

# Syllabus for PHIL 6: Ethical Issues in Business

Spring 2XYZ

MWF XYZ

Is it possible to be a good person *and* a good businessperson? Is it worth it for a businessperson to be a good person? Is it worth it for a business to be ethical? A business's ethical practices are becoming increasingly important to its financial success, especially over time. The recent global economic crisis has forced many to reconsider the importance of ethical business practice. In this course, we will grapple with the fundamental issues in ethical decision-making facing individuals and businesses in the modern world. Among the questions we will address are: Must businesses be ethical? What does it mean for a business to be ethical? What are an employer's rights? What about an employee's rights? What about a consumer's rights? What, if any, forms of discrimination are acceptable in the workplace? In what ways are businesses and the individuals that comprise them responsible for the actions they take? How should businesses relate to the environment and sustainability?

The goals of this course are (i) to acquaint you with the main issues in business and organizational ethics, (ii) to acquaint you with the methods by which experts work on these issues, (iii) to give you opportunities to apply these methods to real-world ethical problems, and (iv) to give you opportunities to learn and practice professional writing and speaking. By the end of this course, you will have gained knowledge and skills essential to ethical decision-making and contemporary ethical business practice. You will have learned how to think through ethical problems, and make better decisions when faced with real-world ethically problematic situations. Specific skills that will serve these purposes include: identifying the essential elements of a case, identifying and applying the relevant philosophical methods to a case, rigorous argumentation, and clear self-expression in the form of clear writing as well as clear speaking.

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**Text:** Gibson, Kevin. *Ethics and Business*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.  
*Additional readings will be provided as needed, and typically posted on Camino.*

## Requirements

- (i) In-class attendance and participation, worth 15% of final grade.
- (ii) One short writing exercise, worth 10% of total grade.
- (iii) One mid-term exam, worth 20% of total grade.
- (iv) Final project/presentation, worth 35% of total grade.
- (v) One final exam, worth 20% of total grade.

**I.** Attendance and participation in lectures and discussions are an integral part of the work for this class. All students are expected to participate. Some of us are shier than others, but a successful

discussion depends on participation. In studying ethics especially, we expect to address controversial issues and deeply held beliefs, so hearing a variety of viewpoints is crucial to this class. For that to happen, you need to be present, and participating. In addition, this is good practice for you in the real world. In many jobs (maybe most) your advancement depends on being willing to speak up in a group and express yourself clearly. You will not always know, or even feel particularly comfortable with the other people in the room, yet the people who are going to be remembered and promoted are the ones that contribute.

As an objective measure of your attendance, a sign-in sheet will circulate each day. It is your responsibility to get here on time, and sign it. If you miss 2 or fewer class meetings, you will get 10 of the 15 points, automatically. If you miss more than two class meetings, you lose two points per unexcused absence. You may be excused if you have to miss class time for legitimate reasons. If you are going to miss class, you can make a good impression by being an adult and telling me why you are missing class, even if you're unsure whether you will be excused. (That's just respectful professional courtesy. Besides, you can't be excused if you don't ask.) If you have to miss class owing to unforeseen circumstances, follow up with me as soon as possible.

The remaining 5 points measure (i) how often and (ii) how enthusiastically you participate in class discussions, as well as (iii) whether you take advantage of office hours, and / or (iv) other appointment-times. Participation includes asking questions, answering questions, challenging or building off of what other students say, etc. As a general guide, a student who raises her hand almost every class period with an on-point question, answer, or comment (whether agreeing or disagreeing) would get a "5." A student who raises her hand most (but not all) class periods, and supplements that by coming to office hours or making appointments, would also get a "5." A student who raises her hand most (but not all) class periods with memorable or on-point contributions, would get a "4." A student who raises her hand regularly but not frequently would get around a "3." A student who raises her hand only once in a while would get a "2." A student who never or almost never raises her hand would get a "0" to a "1." If at any time, you feel that you are trying to contribute but I'm not calling on you or not hearing you, please bring this to my attention right away, either before or after class, at office hours, or via email.

