

SOSC 3850: ETHICS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Wednesdays & Fridays, 16:30 – 17:50, Room 6580 (lifts 27-28)

Instructor	Teaching Assistant
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Course Description

This course studies the ethical dimensions of public affairs. The overarching theme is to explore the moral debate surrounding some pressing public issues in today's world. The first part introduces the essential moral concepts and theories for reasoning in ethics and public affairs. The second part discusses a selection of disputed public issues through the application of moral concepts and theories. By the end of the course, students will benefit with the knowledge and skills necessary for discussing public affairs from the perspective of ethics.

Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

By the end of this course, students will be better equipped to:

1. Explain the key ideas and issues in ethics and public affairs.
2. Analyze and evaluate moral arguments underpinning the issues of public affairs.
3. Apply relevant concepts and theories to discuss the issues of public affairs.
4. Exercise independent and critical judgments as well as formulate and communicate arguments effectively.

Class Schedule

WEEK	ONLINE LECTURE	WEDNESDAY CLASS	FRIDAY CLASS
Module 0: Course and Blended Learning Introduction			
1	Lecture 0	Class 0 [Feb 4]	*Learning Consultations*
Module 1: Introduction – Moral Reasoning and Public Affairs			
2	Lecture 1	Class 1 [Feb 11]	**Learning Consultations*
Modules 2 & 3: Reasoning with Consequences			
3	Lectures 2 & 3	*PUBLIC HOLIDAY*	*Learning Consultations*
4		Class 2 [Feb 25]	Class 3 [Feb 27]
Modules 4, 5 & 6: Reasoning with Obligations			
5	Lecture 4	Class 4 [Mar 4]	*Learning Consultations*
6	Lecture 5	Class 5 [Mar 11]	*Learning Consultations*
7	Lecture 6	Class 6 [Mar 18]	*Learning Consultations*
Module 7: Reasoning with Virtues and Vices			
8	Lecture 7	Class 7 [Mar 25]	Class 8 [Mar 27] – CASE WORKSHOP (1)
9	*NO LECTURE*	Class 10 [Apr 1] – MID-TERM TEST	*PUBLIC HOLIDAY* [Apr 3]
		MID-TERM BREAK [Apr 8]	*Learning Consultations* [Apr 10]

Module 8: Case Study (1) – Ethics and the Body			
10	Lecture 8	Class 11 [Apr 15]	*Learning Consultations*
Module 9: Case Study (2) – Ethics and the Economy			
11	Lecture 9	Class 12 [Apr 22]	Class 13 [Apr 24] – CASE WORKSHOP (2)
Module 10: Case Study (3) – Ethics and the Environment			
12	Lecture 10	Class 14 [Apr 29]	*PUBLIC HOLIDAY*
Module 11: Case Study (4) – Ethics and the Future			
13	Lecture 11	Class 15 [May 6]	*Learning Consultations*

Note: Class schedule and topics may be adjusted to facilitate students' learning.

Assessment and Grading

Assignment / Weighting		Requirements
Group Project <i>Alignment with ILOs: 1(a), 2(a) & 3</i>	20%	<p>Deliverable 1: Video Case (15%)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each group will be assigned ONE public issue with ethical controversies. They will create a 10-minute video case which contains a detailed narrative featuring relevant plots and characters. The groups will demonstrate the preliminary version of their video cases in Classes 11-12 and 14-15. Each demonstration should NOT exceed 5 minutes. The submission deadline for the video cases is 23:59, May 9 (Sat). <p>Deliverable 2: 'Behind-the-scenes' Video (5%)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All groups will make use of generative AI tools to assist in the production of the video cases, such as setting out scenarios, simulating character dialogues, and/or enhancing storylines. Each group will produce a 5-minute 'behind-the-scenes' video to illustrate how generative AI tools have been used throughout the process of case development. The submission deadline for the 'behind-the-scenes' videos is 23:59, May 9 (Sat).
Mid-term Test <i>Alignment with ILOs: 1(a), 1(b), 2(a), 2(b) & 3</i>	35%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is a closed-book test scheduled for Apr 1 (Wed). The test will cover materials for Modules 1 to 7. Students will respond to short, structured, and/or essay questions. Each student is allowed to bring an information sheet of ONE double-sided A4 paper. The information sheet will be collected by the end of each test. Students must complete the test in person. In case of medical/family emergencies or unavoidable duties, students must present appropriate evidence to request 'make-up' arrangements.
Final Essay <i>Alignment with ILOs: 1(a),</i>	35%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students will write a 2,000-2,500-word essay to analyze ONE of the video cases created by a <i>peer</i> group (i.e., NOT the video case

