

Ethics in Business (BLBU-3443)

Professor: Dr. Adam Gjesdal | agjesdal@fordham.edu

Office hours: By appointment on Zoom. My preferred meeting times include Tuesday and Wednesday, 11am-12pm.

Session times:

Monday 6:30-9:15pm in Keating Hall Room 121

Tuesday 6:30-9:15pm in John Mulcahy Hall Room 112

Class will break from 7:45-8:00pm unless extra time is needed for an exam.

Course Aims

This course explores topics in ethics and organizational decision making with an emphasis on issues that affect businesses and arise in markets. The class will primarily focus on three things: 1) reasons why for-profit businesses can and should be construed as moral ventures, 2) features of our psychology and of organizations that affect our ability to make good decisions, and 3) normative criteria that can help us evaluate decisions, policies, or courses of action that might be considered by businesses, legislatures, or regulatory bodies. Note that the goal of the class is not simply to teach you a bunch of facts or theories. Rather, the main goal is to prepare you for moving into the business/professional world by developing your ability to critically explore ethical issues that you are likely to confront in your professional lives. Topics discussed will likely include: rent-seeking, fiduciary duties and responsibilities to other stakeholders, why good people do bad things, the importance of incentives and putting people in positions to succeed, the costs and benefits of diversity, and challenges created by new technologies. Where possible, we will try to discuss these topics with an eye towards issues and cases currently in the news.

Reading Materials

There is no required textbook for this course. All readings will be made available through Blackboard as pdfs. Some of the reading selections and session topics are in flux and won't be posted until a few weeks before they are assigned.

If you want to learn more about a specific topic, feel free to ask me for reading recommendations.

Assignments and Grading

There are six components to your grade. They are: two exams, a group business memo, a group presentation, weekly quizzes, online reaction posts. These components will contribute to your course grade as follows:

Exam #1	Exam #2	Memo	Presentation	Quizzes	Postings
20%	25%	30%	10%	10%	5%

Grading Scale: 94-100 = A, 90-93 = A-, 88-89 = B+, 84-87 = B, 80-83 = B-, 70-79 = C, 69 & below = F. Per Fordham's policy, there are no grades of C+, C- or D.

EXAMS: There will be two in-class exams. They will consist of some combination of short answer questions (requiring a few sentences), and longer answer questions (requiring a paragraph or two). The second exam will *not* be cumulative.

Missed exams can be made up without penalty only if there is a good excuse, and documentation must be provided. If you know that you will be absent on the day of an exam, you should notify me as soon as possible. Missed exams that are the result of an unexcused absence can be made up but will be penalized at least a letter grade.

GROUP BUSINESS MEMO: Much of your grade will be based on a memo that you will prepare over the course of the semester. This is a group project and groups can include up to five students. You are responsible for forming your own groups and managing any conflicts that arise while you work together.

The goal of the memo is to identify an ethical issue that either affects an existing organization(s) or that an organization(s) is (partly) responsible for, and to identify and analyze ways of addressing the issue (this can include things that the organization could do and/or things that legislative/regulatory bodies could do). In the memo you will need to do three things:

- (1) identify the primary ethical issue at stake and the reasons why it is interesting/important,
- (2) identify one (or more) courses of action that might be undertaken in order to address the issue, along with a reasoned argument for why these actions should or shouldn't be undertaken, and
- (3) identify at least one aspect of the issue that needs to be addressed further in order for us to have more confidence in the proposal you put forward in the memo.

A more detailed set of guidelines for the assignment along with a template will be posted on Blackboard. Your memo must conform to the guidelines and format laid out there. Note that, in keeping with our emphasis on preparing you for the professional world, your memo must be short. **It should be between 2 and 4 pages.** This might sound easy, but don't put off the assignment. Many of you will find it surprisingly difficult. It is hard to write something that is interesting, informative, and concise, and because your ability to write well is often a key to success in the business world you will be graded in part on the basis of the quality of your writing.

You are encouraged to meet with me to talk about your memos over the course of the semester. The earlier you do so the more feedback I will be able to give you, and the better your final product will likely be. Memos are due Week 12 (November 21, 22).

GROUP PRESENTATION: A portion of your grade will be based on a short presentation you will deliver in class in Week 11 (November 14, 15). You can use the same group for both the presentation and the memo. Like the memo, the goal of the presentation is to identify an ethical issue that impacts a business or which a business may be (partly) responsible for. You may, but need not, do your presentation on the same topic as your memo. It's up to you to decide exactly what form your presentation will take: for example, you can record it as a video, or do it in-person with Powerpoint slides. Some group members can sit out the presentation if they wish, assuming they have the consent of other group members and contributed their fair share to the project. Once I know how many groups there are, I will tell you how long presentations need to be.

