



# Syllabus

## LGST 1000 – Ethics and Social Responsibility

Spring 2024

Huntsman Hall F55

Section 003: Tuesdays & Thursdays 1:45–3:15PM

Section 004: Tuesdays & Thursdays 3:30–5:00PM

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### PROFESSOR

Nina Strohminger

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Office hours: By appointment

### TEACHING ASSISTANTS

Isabela Baghdady, Aleena Bhatti, Kemi Ogunyankin, Jane Zhang

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Office hours: Send an email to the above address to schedule

### COURSE OVERVIEW

Often ethics classes treat unethical behavior as the result of having the wrong values. In this class, we will explore the idea that ethical lapses are better understood as a *design* problem: a failure to foster the psychological and organizational conditions that allow good behavior to flourish.

Another common misperception about ethical behavior is that it comes at the price of happiness and professional success. We will consider the evidence for the opposite conclusion: that doing well, doing good, and feeling good are all deeply intertwined.

This course provides scientifically-grounded ways of navigating the cognitive biases and blind spots that stand in the way of ethical behavior. We will explore strategies for how to act more in line with our own values, and more generally, live happier, more fulfilled lives.

### MATERIALS

I have done my best to minimize the out-of-pocket expenses in this course. If you have trouble affording or accessing any of the source material please let me know and we will figure out a solution.

—**Course website:** The latest syllabus, readings, announcements, and all relevant course information can be accessed on Canvas: <https://canvas.upenn.edu/>

—**Course Pack:** The course pack, which contains case studies and articles from the Harvard Business Review, is available on Canvas under “Study.net Materials”. The course pack is free for all students enrolled in this class.

—**Books:** We are reading one book in its entirety (*Blind Spots* by Max Bazerman & Ann Tenbrunsel) and chapters from a few others (*The Righteous Mind* by Jonathan Haidt, *What Money Can't Buy* by Michael Sandel, *Bullshit Jobs* by David Graeber, *When McKinsey Comes to Town* by Walt Bogdanich & Michael Forsythe). The library has **some** of these books in

digital form which can be accessed online for free (see below). If you log on to Canvas and click on the “Penn Library Course Reserves” tab, you will find digital copies linked there.

- Books that can be read online through Penn Libraries, with unlimited access: *Blind Spots*, *Bullshit Jobs*
- Books that can be read online through Penn Libraries, with one copy accessible at a time: *The Righteous Mind*
- Book chapters that will be accessible on Canvas for free: *When McKinsey Comes to Town*
- Books not available online: *What Money Can't Buy*

I recommend purchasing *The Righteous Mind* and *What Money Can't Buy*.

—**Journal articles, book chapters, movies, etc.:** All other course material is linked to in Canvas under the “Course Materials @ Penn Libraries” tab.

—**Lecture notes:** I will post .pdf versions of the lecture slides on Canvas as quickly as possible **after** the classroom session. I will not distribute them before class for two reasons. First, I will be revising material right up to the beginning of each class. I want to make sure you get the slides I actually present in class. Second, although having my slides during the lecture seems like a good way for you to learn the material, the experimental evidence suggests that it actually impairs learning because students tend to take fewer notes of their own during class. Taking notes in class (as opposed to passively following along with the slides) is a terrific way to encode the course material. All of my lecture slides will be numbered in the lower-left corner. My advice is to keep notes during the lecture tagged with these slide numbers, and then match them up with the slides when you download them after class.

## STUFF THAT GETS GRADED

### *Very small assignments (5% of grade)*

During the semester, I will periodically ask you to do online surveys, submit written answers to discussion questions, and collect data out of class. You will receive the maximum grade for an on-time, excellent assignment and a grade of 0 for a late or unsatisfactory assignment. These assignments will be described in more detail throughout in the semester. **If you added the class late, you have until February 2 (i.e. two days after the Add deadline) to make up the “very small assignments” you missed.**

### *Small written assignments (30%)*

You will complete two out of three possible short written assignments (of 1–2 pages) (design a psychology experiment, write a newspaper op-ed, or write a 10-question test with answer sheet). You may select which two assignments to complete, and in which order. The first assignment is due February 27; the second is due March 28; both by 5PM. Full instructions will be made available on Canvas.

### *Class participation (35%)*

Class participation will be graded as a composite of leading class discussion, quality of contributions to class discussion throughout the semester, and attendance. For a subset of class sessions, two students will lead the class in a discussion of that day’s reading. Students will be in charge of introducing the central arguments made in the reading, suggesting key points for discussion, and guiding the discussion with classmates. I recommend making a handout to distribute to us during class.

