agree	12	52.17%
N/A	0	0.00%
Total	**23**	



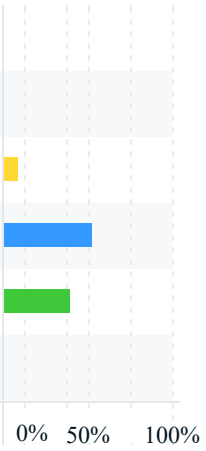
6. The instructor provided feedback that was helpful to me.

Strongly disagree	1	4.35%
Disagree	1	4.35%
Neutral	0	0.00%
Agree	8	34.78%
Strongly agree	13	56.52%
N/A	0	0.00%
Total	**23**	



7. I learned a lot from this course. If there is no basis to judge or not applicable, answer N/A.

Strongly disagree	0	0.00%
Disagree	0	0.00%
Neutral	2	8.70%
Agree	12	52.17%
Strongly agree	9	39.13%
N/A	0	0.00%
Total	**23**	



DSAS Comments

What did you like best about how the course was taught?

Comments
The in class discussions and hand outs
I liked the discussions that we were able to have
I liked the mixture of lecture content and group discussion activities.
I really like how engaging the lectures were. The class days were very long, so having it split up into half lecture, half application groupwork was not only very helpful for understanding content, but kept you engaged during the long hours into the night time.
I liked how the readings were also supplemented with lecture aswell for discussions
Created a good environment for discussion
I liked that every resource was made available to you and easy to access. I enjoyed the video annotations rather than the reading annotations.
The content all fit together into a very cohesive class; every new "unit" applied to all the others and built upon the previous ones.
I liked how collaborative it was
Interactive and discussion based
I loved the in class discussions and the questions asked by my professor since it added context to what we were learning.
I liked the readings that reinforced class content.
I really enjoyed how the course allows discussion and debate, and he does a great job of encouraging and keeping it civil.
The teacher is an interesting lecturer, a funny and very nice person.
I liked the small group discussions. I feel it's a way to keep students engaged at 6pm and also allows someone, besides the instructor, to explain a concept (which is sometimes beneficial).
I liked that it was applied back to real world situations multiple times.
I liked the classroom and peer engagement in the classroom.
I liked how there was a balance of group assignments/discussions and traditional lectures.
I liked how engaging he was and created an atmosphere that made it easy to participate and voice our opinions.

If you were teaching this course, what would you do differently?

Comments
I would switch to essay based versus in class midterms and finals
I would make the lectures more engaging, with it being a long class sometimes the same topics were getting explained over and over again and made me zone out.
I would incorporate more practice exams/quizzes for comprehension checks.
I would weigh the exams a little bit more I think. Maybe I am just used to my other classes having really hard and heavily weighted exams but the exams for this course felt very easy and were only 25 points.
Not anything
Provide a bit more context for some medical terms or situations.
Provide more opportunities to earn points throughout the course.
N/a
More concise
I would like to have a graded debate rather than a second paper
I'm not sure.
I would not do anything different I really enjoyed this class.
Not do it on Thursday night .
I would make the readings not as long. I feel we had to read so many things and didn't talk about half of it. Maybe instead of a bunch of readings, assign short reading and also assign the worksheet we did in class (so that we knew which parts of the reading was important and what we should pay attention to). I would work on explaining difficult concepts– I feel the way certain things were presented wasn't fully engaging/ made sense.
The reading assignments were really long and it was hard to memorize all the content for the course.
I would provide rubrics for every assignment, provide clear and in depth feedback, and explain grading thoroughly. Adding more structure to the course would be beneficial. Definitely creating outlines to help understand key takeaways from the notes and slideshows. Exam preparation and details would also be provided with greater time concerns.
I would probably give more midterm exams and hold review sessions for them. Also, I would grade a little bit faster to give students a better idea of their overall grades sooner.
I would maybe incorporate less readings or some visual type interactive thing like a video.

Diversity and Inclusion

Question	Response Count	Response Rate	Mean	Mode	Median	SD
The instructor creates an inclusive learning environment for all students.	23	67.65%	4.61	5	5.00	0.50