



COURSE OUTLINE – Fall 2026

PH3330(A2): Professional Ethics – 3 (3-0-0) 45 Hours for 15 Weeks

Northwestern Polytechnic acknowledges that our campuses are located on Treaty 8 territory, the ancestral and present-day home to many diverse First Nations, Metis, and Inuit people. We are grateful to work, live and learn on the traditional territory of Duncan's First Nation, Horse Lake First Nation and Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation, who are the original caretakers of this land.

We acknowledge the history of this land and we are thankful for the opportunity to walk together in friendship, where we will encourage and promote positive change for present and future generations.

INSTRUCTOR: Joseph Van Weelden

OFFICE: A306

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OFFICE HOURS: Mondays and Wednesdays 1-2:30 pm

CALENDAR DESCRIPTION: This course will examine the roles and responsibilities of professionals, as well as ethical challenges they face. These challenges often involve balancing self-interest, clients' interests, and the public good. At times they involve weighing clients' interests and clients' wishes (and their autonomy.) They may also involve efforts to resolve conflicts between the professional's personal moral beliefs and their perceived duties as professionals. Challenges and issues will be explored through consideration of debates within specific fields (such as accounting, medicine, engineering, journalism and law) – often with relevance across professions. Controversies will also be investigated through study of general discussions of common concerns. Ethical concepts and outlooks will provide assistance in facing the challenges.

PREREQUISITE(S):

None

COREQUISITE(S):

None

REQUIRED MATERIALS: All readings and other course materials (including the instructor's PPTs and any handouts, links etc.) will be made available on MyClass.

DELIVERY MODE(S): On-Campus



COURSE OBJECTIVES:

1. To gain an understanding of important historical approaches to ethics and apply these theories to current day professional issues.
2. To develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills through the practical application of ethical theories to professional concepts.
3. To examine assumptions, values, goals, principles, and actions as they affect professions and society.
4. To gain an understanding of the effect of individual and professional decisions.
5. To enhance awareness and increase understanding of the nature of professional ethics.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

The learning outcomes stressed in this course are Communication Skills, Critical Thinking Skills and Ethical Reasoning.

1. Students will use **Communication Skills**

- Communicating clearly and concisely employing written and verbal skills appropriate to class assignments and discussion.
- Demonstrating interpersonal skills by listening effectively, establishing a rapport with peers, and monitoring non-verbal signals.
- Expressing awareness of and respect for self and others.

2. Students will use **Critical Thinking Skills**

- Analyzing theoretical concepts and examining the connections between them.
- Critically assessing philosophical theories and arguments in support of these theories.
- Developing arguments with strong logical inferences between premises and conclusions.

3. Students will use **Ethical Reasoning**

- Applying ethical reasoning to practical situations.
- Recognizing and examining multiple perspectives.
- Analyzing and discussing issues from an ethical perspective.

TRANSFERABILITY:

Please consult the Alberta Transfer Guide for more information. You may check to ensure the transferability of this course at the Alberta Transfer Guide main page <http://www.transferalberta.alberta.ca>

**** For courses with alpha (letter) grading, a grade of D or D+ may not be acceptable for transfer to other post-secondary institutions. Students are cautioned that it is their responsibility to contact the receiving institutions to ensure transferability**

EVALUATIONS:

Presentation (worth 10%)- Working in groups of 2 or more (pending enrolment), students will present a summary of one of the pre-readings to the rest of the class. They will together prepare and submit a write-up of their presentation to the instructor.

4 Quizzes (worth a total of 20%)- Quizzes will consist of a series of basic comprehension questions.

Midterm Exam (worth 25%)- The exam will consist of 4 short essay questions from which each student may select any 2 to answer.

Final Exam (worth 35 %)- The exam will consist of 6 short essay questions from which each student may select any 3 to answer.

Participation (worth 10%)-This includes attendance, as well as contributions to the class discussion both in class and online.

GRADING CRITERIA:

Please note that most institutions will not accept your course for transfer credit **IF** your grade is **less than C-**.

Grading Chart

Alpha Grade	4-point Equivalent	Percentage Guidelines	Alpha Grade	4-point Equivalent	Percentage Guidelines
A+	4.0	95-100	C+	2.3	67-69
A	4.0	85-94	C	2.0	63-66
A-	3.7	80-84	C-	1.7	60-62
B+	3.3	77-79	D+	1.3	55-59
B	3.0	73-76	D	1.0	50-54
B-	2.7	70-72	F	0.0	00-49

COURSE SCHEDULE/TENTATIVE TIMELINE:

Topic Title	Week No.	Details	Readings.	Activities	Date (s)
Introduction. What is Professional Ethics?	1	Course Outline and Expectations from Students. What is ethics? What is professional ethics?	Post-Reading: Theodore Gracyk. <i>An Introduction to Professional Ethics: A Duty-Based Approach</i> (pp.1-7)	Icebreaker: 'My Philosophy' Interview	Wednesday, September 2
Thinking (Better) About Ethics.	2	Simple Subjectivism, Cultural Relativism, Moral Universalism. Thinking About	Julia Driver. <i>Ethics: The Fundamentals</i>	Lecture, Group Discussion.	Wednesday, September 9

		Ethics: A Conceptual Toolbox. Thinking Better About Ethics: Common Traps to Avoid.	Introduction and Chapter 1		
Ethics in the Professions. <i>Prima Facie</i> Duties.	3	What is Special About the Professions (and about Professional Ethics)? What is a <i>Prima Facie</i> Duty? What is a fiduciary duty?	Gracyk Chapter 1 (pp.7-35) Matthew Pianalto. 'W.D Ross's Ethics of "Prima Facie" Duties' Frederic Reamer. 'Prima Facie and Actual Duties in Social Work'	Lecture, Student Presentations.	Monday, September 14 Wednesday , September 16
Gracyk's Fiduciary Model	4	The Fiduciary Relationship. The fiduciary model of professional ethics.	Gracyk Chapter 2 (pp.36-70)	Lecture, Student Presentations, 1 st Quiz on September 23.	Monday, September 21, Wednesday, September 23.
The Fiduciary Model: Is It The Right Approach?	5	Challenges to the fiduciary model of professional ethics. Psychological Egoism	Gracyk Chapter 3 (pp.70-95)	Lecture, Student Presentations.	Monday, September 28.
Upholding Client Autonomy	6	What is autonomy? What is its significance for professional ethics?	Gracyk Chapter 4 (pp.96-138)	Lecture, Student Presentations	Monday, October 5. Wednesday, October 7.

