

Format revised 2025  
Syllabus revised 2023

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**SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS**  
**DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY / HEALTH HUMANITIES**  
**COURSE TITLE: Biomedical Ethics**  
**COURSE CODE: LAPLBE320 / LSHHBE320**  
**3 semester credits**

### 1. DESCRIPTION

This course examines the ethics of medical practices and issues in contemporary society. Coursework will pose questions regarding areas that affect human life and death. Topics include practices such as euthanasia, birth control and abortion, cloning, genetic engineering, and biomedical research. Students will analyze the ethical nature of covered practices, how they affect people on individual and social scales, and the relationship between patients and physicians and medical structures in terms of information, consent, and responsibility. Case studies from local European as well as non-European countries will be closely considered for discussion and study.

### 2. OBJECTIVES

Students in this course will:

- gain an understanding of the origins and foundations of Bioethics.
- examine historical cases and their implications today.
- explore future developments that will arise in the field.
- learn how to deal with moral and ethical issues that we, as human beings, have to face.
- become familiar with fundamental philosophical principles and ethical concepts in the field.

### 3. REQUIREMENTS

There are no prerequisites for this course.

### 4. METHOD

This course consists of lectures, class discussions, projects, and interaction with the local community. Mediums for instruction used will include, but are not limited to, interactive and hands-on activities which challenge thought processes, integrate relevant academic sources, may include multimedia references, propose creative problem-solving, and other appropriate forms of delivery as deemed appropriate to the course's purpose.

### 5. TEXTBOOK – FURTHER READINGS – RESOURCES

TEXTBOOK (Copy available at the university library):

Lewis Vaughn, *Bioethics: Principles, Issues and Cases*, 2nd Edition. Oxford University Press; 2nd edition (September 12, 2012)

The textbook is mandatory for course participation and completion. Where applicable additional materials may be provided by the instructor.

### FURTHER READINGS

David DeGrazia, Thomas Mappes, Jeffrey Ballard. *Biomedical Ethics* 7th Edition. McGraw-Hill Education; 7 edition (June 28, 2010)

Robert M. Veatch, Amy M. Haddad, Dan C. English. *Case Studies in Biomedical Ethics: Decision-*

*Making, Principles, and Cases* 2nd Edition. Oxford University Press; 2 edition (October 13, 2014)

## **LIBRARY**

Course participants may access the campus library. Please consult the posted schedules for official opening times. Texts may be consulted on-site, and scanning/internet services available.

## **6. COURSE MATERIALS**

No additional course materials are necessary.

## **7. COURSE FEES**

Course fees cover course-related field learning activities, visits, and support the instructor's teaching methodologies. Book costs are not included in the course fee. If this course requires a fee, the exact amount is communicated prior to enrollment.

## **8. GRADING AND EVALUATION & ATTENDANCE**

10% Attendance  
30% Assignments  
20% Midterm Assessment  
20% Paper & Presentation  
20% Final Exam

The above grade breakdown percentages reflect the grading scale standards in the "Grading and Evaluation System" section of the catalog.

### **Attendance**

Class participation is mandatory. Based on the hours defined in the Academic Catalog's attendance policy, students may miss up to 2 class encounters delivered as lecture hours. A third absence constitutes a course failure.

Please note that absence hours may vary according to the learning methodology, as per the academic catalog policy on credit hours: [https://catalog.fua.it/standard\\_regulation](https://catalog.fua.it/standard_regulation)

## **9. EXAMS / PROJECTS / ASSIGNMENTS**

This course requires at least 3 **assignments** as per the course outline in the syllabus.

The **Midterm** assessment accounts for 20% of the final course grade. **The time and date of the submission cannot be changed for any reason.** The assessment prompt and instructions will be provided on the course site.

The **Final** exam accounts for 20% of the final course grade. For exam time and date consult the course calendar. **The time and date of the exam cannot be changed for any reason.** Format:

- 20 multiple choice questions (3 points each)
- 1 short answer (15 points)
- The discussion of a case study

The **Paper (15%) & Presentation (5%)** account for 20% of the course grade. Format topic, length, and guidelines are provided on the course site.

