



REL 3171: ETHICS IN AMERICA Spring 2024

Instructor: Anna Peterson

Office: 105 Anderson (Mailbox in 107 Anderson)

Tel. 392-1625, fax 392-7395

E-mail: annap@ufl.edu

Class meetings: Tues 4th, Th. 4-5

Room: Anderson 113

Office Hours: In person, Tues 5-6th periods (11:45-1:40) and Zoom by appointment

DESCRIPTION

This class teaches students to reflect on and analyze ethical issues facing contemporary American society. We focus on racial justice, immigration, and religious conflict. As a foundation for thinking about ethical dimensions of these issues, the course will provide an overview of ethics as an academic discipline, including introductions to major ethical theories and thinkers. We will explore the ways that issues such as justice, integration, cultural autonomy, and the common good shape visions of an ethical society. We will also address various obstacles – cultural, economic, and political – that make those visions difficult to achieve.

REQUIRED BOOKS

1. Miguel de la Torre, *The U.S. Immigration Crisis: Toward an Ethics of Place* (Cascade Companions, 2016)

Other required readings available on Canvas.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Please Note: The requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found in the online catalog at: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>.

Also, please note that a minimum grade of C is required for general education and writing credit.

1. Participation. The participation grade will be based on active and informed engagement in class, consistent attendance, and performance in random reading quizzes (up to five over the semester). 10% of final grade.
2. In class writing on ethical theories. Thurs., Feb. 8. 20% of final grade.
3. Two short essays (25% of final grade each, total 50%)
 - a. First short essay, on race and racism. Due March 10. Minimum 1000 words.
 - b. Second short essay, on immigration. Due April 7. Minimum 1000 words.
3. Final project: reflection paper (or another format), addressing ethical issues we have discussed during the last module and their relationship to the American dream. Due April 28. 20% of final grade.

POLICIES, RULES, AND RESOURCES

1. *Attendance and Participation:* Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies, found in the online catalog at: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>

Class attendance is required. Do not register for this class if you cannot arrive on time. Students should arrive on time and prepared to discuss the day's readings. Tardiness harms your understanding of the material and disrupts the class. After the first late arrival, the instructor reserves the right to mark you absent. The instructor will *not* provide notes or discuss material that has already been covered for students who arrive late, barring extraordinary circumstances (which do not include failing to find a parking place or sleeping in).

Please let me know about any planned absences (for religious holidays, athletic events, or other reasons) as soon as possible. For unplanned absences (due to illness or emergency), please let me know as soon as possible and please provide documentation (e.g, doctor's note) if possible.

2. *Make-up policy:* I will arrange for a make-up or early in-class exam only with sufficient notice. If you are out of town when an out-of-class assignment is due, you must email it to me on the date due and then provide a print copy when you return to Gainesville.

If you do not receive an extension from the instructor, assignment will be marked down a half grade (e.g., from B+ to B) for each day late.

3. *Completion of All Assignments:* You must complete all written and oral assignments and fulfill the requirement for class participation in order to pass the course. I will not average a grade that is missing any assignment or requirement.

4. *Common Courtesy:* Cell phones and other electronic devices must be turned to vibrate during class (in order to be available for the UF emergency system). Students who receive or make calls during class will be asked to leave and will be marked absent (unexcused) for the day.

5. *Laptop and tablet use:* You may take notes on a laptop computer, although the instructor reserves the right to ask you to turn off the computer if circumstances warrant. The instructor also reserves the right to ask any student engaging in disruptive behavior to leave the class. If that occurs, the student will be marked absent for the day.

6. *Honor Code:* The honor code applies to this and all courses taken at UF: “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity. On all work submitted for credit by students at the university, the following pledge is either required or implied: On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment”
(<https://archive.catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/1617//advising/info/student-honor-code.aspx>).

The university specifically prohibits cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation, bribery, conspiracy, and fabrication. Any student(s) demonstrated to have cheated, plagiarized, or otherwise violated the Honor Code in *any assignment* for this course will fail the course. In addition, violations of the Academic Honesty Guidelines may result in judicial action and sanctions, as specified in the Student Conduct Code (<https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/process/student-conduct-code/>).

