NREM 306 - Environmental Ethics

Instructor: Travis Idol  
Contact Information: Sherman Lab 125, 6-7508, idol@hawaii.edu
Office Hours: http://goo.gl/Ob8st

Class Times: MWF 8:30-9:20

Textbooks:

Course Objectives
Students will accomplish one or more of the following objectives

1. Learn the philosophical foundations of ethics in the context of environmental issues.
2. Understand how ethical principles have been redefined and expanded to address human-environment relationships and interactions.
3. Analyze the ethical dimensions of environmental issues from personal, professional, political, and cultural perspectives.

Contribution to NREM/CTAHR Student Learning Goals
This course will contribute to Goal A in the NREM undergraduate program, specifically

1. Students will demonstrate effective written and oral communication skills through technical reports and class presentations.
2. Students will broaden their social perspectives through exposure to diverse culture and thinking in course work.

This course also carries an ethics (E) (O) focus designation, and it is an approved elective for Track II NREM majors.

This course contributes to several of CTAHR’s critical skills and competencies, including

- Oral Communications  
- Analytical/Problem Solving Skills  
- Human Relations Skills  
- Leadership Skills  
- Personal Characteristics

Class Structure and Assignments
There will be two 50-min lectures and one 50-min discussion session each week. Details of class topics and assignments are provided below. There are two exams during the course of the semester. A final project will be assigned in lieu of a final exam.

This course has both Contemporary Ethical Issues (E) and an Oral Communications (O) Focus designations. Students must adequately complete all oral communication assignments to pass the course with a D grade or better. Students who do not complete all oral communication assignments will not earn O Focus credit.
Grading
Weekly quizzes 10%
Discussions and class debates 25%
Exams 1 and 2 40%
Final project 25%

Class Topics (by week)
1. Basic moral principles and argumentation
   *Readings:* Chapter 1; Handout: Logical Fallacies.
   *Discussion:* Effective strategies and techniques for public speaking and debating
2. Foundational ideas and theories
   *Readings:* Chapter 2, Sections 2.1-2.8
   *Holiday:* Monday, 02 September
3. Ethics and economics: a love-hate relationship
   *Readings:* Chapter 3
   *Debate:* Intelligence^2-US: Major reductions in carbon emissions are not worth the money
4. Religious principles and rules to live by
   *Readings:* Chapter 2, Section 2.9; Handout: Rules to Live By
   *Discussion:* Using guiding principles to make ethical decisions
5. Expanding ethical consideration to the natural world
   *Readings:* Chapter 6
   *Debate:* The Endangered Species Act is not just bad policy, it’s bad ethics.
6. Wilderness, holism and the naturalistic fallacy
   *Readings:* Chapter 7
   *Exam 1*
7. Ecocentrism and the land ethic of Aldo Leopold
   *Reading:* Chapter 8
   *Discussion:* The (in)fellibility of nature
8. Deep ecology: the metaphysics of ecocentrism
   *Readings:* Chapter 9, Sections 9.1-9.7
   *Debate:* Humans have a moral responsibility to constrain population and consumption
9. Ecofeminism: negative critique and positive
   *Readings:* Chapter 9, Sections 9.7-9.9; Environmental Ethics, Ch. 4.C (34-37).
   *Discussion:* Androcentrism is the real cause of environmental degradation.
10. Environmental justice and social ecology
    *Readings:* Chapter 10
    *Discussion:* Climate change and social/environmental justice
11. Professional ethics and the environment
    *Reading:* Handouts
    *Exam 2*
12. Professional ethics in environmental fields
   Readings: Handouts
   Holiday: Monday, 11 November

13 Animal Rights vs Animal Welfare
   Readings: Chapter 5
   Debate: The ethics of vegetarianism

14. Planetary Ethics
   Readings: Gaia hypothesis for and against; Moral Ground, Section 13. (pp. 395-417)
   Holiday: Friday, 29 November

15. The ethics of agriculture
   Readings: Environmental Ethics, 5.B (69, 73); Handout
   Discussion: The ethical responsibilities of producers and consumers

16. Sustainability and intergenerational ethics (Nov. 28-Dec. 02)
   Readings: Chapter 4
   Debate: City Council resolution on purchasing sustainably certified products.

17. A pragmatic approach to environmental ethics.
   Readings: Chapter 11

Finals Week: Final Debate

Assignments

Class Discussions

On certain Fridays, the class will engage in an open discussion of the ethical dimensions of controversial but general environmental issues, such as the moral dimensions of climate change, regulating agricultural sources of pollution, our responsibilities to protect endangered species, etc. The discussion will be guided by an ethical decision making framework as described by the Santa Clara University Markkula Center for Applied Ethics (www.scu.edu/ethics/practicing/decision). In brief, we will discuss:

1. the facts, theories, and guiding hypotheses surrounding the issue
2. the rights, responsibilities, and values or interests of those most affected by the issue
3. the ethical dimensions that arise from the facts and the interests of those affected
4. the range of decisions suggested by relevant ethical theories or approaches
5. how the outcomes of those decisions affect the values or interests of those affected.

Handouts or online resources will be provided that describe the issue and present ethical arguments for making certain decisions or adopting a certain position. Students are expected to do their own investigation and come prepared to discuss the issue according to the Markkula decision making framework.