## 10. COURSE OUTLINE

Lesson 1	
<b>Meet</b>	In class
<b>Lecture</b>	Introduction, Morals and Ethics
<b>Objectives</b>	Summary of topics to be covered in the course. Define “ethics.” Development of ethics and medicine through time and different societies. Define and delineate morals from ethics, discuss the role of technology and pragmatism in the practice. Outline and explain the main branches of ethics. What is “morality”? Morality and the Law.
<b>Readings/Assignments</b>	Case Studies: Introduction: <i>Four Questions of Ethics</i> p. 1-16 Chapter 1 - Moral Reasoning in Bioethics p. 3-32 Chapter 2 - Bioethics and Moral Theories p. 33-51 <i>Utilitarianism</i> , John Stuart Mill p. 52 <i>The Moral Law</i> , Immanuel Kant p. 53 Case Studies: Chapter 2: <i>Values in Health and Illness</i> p. 29-44 Assignment #1 assigned, due by next class meet.

Lesson 2	
<b>Meet</b>	In class
<b>Lecture</b>	Religion and Society
<b>Objectives</b>	Explore the role of religion and the social environment in medical decisions and practices. Explore how a country’s religious and historical past influences the medical practices and legislation in place today. Understand and investigate how religion and society can influence an individual’s/doctor’s decision to undergo/perform medical procedures. Case studies: First Council of Nicaea, human body dissection through centuries and societies.
<b>Readings/Assignments</b>	Textbook: Chapter 3 p. 71 – 80, p. 80 Case Study 1: <i>Prayer, Medicine, and a Child’s Death</i> Case Studies: Chapter 3 <i>Grounding Ethics in Religious or Philosophical Perspectives</i> p. 57-61 Case study 10-7: <i>Biased Counseling: Teaching About Birth Control</i> p. 220 - 222 Case study 12-4: <i>The Jesus Christian Transplant: Brainwashed into donating a Kidney?</i> p. 261 – 263 Case study 18-7: <i>Demands for Futile Care</i> p. 422 - 424

Lesson 3	
<b>Meet</b>	In class
<b>Lecture</b>	Physicians and Patients
<b>Objectives</b>	Investigate how the relationship between doctor and patient has evolved over time, including privacy and consent. Define and discuss key issues related to the doctor-patient dynamic, including paternalism, confidentiality, and therapeutic privilege.
<b>Readings/Assignments</b>	Textbook: Chapter 4 - Truth-Telling and Confidentiality p. 131 - 140 Chapter 5 - Informed Consent p. 180 – 190 <i>The Concept of Informed Consent</i> , Faden and Beauchamp p. 190 Assignment #2 assigned, due by next class meet.

<b>Lesson 4</b>	
<b>Meet</b>	In class
<b>Lecture</b>	Experimentation and Testing Final Project Overview
<b>Objectives</b>	How can we be sure that a drug is useful and not dangerous? Ethical issues of experimenting and testing on animals and humans. Case studies: vaccination (polio, small pox, etc.), thalidomide, first heart transplant. Testing new drugs: Protocols and practices. Clinical studies: Prospective, retrospective, case-control, cross-sectional, double-blinded trials, etc. and their implications for experimentation and testing. Basic biostatistical knowledge: sensitivity, specificity, positive/negative predictive value, area-under-curve, for objectively assessing clinical study results and ensuing ethical questions.
<b>Readings/Assignments</b>	Textbook: Chapter 6 – Human Research p. 221 – 241 <i>Racism and Research: The Case of the Tuskegee Syphilis Study</i> , Brandt p. 266-275 Biomedical Ethics: Chapter 4 – Human and Animal Research Midterm Assessment assigned, due prior to next class meet.

<b>Lesson 5</b>	
<b>Meet</b>	In class
<b>Lecture</b>	Euthanasia and Physician Assisted Suicide
<b>Objectives</b>	Explore end of life issues in a social and ethical context. Define active vs passive euthanasia. Case study: Englaro and Welby in Italy. Comparison of varying laws on euthanasia (Switzerland, EU, USA, rest of the world).
<b>Readings/Assignments</b>	Textbook: Chapter 10 – Euthanasia and Physician-assisted Suicide p. 594 – 609 <i>When Self Determination Runs Amok</i> , Callahan p. 625 <i>When Abstract Moralizing Runs Amok</i> , Lachs p. 630

