

BLOOMSBURG UNIVERSITY
Department of Psychology
Course Syllabus

Course: Psychological Aspects of Social Issues (3 credit hrs.)

Instructor: Jeffrey D. Leitzel, Ph.D.

Catalog # 48.254.01 & 2

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Course Schedule: M W F 9-9:50am(s1) & 10-10:50am(s2)

Office: McCormick 2123

Office hours: M W F 8:10-9 am & 1:10-2 pm

Course Description:

Examines the application of psychological, ethical and philosophical theories to existing social issues as well as their relationship to alternative ethical viewpoints. Lecture, class discussions, group activities, experiential exercises, videotapes, and homework assignments will be used to meet the instructional goals. **Prerequisite:** 48.101 (General Psychology).

Learning Objectives

The overall course goal will be to provide the student with knowledge pertaining to how the various theoretical perspectives listed above can inform our decision making processes. We will systematically evaluate the various issues that come into play when making decisions about our behaviors, paying particular attention to the psychological research literature that is relevant to the various issues we will explore.

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be expected to be able to:

1. State alternative ethical viewpoints regarding social issues
2. Identify the pervasive application of psychological knowledge and theories and comprehend the ethical questions arising from their use.
3. Engage in critical thinking regarding social issues as presented by the popular press, novelists, textbook writers, and psychologists.
4. Comprehend the interwoven nature of all psychology and philosophy and their relationship to humanities and applied areas of study.
5. Demonstrate awareness of the importance of values, ethics, and decision making on their lives, and the ethical dilemmas posed by specific issues, and practices.

Students will demonstrate their attainment of these learning objectives during class discussions, debates, oral presentations, quizzes, on their written assignments, and on exams.

Required Materials:

1. Vaughn, L. (2008). *Doing Ethics: Moral Reasoning and Contemporary Issues*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co.

2. Turning Point Response Card XR Classroom Response Device a.k.a. "Clicker" – must be registered in blackboard. Go to <http://ot.bloomu.edu/Turningpoint/index.php> for help with registering.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Attendance

Attendance is required for all class meetings; three absences are allowed without penalty. Exceeding three absences will result in a reduction of your attendance/participation grade, one point off per absence beyond the third (I also track late arrivals and count each three as an additional absence). You remain responsible for any material presented or announcements that are made in class, even if you are not present. Since exam items will be taken from both the textbook for the course and material not in the book that I present during class, it is in your best interest to be present for class. Regular, attendance and thoughtful participation during class can help in the event of a borderline grade. Participation is also an important part of your attendance/participation grade. This means that if you attend class and simply sit quietly and do not participate, your point total for attendance/participation will not be very high.

2. Exams

There will be two exams during the course of the semester and a comprehensive final exam. Exams will cover all material from the assigned readings and topics discussed during class (including student debate presentations) as well as any films or videos we watch in class. If classes are cancelled on an exam date due to snow, the exam will be given during the next class. If there is a snow cancellation of the class preceding an exam, check your University e-mail account for information. Make-up exams will only be administered in the event of a student illness, family member death, or official University activity. If such circumstances prevent you from being present for an exam you should contact me as soon as it is clear that you will not be present for the exam. You should contact me to schedule a time to take a make-up exam prior to the class meeting

following the exam. Failure to follow this procedure will result in a grade of zero for the exam in question. Only under truly extraordinary circumstances will more than one make-up exam be allowed for any student during the semester.

3. Oral Debate Presentations

Students, working in groups of 2-4, will choose a debate topic, and side of the debate from the list provided by the instructor to research, prepare, and present in class. Each team will distribute a brief outline or summary of their primary presentation and key references related to their stance on their topic at the time of their presentation. **Each student team must submit to the professor, via e-mail, four multiple-choice questions, with four response options based on their presentation, clearly indicating the correct answer for each question.** A sampling of these questions will be included on the final exam, so it will be to your advantage to be present and attentive. Time for discussion will be allowed following the debates. Debates will be held during the last two weeks of class. At least two of the sources utilized in preparing the oral debate presentation must be from a psychology (or related field) professional journal. If you have any uncertainty about the appropriateness of your source(s) or what constitutes a professional journal, please see me. A checklist for this assignment as well as the criteria I will be using to evaluate the debates are available to help you to ensure that you are meeting all requirements. These materials can be accessed at the course web page.

4. Debate report

Each student team will be responsible for the completion of one written debate report. This assignment will comprise 15% of the final grade. It is expected that the written product will include both the fruit of the references team members have read and the distillation of this information into a product of their own synthesis. This is to say that papers that consist entirely of summaries of the work of others will receive minimal grades. All debate reports should be 6-8 pages long (not including reference/cover page(s)), typed, double spaced with left and right margins no greater than 1.25", and font no larger than 12 point (Note: I hate to have to be this specific). Appropriate reference citations should be provided for all sources utilized.

An outline of the planned debate report, along with key references, must be submitted at least three weeks prior to the project due date (actual date is listed in course schedule). Submission of this outline by the deadline is a part of the assignment, failure to do so will result in a 1.5 point reduction in your team's grade for the project.

While the oral debate presentation will require that you argue and support one side of the topic, in the written report you must present a thorough description of both sides of the issue and your conclusion, based on your review of the evidence. This will require some review of literature and appropriate use of a range of information sources. This assignment will require the use of multiple sources of information, **at least two of which must be articles from a psychology or related field journal.** Use of information from web sites should be kept to a minimum. The majority of the sources used should be scholarly books and articles.