		Immanuel Kant's Ethics of Autonomy.	Onora O'Neill. 'A Simplified Account of Kant's Ethics'		
Informed Consent and Conflict of Interest	7	What is informed consent, and why is it so important? What are conflicts of interest and what ethical challenges do they pose for professionals?	Gracyk Chapter 5 (pp.139-174)	Lecture, Student Presentation.	Wednesday, October 14
Confidentiality and its Limits	8	The ethics of confidentiality. What is whistleblowing and when is it justified?	Gracyk Chapter 6 (pp.175-203)	Lecture, Student Presentations, 2 nd Quiz on October 21.	Monday October 19, Wednesday, October 21
Justice and the Professions	9	What is justice and how does it relate to professional responsibility? Utilitarianism, Egalitarianism, Libertarianism. Enhancing justice in psychiatric treatment.	Gracyk Chapter 7 (pp.204-254). William McAskill et al. 'Introduction to Utilitarianism' Video: What Would a Fair Society Look Like? Daniel Weltman. 'Robert Nozick's "Wilt Chamberlain" Argument for Libertarianism' Abigail Gosselin. 'Clinician Knows Best? Injustices in the Medicalization of Mental Illness'.	Lecture, Student Presentations.	Monday, October 26, Wednesday, October 28



Cultural Sensitivity	10	How can professionals navigate cultural differences with their clients?	Kerry W. Bowman and Edwin C. Hui 'Chinese Bioethics' Kristin Furfari 'Seizures, Cultural Beliefs, and Ethical Tensions'	Midterm Exam on November 2nd Lecture, Student Presentations.	Monday, November 2 Wednesday, November 4
Zooming in on the Medical Professions	11	Conscientious Objection-A Canadian Case Study. Ethical Thinking in the Medical Professions. Virtue-Based Ethical Thinking. Compassionate Understanding.	Richard Moon. 'The Conscientious Objection of Medical Practitioners to the CPSO's "Effective Referral" Requirement' David T. Ozar. 'Ethical Thinking and Practice in the Healthcare Professions'. Julia Annas. 'Applying Virtue to Ethics' Steve Matthews. 'Compassionate Understanding'	Lecture, Student Presentations. 3 rd Quiz on November 18	Monday, November 16 Wednesday, November 18
Zooming in on the Social Work Profession	12	Social Work as 'Ethics Work'. Care-Based Ethical Thinking	Sarah Banks. 'Everyday Ethics in Professional Life: Social Work as Ethics Work' Helen De Cruz. 'Perplexity and Philosophical Progress'	Lecture, Student Presentations.	Monday, November 23 Wednesday, November 25



			Virginia Held. 'The Meshing of Care and Justice'.		
Zooming in on the Engineering Profession	13	Engineering, Social Responsibility and Sustainability	Marco Guerici and Luca Carollo. 'A Farewell to Arms...Manufacturing' Diane P. Michelfelder and Sharon A. Jones. 'Sustainable Communities and the Challenge of Caring for Future Generations'	Lecture, Student Presentations.	Monday, November 30, Wednesday, December 2
The Boeing Scandal: A Professional Ethics Case Study. Wrapping Up	14	What Went Wrong At Boeing? Why Did It Go Wrong? What Have We Learned?	Robert Prentice. 'Engineering Ethics and the Boeing Scandal' Martin Petersen. 'The Ethical Failures Behind the Boeing Disasters' Video: Boeing's Fatal Flaw	Film Viewing and Discussion, Lecture, 4 th Quiz on December 9, Revisiting 'My Philosophy' Activity.	Monday, December 7 Wednesday, December 9.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES:

Maintain an inclusive and respectful classroom environment, where no student is made to feel unwelcome or uncomfortable. Kindness and civility are not only compatible with spirited intellectual debate about controversial topics, but essential to it. Any student caught violating this policy will be asked to leave the class.

Please extend the courtesy of paying attention to the other human beings around you (especially to your fellow students!) while you are in my classroom. While electronic devices are not forbidden, if I notice that you are spending the class texting your friends

rather than listening/thinking/engaging I may ask you to leave the classroom until you are prepared to be genuinely present in it. Even if it does not come to this, which I hope it won't, you are hereby notified that such behaviour *will* be reflected in your end of semester participation grade.

Complete all course readings in advance of the session (s) in which we are to discuss them.

Be an active participant in the course (ideally through your own spoken or written contributions to class discussion etc., but at a minimum by actively listening to what others have to say).

STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT:

Academic Misconduct will not be tolerated. For a more precise definition of academic misconduct and its consequences, refer to the Student Rights and Responsibilities policy available at <https://www.nwpolytech.ca/about/polytechnic-leadership/policies-directory>.

****Note:** all Academic and Administrative policies are available on the same page.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

If you require special accommodations for any reason or have any concerns about the classroom environment, please do not hesitate to raise this with me. I am invested in creating a space where every student can flourish, and if there is anything holding you back from fulfilling your potential in my classroom I want to know about it as soon as possible.