**II.** The short writing exercise is on a topic set well in advance (see below). It involves writing a very concise answer to a specific question, in a standard professional format of a corporate memo or business letter (your choice). In either format, your paper must be fewer than 400 words in the body, and fit onto a single page. This is a strict limit, because this assignment is about rigorous, concise, and clear writing, of the kind that is essential for efficient communication in the workplace. It is also practice for the kind of writing you will be asked to do on the exams and in the final project (see below). You may not receive a grade if your piece is too long—a big part of your grade for all writing in this course concerns how clearly and thoroughly you can address an issue, without wasting any words. Submit electronically on Camino.

**III.** The mid-term examination may include multiple-choice *or* short-answer factual questions (3-4 sentences) as well as essays answering more in-depth questions. A study guide will be handed out in advance. The exam will be administered in Week 6.

**IV.** For the final project, form groups of 3. (Depending on class enrollment, there may be one or two groups of two. Groups of four will be avoided.) Each group will research a contemporary ethically challenging situation faced by an actual organization, *not* one from readings or class-discussions. First, assemble a team, and get a case approved by the instructor. Once your team and case have been approved, your tasks are: (i) research all the important facts of the case, (ii) assemble appropriately in-depth analyses of the case, the organization and its response (if it has made one), and (iii) devise your own proposal for how the organization *should* respond (or should *have* responded). The culmination of the project is an in-class presentation of 7-minutes *maximum*, where the team presents its findings to the class, and (time permitting) fields questions concerning your proposed solution. A set of instructions will be issued in Week 6, after the midterm.

This project allows you to work on a topic of personal interest. It requires you to synthesize information from various parts of the course, think creatively about how to solve ethical problems, and do original research outside of what is assigned on this syllabus. It also gives you practice working in goal-oriented teams, similar to those common in the contemporary workplace. Working in groups may involve novel or challenging interpersonal situations. This assignment offers you practice at handling these situations in an educational and relatively low-stakes environment (you won't lose your job, or miss out on a promotion!). If a problem arises within your group, you are welcome to ask me for help. Report: 20%, presentation 15%.

**V.** The final exam is scheduled by the University, and occurs during Exam Week. It will have exactly the same format as the mid-term exam. A study guide will be handed out in advance. You will have the same time to complete this exam as you did for the midterm (65 minutes)—it is not a 3-hour exam.

***Pathway Notice:*** this course is associated with the Design Thinking Pathway, and the Applied Ethics Pathway. See <<http://www.scu.edu/provost/ugst/core/pathways/>> for more information.

## **Policies**

### *Academic Integrity*

The University seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. Principles of academic honesty include respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that only individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligation to protect your own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as your own. Both the University Bulletin and the Student Handbook explain the University's and my expectations that all members of our community are to be honest in their academic endeavors. Engaging in any form of academic dishonesty, or acts generally understood to be dishonest in an academic context, subjects you academic and judicial action. Students determined to be in violation of the Academic Integrity Protocol may face sanctions such as an "F" on the relevant assignment or an "F" in the course, depending on severity. It is your responsibility to understand and follow these principles. In particular, make sure you know what counts as plagiarism! As a rule, cite and/or quote, unless specifically directed otherwise. To learn how to do this, and how to avoid the various forms of plagiarism watch this: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2q0NIWcTq1Y>>.

For the full policies, see: <[Academic Integrity Protocol \(revised\)](#)>. This document plus a briefer version are posted on Camino.

### *Students with Disabilities*

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is requested to register with office of Disability Resources. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DR. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me early in the term. DR is located in Benson room 216, & online at: <<http://www.scu.edu/studentlife/disabilities/>>.

### *Assignments, Due-dates, and Grading*

Due-dates and times are fixed in advance by this syllabus. By University policy, examinations and assignments are not rescheduled for personal convenience, including travel plans. We all must adjust other elements in our lives to meet course and University policies. If you have a serious medical or family emergency that compels you to miss an exam or assignment date, be sure to make arrangements with me. According to University policy, you must provide written, verifiable documentation of your emergency. If a scheduled exam or due date conflicts with your observance of a religious holiday, we will accommodate your request for an alternate exam date. Such arrangements must be made *at least* two weeks before the scheduled date, or we may not be able to accommodate you.

