HU3710: Engineering Ethics  
Spring semester, 2009

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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 some general philosophies of ethics in order to see what light they can shed on those questions. We shall also examine and evaluate the codes of ethics of several professional engineering organizations. A great deal of our time will be devoted to examining cases (both actual and fictional) that highlight important areas of engineering ethics, such as whistle-blowing, confidentiality, conflicts of interest, safety and public health, environmental protection, loyalty, and honesty.

Examinations

There will be 2 major exams during the semester. The first will take place sometime near mid-term (7th or 8th week), and the second will occur near the end of the semester, perhaps during the 13th week. There will also be an optional final exam during final exam week.

Course Paper

You will write a formal course paper on some issue or situation in engineering ethics. A list of topics will be provided for you to choose from. In your paper, you will identify and examine arguments on both sides of the pertinent ethical questions. To a large extent, your grade will depend on how thoroughly and insightfully you explore those questions. Your paper should be no longer than is needed to cover your topic adequately—to present and critically examine the relevant arguments. Typically this turns out to be about 6 double-spaced typewritten pages. However, there is no required length for your paper.

Specific instructions for your course paper will be provided later. You may, if you choose, show a draft of your paper to me for my comments and suggestions before you turn in your final paper.

Informal Writing Assignments

You will occasionally be asked to complete short assignments that involve writing of some sort. For example, you may be asked to complete a questionnaire on some topic we are going to discuss in class. Or you may be asked to take a few minutes of class time to write down your ideas on some
issue we are going to discuss. Generally speaking, assignments of written work to be done during class will not be announced in advance of that class.

Class Attendance and Participation

You are expected to attend class regularly and to participate in class activities. You are also expected to come to each class prepared to discuss the topic of the day. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to determine what material was covered and what announcements were made.

You will be allotted 3 absences for the course. If you miss more than 3 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 (1) your grades on the two major exams, (2) your course paper grade, (3) 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:

Major Exam 1: 25%
Major Exam 2: 25%
Course Paper: 30%
Informal Writing Assignments: 10%
Class Attendance and Participation: 10%

If you choose to take the final exam, then your final exam grade will determine 50% of your final course grade and the 5 items above—exam 1, exam 2, course paper, informal writing assignments, class attendance and participation—will determine the other 50% (in the same proportions as above).

In order to calculate your final course average, I shall first convert your letter grades to numbers. After calculating your final course average in accordance with the percentages above, I shall then use it to determine your final course grade by applying the following scale: A: 93–100, AB: 88–93, B: 83–88, BC: 78–83, C: 73–78, CD: 68–73, D: 63–68, F: 0–63. I do not grade on a curve.

Records

You should keep all written work affecting your course grade (e.g., graded exams, course paper, informal written work) 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 that may come up at the end of the term.

Disclaimer

Although I shall endeavor to follow the above-stated policies and procedures closely, I reserve the right to make reasonable changes if circumstances warrant. I shall announce any such changes in class, and I shall explain why I am making those changes.