

**PHIL 305:
BUSINESS ETHICS AND PUBLIC POLICY – FALL 2026**

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Office Location: [TBD}
Office Hours: W 1:15-2:15 pm; Th 2:45-3:45 pm

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces you to the application of moral philosophy to the conduct of individuals and businesses in contemporary society. It begins by briefly looking at the contours of ethical theory in general, as well as the relevance of ethical theory to businesspeople. From there, it moves on to an examination of the natures of capitalism and socialism. After that, we examine the responsibility that the corporation should have in society: does it discharge its social responsibilities simply by creating value for its shareholders, or does it have stronger obligations to society at large? To what extent is it a moral agent responsible for its effects? We then examine the ethics applicable to work and the workplace. Finally, we will look at questions related to corporations' global reach and corporate beneficence.

GE Statement: This course is available for General Education credit in Social Sciences or Lifelong Learning. The goal of the Social Sciences requirement is understanding the behavior of humans as we relate to one another, to ourselves and to our environments, as we create the structures and values that govern our lives in the present and through time. The goal of the Lifelong Learning requirement is developing an appreciation for the importance of the continued acquisition of new and diverse knowledge and skills, and it offers opportunities to integrate personal, professional and social aspects of life. This is a writing intensive course.

Texts

- *Ethics and Business: An Introduction*, by Kevin Gibson, 2nd Edition
- Additional required readings will be posted as PDFs on Canvas.

Learning Outcomes

- To understand some important outlooks on ethics, and be able to produce reasons for and against those outlooks.
- To understand, and be able to produce, some reasons for and against capitalism and socialism.
- To be conversant with controversies surrounding the role and nature of the contemporary for-profit corporation.
- To synthesize and apply this knowledge to concrete cases.
- To write essays that demonstrate working knowledge of the course material and to analyze that material in a clear, systematic, original, and well-developed manner.

Assignments & Grading

Philosophical texts can be complicated, even when they may appear otherwise. It significantly helps with understanding to come to class with questions and thoughts in advance. For this reason, it is required and extremely important that you do the reading before the class meets. In addition, I highly recommend the following guide to reading philosophy: <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html>.

Assessment:

Assignment	Weight
Weekly Discussion Question/Comment	15%
Participation and Attendance	20%
Midterm	30%
Final exam	35%

Weekly discussion questions: Each week before that week's first class (except for the first week of class and the week of the midterm), you must post 2 questions/comments (or one of each). One question/comment must be on material from the upcoming week and one from past class discussion. These should be a result of careful reflection, and express your own original vantage point on the material. They are due on Canvas no later than midnight prior to the first class of the week. The assignment will be graded based on the following criteria: relevance, clarity, thoughtfulness, and accuracy. **No extensions or make ups are possible for this assignment.**

I recommend that you do the reading well before the comment deadline, so you have time to think about what others are saying and respond. This will help everyone have a better class experience.

Attendance & Participation

- 5% of your grade will be based purely on attendance. Attendance will be taken at every class. If you arrive more than 15 minutes late, this will count as an absence. Exceeding 4 absences will result in a further reduction of the final grade by 2% for every excess class missed. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to find out what was covered and to confirm the reading assignment for the next class.
- 15% of your grade will be based on participation. Participation may include asking relevant questions in class, engaging with others productively when in groups, and turning in any in-class, pass/fail quizzes. Philosophy works best with your participation. The aim is not for me to deliver content to you (though I will certainly assist you in helping to understand the readings) but to engage with you in conversation about the topics of the readings.
- If you are not comfortable speaking in class or are unable to participate well in class a particular week, you can send me 2 questions AND 2 comments for the weekly discussion assignment. I will attempt to have us discuss the questions/ comments in class, so this is a good way to clarify content that was not very clear to you.

Midterm and Final Exams: The midterm and final exams are in-person, closed-book exams including multiple choice questions and short essays.

Late submissions: For all assignments, late papers submitted without a valid medical or family emergency-based excuse will be penalized by 1/3 grade per day late. You will be excused from this penalty only if I have explicitly notified you in writing (e.g., by email) that you are exempt.

*****In any of these cases, if you are unable to submit assignments on time due to circumstances outside of your control, please let me know and I will determine whether to waive the late penalty in your case.*****

Grading will be on a 100-point scale. Here are the letter conversions:

A:	93–100	C:	73–76
A-:	90–92	C-:	70–72
B+:	87–89	D+:	67–69
B:	83–86	D:	63–66
B-:	80–82	D-:	60–62
C+:	77–79	F:	0–59

Office Hours: Office hours is a time to ask questions you might not have formulated in class or to discuss certain details, problems, possible alternatives to what we've discussed in class, and more. It's also a time to try out paper examples, theses, etc. I've set a tentative time for office hours. If your schedule does not permit you to attend any of the office hours, please let me know as soon as possible, and I'll do what I can to accommodate you.

