The course

Bioethics is the study of the ethical issues that arise in the practice of medicine, the study of human biology, and other biological research. Drawing on a variety of ethical cases drawn from the recent biomedical literature, we will cover both the conceptual foundations of moral theory and the application of conceptual tools developed from those principles. Though the majority of cases concern the practice of contemporary medicine, we will also pay attention to cases drawn from biological research.

Learning Objectives

Over the course of the semester, students will:

- Consider recent ethical issues of concern to medical practitioners and researchers;
- Become familiar with major theories of moral philosophy, and the standard principles of bioethics;
- Articulate and defend an interpretation of an ethical dilemma using one of the primary moral theories;
- Apply the standard principles of biomedical ethics to contemporary and classic cases;
- Work in groups to produce an ethical case study;
- Extract subtle points from complicated readings, and use these in the construction of their own arguments;
- Negotiate, defend, and revise clearly stated propositions in small groups in order to develop a consensus;
- Develop skills designed to improve performance on graduate entrance exams (e.g., MCAT, LSAT, GRE, etc.).
Course Topics

Week 1: Intro to Moral Theory and the Principles of Medical & Research Ethics.
Week 2: Against Ethical Egoism, the Ethics of Selfishness, and Moral Relativism.
Week 3: Utilitarianism & Deontology (Case study: Up in the Air; Medical Repatriation).
Week 4: The Use of Animals in Biomedical Research.
Week 5: Autonomy of Children and the Right to Consent or Refuse Treatment.
Week 6: Disability and Normal Function.
Week 7: Enhancement and the Ethics of Reproductive Technology.
Week 8: The Obligation to Provide Care I: Providing Care in Ethically Challenging Conditions.
Week 9: The Obligation to Provide Care II: Conscientious Objection & Healthcare Providers.
Week 10: Health Care Disparity.
Week 11: Group Case Study
Week 12: Death & Dying (Physician-Assisted Suicide).
Week 13: E-Health and Direct-to-Consumer Health and Biomedical Products.
Week 14: Revisiting the Principles of Biomedical Ethics.
Week 15: Presentation of Group Studies.

Course Layout

I have adopted what I call an ‘open source’ approach to teaching. The term is borrowed from the movement in software design that promotes open access to source code and encourages end users to improve and add functionality to that code. My intention is to evoke the value of transparency, broad participation in design, and end user ownership of the courses that I teach. The Keyword Proposals, in particular, are designed to achieve these goals while helping you master centrally important skills. These are briefly described below, and details will be provided in class and on Canvas.

Class will largely consist of group discussions, and it is expected that you attend all classes. If you fail to attend class and miss an assignment it is your responsibility to make this up; however, you typically may not make up in-class exercises. Many classes will incorporate online components, e.g., Keyword Proposals. This is to give students ownership of the course, and to identify what topics are generating the most interest. Developing in-class discussion from online activities is designed to teach you to extract subtle positions from complicated texts and to provide you with practice writing about, discussing and defending conceptual points in a clear, concise manner, both on your own and negotiated as part of a group. This is especially important in bioethics, where this sort of activity is often done in groups where an actionable decision must be drawn as a consensus.

To reflect the importance of the online component of this course, in many weeks this class will be run as a hybrid course. This means that rather than meeting in class on Friday, we will reserve that time for you to participate in online discussions and other activities. In most weeks, we will use the Friday meeting time as an optional seminar-style discussion, or for other activities (e.g., training for standardized graduate exams). More details will be provided in class.
Assignment Details

Keyword Assignments

Keyword proposals consist of three parts: (1) proposing keywords; (2) discussing keywords online; and (3) in-class group exercises. Each student is responsible for two sets of keyword proposals this semester, due the Thursday prior to the week the reading has been assigned. In weeks in which you are not proposing a keyword, you are expected to participate in the online discussion of the posted keywords prior to class on Monday. All students will be expected to participate in the in-class group exercises.

Due to the nature of these assignments, I will not accept late or hand-written submissions. Furthermore, in-class discussion of keywords is a central component of this course, and may not be made up if missed. Failure to attend discussion may result in grade penalties for the online components of these discussions. Do not expect to pass if you fail to attend class!

Grading

There are five categories of grades: Keyword proposals, online discussions, in class exercises, in vivo assignments, and your group case report, along with a final exam (which gets folded into your in class exercises). Details for these will be provided in class and on Canvas. Your overall grade will be determined by a combination of completing each component, and doing it well. Think of it as getting a good score on a video game; you'll need to satisfy multiple thresholds while also scoring well to get the top mark. (Details of this can be seen on the grading rubric provided on Canvas.)

Points gained by having your individual or group keyword selected may be used to determine what to do if your grade is borderline, or even bump you up a full 1/3 of a grade (if you've collected a lot).

Though no single assignment is particularly onerous, each week you will have work to do. We have designed the course so you can designate which weeks you might have more or less work to complete, which many busy students find helpful for planning out their semester.

Academic Misconduct

Students are responsible for knowing and understanding the University’s policy on academic misconduct. This is detailed in the Student Code, section V (“Student Academic Conduct”), Part B (“Academic Misconduct”). You will find this at: http://www.regulations.utah.edu/academics/6-400.html. According to the Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities, “Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, representing as one’s own, without attribution, any other person’s words, phrasing, ideas, sequence of ideas, information or any other mode or content of expression.” It does not include honest error. You are welcome to cite sources in your work, but you must do so explicitly and clearly. Please contact us if you have any questions on how to appropriately credit and mark the work of others.