1(b), 2(a), 2(b) & 3		<p>created by students' own groups).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The word limit does not include endnotes and appendices. Students are expected to use Harvard citation and referencing style. The submission deadline for the final essay is 23:59, May 16 (Sat).
Canvas MC Quizzes <i>Alignment with ILOs: 1(a), 1(b) & 2</i>	10%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> These are open-book quizzes. Before completing each quiz, students should watch the online lecture videos as assigned. Students will complete a total of 10 quizzes (Modules 2 to 11). Each quiz contains 5 questions, and each question is worth 0.2 point. <u>Only ONE attempt is allowed for each quiz.</u> Students should complete the quizzes by the following deadlines: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Modules 2 to 4: 14:00, Mar 4 (Wed) Modules 5 to 7: 14:00, Mar 25 (Wed) Modules 8 to 11: 14:00, May 6 (Wed)

Remarks:

- (1) A maximum of 5 points of **attendance and participation bonus** will be awarded to students who contribute actively to class discussions. Attendance will be taken on an ad hoc basis, and a maximum of 3 points will be awarded. For participation, 2 points will be awarded 'by default' as active participation is assumed for this blended learning course. However, points will be deducted if there is evidence of inactive participation.
- (2) For late submission, no submission or no show, **mark penalty** will apply. For confirmed cases of plagiarism, cheating, and abuse of generative AI tools, sanctions will be imposed.
- (3) For the group project, each group should submit detailed **division of labor**. The score of each individual student may be adjusted based on the division and quality of labor.
- (4) This course will be assessed using **criterion-referencing**. The rubrics for the major assessment tasks are provided at the end of this syllabus, outlining the criteria used for evaluation. Assessment marks for individual assessed tasks will be released within **two weeks of the due date**.

Important Dates

Date / Time	Task	Date / Time	Task
Feb 20 / 23:59	Grouping confirmation	Apr 15, 22, 29 & May 6 / in class	Group Project – Video case demonstrations
Mar 4 / 14:00	Completion of quizzes for Modules 2 to 4	May 6 / 14:00	Completion of quizzes for Modules 8 to 11
Mar 25 / 14:00	Completion of quizzes for Modules 5 to 7	May 9 / 23:59	Submission of video case AND 'behind-the-scenes' video
Apr 1 / in class	Mid-term Test	May 16 / 23:59	Submission of final essay

Final Grade Descriptors

Grades	Short Description	Elaboration on Subject Grading Description
A+, A, A-	Excellent Performance	Demonstrates excellent attainment of knowledge, skills and attitude in ethics and moral reasoning in public affairs.
B+, B	Good Performance	Demonstrates good attainment of knowledge, skills and attitude in ethics and moral reasoning in public affairs.

B-, C+, C	Marginal Performance	Demonstrates adequate attainment of knowledge, skills and attitude in ethics and moral reasoning in public affairs.
F	Failure	Demonstrates insufficient attainment of knowledge, skills and attitude in ethics and moral reasoning in public affairs.

Course AI Policy

The use of generative AI tools is permitted. However, students should understand that generative AI tools should only be used as *tools* and should NOT be a substitute for students' own work. Students must certify that the work submitted in their assignments is their own original work, except where they have acknowledged the use of external sources or assistance, including generative AI tools.

Communication and Feedback

Assessment marks for individual assessed tasks will be communicated via Canvas within two weeks of submission. Feedback on assignments will include comments and suggestions for further improvement. Students who have further questions about the feedback, including scores, should consult the Instructor OR Teaching Assistant within five working days after the feedback is received.

Resubmission Policy

Students who are unable to submit any of the assessed tasks should contact the Instructor or Teaching Assistant within five working days after the respective deadlines to discuss arrangements for resubmission.