<b>Lesson 6</b>	
<b>Meet</b>	In class
<b>Lecture</b>	Genetic engineering, Cloning
<b>Objectives</b>	Planning and enhancing a living organism: from plants to animals to human beings. Economic role of modified vegetables in developed and developing world (corn, ...). DNA modification to cure genetic diseases. Distopic future as represented in literature: “Brave New World,” “Our neural Chernobyl,” “Blade Runner.” Technical aspects of cloning. Duplicating a human being: Purpose? Organs' reservoir? Mass production? Cloning and genetic engineering in fiction: “The Island” vs “Attack of the Clones”
<b>Readings/Assignments</b>	Textbook: Chapter 8 – Reproductive Technology p. 400 ( <i>Cloning</i> ) <i>Cloning Human Beings: An Assessment of the Ethical Issues Pro and Con</i> , Brock p. 499 - 509 Chapter 9 - Genetic Choices p. 518 – 537 <i>Germ-Line Gene Therapy</i> , Walters and Palmer p. 589 - 591

<b>Lesson 7</b>	
<b>Meet</b>	In class
<b>Lecture</b>	Human Reproduction and Eugenics
<b>Objectives</b>	Abortion and contraception; case studies: Roe vs Wade in USA, Italian laws and 1978 referendum, gender control in developing countries Biological determinism, improvement of genetic pool, eugenics; examples: sterilization in Nazi Germany, eugenics law in USA, Cesare Lombroso in Italy
<b>Readings/Assignments</b>	Textbook: Chapter 7 – Abortion p.291 – 306 Chapter 8 – Reproductive Technology p.392 – 399 <i>Is Gene Therapy a Form of Eugenics?</i> , Harris p. 571 – 576 Assignment #1 assigned, due by next class meet.

<b>Lesson 8</b>	
<b>Meet</b>	In class
<b>Lecture</b>	Mental illness
<b>Objectives</b>	Explore mental illness in different cultures and throughout history. Debate and argue on madness as violation of social or religious norms.
<b>Readings/ Assignments</b>	Foucault, <i>Madness and Civilization</i> (pdf, excerpts)

<b>Lesson 9</b>	
<b>Meet</b>	In class
<b>Lecture</b>	Health Care Resources
<b>Objectives</b>	Who is or is not eligible for care? Who comes first? Moral and ethical issues in emergency situations when large groups of people are involved: natural disasters (i.e. earthquakes), industrial accidents (i.e. Chernobyl), war zones. Allocation of healthcare resources on a daily basis: treatment eligibility, the controversy of over-testing, who pays for therapies (i.e. immunotherapy). Examining standard guidelines of clinical management.
<b>Readings/ Assignments</b>	Textbook: Chapter 11 – Dividing Up Health Care Resources p. 681 – 695 <i>Is There a Right to Health Care, and, if So, What Does It Encompass?</i> , p. 696 <i>The Allocation of Exotic Medical Lifesaving Therapy</i> , Rescher p. 72 Final Paper due by this Lesson.

<b>Lesson 10</b>	
<b>Meet</b>	In class
<b>Lecture</b>	Biology Meets Technology Final Paper Presentations
<b>Objectives</b>	Explore and discuss the boundary between humans and machine. Examples: - Prostheses implantation: Oscar Pistorius: too enhanced to compete? - Organ transplantation: Donation or sale? Ethics of face-transplantation - Stem-cell therapy: doing research with fetal stem cells, the position of the Catholic Church in Italy
<b>Readings/ Assignments</b>	Textbook: <i>What Does 'Respect for Embryos' Mean in the Context of Stem Cell Research?</i> , Steinbock p. 589 <i>Declaration on the Production and the Scientific and Therapeutic Use of Human Embryonic Stem Cells</i> , Pontifical Academy for Life p. 592 Case Studies in Biomedical Ethics: Chapter 14 – Organ Transplants p. 293 – 325 Case study 14-1: <i>Donation, Salvaging, Incentives for Transplantable Organs</i> p. 295 Case study 14-8: <i>The Full-Face Transplant</i> , p. 315

<b>Lesson 11</b>	
<b>Meet</b>	In class
<b>Lecture</b>	<b>Final Exam</b>