I have zero tolerance for plagiarism and cheating. Fair warning: though I think turnitin.com is very good at detecting plagiarism, it is not perfect. I have discovered multiple cases of plagiarism that turnitin.com missed. Please do NOT try to test me on this. If I determine you have violated the student code, I will report the violation. There is no negotiation on this.
Course Etiquette

Discussion Norms (From Chalmers’ Rules and Ned Markosian’s Classroom Rules)

In class we will use a standard philosophical convention for class discussions, the hand/finger system. If you have a new comment, raise your hand; if you have a follow up, raise a finger. This will help maintain a continuity of discussion, while also helping ensure voices get heard.

Class Norms:

1. **Norms of respect**
   1.1. Be nice, don't be mean. Be respectful.
   1.2. Don't interrupt.
   1.3. Don't roll your eyes, make faces, laugh at a classmate, etc., especially if you are disagreeing with someone. (Partial exception for signaling norm violations to me.)
   1.4. Don't be incredulous. Encourage exploring conceptual space.
   1.5. Acknowledge your interlocutor's insights.
   1.6. Object to theses, don't object to people.
   1.7. If you notice someone else violating 1.1-6, speak up right away, even if—especially if—you are not the victim.

2. **Norms of constructiveness**
   2.1. Objections are great, but it's also always OK to be constructive and build on a previous comment. Even the most destructive objection can often be cast in a constructive way and provide positive insights.
   2.2. *Philosophy is not a zero-sum game.* Don't worry about impressing anyone or ‘winning’.
   2.3. You don't need to keep pressing the same objection (individually or collectively) once it has been heard or acknowledged.
   2.4. Try to identify unstated assumptions and premises, and ask whether these are reasonable or justified.
   2.5. Try applying the ideas under consideration to new contexts, or under different conditions.
   2.6. Every once in a while, someone should offer a big picture comment to help us avoid getting lost in details.

3. **Norms of inclusion**
   3.1. Don't monopolize the discussion. Leave room for others to speak.
   3.2. Raise one question or comment at a time (then go back in the queue).
   3.3. Acknowledge previous comments where appropriate.
   3.4. Try to build on the points that have been made by others. Seek to connect the point under consideration to previous points or the larger discussion.
   3.5. *It's OK to ask a question that you think may be unsophisticated or uninformed.*
   3.6. Don't use unnecessarily offensive examples.

4. **Metanorms**
   4.1. When norms are violated, I will aim to gently point this out. Others should feel free to say something or signal to me that I should. If it’s more comfortable, it’s fine to quietly point out violations after class.
   4.2. If I violate the norms, feel free to say so then or afterwards.
   4.3. Try not to be defensive when a violation is pointed out; try to be respectful when pointing out a violation.
   4.4. Remember that it's quite possible to violate these norms without being a bad person. (I've certainly done so!)
   4.5. Respect your instructor's enforcement of these norms.
   4.6. These norms may be modified, negotiated, or shift over the course of the semester. That's OK.
In Class Expectations

1. Show up on time; do not leave until class is over. Arriving to class late or leaving early is very distracting and disruptive, both to me and to other students. If you must leave class early, please select a seat such that you can leave in an unobtrusive manner;

2. Turn off your cell phone ringers, and please refrain from texting in class. If a cell phone rings during class or I catch you texting, I reserve the right to answer your phone or reply to your texts.

3. No web-surfing, newspaper reading or other related activities during class. If you feel these kinds of activities are more meaningful than paying attention in class, then by all means do it – just not in the classroom. My feelings won’t be hurt if you choose not to attend class;

4. Be respectful of others. We are going to have in-class discussions over controversial foundational philosophical issues. You may feel strongly about these, and disagree with your fellow students (or me!). Disagreement is fine, *ad hominem* attacks are not.

E-mail correspondence

I am very happy to correspond with you via e-mail, and this is the best way to contact me. I hardly ever check my voicemail, and rarely return student phone calls. E-mails, on the other hand, will typically get a response within 24 hours (and often much quicker). However, I do ask that you follow some minimal guidelines:

1. Please indicate which class you are writing to me about. I teach more than one course and it does neither of us any good if my reply is simply, “Which class are you writing me about?”

2. Please use a proper greeting. This may be formal (e.g., “Dear Prof. Haber”) or informal (“Hi Matt”). You may address me in whatever way you feel comfortable (so long as it is respectful!), though my preference is that you simply call me “Haber.” If you are unsure how to address me, you may simply use, “Dear Prof. Haber.”

3. Please sign your e-mail. All too often I get unsigned e-mails from students with inscrutable e-mail addresses. Please identify yourself to me.

These guidelines may be relaxed in obvious cases (e.g., in a string of e-mail replies). I will use similar guidelines in writing you. As stated above, I am happy to answer student e-mails, and tend to respond promptly (within a day). If I receive e-mails that fail to meet the guidelines above, I reserve the right to not respond.
Administrative and Campus Policies

The Americans with Disabilities Act

The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services and activities for people with disabilities. If you will need accommodations in the class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the Center for Disability Services, 162 Union Building, 581-5020 (V/TDD). CDS will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations. All written information in this course can be made available in an alternative format with prior notification to the Center for Disability Services.

Addressing Sexual Misconduct/Title IX

Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender (which includes sexual orientation and gender identity/expression) is a civil rights offense subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, color, religion, age, status as a person with a disability, veteran’s status or genetic information. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you are encouraged to report it to the Title IX Coordinator in the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, 135 Park Building, 801-581-8365, or the Office of the Dean of Students, 270 Union Building, 801-581-7066. For support and confidential consultation, contact the Center for Student Wellness, 426 SSB, 801-581-7776. To report to the police, contact the Department of Public Safety, 801-585-2677(COPS).

Wellness Statement

Personal concerns such as stress, anxiety, relationship difficulties, depression, cross-cultural differences, etc., can interfere with a student’s ability to succeed and thrive at the University of Utah. For helpful resources contact the Center for Student Wellness at www.wellness.utah.edu or 801-581-7776.