Students will write up a one to two-page summary of their responses to the decision-making framework (1-5 above), selecting the ethical approach they feel best meets the ethical challenges presented by the environmental issue. Because the issue itself will be intentionally broad, students are free to focus on any particular aspect that appeals to them. The write-up should be typed double-spaced using 12-point Times New Roman font on 8.5 x 11.0-in paper with 1.0-in margins. This should serve as your personal reference during the class discussion, so it can be written as a series of short statements, bullet points, or in a handout style. It will be handed in at
the end of class on the day of the discussion.

Class Debate
During other Fridays, the class will engage in an Oxford-style debate on the ethical dimensions of a specific environmental issue, as illustrated in the radio program Intelligence Squared U.S. (intelligencesquaredus.org). The debate will be over a proposed policy, law, or regulatory decision that addresses the interests or values of various stakeholders in an environmental controversy, e.g. whether the US should allow deep-ocean drilling for oil and natural gas. Students will be assigned to either a stakeholder group or serve as an “audience member”. Members of each stakeholder group will be asked to develop a rational and persuasive argument either for or against the proposition, focusing on the moral or ethical dimensions of the issue. As with the class discussion, use the ethical decision making framework as a guide. Before the debate, audience members will write down whether they are for or against the proposition. Then, students from each stakeholder group will be asked to give a 3-min summary of their argument. Next, audience members will be invited to ask questions of any group, and stakeholders may challenge the position of any other group, again using the principles of argumentation and rhetoric. The debate will finish with students from the various stakeholder groups giving a 2-min closing statement, emphasizing key points from the debate or answering challenges from opposing interest groups. At that point, audience members will be asked to write down their final position on the proposition. These class debates will be advertised to the UH community so that the audience may consist of more than just students in the class.

As with the classroom discussion, students in the stakeholder groups will be required to write up a one to two-page summary of their argument using the ethical decision making framework as a guide. This write-up should be deliberately persuasive but still follow the principles of rational argumentation. The write-up is due at the end of the debate session. Audience members will be given an evaluation form to rate the effectiveness of each stakeholder’s argument and position through a simple rating system and brief comments. These will be used to write a two to three-page summary after the debate, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of different stakeholder groups relative to various aspects of the decision making framework. If your position on the proposition changed as a result of the debate, discuss why. If not, discuss what strengthened your own position or why you were not swayed by opposing arguments. The evaluation form will be handed in on the following Wednesday. The summary will be handed in on Friday. Scores and comments from the evaluation forms will be summarized by the instructor and given to students in the stakeholder groups on Friday.

Final Project
The final project will take place during the final exam period. It will be styled after a public hearing on a new law or regulation concerning some controversial environmental issue. As with the formalized debate, most students will be assigned to one of several stakeholder groups. Instead of having an audience group, the remaining students will be assigned to a panel of decision makers. The format will be similar to the class debate in which each group will be given 3 minutes to make an opening statement, the decision makers will ask questions of the various groups, and the stakeholder groups will be given an opportunity to make a closing statement. The
decision makers will confer at the end of the hearing to discuss the relative merits of the arguments and then reconvene to vote on the proposition.

Instead of a personal summary, each stakeholder group will submit a two-three page argument as written testimony the day before the final exam, again following the ethical decision making framework. This will be provided to the decision makers for their preparation prior to the hearing. After the decision makers render their decision, each panel member will write a two to three-page summary justifying their vote, similar to the summary of the audience members for classroom debates.

Evaluation

For oral assignments, students will be evaluated primarily upon their participation in the class discussion or debate. The criteria on the evaluation form will serve as the guide for grading. The write-ups will serve as evidence of your preparation and as a supplement to what you are able to express during class. The instructor will moderate the class discussion to ensure adequate opportunities for everyone to participate. You are not expected to contribute your thoughts on all aspects of the discussion or debate, but you should be prepared to both defend your own position and challenge other viewpoints that you think contain serious weaknesses using the principles of rational argumentation and rhetoric. For audience member or panel summaries, your ability to understand the arguments presented and ask relevant and insightful questions will serve as the basis for evaluation of your class participation. In the write-up, the ability to summarize the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments presented, again using the ethical decision making framework as a guide, will serve as the basis of your evaluation. One grade will be given for each assignment, so it will reflect a combination of the oral and written evaluations.

Quizzes and Exams

A 5-min weekly quiz will be given at the beginning of class each Monday to assess your general preparation for the week’s topic. Questions will come from the basic reading assignment, usually The Environmental Ethics and Policy Book textbook. Grades will be from 0-2 based on your answers. Your top ten quiz scores will be used to determine your overall quiz grade for the class.

A 50-min exam will be given on Sep. 30 and Nov. 04. Questions will cover all material through the semester to that point, although the second exam will focus on material covered since first exam. Questions will require “short essay” responses that present concise analyses or arguments, similar to the class discussions and debates.

Other Resources

Markkula Center for Applied Ethics: www.scu.edu/ethics/practicing/decision
Logical Fallacies/Encyclopedia of Errors of Reasoning: www.logicalfallacies.info/
Archive of Environmental Ethics Case Studies: http://environmentalethics.posterous.com/
Intelligence Squared U.S.: http://intelligencesquaredus.org
Effective Public Speaking: http://www.effective-public-speaking.com/
Toastmasters Tips & Techniques: http://tinyurl.com/44n4g9
NREM 491 – Environmental Ethics

Debate Evaluation Form

Criteria
A. Understanding and use of facts and knowledge
B. Application of ethical theories and approaches
C. Use of logic and rhetoric to construct an argument, challenge the opposition, and respond to questions or challenges
D. Presentation style: clarity, tone, emphasis, humor, emotion, etc.

Scores:

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