7. *Accommodation for Disabilities:* Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student, who must then provide this documentation to the Instructor when requesting accommodation.

8. *Counseling and Emergency Resources:* Resources available on-campus for students include the following:

- a. University Counseling Center, 301 Peabody Hall, 392-1575, personal and career counseling;
- b. Student Mental Health, Student Health Care Center, 392-1171, personal counseling;
- c. Sexual Assault Recovery Services (SARS), Student Health Care Center, 392-1161, sexual counseling;
- d. Career Resource Center, Reitz Union, 392-1601, career development assistance and counseling.
- e. For security issues, please contact the University Police Department: 392-1111, or 911 for general emergencies.

9. *Software Use:* All faculty, staff, and students of the University are required and expected to obey the laws and legal agreements governing software use. Failure to do so can lead to monetary damages and/or criminal penalties for the individual violator. Because such violations are also against university policies and rules, disciplinary action will be taken as appropriate.

SCHEDULE

Module/Date	Topic	Reading
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MODULE 1: Ethical thinking and theories

Please note: Dr. Peterson is having eye surgery on Jan. 4 and will be on medical leave during the first week of class. Visiting faculty will be leading class on Jan. 8 and 10. You are expected to attend all classes and participate in all activities during this time. I look forward to meeting you all on Jan. 15!

Tu 1/9	Introduction to the class Welcome and questions: Dr. Rachel Gordan, Department of Religion Read: Syllabus
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Th 1/11	Research methods and sources Guest lecture: Megan Daly, religion librarian
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Tu 1/16	American dreams Read: John Winthrop, "City on a Hill" Listen: Anand Giridharadas, "A Tale of Two Americas"
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Th 1/18	Religious ethics and social ethics Read: June O'Connor, "On Doing Religious Ethics"
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Tu 1/23	Kantian ethics Read: Immanuel Kant, "On the Supposed Right to Lie from Benevolent Motives"
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Th 1/25	Utilitarian ethics Read: Jeremy Bentham, "Principles of Legislation and Morals," Ch. 1
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Tu 1/30	Virtue ethics Read: Peter Simpson, "Contemporary Virtue Ethics and Aristotle"
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Th 2/1	Care ethics Read: Nel Noddings, "The Care Tradition: Beyond 'Add Women and Stir'"
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Tu 2/6	Review
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Th. 2/8 In class writing on ethical theories

Module 2: Race and Racism in America

Tu 2/13	Introducing MLK Read: King, "Letter from Birmingham Jail"
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Listen: King, [“I Have a Dream”](#)

Th 2/15 MLK’s ethical vision

Read: Preston Williams, “An Analysis of the Conception of Love and Its Influence on Justice in the Thought of Martin Luther King, Jr.” *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Fall, 1990), pp. 15-31.

Tu 2/20 Introducing Malcolm X

Listen: Malcolm X, [“Message to the Grassroots”](#)

Th 2/22 Malcolm’s ethical vision

Read: Reiland Rabaka, “Malcolm X and/as Critical Theory: Philosophy, Radical Politics, and the African American Search for Social Justice”

Tu 2/27 Martin and Malcolm in dialogue

Read: Clayborne Carson, “The Unfinished Dialogue of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X.” *OAH Magazine of History* 19, No. 1 (Jan., 2005), pp. 22-26

Th 2/29 Martin and Malcolm on violence

Read: James H. Cone, “Martin and Malcolm on Nonviolence and Violence.” *Phylon* 49, No. 3/4 (Autumn - Winter, 2001), pp. 173-183

Tu 3/5 Black theology in American Religion

Read: James H. Cone, “Black Theology in American Religion.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 53, No. 4 (Dec., 1985), pp. 755-771

Th 3/7 Contemporary issues

Listen: [Interview with the founders of BLM](#)

Listen: [Ruby Sales, “How we can heal the pain of racial division”](#)

Short essay due at midnight on Sunday, March 10

March 10-16 Spring Break

Module 3: Immigration and the American Dream

Tu 3/19 Benjamin R. Knoll, “‘And Who Is My Neighbor?’ Religion and Immigration Policy Attitudes.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 48, No. 2 (June 2009), pp. 313-331.

