

# Introduction to Ethics (HUMANITIES 275)

*"We are discussing no small matter, but how we ought to live."  
(Socrates in Plato's Republic, Circa 390 B.C.)*

**Ethics:** *"The theory and practice of how best to live, sometimes called wisdom."  
(Morgan)*



## **BASIC COURSE INFORMATION**

*Introduction to Ethics* – Humanities 275 Prerequisites: COM 121 (English Composition) Dr. John Morgan Email: jmorgan@racc.edu Phone: 610-607-6262 Ext. 4240

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION FOR OUR LEARNING COMMUNITY**

*This is a course which explores how best to live as individuals and as a society. It has been planned as a highly interactive learning experience in which we form a single learning community, gathering as one large group and often in smaller teams. For this reason, while there are lectures, our learning together will be relational--whether one to one, in small groups, in the classroom, or outside the class. Your life really is the textbook from which you learn. Your textbook is still being written. Hopefully this class will help you understand more deeply the meaning of your life in the light of the wisdom of the great ethical traditions.*

## **OBJECTIVES**

1. Tell your story and learn how to listen to the stories of others.
2. Develop your ability to express yourself in oral and written form.
3. Learn to work with others on ethical issues or concerns.
4. Identify the major moral traditions of the world's wisdom traditions.
5. Analyze and write an argumentative paper on one major ethical theory.
6. Articulate more clearly your ethical principles and practices
7. Apply what you have learned to your own life and others.

### **A CODE OF ETHICS FOR LEARNERS\***

We will respect one another as individuals and as members of a learning team by:

1. Attending all classes.
2. Coming and leaving class at assigned times.
3. Reading all assignments beforehand.
4. Turning in assignments on time.
5. Keeping a notebook of readings, lectures, handouts, code, etc.
6. Making sure the authors of your ideas or actual words are given credit.
7. Helping other learners by listening and not speaking when others are talking, participating in small groups and when not there, letting someone in your group know.
8. Stating your ideas clearly and being respectful of others' ideas.
9. Bringing any grievances you have about the class or anyone in it to the attention of the instructor to see if it can be resolved.
9. Providing help to other learners if they ask for it (e.g., they miss a class and need notes).
10. Treating other learners as you would want to be treated yourself.

\*Based on the experiences of students in Introduction to Ethics and Introduction to Philosophy. It is recognized that there may be compelling exceptions to some of these rules; for example, because of a sickness or family emergency, you may not be able to attend a class or complete assignment. Even in such cases, you are expected to let the instructor know by phone or email at his community college extension or email address. Please read the student handbook of rights and responsibilities for more detailed information.

SIGNED \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

### **My Teacher's Code**

1. *To help students discover meanings in their own stories.*
2. *To provide an environment where the stories of others can be heard.*
3. *To help students want to learn more than I can possibly teach.*
4. *To create an environment in which students are free to question and grow.*
5. *To leave students feeling they have succeeded.*
6. *To expect the best in students and myself.*
7. *To help students apply what they learn to their lives.*



5. Written code of ethics for your profession. (search under your specific vocation, such as Nurses Code of Ethics, Business Code of Ethics, etc.)
6. Book Report on one of two assigned books (Tolstoy or Frankl)
6. Team Presentations on Social Ethical Issues.
7. Final exam.

## ASSESSMENTS STRATEGIES

Your grades are shaped by the following:

Class Participation (group discussions, small groups, attendance) 15%

Argumentative Essay 15% (At mid-term, in lieu of exam)

Written Character Interview and Case Studies Reports 20% (Begin mid-course)

Book Report 10% (On or preferably before last class)

Team Presentation 20% (Final weeks of class)

Final Exam & Letter to Yourself 20% (Last day of class)

## EXPECTATIONS

1. You are expected to attend all classes unless you have a valid excuse. Missing more than three classes will result in a reduction in your final grade (one grade level, for example, from a B to a B-).
2. You are expected to be on time for all classes.
3. You are expected to turn in all assignments on time unless you have a valid excuse. Your grade on the assignment will be reduced one grade level for each day the assignment is handed in late (e.g., from an A to A- , etc.). No assignments can be accepted as email attachments, for your protection and my sanity.
4. You are expected to keep up with assigned readings.
5. You are expected to attend and participate in your ethics study group

## LEARNING CYCLE & ASSIGNMENTS

### **Phase I: Introduction to Ethical Theories**

**Read**        **Timmons: *Conduct and Character***

**Website:**    **<http://ethics.sandiego.edu>**

**Assignment:** **Argumentative Essay**

**Phase II: Ethical Practices****Read:** Search websites for your career code of ethics.**Assignment:** A. Character Interview

B. Case Study and Group Analysis

**Phase III: Ethical Issues (Ethical Teams)****Website:** <http://ethics.sandiego.edu>**Assignment:** Team Presentation**Phase IV: Personal Ethics and the Quest for Meaning****Read:** Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*Tolstoy: *A Confession***Assignment:** A Letter to Myself, Final Exam**DESCRIPTIONS OF SOME COURSE REQUIREMENTS****1. ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY**

Using one of the seven ethical theories described in Timmons' *Conduct and Character*, write a reflection paper of no less than five (5) pages but no more than ten (10) pages typed and double spaced which addresses the following main points of essays as described by Professor Anthony Weston in *A Rulebook for Arguments* (Hackett, 2000):

- A. Define and describe clearly the ethical theory.
- B. State whether you agree or disagree with the theory. Be specific: Why do you or don't you subscribe to the theory?
- C. Develop your arguments for or against the theory. Give examples.
- D. Consider objections to your argument.
- E. Summarize the theory and your conclusion.

Professor Weston suggests developing an outline for your paper first, then keep your introduction brief, give your argument, clarify, be clear about why some don't agree with your analysis, and summarize.

