

HONR 210: Honors Social Science (Justice, Politics, and Policy)

Fall Term 2012

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:30-10:45 a.m.. SSA-218

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SSA-207

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Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday 11:00 a.m. -12:00 noon and 1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Tuesday / Thursday 11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m

Course Description

How might we estimate the moral worth of our actions? What are the obligations of citizenship, of membership in a self-governed community? What is the moral basis of individual rights and liberties? How might we discern justice in law and public policy? Should moral or religious perspectives play a role in political life? What moral and ethical questions are raised by emerging technologies? Students enrolled in HONR 210 examine these and numerous other questions amidst a close encounter with the great ideas of western philosophy. Moreover, students enrolled in HONR 210 attempt to make sense of the present, and future, by looking to the great minds of the past – Aristotle, Kant, Mill, Rawls, and many others.

HONR 210 attracts students of every academic major and professional ambition. No prior exposure to either political science or moral philosophy is required or assumed. Prerequisite to the course, however, are an active mind, openness to the ideas of authors of canonical status, and an appetite for civil dialogue on questions of enduring significance.

Classroom sessions follow a discussion and, frequently, seminar format. Written essays, discussion leadership duties, and a term-length research project are used to assess learning, arouse in students an appetite for critical reflection on moral and ethical questions arising in their own fields of study.

Required Texts

- Blackburn, Simon. 2001. *Ethics: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 9780192804426.
- Sandel, Michael. 2007. *Justice: A Reader*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 9780195335125.

Daily Activity

Class meetings are, with few exceptions, discussion in format. On many occasions, discussion leadership/initiation duties are assigned to a specific student who provides a short overview of assigned readings, offers a brief commentary contextualizing the ideas presented by the author(s), and launches discussion with a question designed to illuminate a problem, puzzle, or philosophical perspective germane to the course. Students assigned discussion leadership duties “have the floor” for about 5-10 minutes at the beginning of class. The balance of class time is spent in group discussion with all members of class contributing to the shared enterprise of exploring the great ideas of philosophical ethics.

The course calendar – located on the following pages – provides a schedule of assigned readings, assignment due dates, in-class essay dates, and other useful information. Each day, the professor will indicate to students those readings likely to be discussed in subsequent class meetings and announce any necessary adjustments to the schedule of activities.

The professor strongly urges students to take careful notes while reading [it goes without saying that students should read diligently prior to each class meeting] and plan for some measure of note taking during class discussion.

Special Note on the Matter of Class Participation: Students are reminded that class preparation / participation are among the graded elements of the course. A student’s class preparation/participation grade is determined on the basis of the frequency, cogency, and effectiveness with which contributions are made to class discussions. It is important to remember that effective participation takes many forms, not the least of which are asking an insightful question, attempting to clarify a concept for another student, and declaring oneself “lost” or confused as what an author is relating to the audience. Put simply, some amount of misunderstanding and bewilderment are expected phases of the student (and professor’s) experience in HONR 210. Not rewarded, however, is evidence of languishing in solitary bewilderment as to how an assigned reading contributes to the purposes of HONR 210. Thus, students are urged to ask questions, seek clarification, and acknowledge the limits of their own comprehension. [The professor assures you that he is not infrequently at wits end as to what one or another author is relating. Chances are, we will share many instances of disorientation.]

Absences

Faithful attendance is required. Excessive absences will result in a lowered class participation grade. In the event that a student encounters the need to be absent on the day of an examination, all due effort must be directed at notifying the instructor prior to class time. The instructor will serve as the sole and final arbiter of requests for excused absences, pleas for make-up examinations, or extended deadlines on assignments. Excused absences and make-up examinations are likely to be granted in instances of profound illness, family exigency, personal crisis, or commitment to participation in a University sponsored event. Students should be prepared to document or in some way substantiate a request for a make-up exam or essay.