QUIZZES: The start of each class when we don't have an exam (starting week 2) will have a short quiz (1-2 multiple choice questions) you can either take on Blackboard or submit in writing. Quizzes will include basic questions covering the week's readings or last week's class. They will be open-note and open-book, but not open-person. You need to be in class to take the quiz: you cannot take them late or from home, even if you have an excused absence (exceptions are possible if you're in quarantine due to having Covid).

There will be 10 quizzes given over the course of the semester, and **9 of these** will count towards your grade. You can miss 1 quiz for any reason—be it an excused absence or you need to miss class for personal reasons—and it will have no negative effect whatsoever on your course grade.

I will design these quizzes to be straightforward for anyone who is attending class and keeping pace with our readings. If you find them challenging despite keeping up with the class, let me know.

ONLINE REACTION POSTINGS: At least 5 times during the semester, students are asked to write up and post some thoughts on the week's readings to an online discussion board no later than noon of the day of class. These posts should be about 150 words and should engage with specific details from the week's texts. You might point to a passage from that week's readings you find confusing and articulate what confuses you. Or, you can draw a connection between a specific concept from the week and a previous week's readings. What you choose to write about is up to you. The only condition is that you must display serious intellectual engagement with the week's readings through prose that is clear and precise. These posts give me insight into what you are thinking about, and they give you an opportunity to formulate comments in advance to raise during discussion.

If you do not get to the reading in time, do not write a post for that week. Quickly skimming the reading or guessing at its contents is not enough for you to engage with it seriously. These assignments are graded Pass/Fail, and your comment will receive a failing grade if it does not show you have read and seriously thought about the reading. I will let you know if you receive a failing grade. If that happens, you should write me to ask how to improve.

Everyone should receive full credit for this portion of the grade. You can only write one reaction post a week. But if you receive a failing grade, you can write another post as long as there is

another week left in the class. I will periodically update your number of “Passes” in the gradebook so you know when you’ve received full credit. To receive full credit for this portion of your grade, you must submit at least 5 of these comments, across 5 weeks of your choosing.

Policies

ELECTRONICS: You may use laptops and cell phones to take quizzes and notes. Otherwise, you are strongly encouraged to put away devices or to deactivate wifi when using them for notetaking during class.

ACADEMIC HONESTY: No form of academic dishonesty will be tolerated in this course. You are expected to understand and honor the requirements stated in Fordham University Handbook regarding cheating and plagiarism.

INCLUSIVITY: This class will be conducted in an atmosphere of mutual respect. We expect an active participation that elicits reasoned debates. Remarks directed at the age, beliefs, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, or other perceived status of the participants are not only irrelevant but potentially hurtful. They degrade our experience as a group. Make sure that your interventions demonstrate respect for your interlocutor.

MENTAL HEALTH: During the semester, if you are experiencing personal emotional or psychological difficulties, consider seeking free and confidential support at Counseling & Psychological Services (CPS). To make an appointment, call 718-817-3725 (RH) or 212-636-6225 (LC) (To visit their website: go to www.fordham.edu/counseling).

Course Schedule and Topics

The following schedule tells you when things are due and gives you a sense of the topics we will cover. Topics are subject to change. All readings will be posted at least a few weeks before their assigned date on Blackboard.

Students in the Monday unit: please note that we will have rescheduled classes for September 5 and October 10.

Week 1: September 5, 6

- Topic: Markets and well-being
- **Note:** Monday, September 5, is Labor Day. All Fordham classes for that day are rescheduled for Wednesday, September 7.
- No reading quiz

Week 2: September 12, 13

- Topic: Markets and information

Week 3: September 19, 20

- Topic: Markets and virtue

Week 4: September 26, 27

- Topic: Moral psychology and wrongdoing

Week 5: October 3, 4

- Topic: Moral psychology continued

Week 6: October 10, 11

- **Note:** Monday, October 10 is Columbus Day, and the university will be closed. That class will be rescheduled for Wednesday, October 12, 6:39pm-9:15pm in Dealy Hall 308.
- Exam #1
- No reading quiz

Week 7: October 17, 18

- Topic: Corporate social responsibility: shareholder and stakeholder theories

Week 8: October 24, 25

- Topic: Environmental, social, and governance sustainability

Week 9: October 31, November 1

- Topic: Sweatshops and overseas exploitation

Week 10: November 7, 8

- Topic: Morally repugnant markets

Week 11: November 14, 15

- Topic: Morally repugnant markets continued

Week 12: November 21, 22

- Group presentations, Memos due
- No reading quiz

Week 13: November 28, 29

- Topic: Firm growth and rent-seeking

Week 14: December 5, 6

- Exam #2
- No reading quiz