Instructor: T. Lockhart

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Office Hours: 1:30–2:30 PM, Tuesday, Thursday; 2–3 PM, Wednesday; and by appointment

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Course Content

This course will address some of the important ethical questions that arise for individual engineers and for the engineering profession. We shall study general theories of ethics and attempt to see how they can be applied to the ethical problems of engineering. We shall study a number of real and hypothetical cases in engineering ethics that raise questions about such topics as whistle-blowing, confidentiality, conflicts of interest, safety and public health, environmental protection, loyalty, and honesty. We shall also examine the codes of ethics of some of the professional engineering organizations.

Course Project

You will complete a course project consisting of (1) writing and submitting a formal course paper and (2) making a class presentation. The topic for your paper and presentation will be the same. Your topic will be a real-life case in engineering ethics. The main goal of your project will be to study, analyze, and evaluate the ethical issues that arise in your case.

Your first task will be to find a real-life case in engineering ethics that raises one or more interesting, important ethical questions. There are several sources you might consider: (1) cases documented in the literature—books, periodicals, newspapers, etc., (2) cases based on the personal experiences of practicing engineers, and (3) cases based on your own experience as an engineer or student of engineering. You are required to submit a written description of your case to the instructor for his approval before you proceed with your project.

Course Paper

In your course paper, you will (1) report the facts of the case you have chosen to study and (2) analyze and resolve the important ethical issues that arise in that case. Your grade will depend largely on how well you support your conclusions on those issues. There is no length requirement for your paper. Your paper should be no longer than is needed to cover your topic adequately—i.e., to present the important facts of the case and to present arguments defending your solutions to the ethical problems that you are addressing. Usually this will be about 5–7 double-spaced typewritten pages. The appropriate length for your paper will depend on your topic and writing style.

You may, if you choose, submit a draft of your paper to the course instructor for his comments and suggestions for improvement. The due date for your draft is one week after your class presentation. Specific directions and guidelines for the final papers will be provided later.

Class Presentation

The content of your class presentation will be the same as that of your course paper—i.e., (1) a report of the facts of your case and (2) your analysis and resolution of the important ethical issues in that case. Your presentation should be about 15 minutes long, and time will be allotted for the class to ask questions about your case and to discuss the
ethical issues you have raised. Your presentation will serve to enable the rest of the class to learn about your case and to give you feedback that may be useful to you in thinking about the ethical issues you are addressing.

More information about the presentations will be provided later.

Class Activities and Attendance

Class activities will include such things as (1) general class discussion, (2) work in groups, (3) short in-class writing assignments, (4) quizzes, and (5) class presentations.

You are expected to attend class regularly and to come to each class prepared to discuss the topic of the day. It is your responsibility to determine what material was covered and what announcements were made during any class that you miss. You will be allotted 2 absences for the course. If you miss more than 2 classes, then your excess absences must be excused in order for you to avoid penalty. Refer to your MTU Student Handbook for the criteria used to determine an absence is excused or unexcused.

Quizzes

Short quizzes on reading assignments and material presented in class will occasionally be given. Your quiz grades will be part of your class activities grade. (See below.)

Final Examination

There will be an optional comprehensive final exam during final exam week at the end of the semester. Information about the final exam will be given later in the term.

Final Course Grade

Your final grade in the course will depend on (1) your course paper grade, (2) your class presentation grade, (3) your class activities grade, and (4) your final exam grade, if you choose to take the final exam. If you choose not to take the final exam, then the percentages for your final course average will be as follows:

- Course Paper: 40%
- Class Presentation: 10%
- Class Activities: 50%

If you choose to take the final exam, then your final exam grade will determine 50% of your final course grade and the three items above—course paper, class presentation, class activities—will determine the other 50% (in the same proportions as above).

For the purpose of computing a final course average, letter grades will be converted to numbers. Course averages will be interpreted as follows: A: 93–100, AB: 88–93, B: 83–88, BC: 78–83, C: 73–78, CD: 68–73, D: 63–68, F: 0–63. Numerical grades will not be curved.

Records

You should keep all written work affecting your course grade (e.g., quizzes) until after the course is completed and you have received your final grade for the course. This will enable us to resolve any questions about your grades if they come up at the end of the term.

Disclaimer

Although the instructor will endeavor to follow the above-stated policies and procedures closely, he reserves the right to make reasonable changes if circumstances warrant. Any such changes will be announced in class and the reasons for making the changes will be given.