Unless arrangements are made ahead of time, work turned in late will be graded down 1/3<sup>rd</sup> letter grade per day (so an A becomes an A- becomes a B+, etc.). The longer you wait to make such arrangements (e.g. requesting an extension) the more unprofessional you appear. Always request accommodations in advance; I may reject requests made the day or night before a due date.

Any assignments not turned in turn into “zeros” at the end of the quarter. Please note that even a bad grade is better than a zero, so it is better to turn something in rather than let something go.

All readings and assignments are to be done before the class-meeting when they are listed. Readings are assigned to prepare you for our discussions. I will assume familiarity with them. In the past, students who came to class without having done the reading sometimes earned good participation grades, but their overall grades suffered. Readings average 20 to 40 pages per week.

It is not permitted to use laptops in class. Empirical research has shown that they distract others more than they help you, and that chronic multi-tasking harms higher cognitive function, concentration, and creativity. You don't have to take my word for it—there is loads of research on this. For example, watch <["The Myth of Multi-tasking"](#)> and watch <["What Multi-tasking Does to Your Brain"](#)> starting at 2:55.

Texting and other uses of phones are not permitted in class for similar reasons. In addition, being on your phone during class is very rude, even if it does not bother you. I do call people out when I see them on their phones. If you are having a legitimate crisis, or if an emergency comes up, the polite adult thing to do is to excuse yourself, step outside, and do what you need to do. Then, after class, you can pull me aside and let me know what's going on. I do understand that things happen.

## Grades

Here is what grades mean, in this class and in many others at Santa Clara:

- A** work of surpassing quality, with perhaps a few very minor faults
- B** work of good quality, which may have several minor faults, or a few more significant faults
- C** work of fair-to-acceptable quality, usually with several significant faults, or a few major faults, or which does not meet some of the requirements of the assignment
- D** work of poor quality, which does not meet multiple requirements for the assignment
- F** work that does not meet the requirements at all, or which is utterly incomprehensible

Here is how letters map onto percentages, in this class:

|            |            |            |            |        |
|------------|------------|------------|------------|--------|
| A > 93     | B+ 87-89.9 | C+ 77-79.9 | D+ 67-69.9 | F < 60 |
| A- 90-92.9 | B 83-86.9  | C 73-76.9  | D 63-69.9  |        |
|            | B- 80-82.9 | C- 70-72.9 | D- 60-62.9 |        |

If a percentage falls on the borderline between two grades (e.g. a 92.96%), I reserve the right to round up. Please do not ask me to do this, however, because it makes you look like a grade-grubber. Also, please note that Camino sometimes does weird things when it tries to compute overall grades, so it is better to use Camino only to check your grades on individual assignments.

It is crucial that you understand how your written work relates to the standards described above. Another document, which will be posted on Camino, explains this *in detail*: the “Writing Guide + Rubric.” Read it carefully. You are also encouraged to ask for clarifications during class (at appropriate opportunities), in office hours, at appointments, before or after class, or via email. This syllabus will also be posted electronically on Camino as a PDF, so that the hyperlinks work.

**How to do well in this class:** for most students, it takes a lot of work to do well in this class. The subject matter is very difficult at times, and it may be new to you. I have structured this class to reward students who (1) follow all instructions meticulously, (2) *do* all assigned readings and videos on-time, (3) stop and *think* about them before coming to class, (4) participate in every or almost every class meeting, (5) turn in truly college-quality work—work that is professionally done, cogently written, plus free from grammar and spelling mistakes. The single most important way to excel in my classes is to make sure you have understood the material, and then show me you have done so in your quizzes, participation, and written work. I give comments on your work because I have very high standards and I know you can reach them.

## Office Hours & Appointments

I am available at office hours and at other times several hours every week, all quarter long. Please email me if you intend to come to office hours, or to make an appointment outside of office hours. Sometimes, many students show up and I am unable to see everybody. I really want you to come to office hours, but if you just show up, I may not get to you, especially if other students have made arrangements ahead of time. Please work with me on this. It’s always best to email ahead.