Research Project

All students enrolled in HONR 210 will submit for grading a research project of approximately ten pages in length (not including bibliography, references, and title page). The purposes of the research paper project is to encourage each student to examine an issue or policy question arising in their field of study and analyze that question from *several moral philosophical perspectives*. For example, a student intending to study medicine or nursing may decide to examine ethical issues arising in the practice and application of stem cell research. A student planning a career in teaching may resolve to investigate from moral philosophical perspectives the practices of for-profit, proprietary schools. A business major may decide to inquire into the marketing and sale of products known to present risks to the health or safety of the consumer.

How might you identify a topic for research? First, meet with two or more BVU faculty teaching courses in your intended major. Engage your professors in a discussion of emerging (or long-disputed) questions, problems, or challenges with identifiable ethical dimensions. Next, report the content of your discussions to Dr. Best and work toward a clear, unambiguous statement of an issue stimulating ethical debate in your field. Furthermore, begin an aggressive search for scholarly, and quite possibly journalistic, commentary on the issue capturing your interest. Read deeply, thoroughly on this issue, taking careful notes on the controversy in question while constructing a complete bibliography of the books, articles, web materials, perhaps even films, you're examining.

Students are reminded that early in the term (**3rd week**), Dr. Best requires each student to submit a short, one-page research project proposal. Shortly thereafter, in the **5th week**, students will submit a brief annotated bibliography of sources used in the early stages of research. Following a one-on-one consultation session with Dr. Best, student will submit in the **8th week** of the term a revised topic proposal (now 3 pages in length) and a revised annotated bibliography. Additional guidance on the preparation of the topic proposal will occur in the early weeks of the semester. Presentation and submission of the final, 10-page research project will occur in the **15th week** of the term. Additional instructions relevant to the preparation of the final draft will be provided periodically throughout the semester. Support and guidance in the research process is, of course, available at all times throughout the semester. Students should never hesitate to seek Dr. Best for assistance.

In-Class Essays

On four occasions, students will be asked to write an in-class essay responding to one or more questions stemming from the assigned readings and class discussions. In the class meetings prior to the scheduled in-class essay date, Dr. Best will provide direction and guidance as to the general scope of essay question(s). This is done for the purpose of encouraging students to focus on preparation and ease the natural tendency to speculate about the nature of upcoming essay questions.

Plagiarism:

Evidence of plagiarism will result in a failing grade in the course. In the event that evidence of plagiarism is discovered, the instructor reserves the right to pursue remedies through administrative channels. Such remedies may include expulsion from the University.

Graded Elements

Final grades in HONR 210 will be determined on the following basis:

- Written essays → There are four, each worth a maximum of 40 points.
- Take-home essay → There is just one, and it is worth a maximum of 10 points.
- Final Examination → worth a maximum of 40 points
- Research Project → One is required, and it is worth a maximum of 80 points.
- Class preparation / participation → worth a maximum of 40 points

TOTAL POINTS POSSIBLE in HONR 210 → **430**

Final grades will be awarded on the basis of the percentage of the maximum number of points earned in the course.

Final Point Scale:

<i><u>Final Point Scale</u></i>	<i><u>Grade</u></i>
93-100%	A
90-92%	A-
<hr/>	
87-89%	B+
83-86%	B
80-82%	B-
<hr/>	
77-79%	C+
73-76%	C
70-72%	C-
<hr/>	
67-69%	D+
63-66%	D
60-62%	D-
<hr/>	
< 60%	F

Additional Comments:

The schedule and procedures identified in this document are subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances. Where possible, substantive changes to this course syllabus will be

communicated to students prior to the time at which students are affected. Changes in the schedule of readings may be communicated in oral or written form.

Students are encouraged to contact the Center for Academic Excellence (CAE) (telephone ext. 1236) and request assistance with any known or suspected need for accommodation that supports their academic goals.

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Course Calendar

Week 1 Course Introduction / Initial Thoughts on Moral Philosophy (Aug. 28, 30)

Assigned Reading

- *The Queen v. Dudley and Stephens* (1884)
 - Take-Home Essay (2 pages, 10 points) – “Is killing ever morally justified?” (due August 30)
- “Ethics” entry in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* <http://www.iep.utm.edu/ethics/>

Week 2 Utilitarianism / Initial Discussion of Research Project (Sept. 4, 6)

Assigned Reading

- Bentham, *Principles of Morals and Legislation* (Sandel, pp. 9-14)
- Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Sandel, pp. 14-47)

Discussion Leadership: _____.