OTHER INFORMATION

Class Communications: All updates on assignments and class meetings will be communicated through Announcements on Canvas. It is therefore important that you turn on all Canvas notifications (for announcements, assignment comments etc.) and check your (CSUN) email regularly. Please email me through Canvas or your CSUN email address ONLY. In all email correspondence, please identify the course title and/or number. Please reserve substantive questions about the course material for office hours or after lecture. I typically respond to emails within 24 hours. Help me stick to this 24-hour rule by placing multiple questions in a single email.

Electronic Devices: No electronics of any type are allowed, unless by individual permission. You are not permitted to record class without explicit consent.

Respectful Language: Abusive language is counterproductive and will not be tolerated. At all times, I encourage you to approach sensitive topics with thoughtfulness and communicate in ways that show respect.

Learning Language: Whenever possible, I will do my best to explain things in the simplest terms. If I stray from this and you're lost, ask for clarification. The ultimate goal is for you to understand the material and to articulate your views with clarity and precision.

Academic Integrity: Each student has a responsibility to maintain academic integrity and is expected to be familiar with the University's policies on academic dishonesty (http://catalog.csun.edu/policies/_academic-dishonesty/). Academic misconduct will not be tolerated, and students who engage in academic misconduct will be reported to the appropriate university body, which may impose additional penalties in addition to this class's grade penalties.

The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) including Large Language Models such as ChatGPT is forbidden in this class. All work completed for a grade for this class is expected to be completed in full by none other than yourself with no use of AI. Please note that the use of Grammarly is prohibited in this class. (No grade penalty for improper grammar for the most part!)

Learning Accommodations: If you have a disability and need accommodations, please register with the Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES) office or the National Center on Deafness (NCOD). The DRES office can be reached at 818.677.2684 and NCOD can be reached at 818.677.2611. If you would like to discuss your need for accommodations, please let me know

READING SCHEDULE

Note: I reserve the right to make changes to this course outline at any time (though I will try not to do this much).

Unit I: Introduction & Overview of Business Ethics

Week 1 (8/25; 8/27)

- Read: EAB – Chapter 1

Unit II: Ethical Theory

Week 2 (9/1; 9/3)

- Read: EAB – Chapter 2 (up to page 59; remainder of chapter is optional)

Week 3 (9/8; 9/10)

- Bernard Williams, “Utilitarianism and moral self-indulgence” from *Moral Luck* (1981)
- Joseph Heath's “Business Ethics and Moral Motivation: A Criminological Perspective”

Unit III: Capitalism & The Corporation

Week 4 (9/15; 9/16)

- Read: EAB – Chapter 3 pp 69-84
- Read: EAB – Chapter 5, pp 84-97

Week 5 (9/22; 9/24)

- Kai Nielsen, “A Moral Case for Socialism”
- Piet-Hein van Eeghen, “The Capitalist Case Against the Corporation”
- Watch: The Corporation

Unit IV: Shareholders, Stakeholders, Social Responsibility

Week 6 (9/29; 10/1)

- Read: Milton Friedman, “The Social Responsibility of Business Is to Increase Its Profits”
- Read: “Three Special Stakeholders” from Byars & Stanberry’s *Business Ethics*

Week 7 (10/6; 10/8)

- Read: EAB – Chapter 4, pp 98-114
- Read: EAB – Chapter 4, pp 115-35

Week 8 (10/13; 10/15)

- Midterm Review

****Midterm Exam**- 10/15**

Week 9 (10/20)

- Read: EAB – Chapter 5, pp 136-165
- Read: EAB – Chapter 5, pp 150-166

Unit V: Rights & The Workplace

Week 10 (10/27; 10/29)

- Read: EAB – Chapter 6, pp 167-177
- Read: EAB – Chapter 6, pp 178-197

Week 11 (11/3; 11/5)

- Read: EAB – Chapter 7, pp 198-211
- Read: EAB – Chapter 7, pp 212-223

Week 12 (11/10; 11/12)

- Read: Elizabeth Anderson, "Private Government"
- Read: Norman E. Bowie, "A Kantian Theory of Meaningful Work"

Week 13 (11/17)

- Read: "Alternatives to Traditional Patterns of Work; Robotics, Artificial Intelligence, and the Workplace of the Future" from Byars & Stanberry's *Business Ethics*

Unit VI: Corporate Reach; Corporate Beneficence

Week 13 (11/19)

- Read: EAB – Chapter 9, pp 245-263

Week 14 (11/24; 11/26 is **Thanksgiving Holiday– No Class**)

- Read: EAB – Chapter 9, pp 264-279

Week 15 (11/31; 12/2)

- Read: EAB – Chapter 8, pp 224-244
- Read: Robert Reich, "What Are Foundations For?" in *Boston Review*

Week 16 (12/8; 12/10)

- Read: Seana Valentine Shiffrin's "The Power and Influence of Grantors" in *Boston Review*
- Read: Stanley Katz's "Curb Mega-Foundations" in *Boston Review*
- Finals review session

****Final Exam****