### Peer Educator

For this class, we are fortunate to have a student who excelled in this class in the past, is highly knowledgeable in the field, and who has demonstrated teaching ability. This student will assist us as a Peer Educator. Peer Educators do not do any grading, but they may facilitate discussions, lead review sessions, help you edit your papers, help you understand course material and course requirements, and generally serve as an additional resource to help you succeed.

### Copyright Notice

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## **Schedule of topics and readings**

### Week 1: Course Intro

- Monday** Welcome to the course! The topics, the syllabus, preview of coming attractions.  
Discussion: The *Herald of Free Enterprise* Case. What do we think? Why?  
**Posted Online:** Handout on Key Terms + this syllabus + Memo/Letter Format
- Wednesday** Read: This Syllabus + pp27-28, “Gleaning at the Grocer” + Handout on Key Terms + watch four videos on this website: <[Intro to Business Ethics](#)>  
Case: Owen Bedborough and the Grocery Store  
Discussion: Ethics at work. What are the key factors in the case?  
Discussion: key terms & concepts. ‘Must’ versus ‘ought’ versus ‘may.’ ‘Autonomy.’ What are requirements? Obligations? Permissions?
- Friday** **NO CLASS TODAY (GOOD FRIDAY)**

### Week 2: Three Approaches to Ethical Decision-making

- Monday** Read: pp68-73 “Globalization and its Implications” + pp30-37 “Utilitarianism”

Case: Cotton and Steel Subsidies

Discussion: how do we decide which was better: having a subsidy or not having a subsidy? *Note: corn and food subsidies are good topics for the final project!*

**Wednesday** Read: pp1-7 “The Bhopal Disaster” + pp38-44 “Duty-Based Theories”

Case: The Bhopal Disaster

Discussion: what duties did the players in the Bhopal Disaster case have? If so, which, to whom and why? Do they make anyone’s actions right or wrong?

**Friday** Read: pp44-50 “Virtue Ethics”

Discussion: What is a virtue? How are the virtues relevant for making ethical business decisions? What are virtues in people? In businesses? Eastern and western perspectives on virtue(s).

### **Week 3: Minority Reports—two more approaches to ethics**

**Monday** Read: pp12-15 “Ethical Relativism.”

Discussion: “Isn’t it all just opinion or upbringing?” Ethical relativism & what’s wrong with it. Cultural Relativism versus Ethical Relativism.

**Wednesday** Read: pp15-24 “Egoism”.

Case: Sweatshops—right, wrong, or “depends”?

Discussion: “Can’t we all just look after our own interests, and let other people do the same?” Ethical egoism: what makes it attractive? What’s wrong with it?

**Announcement:** next Monday is special, as we enact ethical corporate practice.

**Friday** *Catch-up day*

### **Week 4: Rights, Responsibility**

**Monday** Proper Ethical Responses—Applying what we’ve learned

Prepare before class: review materials so far, especially how to apply different ethical theories to real-world scenarios.

**Handout:** Case for today’s class.

As a class, we will act out a real-world scenario: an actual company has discovered an ethical violation. Key players, including the board of directors, must evaluate and decide what course of action to take. Once we are agreed on

the most apparent reasonable courses of action, we will split into groups, discuss, and re-convene in an attempt to reach a decision.

**Wednesday** Read: pp95-112 up to the end of the “Inalienable Responsibility” section.

Discussion: What is responsibility? Milgram’s (In)Famous Experiment.

**Friday** Read: pp112-124 up to the end of the chapter on Responsibility.

Discussion: What are the different ways in which people appeal to “responsibility” in justifying fault and liability? What are the connections between responsibility and moral accountability?

**DUE:** Short Writing Exercise. Submit electronically on Camino, before start-of-class today. Instructions are posted on Camino, and handed out in-class.

**Handout:** study guide for the mid-term exam.

### **Week 5: Responsibility, and Study for the Midterm**

**Monday** Read: pp125-136 up to the end of the “Niger Delta” section.

Discussion: What is a right? Does that question even make sense? What are the different kinds of rights? What generates rights?

**Wednesday** Read: pp136-147.

Discussion: Rights and responsibility—how do responsibilities and duties ground rights, and vice-versa? Also, thinking back to previous discussions, what rights (if any) do various players have in different cases?