Th 3/21 Christopher Heath Wellman, “Immigration and Freedom of Association.” *Ethics* 119, No. 1 (October 2008), pp. 109-141

Tu 3/26	Mexico and Indiana Listen: Juan Enriquez, " A Personal Plea for Humanity... "	De la Torre, Ch. 1-3
Th 3/28	Anti-immigrant protest	De la Torre, Ch. 4
Tu 4/2	Tucson	De la Torre, Ch. 5-6
Th 4/4	Mexico	De la Torre, Ch. 7

Second short essay due at midnight on Sunday, April 7

Module 4: Religion and the American Dream: Contemporary Ethical Conflicts and Issues

Note: Students will select topics and readings for this module.

Tu 4/9	Class brainstorm: select issues and readings
Th 4/11	TBD
Tu 4/16	TBD
Th 4/18	TBD
Tu 4/23	TBD

Reflection paper due Sunday April 28.

RUBRIC

Writing Assessment Rubric

This rubric will be used for evaluating all written work in this course.

	SATISFACTORY	UNSATISFACTORY
CONTENT	Papers exhibit at least some evidence of ideas that respond to the topic with complexity, critically evaluating and synthesizing sources, and provide at least an adequate discussion with basic understanding of sources.	Papers either include a central idea(s) that is unclear or off- topic or provide only minimal or inadequate discussion of ideas. Papers may also lack sufficient or appropriate sources.
ORGANIZATION AND COHERENCE	Documents and paragraphs exhibit at least some identifiable structure for topics, including a clear thesis statement but may require readers to work to follow progression of ideas.	Documents and paragraphs lack clearly identifiable organization, may lack any coherent sense of logic in associating and organizing ideas, and may also lack transitions and coherence to guide the reader.
ARGUMENT AND SUPPORT	Documents use persuasive and confident presentation of ideas, strongly supported with evidence. At the weak end of the Satisfactory range, documents may provide only generalized discussion of ideas or may provide adequate discussion but rely on weak support for arguments.	Documents make only weak generalizations, providing little or no support, as in summaries or narratives that fail to provide critical analysis.
STYLE	Documents use a writing style with word choice appropriate to the context, genre, and discipline. Sentences should display complexity and logical sentence structure. At a minimum, documents will display a less precise use of vocabulary and an uneven use of sentence structure or a writing style that occasionally veers away from word choice or tone appropriate to the context, genre, and discipline.	Documents rely on word usage that is inappropriate for the context, genre, or discipline. Sentences may be overly long or short with awkward construction. Documents may also use words incorrectly.
MECHANICS	Papers will feature correct or error-free presentation of ideas. At the weak end of the Satisfactory range, papers may contain some spelling, punctuation, or grammatical errors that remain unobtrusive so they do not muddy the paper's argument or points.	Papers contain so many mechanical or grammatical errors that they impede the reader's understanding or severely undermine the writer's credibility.

GRADING SCALE

A	4.0	94-100
A-	3.67	90-93
B+	3.33	87-89
B	3.0	84-86
B-	2.67	80-83
C+	2.33	77-79
C	2.0	74-76
C-	1.67	70-73
D+	1.33	67-69
D	1.0	64-66
D-	0.67	60-63
E	0.0	0-59

For information on UF grading policies, please see:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>.

Please note:

A “C-“ will not be a qualifying grade for major, minor, General Education, University Writing Requirement or College Basic Distribution credit. You must receive a “C” or better in order to receive that credit.

APPENDIX

GENERAL EDUCATION DESCRIPTION AND STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Primary General Education Designation: Humanities (H)

Secondary General Education Designation: Diversity (D)

Writing Requirement: 2000 words

A minimum grade of C is required for general education credit. Courses intended to satisfy the general education requirement cannot be taken S-U

HUMANITIES DESCRIPTION

Humanities courses provide instruction in the history, key themes, principles, terminology, and theory or methodologies used within a humanities discipline or the humanities in general. Students will learn to identify and to analyze the key elements, biases and influences that shape thought. These courses emphasize clear and effective analysis and approach issues and problems from multiple perspectives. Full description of General Education objectives [here](#).

