

**RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW
JERSEY New Brunswick, NJ**

Topics in Medical Ethics and Policy

10:652:301 / 01:730:348

Spring 2021

Instructor: David Sorensen
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Office hours: By appointment only

Course Schedule: Asynchronous (deadlines for assignments posted below)

Location: Online

Course Credits: Three (3)

Rutgers Canvas: Access: <https://tlt.rutgers.edu/canvas>. Log in using Rutgers NetID and password. [Students who are new to Canvas may wish to refer to the on- line tutorial found at <https://tlt.rutgers.edu/getting-started-canvas- students>]

I. Course Overview

It is a truism that contemporary society is undergoing transformation driven by what can seem to be vertiginous changes not only in technology and in the dominant economic models, but in the culture that responds to both. What is less discussed, but no less clear is that these developments present profound challenges for our ability to think critically about fundamental issues involving our changing human enterprises and the ethical choices they lead us to confront. Specifically, the changes in the scientific enterprise can appear to be so rapid that they are bound to outrun our ability to think critically about what is right and what is wrong, and more generally, what outcomes we should value as individuals and as members of a society.

This course provides an opportunity for students with a basic understanding of biomedical and biobehavioral ethics and their role in shaping health policy to explore key emerging issues – ‘hot topics’, with topics changing each year as new issues arise and new challenges confront us. In 2020, the topics will include:

- Vaccines and Immunization Policy
- Gene Editing and Reproductive Technologies
- Moral Dimensions of Climate Change
- Drug Pricing, Access, and Inequality
- Gene Drives
- Organ Sales and Donations, Transplant Tourism, and Organ Trafficking

Each of these topics will be explored in a 'deep dive' during the semester, drawing on scholarly academic work, mainstream coverage of related current events, reports, records of public hearings, and popular videos. As part of this course, students will build their own libraries, prepare an in-depth case analysis for each topic, and participate in assigned in-class debates.

II. Learning Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Draw upon philosophical traditions, contemporary writings in bioethics, and coverage of current debates to inform one's understanding of these topics.
2. Illustrate how different values and belief systems may influence attitudes towards these topics.
3. Identify ethical issues that need to be considered in each of these topical areas.
4. Apply critical reasoning skills to assess stakeholder interests, risks and benefits, and choose and defend a course of action.

III. Course Structure

This course will meet once each week for three hours during the semester except where noted on the course schedule that follows on pages 5-6. It uses a discussion-and-debate structure that requires students to build their own libraries on a topic, defend a pro- or con-position on a policy decision, and engage with their peers in meaningful debate.

Over the course of the semester, we will be examining six emerging 'hot topics' in science, each of which has implications for human health, and in some cases, how society will organize itself in the future. Each topic is explored using a basic framework:

1. Each student identifies a reading, video, mainstream article, etc. that is relevant to the topic under discussion and submits it with a brief content digest and APA reference. That selection becomes a required reading/viewing assignment for the entire class.
2. The instructor will provide an overview of the topic for background.
3. Students are randomly assigned to a pro- or con- policy position on some aspect of the topic under discussion and work in small groups during class to develop a compelling argument in support of that position.
4. Pro- and con- policy groups debate the merits of their policies in class (debates will be held live at specific times)
5. Each student writes and submits a 500-word-plus-references policy position paper on the topic under discussion.

In order to maintain course flow, there will be overlap between topics, i.e. student reading recommendations on a 'next' topic will be submitted before we have completed a 'current' topic. This is complicated and students are encouraged to monitor the course schedule carefully to avoid missing due dates.

