PART I – COURSE OVERVIEW AND REQUIREMENTS

Instructor: Professor Keith A. Maxwell  Contact at: 253-879-3703, maxwell@ups.edu

Office Hours: MW 11-12, TT 2-4 (Other times can be arranged.)

Textbooks:

- Maxwell, K. *Course Pack* (Fall, 2004).

Assumptions Made:
The fundamental assumptions behind this course are (1) that ethics can be taught, (2) that ethics can best be taught through methods that promote our moral growth, (3) that moral growth is based on a way of thinking which can be consciously developed, (4) that this way of thinking is a *sine qua non* – a minimum necessary requirement of morality, and (5) that to be ethical, this "Moral Minimum" is a universally required style of moral reasoning. The encompassing assumption which will guide us is that one cannot be a moral person--cannot live the good life--without developing skills in the disciplined, constant, and consistent use of the Moral Minimum.

Information Used:
The materials in this course come from the fields of cognitive psychology, moral philosophy, and law. You will be working with real and hypothetical scenarios that present ethical dilemmas and conflicts for analysis and resolution. These scenarios will come from experiences encountered in all facets of life, both personal and professional. Some will come from law cases and case studies of actual events in business, some from accounts reported in the press, and others from the experiences, concerns, and ruminations of you and your classmates. We will also draw on the life experiences which have been the subjects of literature and film.

Core Concepts and Skills Used in Applied Ethics:
You will learn cognitive skills for effective moral reasoning. Moral reasoning can follow one or a mixture of styles. We will learn, compare, apply, and assess the conclusions, decisions, and judgments based on the principles of consequentialism, deontology (duty), and virtue ethics. We will learn and apply key concepts from moral psychology, principally Kohlberg's stages of moral development. Other concepts include findings from cognitive psychology that furnish insight into how we acquire our values, beliefs, and our personal versions of the truth. Cognitive psychology also alerts us to numerous cognitive impediments and illusions that keep us from making the best moral choices. We will use these concepts to develop
skills for moral growth and ethical decision-making. Throughout, developing expertise in facts and expertise in concepts will be emphasized.

**Point of View:**
The Moral Minimum requires impartiality (see Part II), so we will always start our decision-making process with the assumption that our own point of view is no more or no less valid than those of others. But, remember that this is only the starting point. In the end, not all opinions or points of view are entitled to acceptance. Acceptance is always based on the degree to which the point of view passes the test of the Moral Minimum; it never depends on popular opinion!

**Implications:**
Your acquisition of cognition and moral reasoning skills and the sharpening of your critical thinking will move you to a higher stage of moral development and will give you greater ability to resolve conflicts in your personal life and professional activity.

**Course Topics:**
- **What ethics is and is not: Dispelling some misconceptions. The Moral Minimum (I): Developing the skill of fact analysis.** Our first task, and perhaps the most difficult of the semester, is to set the record straight about the nature of applied ethics, i.e., ethical decision-making and action. We will need to distinguish between ethics and law, ethics and religion, and between ethical principles and cultural beliefs. After an overview, we will tackle the first requirement of the Moral Minimum by learning ways to assure that we base our moral decisions on complete and accurate facts.
- **The Moral Minimum (II): The Search for Valid Moral Principles.** In this unit we will be covering the most important moral theories used in making ethical decisions in accordance with the Moral Minimum: Utilitarianism; Kantian deontology; rights and justice; and virtue ethics. We will use these theories to discuss and analyze some important ethical dilemmas.
- **Applying the Moral Minimum to Ethical Dilemmas.** Throughout the course you will be required to make well-reasoned judgments about ethical dilemmas. This will be accomplished in a number of ways: writing an ethical analysis of the characters in a film; presenting, and leading a discussion on an ethical dilemma as illustrated in an actual law case; writing a paper analyzing the ethical dilemma you presented; and individual participation in class and group discussions of ethical issues and dilemmas.

**The Plan We Will Follow in the Classroom:**
The course will be designed so that on a typical day you will be using the Moral Minimum by engaging in moral reasoning about crucial issues we might face in our personal and professional lives. A variety of formats will be used.

- **Discussions between you, other students, and/or your professor.** I call these discussions “shared inquiries.” Their purpose is to reason our way to a decision in an actual or hypothetical situation. These discussions will, at times, seem to be "madness without a method." However, remember that our method is the Moral Minimum; it will help if you always relate the discussion to it.
- **Group work.** You and your group members will write (or orally state) in class an ethical decision and support it with moral reasoning grounded in the Moral Minimum.
Others in the class will evaluate your decision and make specific recommendations for improvement.