### *Final project (30%)*

In the final project, you will take the concepts we learned about in class to provide an “ethical audit” of an organization. As part of this assignment, you will be required to describe basic details of the organization, identify likely points of ethical risk in the organization based on course content, describe how the organization currently handles these ethical risks, and describe design solutions that could minimize these risks. Your goal will be to design as “good” an organization as you can. Your write-up should be between 2300–2700 words, and will be due **May 6 by 5PM** (i.e. on the first day of final exam period). An outline of this paper is due **April 12 by 5PM**. I will distribute further details for this assignment midway through the semester. You are encouraged to consult with me and/or the TAs as you develop your ideas for this project.

## FACULTY-STUDENT LUNCHES

You are invited to sign up on Canvas for student-faculty meals sponsored by the Wharton Meals Program. This program is entirely voluntary, and there is no charge to students. Lunches will take place at KPod.

## CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE

Classroom sessions need to be structured so that you and the other students in the course have as ideal a learning environment as possible. We will therefore establish the following ground rules for in-person classroom sessions:

1. **Display name tents.** There is no seating chart, but classroom discussion will be facilitated if your fellow students (and I!) know who we're talking to.
2. **No screens.** Cell phones, laptops, and tablets are to be turned off and put away during the class period. I have nothing against technology except that it's so interesting that students sometimes have a hard time paying attention when it is present. Class will be unplugged in an effort to help you and those around you focus on the class material. If you'd like to read about the scientific case for a no-laptop classroom policy, you may do so here: <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/students-are-better-off-without-a-laptop-in-the-classroom/>
3. **Arrive on time.** We will start promptly. In return, I will do my absolute best to end the class precisely 90 minutes after we have started. I will be happy to stay late to answer any questions you might have for as long as I am able.

## GRADING POLICY

Grading will be at my discretion and in accordance with Wharton policies. With the exception of clerical/coding errors, no change of grades will be issued after final grade sheets are delivered to the University Registrar. No individual extensions are given for class assignments, without documented medical or other emergency reason. Without such documentation, late assignments will be accepted only at my discretion and may incur a grade deduction.

## ACADEMIC FREEDOM

It is possible (even likely) that at various points during the semester you will disagree with me, your classmates, or the readings on an ethical issue under discussion. This is to be expected. You have the right to engage in reasoned disagreement with me (and your classmates, and the readings) without any penalty to your grade. I, in turn, may challenge your beliefs—not necessarily because I disagree, but because I want to help you think more deeply about why these are your beliefs. Everyone in this class has the right to express their views and to challenge others' views, in a mutually respectful manner. The classroom and the university are a forum for the pursuit of truth.

## ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Copying text from any source and claiming it as your own is considered plagiarism and a violation of [Penn's Code of Academic Integrity](#).

ChatGPT and other large language models (LLMs) can be a useful tool for brainstorming in the early stages of a project, or getting feedback at later stages of a project. When used in this way, LLMs are no different from talking through an idea with a friend. If you would like to use LLMs in this way for this class, you may.

However, copying text output from an LLM is not allowed. This is a form of plagiarism—no different from getting your friend to write the essay for you. Please note, also, that written assignments are held to a high standard in this class. While ChatGPT might be able to produce a sterile paper that earns a B or C, it is not capable of producing A-level work.

Violations of academic integrity are taken seriously (this is an ethics course after all), and will be directly referred to the Office of Student Conduct.

## COURSE OUTLINE

CP = Course Pack, available on Canvas under “Study.net Materials”

Links to all other course materials can be found on Canvas under “Course Materials @ Penn Libraries” (except the books as specified above)

Unless otherwise noted, readings/assignments are due at the start of class that day.

