

# **COURSE SYLLABUS**

## **PHIL 1320: Ethics and Society**

### **INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION**

Instructor: Dr. Bob Fischer

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Office: Comal 207F

Phone: 512.245.2403

Phone "Office Hours": By appointment, 7 a.m. to 9 p.m., Monday to Thursday; 7 a.m. to 5 p.m., Fridays

### **Communicating With Me**

For issues that don't require much discussion, I prefer email. But for anything involved, I prefer to talk on the phone. Please don't hesitate to send a message to arrange a time to talk; I'll work with your schedule.

Generally, I will respond to emails within 24 hours of receiving them. If circumstances are going to make this difficult (e.g., I'm traveling), then I'll post an announcement in Canvas.

*Please include "1320-Correspondence" in the subject line of your email; that will let me know that I should make it a priority.*

### **Course Description**

From the Catalog: "Study of ethics, its recent focus on social problems, and new fields of inquiry, including environmental ethics, ethics in business, professions, technology and sport. Also such global issues as poverty, minority rights, and stem cell research. Emphasis on development and application of principles of critical thinking and moral reasoning."

More straightforwardly: Is it OK for a doctor to help a person die? Is there anything wrong with the way we treat farm animals? Are there good reasons to execute criminals who commit heinous acts? These are ethical questions, and they're the subject of this course. We're going to spend the course wrestling through the philosophical issues that these sorts of questions raise. Along the way, I hope that you'll learn how to read, think, and write more carefully and critically.

### **Required Materials**

You'll need to purchase one book:

Shafer-Landau, Russ. *The Fundamentals of Ethics*. 3rd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2014. ISBN: 978-0199997237

I'll link to the remaining readings.

You'll also be required to watch multiple videos. Some of these can be accessed free of charge and are linked to in the course content. Others will require either rental through Amazon or Netflix. (If you have never tried Netflix, you can [sign up for a free one-month trial](#).)

Furthermore, you'll need the hardware and software required to:

- access Canvas;
- watch videos on YouTube/ Amazon.com/ Netflix; and
- produce documents in some format other than .pages. (Acceptable formats include .odf, .doc, .docx, .rtf, .txt, .pdf, etc. Really, just about anything other than .pages.)

You're expected to be proficient with the hardware and software you use to accomplish these tasks. Should you need technical support to do so, please refer to the technical support information later in this syllabus.

### **Ordering Textbooks**

The textbook can be ordered through the Texas State Bookstore [as described here](#) or from an online vendor of the student's choice, such as Amazon.com, BarnesandNoble.com, or Half.com, or from a brick-and-mortar bookstore.

When purchasing required materials for a course, be sure to purchase the correct edition of the material and to verify that the material's International Standard Book Number (ISBN) matches that listed on the course website.

Should you require any assistance in locating course materials, please contact the Office of Distance and Extended Learning at [corrstudy@txstate.edu](mailto:corrstudy@txstate.edu).

Please keep in mind that all materials should be purchased within 30 days of enrollment; after 30 days, materials may no longer be available for your course.

When ordering from the online bookstore:



- Allow plenty of time for textbooks to arrive before class.
- Order early! You will need your textbook early in the course.
- NOTE: Please be aware international versions of the text may differ from the domestic (North American) version required for your course.

### **Learning Outcomes**

After completion of PHIL 1320, students will demonstrate (a) basic knowledge of the nature of moral inquiry and (b) their critical thinking skills.

### **How to be successful in this course**

Completing this course successfully will require time and effort on your part. Accordingly, I've compiled the following list of study practices that I believe will help you to be successful in this course:

- **Realize that you cannot cram this material.** Slow and steady wins the race. Please do not try to complete this course in an unreasonably short period of time. One of your first tasks should be to prepare a schedule and stick to it. (The Course Study Schedule  will help you do this.) I suggest you plan to cover no more than one chapter per week. Be careful about stepping away from the course material for an extended period of time.
- **Fully utilize your textbook's online resources.** Recognize that learning is not a spectator sport. Would you expect to watch someone play a sport and then go and perform at the same level? No. It's the same with online courses. Think of your brain as a muscle; you've got to build it up and get it in shape by practicing.
- **Make a plan.** Self-motivation is necessary for successful completion of this course; no one will be pushing you but you. Use the Course Study Schedule  to help you identify target dates and chart a path for progressing through the course, including when you'll complete each homework, project, chapter test, and exam. You will benefit the most by completing the assignments in the sequence shown on the study schedule. Also, as you plan your submission dates, remember that I have five business days from the date of receipt to grade your projects, midcourse exam, and final exam. Life happens; update your schedule as needed.
- **You are not alone.** Though correspondence self-paced courses offer tremendous convenience for students, they also leave some students feeling isolated. Remember that I am here to help. If you have questions about the course content or structure, please contact me. You can also visit the links to reference materials, interactive activities, and videos provided in Modules. If you're on campus, you can utilize [SLAC](#) for free tutoring. Those of you distant from campus have access to free online tutoring via [Smarthinking](#). See more in Modules regarding free tutoring resources.