- **Self-Discovery and Self-Assessment.** Ethical decision-making requires that we constantly step back and evaluate how well we are utilizing our skills in facts and concepts at an expert-level. Have we considered the evidence on all sides of the issue? Are we using universal moral principles, or have we unthinking jumped to a conclusion based on our preconceived notions of right and wrong? Are we deciding impartially, or are we being egoists? Are we embracing cognitive disequilibrium? You will be doing a number of activities throughout the course that are designed to help you examine your ethical beliefs and decisions.

> “The unexamined life is not worth living.”

--Socrates

Assess Yourself! When faced with evidence that contradicts your long-held beliefs about right and wrong, how easily can you “let go” of them? Put another way: How tolerant are you of cognitive disequilibrium? Use a scale from 10 to 1 (10 being “very tolerant”).

> "A great many people think they are thinking when they are merely rearranging their prejudices."

--William James

**Grades:**
In the last class session of the semester you will choose one of the following grade options:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Component</th>
<th>Option A</th>
<th>Option B</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Writing Assignments</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>II. Law Case Presentation</td>
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<tr>
<td>III. Term Paper: Dilemma Analysis of a Law Case</td>
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<tr>
<td>IV. Scheduled Short Quizzes (3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>V. Class Contribution (more than your mere presence)</td>
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<td>VI. Unannounced In-class Writings</td>
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<td>VII. Final Exam (Comprehensive Essay Question)</td>
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<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
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"Work like you’re not getting paid;

love like you’ve never been hurt;
dance like no one’s watching."

**Description of Grade Components:**
Generally, your written assignments will be essays that require you to apply the Moral Minimum. *Paper grades are based on content and quality of writing.*

- **Writing Assignments (Evidentiary Analysis Papers):** Apply fact analysis skills to evaluate the moral reasoning and level of moral development of characters in stories,
dialogues, and a film; ethical analysis of law cases. Support your evaluation with sound arguments that conform to the Moral Minimum. *(Typed, double-spaced, 1” left- and 1 ½” right-margin.)*

- **Final Paper:** You will be assigned a law case that presents an ethical (moral) dilemma to analyze using the moral minimum. For your assigned case you must write a 6 to 8 page paper that thoroughly and rigorously analyzes the issue using the Moral Minimum. In the paper, you must evaluate the behavior of the litigants and the decision of the court using at least two forms of analysis based on universal moral theories: (1) utilitarian analysis, (2) duty-based analysis using Kantian and *prima facie* deontology, (3) justice and rights. Detailed instructions will be provided in Week 6 of the semester.

- **Law Case Presentation:** You will summarize and defend your analysis in an oral presentation, and react to class feedback about it. These presentations are scheduled to begin in Week 10 and conclude the Tuesday before Thanksgiving.

- **Class Contribution:** Mastery of the content and decision-making skills developed in this course can only effectively come about through quality contributions to discussions of the assigned material. Regular attendance is critical for success in this class. On days where discussion is specifically designated in the schedule, everyone is expected to contribute. Giving quality feedback to your fellow students during their law case presentations will be weighted heavily toward your contribution grade.

- **Scheduled Quizzes:** There will be three (3) short quizzes that require you to apply the concepts from class assignments and discussions. The dates for these are indicated on the class schedule.

- **Unannounced In-Class Writing:** In some classes there will be short writing tasks over the assigned material for that day. Expect these to be closed-book and closed-notes exercises that require that you have read the material ahead of time.

**Grading Standards**

I do not grade on a curve; instead, I assess your work as shown in the following table. (Exams and some assignments are graded on the basis of points earned. In that case I use the percentages in parentheses to assign a letter grade. Each percentage range is divided into thirds to accommodate plus-minus grading.)

>“Certainty is not a sign of success but of lack of imagination!”

---Imre Lakatos

- **A** - excellence in content, organization, writing and presentation, originality, analysis and understanding (90-100%)
- **B** - excellence in some, but not all of the above categories (80-89%)
- **C** - satisfactory completion of the content and structure of the assignment (70-79%)
- **D** - unsatisfactory, but I can tell you at least tried (60-69%)
- **F** - I’m embarrassed, you should be too (below 60%)