Papers graded with an "A" will contain the following elements:

- Effective, complete and balanced presentation of both sides of the controversy.
- Logical and persuasive articulation of the students' stance on the issue.
- Integration and synthesis with information and theories addressed in the course.

Papers must be turned in on or before the due date listed on this syllabus. **Papers turned in after the beginning of class on the due date will be penalized, which means that arriving to class late on the due date means your paper is one class meeting late. The reduction for late papers is 10% per class meeting late.** In addition to the paper copy handed in at class, you must submit an electronic version of your paper to the Turnitin assignment that will be on Blackboard. Plan ahead; expect printer problems, empty ink jet and toner cartridges, computer viruses, pets destroying papers, etc. If you are sick or your car dies on the day the paper is due you may fax it to me or put it in the mail - and I will check the postmark date. I will be happy to read and return to you with comments papers submitted by two weeks prior to the due date. This will give you an opportunity to make changes prior to a grade being assigned.

Bloomsburg University is committed to the fundamental values of preserving academic honesty as defined in the Student Handbook (PRP3512). Students agree that by taking this course all required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers.

5. Issue papers

Two issue papers will be written during the course of the semester. These will be 1-2 pages, typed, following formatting instructions above in the debate report description. Further details are available at the course web page. These papers will identify an issue in a news or popular media source and present a summary of the issue or event and then connections with the psychological issue or principle that might be utilized to understand the issue better. Thus, these assignments will involve two parts, identifying a social/ethical issue presented in a popular media source and then finding a relevant piece of psychological literature that further illuminates the issue.

6. Quiz questions

At the beginning of the coverage of most chapters, we will start things off with a couple of quiz questions. You will need to be sure that you have your response card with you in order to respond to these questions. There will usually be a total of about five questions per chapter, interspersed throughout our coverage of the chapter. I anticipate giving at least 40 quiz questions, possibly more during the course of the semester. These quiz questions are worth 5% of your grade, which is earned in full by answering 80% or more of the total number of these questions correctly. Students answering less than 80% of the questions correctly will receive a prorated portion of the 5 points. Absolutely no make ups of the quiz questions will be given for any reason. If you arrive late for class and a question is in progress you will not have "extra time" to answer. These questions will be discussed immediately.

Evaluation/grading

Attendance/participation	15 points	Issue Papers (2)	5 points
Exam #1	10 points	Debate Presentation	15 points
Exam #2	15 points	Debate Paper	15 points
Final Exam	20 points	Quiz Questions	5 points

For the final grading of the debate presentation and paper, a process will be put in place where group members will be asked to evaluate their own and their peers' contribution to the process, including describing what everyone's role was in preparing the paper and preparing for the debate. It is my sincere hope that all group members will contribute approximately equal effort to the debate work. However, in cases where a group has one or more "freeloaders" I have no problem with providing those individuals with grades that reflect their contribution to the overall process.

Grade Ranges

A = 90-100 B = 80-89.99 C = 70-79.99 D = 60-69.99 E = <60

Grade adjustments

I will not "adjust a grade" at the end of the semester due to academic probation, athletic eligibility, getting kicked out of school, scholarships, or for any other reason unrelated to your performance in the course. You will receive the grade that you earned. If you believe that I made an error in recording or calculating your grade, please contact me as soon as you discover the error.

Any student who is interested in additional readings related to the course material should speak with me. I will be happy to provide suggestions.

All of the PowerPoint presentations for my lectures will be available via my website, simply go to the page for this course and click on the appropriate chapter. There is also a link to the textbook publisher's student homepage for our textbook, on this site you will find information that will be useful to you for this course, including learning activities and practice quizzes that I encourage you to utilize.

Course Schedule (subject to modification)

Tentative course schedule (subject to change, any changes will be discussed in class and substantial changes will be posted to my web site) exact exam dates will be announced in class, this schedule provides the sequence, but not exact dates:

<i>Week of</i>	<i>Topic(s)</i>	<i>Reading(s)</i>
8-31	Course overview, introductions, response card xr overview Ethics and the Examined Life	Chapter 1
9-7	No class 9-7 Labor Day Subjectivism, Relativism, and Emotivism	Chapter 2
9-14	Evaluating Moral Arguments Select debate partner/topic 9-16 Library instruction session, Katie Yelinek, Coordinator of Government Documents – Class will meet in Andruss Library, 2nd floor Classroom-Computer Lab – rm. 243 The Power of Moral Theories	Chapter 3 Chapter 4
9-21	Consequentialist Theories (Mill) Nonconsequentialist Theories (Kant) Issue paper #1 due on 9-25	Chapter 5 Chapter 6
9-28	Virtue Ethics	Chapter 7
10-5	Exam # 1 Abortion	Chapter 8
10-12	Abortion – continued	
10-19	Euthanasia Issue paper # 2 due on 10-21	Chapter 9
10-26	Debate paper outline due at start of class on 10-26 Capital Punishment	Chapter 10
11-2	Exam # 2 No class meeting on 11-6 – Dr. Leitzel @ conference	
11-9	Race/Prejudice/Discrimination	Chapter 12
11-16	War, Terrorism, and Civil Liberties Debate paper due at start of class on 11-18	Chapters 15 & 16
11-23	Continue War, Terrorism and Civil Liberties No Class 11-25 or 11-27 – Happy Thanksgiving!	
11-30	Student debates #1 & #2	
12-7	Student debates #3 & #4, general discussion & course evaluation	

Final Exam: Section 1 (9 am class) - Thursday, December 17 - 3:30 pm
Section 2 (10 am class) - Monday, December 14 - 8:00 am