## Course Procedure

The course is organized into modules of instruction as outlined in the Course Schedule below. Each module is listed by its main topic and contains required readings, videos, quizzes, and writing assignments.

Unless indicated otherwise, you will submit your written assignments via **Assignments**. Detailed submission instructions are provided for each assignment.

## How To Demonstrate That You've Achieved Course Aims: Assignments & Quizzes

Your grade for this class will be based on six quizzes and six short writing assignments.

- Each quiz is worth 10 points for a total of 60 points.
- Each assignment is worth 20 points for a total of 120 points.
- Total possible points: 180.

To get your course grade, take your total number of points and divide by 180. (Where, as is customary, A: 90-100; B: 80-89; C: 70-79; D: 60-69; F: below 60.)

- *You must wait to receive feedback and a grade on submitted assignments before you can submit subsequent assignments.*
- *You may not submit more than two lessons per week.*
- *You may not resubmit an assignment after it has been graded without the explicit permission of the instructor.*

Per the Office of Distance and Extended Learning, I have 10 business days to return an assignment to you, but I usually turn things around within three days.

- I encourage you to use the Course Study Schedule to plan your assignment submissions and ensure that you finish the course on time.

When you submit a writing assignment, name your file according to this format:

LastnameFirstname-ModuleNumber

So, for example, if I were to submit the writing assignment for Module #3, I would name my file

FischerBob-3

You are responsible for keeping copies of whatever work you submit.

## Various Important Tips and Policies

**Reading and Rereading.** In the grand scheme of things, you don't have to read that many pages for this course; however, the numbers are deceptive: you won't be able to get through these texts quickly, and you won't understand much after a single reading. Don't be discouraged by this; it's the nature of the discipline. I have three master's degrees and a Ph.D. and *still* don't understand what I read the first time through. (I'm often reminded of the wise words of Gene Stelzig, a professor of mine, who said that **the only good reading is rereading.**) So be prepared to go through the material slowly and repeatedly. I promise that I do my best to choose texts that are worth the investment.

**Scheduling Your Time.** To some extent, you can set your own pace in a correspondence course, but it is important to schedule your time effectively. You should be able to complete each module, along with the quiz and assignment therein, within two weeks. So completing the course in four to five months is quite possible if you carefully budget your time. Online courses are just as time intensive as traditional courses. In fact, many students claim that online courses require more time and commitment. As you begin this course, you would be wise to schedule eight or more hours per week for studying materials and completing assignments. Remember, you have a maximum of nine months to complete this course. Use the Course Study Schedule to proceed through the course effectively.

## Canvas Technical Support

The [Technical Requirements](#) page identifies the browsers, operating systems, and plugins that work best with Canvas. If you are new to Canvas check out the [ITAC Canvas Support](#) page.

## Using Wikipedia

As a tool for scholarly research, Wikipedia can be either a grade-killer or a valuable friend, depending on who you ask and what you hope to accomplish using it. What is fairly certain is that your professor won't let you cite it in a scholarly research paper.

There are a few common reasons why you can't site Wikipedia:

- Wikipedia is a general encyclopedia. At the collegiate or university level, your professors are looking for more than general rudimentary material. General encyclopedias usually give baseline information, the type of common knowledge that isn't usually cited. Academic subject-specific encyclopedias will often provide more scholarly and citeable information.
- There is often no way to know who is editing the entries in Wikipedia or what his or her level of expertise is.
- You cannot be sure that the content is “permanent” (although you can look at the revision history on the History page).
- You cannot be sure that the content meets standards of academic rigor. One of Wikipedia's main principles is that it strives for a neutral point of view (which it abbreviates to NPOV). This standard states that all articles should strive to “represent...all significant views on each topic fairly, proportionately, and without bias.” The problem is that in any knowledge endeavor, much less a collaborative and ad hoc venture like Wikipedia, deciding what's neutral and having something reviewed for NPOV can be controversial undertakings and too uncertain to meet standards of academic rigor. However, having such a debate take place publicly on Wikipedia makes for interesting talk-page reading and for a good pros-and-cons debate.

