Course description. This course is an introduction to ethical theory through the analysis of contemporary moral issues. The issues explored in depth vary from section to section, but the courses typically cover some of the following: abortion, war and terrorism, drugs and drug prohibition, stem cell research and other issues in medical ethics, wealth, poverty and economic policies, sexual ethics. In order to introduce ethical theory, the instructor must also introduce all areas of philosophy (logic, epistemology, and metaphysics) as well as a fair amount of the history of philosophy. The proper framing of the controversial issues debated in the course requires reading of and discussion of classics of Western philosophy (e.g., Plato, Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas, Hobbes, Hume, J.S. Mill, Kant), as well as more contemporary authors. In addition, this proper framing of the issues also involves discussion of the interplay of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic heritage (and sometimes other religious heritages) with the philosophical heritage, on the one hand, and contemporary economic and political ideas on the other. In other words, students of this course get an introduction not only to moral problems and debates, they also get an introduction to Western philosophy and civilization in a contemporary, complex, global context.

Since moral issues and debates often arise from cultural and religious heritages in confrontation with the demands and changes of the contemporary culture, these aspects of the problematic are essential to effective teaching of this course. The course is a philosophy course and so students learn, above all, how to assess moral principles and arguments. However, the proper teaching of the course involves introducing and considering moral problems from a variety of points of view and with a sensitivity to their origins.

Students also investigate questions about the nature of societies and various types of institutions and groupings that have been considered ethically important in one context or another (families, tribes, clans, nations, races, linguistic communities, religions, species, etc.). They learn to ask critical questions about these groupings and to try come up with a coherent understanding of what social responsibility consists in and what it is, exactly, to which one is responsible when one is said to be “responsible to society”.
This course satisfies the University of Texas at Arlington core curriculum requirement in Language, Philosophy & Culture.

**Learning outcomes.** Students will gain a better understanding of the arguments supporting different ethical positions. Students will also improve their ability to evaluate the strength of arguments and some of the common mistakes that occur in reasoning. Since a significant portion of the class will be devoted to discussions, students will develop their ability to communicate clearly and coherently about issues that are challenging and often polarizing and emotionally fraught. Students will gain knowledge about the cultural and historical perspectives brought to bear in the creation of arguments.

**Core curriculum objectives.**

- Critical Thinking Skills: to include creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, and analysis, evaluation and synthesis of information;
- Communication Skills: to include effective development, interpretation and expression of ideas through written, oral and visual communication;
- Social Responsibility: to include intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national and global communities; and
- Personal Responsibility: to include the ability to connect choices, actions and consequences to ethical decision-making.

**Signature assignments.** The following assignments (among others) will be used to assess the student’s level of achievement of the Core Curriculum Objectives:

1. Each student will analyze an argumentative passage pertaining to a contemporary ethical controversy in order to determine which proposition functions as the conclusion of the argument and which propositions function as the premises. (Critical Thinking Skills)
2. Each student will participate in a group project in which the objective is (a) to take a position on a matter of personal or social responsibility (such as voting or recycling) and support that position with reasons; and (b) write a collaborative essay setting forth the argument. (Critical Thinking Skills, Communication Skills, Social Responsibility, Personal Responsibility)

[The remainder of the syllabus will be filled in by the instructor and will include the mandated policy statements of UT Arlington.]