

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT TYLER

Course Syllabus

PHIL 2306: Introduction to Ethics
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Spring 2026
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Required Textbooks

Reading materials are provided for free (OER) in Canvas.

Course Catalog Description:

A study of moral theory and ethical decision-making including a critical analysis of practical and professional cases.

The Gist of the Course:

Ethics is the study of right and wrong. Is right and wrong a matter of personal taste? Is morality the same as legality? What kind of person or professional should I be? You may have already answered these questions for yourself, but it's worth spending some time thinking about them and considering how famous philosophers have answered them down through the ages.

Course Outcomes:

By the end of this course, students will be able to...

1. explain and critique the ethical theories of the world's most influential philosophers.
2. apply various ethical theories to concrete cases and contemporary moral problems.
3. analyze and evaluate the argument of an essay that takes a point of view on an ethical issue.
4. demonstrate competent writing skills in an argumentative and philosophical essay.
5. demonstrate competent oral communication skills, arguing for a point of view in a presentation.
6. describe how theories of morality apply to the self.

Grading Scale Percents

A=90-100%, B=80-89%, C=70-79%, D=60-69%, F=less than 60%

Grading:

Initiator Posts (4 @ 100 points each):	300 points (lowest dropped)
Response Post Assignments (4 @ 10 pts each):	30 points (lowest dropped)
Reading Quizzes (16 @ 10 pts each):	150 points (lowest dropped)
Term Paper:	100 points
TOTAL:	580 points

Assessment:

Discussion Board Assignment: You'll make a minimum of six contributions to each discussion board: 1 initiator post + 5 response posts = 6 total posts (minimum). These posts will be spread out over three days, which means you need to be active on the board at least three separate days before the board closes. For example, you might post your initiator post on Friday, 2 response posts on Saturday, and 3 response posts on Sunday.

INITIATOR POSTS: You'll write one initiator post for each board. An initiator post is one that starts a thread based on the discussion prompt. A good post will offer a clear point of view and bring moral theory to bear on the question. It will also make connections to other material in the course, demonstrating your understanding and ability to synthesize all the course material. You must include at least three direct quotes from course readings.

A direct quote is a quotation taken word for word from the reading and enclosed in quotation marks. You should have at least three of these, and they should come from the readings. Quotes taken from the case set do not count toward the three. If you only use course material to quote from, quotation marks and parenthetical citations are enough, for example: "yada, yada" (*author's last name, page number or "online"*). If students use even one outside source – like the excellent [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) – a reference list for *all* sources should be included at the end of the post and must follow Chicago Manual of Style (CMS). See [here](#) for Chicago examples, and see below for how proper citations affect the grade.

The post must be at least 300 words. There's no maximum word count, but keep in mind that grades are not based on quantity of words but on demonstrated comprehension and critical thinking. The grading rubric below shows exactly what is expected.

You must post first in order to view other posts. The edit function will be disabled. If you want to edit after posting, you may reply in the thread with corrections or request that I delete the post. There must be a very good reason for deletion. For grading purposes, I consider your first post to be the initiator post even if it is blank or incomplete.

Late initiator posts can be turned in for a lower grade before the board officially closes. A late penalty of half a letter grade per day applies in each case unless accompanied by a valid excuse (e.g. a doctor's note that indicates a serious illness).

DISCUSSION BOARD RUBRIC (INITIATOR POSTS)	
0-30 points	Point of view is clear and well-defended.
0-30 points	Multiple, relevant connections made (at least 3 direct quotes) to course readings.
0-20 points	Moral theory, such as utilitarianism, Kant, etc., plays a prominent role in the post.
0-10 points	Conveys respect for other points of view even if it takes a contrary position
0-10 points	Grammar is polished, several citations are included, and style conforms to Chicago Manual of Style.

RESPONSE POSTS: In addition to the weekly initiator post, you'll write at least five response posts each week (for a total of 6 contributions: 1 initiator post + 5 response posts = 6). A response post is one that replies to a classmate's post and continues the conversation. One that ends the conversation or just says "I agree" in so many words does not qualify as a response. Good posts carry on the conversation in an interesting and relevant way and draw other students into the discussion. The minimum requirements for receiving credit for a response post are the following:

1. The post is 50 words.
2. The post is relevant to the thread.
3. The last sentence is a question.

Posts under 50 words don't count toward the required number of response posts. If you happen to post a few that are under 50 words, just make sure to post a few more posts that are 50 words.

If some of your posts don't end in a question, a deduction of **1 point** will be applied to the response post grade.