**Readings and schedule are subject to change.**

Date	Topic	Readings and assignments due
Introduction		
Thursday 1/18	Ethics as a design problem	(No readings due)
Sunday 1/21		<b>**Fill out Background Survey + NameCoach by 5PM**</b>
Tuesday 1/23	Does ethics pay?	Cialdini, Petrova, & Goldstein, <i>The Hidden Costs of Organizational Dishonesty</i> [CP] Grant, <i>In the Company of Givers and Takers</i> [CP]
Ethical Awareness		
Thursday 1/25	Myths about morality	Bazerman & Tenbrunsel, <i>Blind Spots</i> , Chapters 1–2
Tuesday 1/30	Myths about morality, pt. 2	Haidt, <i>The Righteous Mind</i> , Part I (Chapters 1–4)
Thursday 2/1	Ethical awareness	Bazerman & Tenbrunsel, <i>Blind Spots</i> , Chapter 3
Tuesday 2/6	Ethical awareness, pt. 2	Bazerman & Tenbrunsel, <i>Blind Spots</i> , Chapter 4
Incentives		
Thursday 2/8	Incentives	Sandel, <i>What Money Can't Buy</i> , Introduction and Chapter 1 Fiske, <i>Relational Models Theory</i>
Tuesday 2/13	Incentives (design solutions)	Sandel, <i>What Money Can't Buy</i> , Chapters 2–3
Moral Motives in Conflict		
Thursday 2/15	Conflicts of interest	Carlat, <i>Dr. Drug Rep</i> Bazerman et al., <i>Why Good Accountants Do Bad Audits</i> [CP]
Tuesday 2/20	Conflicts of interest (design solutions)	Bazerman & Tenbrunsel, <i>Blind Spots</i> , Chapters 5–6
Thursday 2/22	Moral courage & whistleblowing	Dungan, Waytz, & Young, <i>The Psychology of Whistleblowing</i>
Tuesday 2/27	Moral courage & whistleblowing (design solutions)	<i>Out for Blood: Tyler Shultz and Theranos (A)</i> [CP] <b>Small Assignment #1 due</b>
Ethical Cultures		
Thursday 2/29	Cross-cultural ethics	Haidt, <i>The Righteous Mind</i> , Chapters 5 & 7 Fadiman, <i>A Traveler's Guide to Gifts and Bribes</i> [CP]
Tuesday 3/12	Ethical cultures	Bazerman & Tenbrunsel, <i>Blind Spots</i> , Chapters 7–8
Thursday 3/14	Ethical cultures (design solutions)	Goldstein et al., <i>A Room with a Viewpoint: Using Social Norms to Motivate Environmental Conservation in Hotels</i>

Tuesday 3/19	The design of an unethical culture: Enron	<i>Enron: Smartest Guys in the Room</i> (video)
Corporate Social Responsibility		
Thursday 3/21	The responsibilities of business: Debates	Friedman, <i>The Social Responsibility of Business Is to Increase Its Profits</i> Bower & Paine, <i>The Error at the Heart of Corporate Leadership</i> [CP]
Tuesday 3/26	The responsibilities of business: Paradoxes	<i>The Rise and Fall of FTX</i> [CP]
Thursday 3/28	The responsibilities of business: Risks	<i>Merck &amp; Co, Inc. (A): The Business Enterprise Trust</i> [CP] <b>Small assignment #2 due</b>
Reputation		
Tuesday 4/2	Reputation	Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, <i>Universal Dimensions of Social Cognition</i>
Thursday 4/4	Reputation, pt. 2	Bogdanich & Forsythe, <i>When McKinsey Comes to Town</i> , Chapters 1 & 7
Tuesday 4/9	Reputation in crisis	Schweitzer et al., <i>The Organizational Apology</i> [CP] <i>Up First</i> (January 21, 2024): "The Sunday Story: When Hospitals Don't Say Sorry" (podcast)
Justice		
Thursday 4/11	Social justice	Bertrand & Mullainathan, <i>Are Emily and Greg More Employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A Field Experiment on Labor Market Discrimination</i> Leslie et al., <i>Expectations of Brilliance Underlie Gender Distributions Across Academic Disciplines</i>
Friday 4/12		<b>**Outline of final project due by 5PM**</b>
Tuesday 4/16	Economic justice	Norton & Ariely, <i>Building a Better America—One Wealth Quintile at a Time</i> Kolbert, <i>Feeling Low</i>
Doing Good and Feeling Good		
Thursday 4/18	Happiness, by design	Kahneman & Deaton, <i>High Income Improves Evaluation of Life but Not Emotional Well-being</i> <u>Optional reading:</u> Killingsworth, Kahneman, & Mellers, <i>Income and Emotional Well-being: A Conflict Resolved</i>
Tuesday 4/23	Happiness and morality	Graeber, <i>On the Phenomenon of Bullshit Jobs</i> (available here: <a href="https://www.atlasofplaces.com/essays/on-the-phenomenon-of-bullshit-jobs/">https://www.atlasofplaces.com/essays/on-the-phenomenon-of-bullshit-jobs/</a> ) Graeber, <i>Bullshit Jobs</i> , Chapter 3
Thursday 4/25	Values, habits, and character	Griffin et al., <i>Personal Infidelity and Professional Conduct in Four Settings</i> <b>Extra credit:</b> <i>FYRE: The Greatest Party That Never Happened</i> (Netflix)
Tuesday 4/30	Wrap-up	Christensen, <i>How Will You Measure Your Life?</i> [CP]
Monday 5/6		<b>**Final project due by 5PM**</b>