HUMANITIES SLOs

Full description of SLOs [here](#).

Content: Identify, describe, and explain the history, underlying theory and methodologies used.

In this course, students will learn about the theories, and methodologies used in the discipline of religious ethics. Students will study the historical development and current uses of different religious and philosophical ethical theories and the ways they shed light on contemporary social issues in the US. They will read and discuss major theories, thinkers, and issues in this field, learning to understand key arguments and the relations among them.

Critical Thinking: Identify and analyze key elements, biases and influences that shape thought within the subject area. Approach issues and problems within the discipline from multiple perspectives. In this class, students will study important factors affecting the ways people think about the moral dimensions of social issues in the US, including immigration, racial justice, and religious conflict. Students will learn about diverse religious and philosophical perspectives on these issues. They will learn to analyze particular arguments and scholarly conversations in complex and critical ways.

Communication: Communicate knowledge, thoughts and reasoning clearly and effectively.

Students in this class will learn to communicate what they have learned clearly and effectively, in writing and orally. The class will strengthen students' ability to write and talk about moral and philosophical claims in clear, accurate, and comprehensive ways.

DIVERSITY DESCRIPTION

This designation is always in conjunction with another program area.

In Diversity courses, students examine the historical processes and contemporary experiences characterizing social and cultural differences within the United States. Students engage with diversity as a dynamic concept related to human differences and their intersections, such as (but not limited to) race, gender identity, class, ethnicity, religion, age, sexual orientation, and (dis)abilities. Students critically analyze and evaluate how social inequities are constructed and affect the opportunities and constraints across the US population. Students analyze and reflect on the ways in which cultures and beliefs mediate their own and other people's understandings of themselves and an increasingly diverse U.S. society.

DIVERSITY SLOS

Content

Identify, describe, and explain the historical processes and contemporary experiences characterizing diversity as a dynamic concept related to human differences and their intersections, such as (but not limited to) race, gender identity, class, ethnicity, religion, age, sexual orientation, and disability.

Communication

Analyze and evaluate how social inequities are constructed and affect the opportunities and constraints of different groups in the United States. Analyze and reflect on the ways in which cultures and beliefs mediate understandings of an increasingly diverse U.S. society.

Critical Thinking

The diversity designation is always in conjunction with another category. Communication outcomes are listed in those subject areas.

WRITING REQUIREMENT

This course confers 2000 words towards the Writing Requirement (WR), which ensures students both maintain their fluency in writing and use writing as a tool to facilitate learning. While helping students meet the broad learning outcomes of content, communication, and critical thinking, the instructor will evaluate and provide feedback on students' written assignments with respect to grammar, punctuation, clarity, coherence, and organization.

Course grades have two components. To receive Writing Requirement credit, a student must receive a grade of C or higher and a satisfactory completion of the writing component of the course.

The writing requirement for this course will be fulfilled by the two short essays. Through writing and revising the papers, and participating in peer review, students will learn to organize their arguments with an appropriate thesis statement, detailed outline, adequate and relevant support for arguments, and clear and correct writing style. In writing assignments, students demonstrate skills in framing arguments, developing plans (outlines), identifying appropriate and accurate support for arguments, and introducing and concluding papers in persuasive and clear ways.

Students will receive feedback from the instructor on the final papers, including comments and suggestions on both content and writing, within 2 weeks of submitting the final papers. This feedback will address content, organization and coherence, argument and support, style, clarity, grammar, punctuation, and other mechanics. The rubric that I use for evaluating all written work is attached at end of syllabus, along with the grading scale. In addition, I will provide specific guidelines for individual assignments closer to the time each is due.

In addition to the feedback from the instructor and the peer review, I encourage you to seek help from the university's Writing Studio (www.writing.ufl.edu), which offers support for writing in all fields and can be very helpful both in developing your first drafts and in polishing those drafts.

I recommend the Chicago manual of style (<https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html>) as a guide for writing format and style. However, if you are used to following a different style guide, that is acceptable, as long as you check with me first and make sure to use the same format consistently throughout your paper.