HU3711 Biomedical Ethics  
Spring semester, 2008

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Textbook: Thomas, John; Waluchow, Wilfrid; Well and Good 3rd ed. (Peterborough, Ontario, Canada: Broadview, 1998)

Course Content

This course will address some of the important ethical questions that arise for individual physicians, nurses, and other healthcare providers and for the medical profession as a whole. It will also consider some of the ethical issues concerning biomedical science and technology. We shall study general theories of ethics and see how they might shed light on these ethical problems. In particular, we shall examine a number of real and hypothetical cases in biomedical ethics that raise questions in such areas as the doctor–patient relationship, abortion, euthanasia, surrogate motherhood, research involving human subjects, and allocation of medical resources. We shall also examine the published codes of ethics of some of the professional medical organizations.

Examinations

There will be an exam on the philosophical foundations of biomedical ethics during the first half of the semester. It will probably occur around the 6th or 7th week of the term. There will also be an optional final exam during final exam week, April 28–May 2.

Cases and Presentations

We shall spend a great deal of time discussing cases in biomedical ethics. For the most part, these cases are described in your textbook. Specific students will be assigned to each case. Those assigned to a particular case will initiate discussion of the case by presenting arguments on opposing sides of the pertinent ethical questions. Each student will be assigned to two or three cases.

Course Paper

Your will write a formal course paper on some topic in biomedical ethics. You will choose your topic from a list of topics that will be provided. Each topic will raise some important ethical question. In your paper, you will identify and critically evaluate arguments on both sides of the question you have chosen and then present and defend your own views on that question. Your grade on your paper will depend largely on how thoroughly you explore your question and how convincingly you support your conclusions. Your paper should be no longer than is needed to cover your topic adequately—i.e., to discuss the pertinent arguments and to present and defend your own views on the ethical question. Typically this turns out to be about 5–7 double-spaced typewritten pages. However, there is no length requirement.

You may, if you choose, submit a draft of your paper to the course instructor for his comments and suggestions prior to turning in your final paper. Specific directions and guidelines for the final papers will be provided later.
Quizzes

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

Class Attendance and Participation

You are expected to attend class regularly and take part in class discussions and other class activities. It is assumed that you have read the material assigned and that you are prepared to discuss the topic(s) 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 whether an absence is excused or unexcused.

Final Course Grade

Your final grade in the course will depend on the following: (1) your grade on the exam on the philosophical foundations of bioethics, (2) your course paper grade, (3) your initiations of class discussion of cases, (4) your class attendance and participation 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:

- Exam on Foundations of Bioethics: 25%
- Course Paper: 30%
- Initiations of Class Discussion: 20%
- Class Attendance and Participation: 25%

If you choose to take the final exam, then your final exam grade will determine 40% of your final course grade and the three items above—course paper, class presentation, class activities—will determine the other 60% (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., exam, course paper) 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.