

TENTATIVE SYLLABUS
(THE FINAL VERSION WILL BE POSTED ON THE COURSE WEBPAGE ON SEPTEMBER 4)

PHIL343 Biomedical Ethics
Fall 2015, MWF 12:35-13:25
Strathcona Anatomy & Dentistry 1/12

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Course Description

This course will investigate philosophical issues arising from the practice of health care and health care system. The course is divided into three parts. The first part is focused on the central issues in conventional bioethics. Topics include non-therapeutic abortion, infanticide (after-birth abortion), physician-assisted suicide, prenatal screening, genetic enhancement, etc. The purpose of the first part is to understand how the philosophical way of thinking proceeds. The second part is focused on the ethics of allocating scarce health care resources. We will focus on three fundamental questions concerning justice in health and health care: (1) What is health and how do we measure health benefit?; (2) When are health inequalities unjust?; (3) How can we meet health needs fairly under resource constraints? The purpose of the second section is to understand how a population's health care system should be evaluated. The third part is group research and presentation. The purpose of group research is to experience quasi ethics committee in hospital or health policy unit. In the real situation of ethics committee, people with different expertise, cultural/religious background, and goals must agree to a set of recommendations for difficult problems in a limited time line. Throughout the third part, I will invite you to put yourself in a position of health policy maker, health care administrator, and hospital director, who encounter difficult, complex, and highly ethical decision problems. By the end of this course, you will learn (a) the theoretical structure of ethical problems in medical practice and (b) how we reason when we allocate health and health care resources fairly.

Trigger alert

This course is a 300-level course in philosophy. It is not a vocational training course for medical professionals. We do NOT assume any prior knowledge of philosophy. However, we assume the basic level of analytical and writing skills in humanities. Having said this, you do not need to worry too much. If you took some humanities courses at CEGEP or one or two 200 level courses in humanities at McGill, then you will be fairly comfortable with the course materials and requirements. Through a series of small assignments and midterm essay, you will have opportunities to improve the analytical and writing skills before the final exam. In any case, we strongly recommend reading Vaughn and McIntosh, *Writing Philosophy: A Guide for Canadian Students* (OUP Canada, 2009) before the first assignment. Throughout this course, we will discuss emotionally charged issues: life and death (and choosing who will die and who will survive). Please be prepared to discuss these sensitive issues in a serious and respectful manner.

Format

There will be two lectures and one conference per week. Lectures meet Mondays and Wednesdays 12:35-13:25 at Strathcona Anatomy & Dentistry 1/12. The first lecture is on September 9 (there will be no lecture on September 4). Conferences meet Fridays, and start on September 18 (exception: the class of September 11 will be a lecture at Strathcona Anatomy & Dentistry 1/12). Conference attendance is mandatory.

Textbook:

- Greg Bogner and Iwao Hirose. *The Ethics of Health Care Rationing: An Introduction*. Routledge (2014). It will be available for purchase at the McGill Book Store.
- Articles on MyCourses

Supplementary books (highly recommended):

- John Harris. *The Value of Life*. Routledge (1985). [Published 30 years ago, but simply classic!]
- Tom Beauchamp and James Childress. *Principles of Biomedical Ethics. Sixth Edition*. Oxford University Press (2009). [The most standard and comprehensive textbook for biomedical ethics course in medical school – less philosophical]
- Norman Daniels. *Just Health*. Cambridge University Press (2008). [The most important book on the normative foundations of health care system]
- Leonard Flick. *Just Caring*. Oxford University Press (2009). [A good book on health care rationing in the US context]
- Peter Ubel. *Pricing Life: Why It's Time for Health Care Rationing* MIT Press (2001). [Introduction to health care rationing]
- Erik Nord. *Cost-Value Analysis in Health Care: Making Sense out of QALYs* Cambridge University Press (1999). [Advanced and seminal work by the most eminent health economist]
- Paul Menzel. *Strong Medicine: Ethical Rationing of Health Care*. Oxford University Press (1990).

Reading schedule

Please see the separate file for the *tentative* schedule of required readings. The course instructor reserves the right to alter the schedule during the fall semester (I have not changed it in the previous years, but I may need to change it under certain circumstances).

Requirements and assessments

In order to pass this course, you must complete (1) midterm take-home exam, (2) group research, and (3) final exam.

- 4 short assignments (5pt x 4): 20pt
- Mid-term take-home exam: 20pt
- Conference attendance and participation: 10pt
- Group research: 10pt
- Final exam: 40pt

Assignments

Each response must be max 500 words and submitted through the myCourses assignment function. myCourses has the cut-off time and does not accept late submissions. **AVOID THE LAST-MINUTE SUBMISSION.**

Midterm take-home exam

Midterm exam should be max 2,000 words. Late submissions will be downgraded at a rate of 3 points per 24 hours on their grade for the course (not 3% on the essay grade), including weekend/holiday days. Requests for extensions will be considered (but not automatically granted) *only when* requested before the exam is due and substantiated at the time of request by a doctor's note documenting illness. Requests must be submitted to your TA.

Conference attendance and participation

Weekly conference attendance is mandatory. There will be two conference groups. Please sign up for one of them via Minerva before September 18. Conference is important part of this course because discussion plays fundamental role in philosophy. In conference, you put forward your own arguments, and your arguments will be cross-examined by your classmates under supervision of TA. The success of conference discussion depends on the attendance, preparation and participation of students. Therefore, we take attendance and participation

very seriously. If you miss two or more conferences, there will be a *disproportional* penalty on conference attendance grade.

Group work

Each group proposes and defends a set of recommendations on a specific topic. We will assess the depth, persuasiveness, coherence and originality of group presentations and the performance in Q&A section (presentation 12 min, Q&A 10 min). Everyone in the same group will receive the same grade. However, if two or more students in your group judge that you did not make fair contribution to the group research, we will deduce 5pt from the grade for your group.

Final exam

Examination will take place on the date that the University sets. The exam will consist in a bunch of short comprehension questions and two essay questions.

The University requires that the following notices appear on every syllabus:

- McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).
- In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.
- In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.