Grading Rubric:

Attendance	10%
Participation in class debates (6)	15%
Selection of readings and submission of content digest (6)	20%
Policy position papers (7)	55%

Students should note that the course is structured in such a way that assignments form the backbone of their grades. **Assignments will not be accepted after the due date** except under highly unusual circumstances and then only when an extension has been approved by the instructor PRIOR to an assignment's due date. **There is no final exam.**

Assessment and Grading: A, B+, B, C+, C, D, and F

NOTE: While students are encouraged to understand the strengths and weaknesses of their reading selections, content digests, and policy position papers, grades are NOT negotiable. Make-up work or extra credit are not available options for improving one's grade, although the instructor is more than happy to work with students to improve their understanding of course concepts and their future performance.

IV. Course Policies and Expectations

Attendance

Students are expected to attend all class sessions. Please make every effort to arrive on time as class will begin promptly. Arriving late to class is strongly discouraged. Repeat offenders will, at the discretion of the instructor, be marked as 'absent'. Unexcused absences WILL result in a reduction of your grade for attendance and will directly impact your ability to actively contribute to group work (and thus your grade for participation). Observance of religious holidays listed in the University calendar is recognized as an excused absence, but please let me know in advance if you will miss class for this reason.

- **Excused absences** include those unavoidable absences due to observance of religious holidays listed in the University Calendar, illness, family emergencies, or academic opportunities, cleared in advance with the instructor, that conflict with class attendance. Please report absences, preferably in advance, through the university's self-reporting absence system, accessed at <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/> . **Please note: Reporting your absence in advance does not "excuse" you, unless you have received permission from the instructor.**
- **Longer periods of absence.** If you anticipate missing more than one week of classes for serious illness, confidential, or sensitive personal reasons, you should also consult with a New Brunswick Dean of Students who will help to verify your extended absences from classes.
- **Absences due to illnesses.** If your absence is due to illness, visit University Health Services for information about campus health services, including information about: how to make an appointment, self-care advice for colds/flu, mental health and counseling

options, and how to access the "After Hours Nurse Line" for medical advice. **In order for an absence due to illness to count as an excused absent, you will need to furnish the instructor with a note from the medical center or a health provider.**

In-class Conduct:

Please note that due to the discussion-and-debate format on which much of this course is based, students are expected to attend every class and to be on time. Attendance will be noted and students who are repeat offenders on attendance and/or timeliness will be marked down accordingly on their attendance grade.

Computers and IPADs may be used for note-taking, but may not be used for purposes unrelated to this course. Phones may not be used at any time, nor may they be held in student hands, or placed on the table surfaces during class hours.

This course and its classroom are to be treated as safe environments in which students are free to hold and express a wide variety of opinions. All students are asked to be respectful of others' rights to their views and sensitive to their feelings. Ethics discourse is grounded in one's ability to draw on moral theories, principles, and regulatory frameworks, not solely on the strength of one's convictions; students should endeavor to support their views using the course materials provided as well as other references materials found in the scholarly literature.

Academic Integrity Policy

This course adheres to the university's Academic Integrity Policy and infractions are taken seriously. All students are required to review this policy, which has been posted to the Sakai site under 'Resources/Administration'.

All required papers for this course may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Students who wish to exclude their submitted papers from the Turnitin.com reference database should contact the course instructor immediately; students may not, however, opt-out of having their required papers reviewed for the detection of plagiarism. Use of the Turnitin.com service is subject to the Usage Policy posted on the Turnitin.com site.

Disability Accommodation

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation:

<https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodation, your campus's disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with me and discuss the accommodations you need as early in the course as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form>.

Course Evaluation

This course will be evaluated by online surveys as administered by the Rutgers Center for Teaching Advancement and Assessment Research.

V. TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE AND DUE

DATES AT A GLANCE COURSE SCHEDULE AND

DATE	DESCRIPTION	ACTIVITY
Wednesday, January 20 th	LECTURE	Introduction to course and review of syllabus
Sunday, January 24 th	ASSIGNMENT 1	Post-a-reading with your content digest on 'Vaccines and Immunization Policy' by 11:55pm
Monday, January 25 Wednesday, January 27 th	READING LECTURE	Student reading list on 'Vaccines' will be posted to Canvas by 6:00 pm <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete all readings on 'Vaccines' assigned by students and instructor before class. • Instructor overview: 'Vaccines' • Random assignment of students to a policy position • Group preparation for next week's policy debate
Wednesday, February 5	LIVE DEBATE 1	Policy debates on 'Vaccines and Immunization Policy'
Friday, February 7	ASSIGNMENT 2	Post-a-reading with your content digest on 'Gene Editing and Reproductive Technologies' by 11:59pm
Saturday, February 8	READING	Student reading list on 'Gene Editing' posted to Canvas by 6:00 pm
Monday, February 10 Wednesday, February 12	ASSIGNMENT 3 LECTURE	Policy Position Paper on 'Vaccines' due by 11:55pm <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete all readings on 'Gene Editing' assigned by students and instructor before class. • Instructor overview: 'Gene Editing' • Random assignment of students to a policy position • Group preparation for next week's policy debate
Wednesday, February 19	CLASS	Policy debates on 'Gene Editing'
Wednesday, February 26	ASSIGNMENT 4	Post-a-reading with your content digest on 'Moral dimensions of climate change' by 11:55pm
Friday, February 28	READING	Student reading list on 'Climate Change' will be posted to Canvas by 6:00 pm
Saturday, February 29	ASSIGNMENT 5	Policy Position Paper on 'Gene Editing' due by 11:55pm
Monday, March 2	CLASS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete all readings on 'Climate Change' assigned by students and instructor before class. • Instructor overview: 'Climate Change'

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Random assignment of students to a policy position • Group preparation for next week's policy debate
Wednesday, March 11	CLASS	Policy debates on 'Climate Change'
Friday, March 13	ASSIGNMENT 6	Post-a-reading with your content digest on 'Drug pricing, access, and inequality' by 11:55pm
Monday, March 16	READING	Student reading list on 'Drug Pricing' will be posted to Canvas by 6:00pm
Wednesday, March 18	NO CLASS	Spring Break
Monday, March 23	ASSIGNMENT 7	Policy Position Paper on 'Climate Change' by 11:55pm
Wednesday, March 25	CLASS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete all readings on 'Drug Pricing' assigned by students and instructor before class. • Instructor overview: 'Drug Pricing' • Random assignment of students to a policy position • Group preparation for next week's policy debate
Wednesday, April 1	CLASS	Policy debate on 'Drug Pricing'
Friday, April 3	ASSIGNMENT 8	Post-a-reading with your content digest on 'Gene Drives' by 11:55pm
Saturday, April 4	READING	Student reading list on 'Gene Drives' will be posted to Canvas by 6:00pm
Monday, April 6	ASSIGNMENT 9	Policy Position Paper on 'Drug Pricing' due by 11:55pm
Wednesday, April 8	CLASS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete all readings on 'Gene Drives' assigned by students and instructor before class. • Instructor overview: 'Gene Drives' • Random assignment of students to a policy position
Wednesday, April 15	CLASS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group preparation for next week's policy debate Policy debate on 'Gene Drives'
Friday, April 17	ASSIGNMENT 10	Post-a-reading with your content digest on 'Organ sales and donations, transplant tourism, and organ trafficking' by 11:55pm
Saturday, April 18	READING	Student reading list will be posted to Canvas by 6:00pm
Monday, April 20	ASSIGNMENT 11	Policy Position Paper on 'Gene Drives' due by 11:55pm
Wednesday, April 22	CLASS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete all readings on 'Organ Sales & Donations' assigned by students and instructor before class. • Instructor overview: 'Organ Sales & Donations'

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Random assignment of students to a policy position • Group preparation for next week's policy debate
Wednesday, April 29	CLASS	Policy debate on 'Organ Sales and Donations, Transplant Tourism, and Organ Trafficking'
Monday, May 4	ASSIGNMENT 12	Policy Position Paper on 'Organ Sales & Donations' due by 11:55pm