Two other Wikipedia policies relevant to academic rigor are its verifiability and “no original research” policies.

### Tips for Using Wikipedia Effectively

Use Wikipedia to get a general overview, and follow the references it provides as far as they can take you.

Look at the Other Projects tab to see if the article you're reading is part of a WikiProject, meaning that a group of people who care about the subject area are working in concert on its content. They may not be experts on the subject, but signing onto a WikiProject implies a writer has more than a casual interest in it.

If it is part of a WikiProject, see if it has been rated. Articles in WikiProjects go through a type of peer review. This is not the same type of peer review your professor talks about regarding scholarly research, but even such a limited review does at least imply that someone from the WikiProject has looked at the article at some point and assigned a quality rating to it. In any case, to be fairly sure that a Wikipedia article expresses what laypeople might need to know to consider themselves reasonably informed, look for a rating of B/A or above.

The Recent Changes tab will indicate recent edits to the Wikipedia article you are using.

## Additional Resources

You may wish to consult any or all of the following for additional help in finding and evaluating sources:

- [ [ [Wikipedia assignments](#) ] ]
- Wikipedia's [Neutral Point of View guideline](#)
- Wikipedia on [verifiability](#)
- Wikipedia on original research
- Wikipedia: [Peer review](#)
- [The Seven Steps of the Research Process](#). A resource designed to answer questions about evaluating sources of information.
- [Critically Analyzing Information Sources](#). This resource lists some of the critical questions you should ask when you consider the appropriateness of a particular book, article, media resource, or Web site for your research.

Using Wikipedia. The Digital Literacy Project by Cornell Information Technologies. 19 May 2015. <https://digitalliteracy.cornell.edu/tutorial/dpl3222.html>

## Students Requiring Accommodations

The Office of Distance and Extended Learning is committed to helping students with disabilities achieve their educational goals.

A disability is not a barrier to correspondence self-paced study, and we strive to provide reasonable accommodations to individuals in coursework and test taking.

Students who require special accommodations need to provide verification of their disability to the [Office of Disability Services](#), Suite 5-5.1 LBJ Student Center, 512.245.3451 (voice/TTY).

Students should notify the [Office of Distance and Extended Learning](#) at [corrstudy@txstate.edu](mailto:corrstudy@txstate.edu) of any disability-related accommodation needs as soon as possible to avoid a delay in accommodations.

## Academic Integrity

The [Texas State Academic Honor Code](#) applies to all Texas State students, including correspondence students. The [Honor Code](#) serves as an affirmation that the University demands the highest standard of integrity in all actions related to the academic community. As stated in the [Texas State Student Handbook](#), [Violation of the Honor Code](#) includes, but is not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work, plagiarism, collusion, and the abuse of resource materials.

Academic work signifies outcomes and products such as essays, theses, reports, exams, tests, quizzes, problems, assignments or other projects submitted for purposes of achieving learning outcomes. Cheating in general means, but is not limited to, engaging or attempting to engage in any of the following activities:

- copying from another student's test paper, laboratory report, other report or computer files, data listing, or programs;

- using, during a test, materials not authorized by the person giving the test;
- collaborating, without authorization, with another person during an examination or in preparing academic work;
- knowingly, and without authorization, using, buying, selling, stealing, transporting, soliciting, copying, or possessing, in whole or in part, the content of an unadministered test;
- substituting for another student—or permitting another person to substitute for oneself—in taking an exam or preparing academic work;
- bribing another person to obtain an unadministered test or information about an unadministered test;
- purchasing, or otherwise acquiring and submitting as one's own work, any research paper or other writing assignment prepared by an individual or firm. This section does not apply to the typing of the rough or final versions of an assignment by a professional typist.

Plagiarism means the appropriation of another's work and the unacknowledged incorporation of that work in one's own written work offered for credit.

Collusion means the unauthorized collaboration with another person in preparing written work offered for credit.

Abuse of resource materials means the mutilation, destruction, concealment, theft, or alteration of materials provided to assist students in the mastery of course materials.

Please cite all unoriginal material through the use of standard bibliographical practice as explained on the Alkek Library site.

Incidents of academic dishonesty as outlined by the University will be reported to the administration for disciplinary action. In addition, students will receive a 0 for the assignment or assignments without the opportunity to redo the work.

## Counseling Center

Philosophers like to talk about topics that many people find awkward, upsetting, or just plain painful. If I say something that reopens an old wound—or creates a new one—please know that that was not my intention. Moreover, **please remember that the folks at the Counseling Center are always available.**

The Counseling Center is in LBJ 5-4.1; you can reach them at 512.245.2208.