Week 3 Libertarianism / Research Project Proposal Due (Sept. 11, 13)

Assigned Reading

- Milton Friedman and Rose Friedman, *Free to Choose* (Sandel, pp. 49-60)
- Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Sandel, pp. 60-73)
- Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Sandel, pp. 73-82)

Discussion Leadership: _____.

➔ Submit 1 page research project proposal _____.

Week 4 Property Rights / In-Class Essay #1
(Sept. 18, 20)

Assigned Reading

- Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (Sandel, 84-126)

→ In-Class Essay #1 – Sept. 20

Week 5 Markets and their Implications
(Sept. 25, 27)

Assigned Reading

- Calabresi and Bobbit, *Tragic Choices* (Sandel, pp. 127-130)
- McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom* (Sandel, pp. 131-137)
- Traub, *All Go Down Together* (Sandel, pp. 137-138)
- Supreme Court of New Jersey, *In the Matter of Baby M* (Sandel, pp. 138-144)
- Anderson, *Is Women's Labor a Commodity?* (Sandel, pp. 144-156)

Discussion Leadership: _____.

→ Annotated bibliography, 10 sources relevant to research project _____.

Week 6 Freedom as Autonomy
(Oct. 2, 4)

Assigned Reading

- Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, pp. 158-199

Week 7 Justice as Fairness
(Oct. 9, 11)

Assigned Reading

- Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, pp. 203-221

Discussion Leadership: _____.

→ Research project consultations with Dr. Best (by appointment)

Week 8 Distributive Justice
(Oct. 16, 18)

Assigned Reading

- Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, pp. 223-226
- Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, pp. 226-235

→ **In-class essay #2 – Nov. 18**

→ **Submission of revised project proposal (2-3 pages) and annotated bibliography**

Week 9 Aristotle and Virtue Theory
(Oct. 25)

Assigned Reading

- Aristotle, *The Politics*, pp. 264-295
- Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, pp. 295-299

Discussion Leadership: _____.

→ **As of Week 9, students should have completed the Blackburn text in preparation for subsequent class discussions.**

Week 10 Age, Disability, and Discrimination
(Oct. 30, Nov. 1)

Assigned Reading

- Pressley, “*Safety Blitz: Texas Cheerleader Loses Status After Others’ Parents Complain*,” pp. 301-303
- Sandel, *Honor and Resentment*, pp. 303-305
- Ryan, *Sorry, Free Rides Not Right*, pp. 305-306
- Kite, *Keep the PGA on Foot*, pp. 306-307
- Supreme Court of the United States, *PGA Tour Inc., v. Casey Martine*, pp. 307-313

Week 11 Justice and Community
(Nov. 6, 8)

Assigned Reading

- MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, pp. 315-328
- Sandel, *Democracy’s Discontent*, pp. 328-334
- Walzer, *Spheeres of Justice*, pp. 335-342

Discussion Leadership: _____.

→ **Research project consultations with Dr. Best (by appointment), rough-drafts in hand!**

Week 12 Moral Argument and Liberal Toleration
(Nov. 13, 15)

Assigned Reading

- Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, pp. 343-358
- Sandel, *Political Realism*, pp. 359-377

Discussion Leadership: _____.

→ **In-class essay #3 – Nov. 15**

Week 13 Same-Sex Marriage
(Nov. 20)

Assigned Reading

- Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts, *Hillar Goodridge and Others v. Department of Public Health*, pp. 379-382
- Kinsley, *Abolish Marriage*, pp. 383-384
- Finnis, *Law, Morality, and Sexual Orientation*, pp. 384-392

Week 14 Same-Sex Marriage - continued
(Nov. 27, 29)

- Macedo, *Homosexuality and the Conservative Mind*, pp. 392-403
- West, *Universalism, Liberal Theory, and the Problems of Gay Marriage*, pp. 403-410

In-class essay #4 – Nov. 29

Week 15 **Research Project Presentations / Submission of Final Draft of Project**
(Dec. 4, 6)

The Final Examination is scheduled for: _____.