Business people face complex ethical issues all the time, even if they are not always aware of it. These ethical issues are the subject matter for business ethics, and this course aims to provide you with a theoretical foundation to understand the ethical issues in business life and to make a contribution to the academic field of business ethics. The course begins with the major contemporary approaches to business ethics, including stakeholder theory, integrative social contracts theory, as well as accounts grounded in Aristotle, Kant, welfare economics and utilitarianism. The course then examines the role of empirical analysis in the field of business ethics through the literature on experimental philosophy and psychology. The third part of the course surveys several important topics in contemporary business ethics, including trust, professional responsibility, corporate social responsibility, corporate agency and the role of business in a democratic society. An underlying theme in the class is the connection between the issues in business ethics and broader issues in moral and political philosophy.

Grading

50% Four class presentations
50% Term Paper

Class presentations

Each student will be responsible for introducing the material for four class sessions. The introduction should provide a critical assessment of the readings and direct the class to the important questions for discussion. The presentation should last 15-20 minutes and include a handout for the class.

Term Paper

A final term paper (20 pages) will count for 50% of your grade. The paper should address a specific set of readings covered in class. It should identify a theoretical issue in the readings, formulate a clear thesis, and defend the thesis in the context of the concerns and arguments raised in the readings. I will happily read drafts of your papers, give comments, talk about possible topics, and otherwise help you in the writing process.
Course materials

Class size permitting, photocopies of all articles and book chapters will be made available through the department office.
Schedule of Readings

I. Approaches to Business Ethics I

September 15: Stakeholder Theory and ISCT


September 22: Aristotelian Approaches


Optional:


September 29: Kantian Approaches


Matt Zwolinski “The Ethics of Price-Gouging” *Business Ethics Quarterly* vol. 18, no. 3 (July 2008): 347-378


**II. Approaches to Business Ethics II**

*October 6: Utility, welfare and profit maximization*


Optional:


*October 13: Efficiency and corporate governance*


Optional:

III. The Role of Empirical Analysis

October 20: Rationality


Amartya Sen, “Rational Fools” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* vol. 6, no. 4 (Summer 1977), section II, IV-VI, and VIII


T. M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), chapter 2, sections 2-5

Optional:


Derek Parfit, “Can Desires be Intrinsically Irrational, or Rationally Required?” *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 120-6


October 27: Ethics and social science


IV. Topics

November 3: Trust

November 10: Professional Responsibility
Michael Hardimon, “Role Obligations” *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 91 no. 7 (1994)

November 17: Corporate Social Responsibility
Liam Murphy, *Moral Demands and Nonideal Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), Chapters 1 and 5-7
Thomas Dunfee, “Do Firms with Unique Competencies for Rescuing Victims of Human Catastrophes have Special Obligations?” *Business Ethics Quarterly* 16 (2006): 185-210
Optional:

November 24: Corporations and moral personality


December 1: Corporations and democratic citizenship

Jürgen Habermas, “Public Sphere” in *Jürgen Habermas on Society and Politics*, ed. Steven Seidman (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), p. 231-7


