Medical Ethics: Fall 2007

Course description
With the development of new genetic and reproductive technologies, the debate over euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide, and an increasing number of Americans without health insurance, bioethical issues are among the most exciting but also among the most urgent facing the world today. This course will explore some of these issues: the relationship between patient and health caregiver (truth-telling, informed consent, the right to refuse treatment, confidentiality); assisted suicide and euthanasia; treatment of defective newborns; scarce resources, social justice and the right to health care; cloning and other new reproductive technologies; the promise and threat of the human genome project; stem cell research; and others. We will discuss issues from the standpoint of patients, medical professionals, and citizens who shape policy in a democratic society. Ethical theories and concepts will be stressed.

Course goals
1. To explore some of the major issues in contemporary medical ethics.
2. To learn a critical-philosophical approach to ethical issues in medicine that will allow you to contribute constructively to ongoing debate and discussion of these issues.
3. To learn the ability to see the existence of ethical issues and to separate ethical questions from factual questions.
4. To learn how to use critical reasoning to defend a position orally and in writing.

Course readings
“Introduction to Bioethics” (Written by instructor; download from course web page)
Additional short readings as links from course web site.

➢ Please note that internet access is a required component of this course.
➢ Bookmark our course web page and check regularly:
  www-personal.umich.edu/~elias/Courses/Med/f07/sched.htm

Reaching the instructor
Office: CASL Building 3088. Email: medicalethics@ebaumgarten.net Please include your name. This address gets highest priority and identifies you as a medical ethics student. Usual office hours: Monday and Wednesday, 2-3 and 6-6:30 (longer when needed). Also available Friday after 1:30. Changes announced in class. Please feel free to use office hours to discuss any matters where I might be of help. Come individually or in a group. Office hours are for you, not just to discuss papers and tests but to engage in informal discussions about ideas that interest you.

Email is the best way to reach me promptly. I am usually reachable 7 days a week. If you don’t get a prompt response from me, let me know because it’s probably an email glitch on your end or mine. (Office phone is 313-593-5179, but I only occasionally check for messages.)
Course requirements

1. Attendance and active and regular participation in class discussion. Your attendance, preparation, and active involvement are essential because (a) the quality of class discussion depends on it, (b) material is discussed in class that is not in the readings. Attendance and your grade: your final course grade is lowered three-tenths (almost one-third of a grade) for each class missed after three and raised three-tenths (.3) for each class fewer than 3 that you miss. See link from schedule for an alternative. Quality of your contribution to class discussion: 12% of course grade.

Matters of courtesy

✓ Leaving class early disrupts others, but if you must, please let me know in advance and sit near the door.
✓ Please turn off cell phones and keep them out of sight during the entire class.

2. Short reaction statements assigned in response to the readings. Instructions forthcoming. (18% of course grade).

3. Two short essays. (25% of course grade, 12% for first paper and 13% for second paper, each about 3 pages. Choose two of three due dates for essays: October 31, November 19, December 3. Feel free to discuss drafts of your essays with me in advance; in fact, I strongly encourage it.

4. Test 1, September 19, on basic ethical methods, concepts, and theories (8% of course grade).

5. Test 2, October 17 (17% of course grade)

6. Test 3, December 10, last day of class (20% of course grade).

7. Oral report. This is “almost” a requirement for those seeking an A or A- in the course. See below.
   A ten-minute oral report (longer for graduate students) to the class, on a bioethics topic that we will not be covering, based on your own reading, to be presented no later than November 26. You must be earning a B or better after the first two tests to qualify for submitting a proposal for an oral report. (Exceptions may be considered.) Your topic and research plan must be presented for approval by October 29. It must be something that will be educationally beneficial to the class as well as the student presenting. If there are many proposals, I may select only a few for classroom presentation but others could still earn credit through office discussion. For full details on how oral reports affect your course grade, see www-personal.umich.edu/~elias/Courses/Med/f07/oralreport.htm. Email your initial proposal and feel free to discuss it in advance. Good sources: bioethics journals (e.g., bioethics.gov, bioethics.net, others recommended in class) and topics in Munson that are not covered in class.

It should not be necessary to say anything about cheating in an ethics course. Unfortunately, that has not always been the case. In any event, it’s also my ethical duty to make clear what my policy is: anyone who cheats or in any way helps anyone else cheat receives a failing grade in the course with a note to the Dean of your School or College explaining the reason for it. Student government has been insisting that the faculty take stronger action against cheating. This protects you, the honest student, because it is you who gets cheated when other students do not do honest work.
Outline of Topics

The online schedule will be continuously updated. (I may also distribute a tentative schedule for the term.). We may get ahead or behind this original schedule or new developments or articles may alter our original plan. The online schedule will also include links to class slides, test study guides, and other materials.

1. Basic Concepts and Theories

2. The Caregiver-Patient Relationship
   a) Autonomy, paternalism, and standards of patient competence
   b) Truth-telling and informed consent
   Test 1
   c) Confidentiality

3. Euthanasia and end-of-life care
   a) Euthanasia and incompetent patients
   b) Treatment of severely deformed infants and children
   Test 2

4. Scarce Resources and Competing Claims to Health Care
   a) Macroallocation of resources
      i) Is there a right to health care?
      ii) Underlying issues of economic justice?
   b) Microallocation: who shall live when not all can live?

5. Genetics, Stem Cells, and New Reproductive Technologies
   a) Genetic counseling. Is there a moral obligation not to have a genetically seriously disadvantaged child?
   b) Ethics of embryonic stem cell research
   c) Should we improve the human species through germline genetic therapy?
   d) Ethics of suggogate motherhood
   e) Ethics of cloning
   Test 3

Some Good Bioethical Resources
Making It All Clear: Your Responsibilities and Mine

My Commitments to You

- I will get papers and tests back in a reasonable period of time, two weeks at most.
- I will be open to discussing any issue of fairness you want to talk about. Come to my office as soon as possible.
- I will listen and respond with compassion to any problem you honestly discuss with me if you bring it to my attention promptly, not late in the term and long after the fact. Come during office hours or make an appointment if you can’t come during those times.
- I am open to discussing any proposal you have for doing an assignment differently. You must convince me of the educational value of your proposal and must present it well in advance, not just before the assignment is due. My instructions for assignments are very exacting because they help most students do better, but I am committed to being open to hearing the need for revisions on an individual basis.

Your Responsibilities

- The obvious keys to doing well in the course are to attend class regularly and to complete the reading assignments. The less obvious keys are (a) taking careful notes on the readings and (b) getting help with drafts of your essays during office hours or by email.
- If you have any special problem, it is crucial that you talk with me honestly and openly as soon as the problem exists (when I will be open and flexible), NOT much later toward the end of the term (when I will much less sympathetic).
- Read the syllabus carefully and ask questions on anything you don’t understand.
- Understand the attendance requirement, the available alternative, and your responsibility to let me know on the same day if you arrived in class after attendance was taken. (You get half credit.)
- Know what cheating and plagiarism are, ask questions if in doubt, and realize that any instances of cheating incur severe penalties: a failing grade in the course and a note to the Dean of your School or College explaining the reason for the failing grade.
- Check the class web site regularly.
- Check your UMD email address regularly or set up the option to have that email forwarded to an address of your choice, which you will update whenever necessary. You may need to add my address as one of your “trusted” or “safe” addresses to avoid my messages going into your junk mailbox. For information on how to have your UMD email forwarded, see http://www-personal.umich.edu/~elias/Courses/emailforward.htm

Fair notice: Some students in the past could have earned higher grades if they had taken the time to read the syllabus, including this page, at the beginning of the term.