You may or may not read materials other than what is in Timmons' *Conduct and Character*. If you do use other books or articles or resources, make sure you cite works at end of the paper using MLA Guidelines.

## 2. A ONE PAGE CASE STUDY FOR ETHICS

1. The case must be written. Select an event in which you were involved that involved some decision making around an ethical or moral issue, one with which you are personally familiar (e.g., debating about what to do at work, with a family member, etc). If possible, choose a recent event that is real but use fictitious names of people, places, etc.
2. Limit yourself to one page or less. Part of the discipline is learning how to be brief, clear, and concise. You may wish simply to jot down notes or outline. Bring enough copies of your case study to share with all group members.
3. The case must have four parts:
  - A. *Background*: Enough information to set the event in context—the issue, people involved, pressures, etc.? Why is this an ethical issue for you?
  - B. *Description*: What happened and what you did. Just report; don't interpret.
  - C. *Analysis*: You identify real issues, differences of opinion, etc. Try to answer the question: What's really going on here?
  - D. *Evaluation*: How did things turn out? What was your role in this and how did you function? What factors emerged you did not anticipate?
  - E. *Group Questions*: What questions might the group discuss that might be most helpful to you?

### HOW YOUR ETHICAL STUDY GROUP WORKS:

(The group appoints a timekeeper who keeps people within the time limits below):

1. Case read aloud by person presenting it (presenter). 2-5 minutes.
2. Group asks any questions to clarify the case (no discussion). 2-5 minutes.
3. Person presenting case now listens as group discusses the case. 15 minutes.  
They analyze by asking such questions as: What's happening here?  
What's really happening here? What's the role of people in the case?  
Why is this an issue for the presenter? What do you think the presenter wants to happen? Were there 'turning points' in the case when something seemed to change?  
What are the ethical issues and resolutions here?
4. The presenter who has been listening now can ask questions of group. They can now respond to questions. 5 minutes.
5. Presenter now has opportunity to explain his/her analysis of the situation, looking especially at what happened and how he/she felt about it and whether there are other alternatives that might have been pursued. 5 minutes
6. Individuals in group may now offer any final thoughts. Presenter may wish To jot down a few notes about what was suggested. 5 minutes.
7. All case study copies returned to presenter.

### 3. CHARACTER INTERVIEW AND REPORT

Your goal is to write a short (about four pages, double spaced) paper about the person you interviewed (life events, values, character) and what you learned.

1. Select someone who really interests you.
2. Call them to arrange an interview and explain why you are doing so (for a class assignment in Ethics). Try to find a place to conduct the interview which will be free of interruptions. Let them know interview will last 30-45 minutes.
3. Think ahead about the kinds of questions you want to ask. You want to focus on what are the key events of the person's life and what values guided them through successes and failures. You're trying to evaluate the concept "character." What is "character," especially what it is for this particular person. What are "values?"

Kinds of Questions To Consider Asking the Person Being Interviewed;

1. What were some of the major formative events in your life?
2. Who were the major influences in your life?
3. Who and what shaped your early childhood?
4. What gave you the most meaning in your life?
5. What did you learn from some of your most difficult life events?
6. What does it mean to be "successful?"
7. What did you learn when you thought you failed?
8. What are the qualities you value most in a person?
9. What are the qualities you think you have that are most important?
10. What advice would you give me about how to live?
11. Anything you want to tell me I haven't asked about?

*Before An Interview:* Make sure you take a notepad and pen or pencil and a recording device if you wish (video or audio). If you tape anything, make sure you get the person's permission first. Think about what questions you want to ask.

*During An Interview:* Use the prepared questions, but be prepared to "go with the flow" and ask other questions. Listen more than talk. Keep interview to 45 minutes or less.

*After the Interview:* Write a thank-you note. If you wish, include a copy of the report you have written on this person.

*For the Report:* Focus on the major life events of the person, his or her character and values, and conclude with what you learned that might be of help to you. No more than four, double spaced and typed pages. You may be asked to share your report in class, but not to use the person's name.

#### 4. BOOK REPORT

Write a 3-5 page review of one of the two required books: Tolstoy or Frankl. This report is your analysis of the author's view of life's meaning, his ethics in other words. What wisdom did the author offer you which makes sense and which does not? The review should cover the author's point of view, how he/she came to that view, what he/she learned, and any critique you have of him/her. If you quote the author, cite page at end of the report (e.g., Tolstoy, page 23).

You may turn the book report in whenever you wish, *at least by day of final.*

#### 5. FINAL EXAM AND LETTER TO YOURSELF

The final exam will consist of two parts:

*Essay: You will be asked to reflect on a number of questions geared to assessing if you have mastered the basics of the course and applied them to your life and larger societal issues.*

*Letter: You will be asked to bring notepaper, a stamped and self-addressed envelope in order to write a reflective, philosophical letter to yourself that will be mailed to you at a later date. Reading how Frankl and Tolstoy struggled to find meaning in their lives may help you shape your own reflections.*

**FINAL NOTE:**

This syllabus is a basic introduction to the course, introducing the major topics to be covered and class assignments. The instructor may change some parts of the course to reflect the learning needs of the class as we progress through the learning cycle so stay on track but be flexible as well.

**Emergency Procedures**

All emergencies should be reported as follows: Dial 211 from red phones in each hall (will connect directly to Extension 5077-or call Ext. 5077) If no response, call Ext 5291. When a building is to be evacuated, leave by nearest, marked exit. Take personal property with you. Do not use elevators. Direct disabled persons to appropriate exits. Once outside, move to clear area as directed by campus security. Do not return to building until directed to do so. If you are signed up with campus security system, you will receive a warning.