The penalty for not posting on the board on three separate days will be applied to the response post grade as a **3 point** deduction.

Extra credit will be awarded for posting extra response posts that meet the minimum conditions (above) for response posts.

Response posts are due when the board closes (see each discussion board for date and time).

Late response posts will not be accepted. Once the board closes, there are no further opportunities to complete the assignment, so it's advisable to post early to avoid unforeseen events such as last-minute technical problems. Encountering technical issues is not a valid excuse for late work, unless the issue is the university's fault.

The discussion board is the focus of the class, the main learning tool (notice the percentage of the grade). I will be active on the boards and hope to be involved in some rich conversations. Be sure to return regularly to the threads to reply to questions and comments, especially in your own thread. Learn how to search for posts, including mine, by using the search function on the board. When I reply to a post, I often take a contrary position as devil's advocate. My response to your posts should be interpreted as constructive and an opportunity to strengthen your argument. It doesn't mean that I don't like you or that I have a different moral or political stance than you. In fact, it's nearly impossible to figure out my personal beliefs from my posts. If I express a point of view, I do so for teaching purposes, to help you think more carefully about your own position and to extend the conversation. By the way, it's possible to get an A in this class and disagree with my personal opinions. It happens quite regularly.

Additional points will be deducted for late initiator posts. No late initiator or response posts are accepted after the board closes.

Cases of plagiarism earn an automatic zero and a possible F in the course. Plagiarized posts may be sent to UT Tyler Judicial Affairs to receive additional consequences. In short, do your own work, and be careful to give credit to the original author when you quote or paraphrase.

Quizzes: There are sixteen reading quizzes. The topic of each quiz can be found on the quiz page. The quizzes may contain true-false, multiple choice, or multiple answer questions. The quizzes are "open book" but timed. Students must work alone and not receive help from the Internet or A.I.

Paper: Students will argue for a point of view on one of the many case studies from the National High School Ethics Bowl. I have included the complete case set in the paper drop box. Your job is to (1) review the cases, (2) pick one you like, (3) choose *just one* of the questions at the end of the case to answer in the form of a five-paragraph argumentative essay. The paper will be between 1500 to 2000 words and follow the [Chicago Manual Style of Citations](#).

BASIC REQUIREMENTS:

- 1500-2000 words (not including citations and bibliography)
- Double-spaced
- No cover page
- Name and title at the top center of first page
- Page numbers on the bottom right of each page
- Standard twelve-point font (e.g. Times New Roman)
- One-inch margins
- .docx, rtf, or pdf file formats only
- The introduction should be no more than half a page.
- The conclusion should be no more than half a page and only review the main points.
- No inflammatory or disrespectful language
- Should include at least three direct quotes (clear and relevant) from course readings

The paper should be a standard five paragraph argumentative essay (no more and no less than five paragraphs), which means an introduction, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion. The thesis statement requirement: *the last sentence* of the introduction should be the *complete thesis statement*

that clearly states your point of view. The topic sentence requirement: the first sentence of each body paragraph should act as a topic sentence and support thesis statement. The paper must be organized in the following way:

PAPER OUTLINE	
<u>First paragraph</u> :	This paragraph includes background info, case summary, and any terms that need to be defined. The thesis statement should clearly state your point of view on the question.
<u>Second paragraph</u> :	first argument in support of your point of view
<u>Third paragraph</u> :	second argument in support of your point of view
<u>Fourth paragraph</u> :	an articulation of a contrary point of view (to yours) immediately followed by your careful and thorough rebuttal. The contrary point of view should involve a moral theory.
<u>Fifth paragraph</u> :	conclusion, review of main points

TERM PAPER RUBRIC (100 POINTS)	
0-30 points	Does the paper demonstrate critical thinking? The paper is an argumentative essay, containing a well-supported argument. It also makes careful distinctions and avoids logical fallacies and gaps in reasoning.
0-30 points	Are connections made with other readings in the course? Multiple, relevant connections (with citations) are made to course materials from the entire semester. Students should demonstrate how much they have learned by using relevant ideas in service of their argument. A minimum of three direct quotes are required, and they must come from the course readings not the case set.
0-20 points	Is ethical theory successfully applied? Moral theory from the course plays a prominent role in the paper – utilitarianism, Kant, virtue theory, etc. – and is correctly applied in the argument to support the student’s thesis statement.
0-10 points	Is another point of view carefully addressed? A contrary point of view is carefully considered and critiqued. See paper outline above.
0-10 points	Is the paper well-written? Grammar is polished, and citation style conforms to Chicago Manual of Style. Also, the paper meets the thesis statement and topic sentence requirements in the instructions and is a five-paragraph essay organized in the way described above.