Required Texts

- Barbara MacKinnon and Andrew Fiala (2024) *Ethics: Theory and Contemporary Issues* (10th edition), Boston, MA: Cengage Learning [NB: Essential text for the entire course].
- Russ Shafer-Landau (2020) *A Concise Introduction to Ethics*, New York: Oxford University Press [NB: Useful text for Modules 1 to 7].

Academic Honesty

Students are expected to adhere to the university's academic integrity policy. Students are expected to uphold HKUST's Academic Honor Code and to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. The University has zero tolerance of academic misconduct. Please refer to [Academic Integrity | HKUST – Academic Registry](#) for the University's definition of plagiarism and ways to avoid cheating and plagiarism.

Additional Resources

Useful Online Resources

- Annabelle Lever and Andrei Poama (2019) *The Routledge Handbook of Ethics and Public Policy*, London: Routledge.
- Gordon Graham (2011) *Theories of Ethics: An Introduction to Moral Philosophy with a Selection of Classic Readings*, New York/London: Routledge.
- Jonathan Boston, Andrew Bradstock and David Eng (eds) (2010) *Public Policy: Why Ethics Matters*, Acton, ACT: ANUE Press.
- Jonathan Wolff (2020) *Ethics and Public Policy: A Philosophical Inquiry* (2nd edition), London: Routledge.
- *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/>

Other Learning Resources

- Anthony Weston (2023) *A 21st Century Ethical Toolbox* (5th edition), New York: Oxford University Press.
- David Morrow (2018) *Moral Reasoning: A Text and Reader on Ethics and Contemporary Moral Issues*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Julian Baggini and Peter S. Fosl (2007) *The Ethics Toolkit: A Compendium of Ethical Concepts and Methods*, Oxford; Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Mark Timmons (2024) *Disputed Moral Issues: A Reader* (6th edition), New York: Oxford University Press.
- Richard Burnor and Yvonne Raley (2022) *Ethical Choices: An Introduction to Moral Philosophy with Cases* (3rd edition), New York: Oxford University Press.

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Appendix: Grading Rubrics

Grading Rubric for Group Project (Video Case)

Excellent Performance	Good Performance	Marginal Performance	Failure
<p>The video case has a specific topic. It contains relevant ethical claims and arguments from the perspectives of different stakeholders. It does NOT make any ethical judgments. The case clearly demonstrates controversies and trade-offs. The storyline is easy to read and understand. The visual and audio materials used are appropriate.</p>	<p>The video case demonstrates the attainment of only some of the desired attributes (as for excellent performance) while some attributes are not yet attained. For the attributes attained, there is room for enhancement.</p>	<p>The video case demonstrates only minimal attainment of the desired attributes (as for excellent performance). For the attributes attained, there is significant room for enhancement.</p>	<p>The video case is inadequate, demonstrating very limited attainment of the desired attributes.</p>

Grading Rubric for Mid-term Test

Excellent Performance	Good Performance	Marginal Performance	Failure
<p>The questions are answered accurately and/or justified with reasonable explanations. There is a logical and coherent elaboration with good use of language.</p>	<p>Only some of the questions are answered accurately and/or justified. The explanations are generally reasonable, but they are not substantiated well and/or there lacks sufficient clarity. There is room for enhancement in terms of logic, coherence, and/or use of language.</p>	<p>Only a very few questions are answered accurately. The explanations are unclear or do not make sense. There is significant room for enhancement in terms of logic, coherence, and/or use of language.</p>	<p>Most of the questions are answered inaccurately or the answers are not relevant to the questions. The answers are unsatisfactory in terms of logic, coherence, and/or use of language.</p>

Grading Rubric for Final Essay

Excellent Performance	Good Performance	Marginal Performance	Failure
<p>The essay has a sensible interpretation of the topic. There is a logical argument substantiated by appropriate examples and/or evidence. There is application of relevant ethical concepts and theories. The essay is well-structured and coherent. There is good use of language. The presentation is clear.</p>	<p>The essay demonstrates the attainment of only some of the desired attributes (as for excellent performance) while some attributes are not yet attained. For the attributes attained, there is room for enhancement.</p>	<p>The essay demonstrates only minimal attainment of the desired attributes (as for excellent performance). For the attributes attained, there is significant room for enhancement.</p>	<p>The essay is inadequate, demonstrating very limited attainment of the desired attributes.</p>