

## Ethical Reasoning

**Goal:** Students should be able to apply ethical reasoning in order to make choices that are informed and principled, and that include consideration of the consequences of those choices.

**Rationale:** Applying ethical reasoning to decision making is a key skill in all arenas of life – the personal, the professional, and the community. The undergraduate years are a formative period during which students are asked to engage in critical analysis of all kinds of general and professional issues and questions. That analysis should include consideration of the consequences of actions. Ethical reasoning involves learning to examine justification for normative claims and theories. Developing skills in ethical reasoning is essential for full and satisfying participation in life after college.

**Sample Outcomes:** You will improve your ethical reasoning when your Ethical Reasoning courses ask you to practice the following:

- to think critically about classic and contemporary moral problems, discerning competing choices, values, and outcomes;
- to recognize the ethical complexity of moral concepts such as right/wrong conduct and good/bad character; and
- to think critically about diverse meanings of social and political ideals such as justice, happiness, dignity, rights, and equality.

**Course Requirement:** Each student must take one designated “E” course. To achieve such a designation, a course must meet the following requirements.

1. At least 25% of the course content is directly linked to ethics, reflective decision-making, justice, virtue, values, and/or critical analysis relating to any of the above.
2. A corresponding percentage of students’ grades will be based on evaluation of their work related to the target categories described above.
3. Course validation and revalidation petitions include submission of syllabi documenting #1 and #2 above.
4. Course validation and revalidation petitions (except for newly developed courses) include course assessment data documenting student learning in relation to target categories of content.

**Rationale for the Requirement:** Although all gen ed goals are likely to be picked up by some faculty and departments as goals of choice in courses to be validated or revalidated for general education, we believe that ethical reasoning is not currently likely to be infused throughout the curriculum to an adequate degree to support an ethical reasoning goal unless there is also a course requirement. Even in courses where a significant amount of the content does revolve around ethical and moral issues, reflective decision-making, and other potential “ethics” content, that content is unlikely to be pulled together into a package that students perceive. Therefore, we believe that any ethical reasoning goal must be accompanied by an “E” course requirement, through which a baseline emphasis on ethics can be obtained. We see the ethics goal as paralleling a quantitative

reasoning or diversity goal in needing an accompanying course requirement, rather than a critical thinking or information literacy goal, which can be accomplished through infusion throughout the curriculum.

### **Questions/Issues/Concerns**

***But can ethics really be taught?*** Unless we argue that babies are born with ethical frameworks, ethics IS taught. The concern might be that students come to us, at 18 or 25 or 40, with fully formed ethical systems with cannot be retaught or reformed. For the most part, we don't want to impose a particular set of ethics on students, but we do want to broaden their awareness of and facility in using ethical reasoning. While it may be true that some students are unable or unwilling to "see differently" or "think differently," that's actually quite parallel to what we ask students to do when they become historians or nurses or counselors – instead of thinking as novices, we want them to habitually apply new disciplinary processes of information collection, data analysis, and concluding. Furthermore, ethical reasoning can be viewed as parallel to critical thinking, communicating, and quantitative reasoning – each is dependent on complex intellectual processes that make teaching and assessment challenging. Yet, we believe that we can move students forward in these skills over time, given concerted emphasis in the curriculum. It is reasonable to expect that students can move forward in the complexity and effectiveness of their ethical reasoning as well.

***Would a one-course ethics requirement really merit a goal?*** Well, the "Cadillac" in this case would undoubtedly be to adopt a gen ed program explicitly organized around citizenship with ethical reasoning as one component and the whole campus working toward this end. (Wait – is that so different than what we're doing? Aren't we arguing that critical thinking, information literacy, quantitative literacy, communication skills, and appreciation of diversity are skills/values/competencies that all educated citizens should acquire??) If all faculty on campus understood citizenship as our institutional focus, then surely ethics would be much more than a one-course requirement. We'd see students taking at least one gen ed course where ethics is a major focus but likely several others where ethical concepts are occasionally (even regularly) addressed. Courses within the major would routinely address ethical concerns. Capstone courses might include an emphasis on ethics, along with a pulling-together of previous exposures to ethical reasoning. Then we'd have a program. Implementing a goal and a single-course requirement doesn't create all of those components, but it puts it on the table at UND and gets conversations going. As Jim told us from the beginning, the program we propose will ultimately be a work in progress. If ethics belongs in the curriculum at UND, a gen ed goal and a single-course requirement are places to get started.

***Would this mean a big new Philosophy and Religion requirement – and lots of new adjunct faculty?*** Some universities house ethical reasoning requirements in specific courses/departments, but the most interesting models allow lots of different classes, each consistent with program focus and goals, to meet the requirement. At one university, classes counting toward ethical reasoning include, for example, the following: The Psychology of Everyday Morality, Ethics and Misconduct in Science, Ethics in

Professions, Shakespearian Dilemmas: Moral Choice in Classical and Renaissance Drama, Ethics in International Security. At UND, many professional programs already offer ethics courses or significant ethics components in courses for their students, and those courses could count toward an ethical reasoning requirement. Some students would take ethics courses already offered through Philosophy and Religion (and perhaps new courses would be developed there as well). Many other departments as diverse as Psychology, Political Science, English, and Theatre Arts could potentially add courses or adapt existing courses to include/enhance an ethical reasoning component.

***Wouldn't it take money to get enough courses created/adapted to meet this requirement for all students?*** Yes. We do not see this as easily well-implemented without additional resources. At institutions with the best ethical reasoning components, the program often had its impetus through an endowment or other significant gift that provided monies for course development and conversations/faculty development of instructors teaching the courses.

***Could we get this going in time to meet the needs of students entering UND under a "new" gen ed requirement?*** The unfortunate reality is that the next catalog goes to print this spring, which likely means that the gen ed program described in that catalog will not be the new one (we can hope to beat that deadline, but there is text to write, approval processes to pass through, and deadlines looming). If we miss the 2007-09 catalog, we (unfortunately) have lots of time to get things in place. In any case, implementation of all pieces of the new gen ed program will need to be phased in. For example, there currently are no classes designated for QR. If students entering next fall have a QR requirement, UND will have a need to get classes designated so that it's possible for them to register for QR classes. Imagine a student who comes to UND as a junior but does not bring a completed gen ed package – in only two years that student will graduate – how will we meet needs for new QR courses, a new capstone, or a new E requirement? Those are questions yet to be addressed, but some form of phase-in is obviously in our future.

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