**Friday** Catch-up time, and in-class midterm review. Bring your questions! I will stay as long as people ask questions. (Note: “What will be on the exam” doesn’t count!)

### **Week 6: The Midterm, Autonomy**

**Monday** **In-class: Midterm Exam**

**Wednesday** Read: pp148-162 to the end of the “Limits on Autonomy” section.

Discussion: Limiting autonomy—balancing liberty and responsibility. When is it morally acceptable to limit another’s autonomy? Political libertarianism.

**Friday** Read: pp162-176.

Discussion: On the face of it, advertising is designed to infringe on a consumer’s autonomy. Cases: CortiSlim, Prop8. When is advertising unethical?

**Posted Online:** Excerpt on whistleblowing.

**Handout:** guidelines and grading policies for Final Projects.

### Week 7: Capitalism, Diversity

**Monday** Read: Posting on whistle-blowing (PDF on Camino) + watch *The Insider* (1999). The film is available on streaming online through the University Library at <http://sculib.scu.edu/record=b2765617>, or as a DVD.

Discussion: When ought one blow the whistle? Why? What protections should be offered to whistle-blowers? By the government? By companies? By others?

**Announcement:** groups to be approved *before* class next Monday. If you have not formed a group by then, you may be randomly assigned by the instructor.

**Posted Online:** Excerpt on the recent global financial crisis.

**Wednesday** Read: pp53-67 up to the end of the “Commons” section.

Discussion: The ethics of competition. Are markets moral? Should they be?

**Friday** Read: pp67-77 + Posting on the recent global financial crisis (PDF on Camino).

Discussion: Markets and government—should markets be regulated? If so, then by whom and based on which principles? Final Projects—questions?

**Final projects:** groups must be approved via email by start-of-class Monday.

**Posted Online:** Excerpts on the Diane Schroer Case and “2 Articles ...”

### Week 8: Diversity, the Environment

**Monday** Read: pp192-198 on “Corporate Promotion of Diversity” and Posting on the Diane Schroer Case.

Discussion: Discrimination—different forms, and should any be allowed?

**Final projects:** groups must be approved via email by start-of-class TODAY! Cases must be approved via email by start-of-class Friday.

**Wednesday** Read: pp78-94 + “2 Articles on Privilege” (PDF posted on Camino, 10pg).

Discussion: How would a utilitarian, a virtue-theorist each respond differently to the major issues raised in Chapter 4? How should we respond to cases like that of Allison Schieffelin and Margaret Roberts?

**Final Projects:** cases must be approved via email by start-of-class Friday.

**Friday** Read pp203-215.

Discussion: Valuing the environment—how businesses evaluate environmental concerns. Can we really give a value to the environment? Should we even try?

**Final Projects:** cases must be approved via email by start-of-class TODAY!

**Week 9: Social Responsibility, Review of Major Themes & Concepts**

**Monday** NO CLASS TODAY (MEMORIAL DAY)

**Wednesday** Read: Read pp215-226 + pp177-192 (top).

Discussion: What responsibilities do individuals and businesses have to the environment? Why? Can and should we derive business ‘ought’s from non-monetary value? How motivation and intention play into utilitarianism vs. deontology—is each approach better-adapted for different issues?

**Announcement:** the quarter is almost over! You should check that you have fulfilled all the requirements so far on this syllabus (see pp. 1-3). You can also double-check that you have turned in all assignments so far on Camino.

**Friday** Read: pp200-202.

Discussion: Some products are not only incidentally harmful (as we have seen, in the case of products that are misused), but known to be harmful (Tobacco). Should these materials be allowed? What about tobacco philanthropy?

**Week 10: Final Projects**

**Monday** Final Project Presentations

**Wednesday** Final Project Presentations

**Friday** Final Project Presentations. Q&A time for the Final Exam. Conclusion.

**Final Exam 11.45am Section: Wednesday June 10<sup>th</sup> @ 1.30pm**

**Final Exam 2.15pm Section: Wednesday June 10<sup>th</sup> @ 4.30pm**

***The End!***