Additional points will be deducted for late papers and papers that don't satisfy the "BASIC REQUIREMENTS" above. Cases of plagiarism earn an automatic zero and a possible F in the course. Plagiarized papers may be sent to UT Tyler Judicial Affairs to receive additional consequences.

You're not graded for your political, religious, or moral beliefs but whether you demonstrate good critical thinking, argumentation, and application of concepts from the semester. Review the grading rubric above carefully.

If you receive help from the Writing Center on an early draft and use the information to revise your paper, I will award you five extra credit points in the extra credit column, which amounts to half a letter grade on the paper. In order to receive extra credit, you must opt in to "email instructor" when you visit the Center. If I don't receive an e-mail from the Writing Center, you will not receive credit. The Writing Center is often busy, so you must plan ahead and make an appointment. No exceptions will be made if you are too late in making your appointment. You can earn only five points even if you visit the Writing Center multiple times. Visiting the Writing Center does not guarantee you a good grade but makes it more likely you will receive a better grade than you would have.

Course Policies:

Late work policy: Assignments must be submitted by the deadline. A penalty of half a letter grade per day up to two letter grades will be assessed for late initiator posts and the paper. This penalty will be waived only under special circumstances (e.g. a serious illness accompanied by a doctor's note). Late discussion board posts are not accepted after the board closes. No late term papers will be accepted after the end of finals week.

Communication policy: The best way to communicate with the instructor is through UT Tyler e-mail (gbock@uttyler.edu) or in Canvas. Students can expect replies within 48 hours excluding weekends and holidays. Students who do not receive a reply within this timeframe should attempt to contact the instructor again. The instructor communicates with the class via Canvas emails and announcements. It is important that students check their email and allow push notifications for class announcements.

Class conduct policy: The subject matter of this class can make some people hot under the collar. This said, all comments and behavior must be classroom appropriate. What does "classroom appropriate" mean? It does *not* mean that students cannot express unpopular opinions. It means practicing reasoning and logical argumentation. It means being civil and listening with respect. Insults, snide comments, name-calling, cutting someone off, derogatory tones, sarcasm, ridicule, cussing, vulgarity, personal attacks, racial slurs, misogynistic remarks, etc. will not be allowed. If you are unsure about what counts as disrespectful, consult the instructor or the Golden Rule. The instructor will act as the final word on what is or is not classroom appropriate. Violators may be ejected from the class.

Cell phone policy (face-to-face sections): Mobile devices can be used in the classroom if it is related to what is going on in class. If you have an electronic textbook or plan to take

notes on your device, please let me know early in the semester. They are permissible as long as they don't distract you or your classmates from the lesson.

Arriving late or leaving early policy (face-to-face sections): Arriving on time can sometimes be challenging, but it is better to be late than never. However, late arrivals and early departures can be disruptive. For this reason, please don't make a habit of it. If it becomes a regular issue, points will be deducted from the attendance grade.

Extra credit policy: Extra credit is available in the class but only on discussion boards and only when they're open. Extra points can be earned by posting extra response posts that satisfy the basic requirements of response posts (see the requirements above). After you've posted the minimum number of qualifying response posts (5), each extra post will receive one point, up to five points max. By the way, five points of extra credit is equivalent to half a letter grade on the term paper.

"It is what it is" final grade policy: Grades are final once the final grade percentage has been calculated in Canvas at the end of the semester. No changes will be made unless the instructor has made a mistake. Grades are not bumped up unless the student is within .5% of the next letter grade. For example, an 89.5% is an A. An 89.4% is a B. No extra credit opportunities will be given during the last week of class. The conditions for an "incomplete" are stated in the university handbook: "(a) the student has been making satisfactory progress in the course; (b) the student is unable to complete all course work or final exam due to unusual circumstances that are beyond personal control and are acceptable to the instructor; and (c) the student presents these reasons prior to the time that the final grade roster is due." The terms and deadline for satisfying an "incomplete" will be set by the instructor.

A.I. policy: See policy in the Start Here module in Canvas.

Plagiarism policy: See policy in the Start Here module in Canvas.

[UT TYLER HONOR CODE](#)

I embrace honor and integrity.
Therefore, I choose not to lie, cheat or steal, nor to accept the actions of those who do.

(By the way, it's really bad karma to cheat in an ethics class.)