

PHIL 235: Bioethics (Bowen)

Ball State University

Spring 2026, Online Sections 800 & 801

Instructor: Adam J. Bowen, PhD

Virtual Office Hours: I am available to meet on **Zoom** upon student request.

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Course Website: Canvas learning environment <https://bsu.instructure.com>

Course Description

An examination of ethical concepts and theories in biological sciences and health care fields. Topics may include distributive justice, autonomy, privacy, informed consent, research ethics, ethics and reproductive technologies, end of life decisions, and genetic ethics.

Course Explanation

This course focuses on bioethics (bio=life, ethics=morality), a challenging course in which we engage a myriad of different issues related to health, healthcare, policies, practices, and complexities of how we care for living things. Since there is an emphasis on biomedical ethics, we will question what principles *should* influence our judgments about what to do in healthcare, how such principles *should* inform our practices and policies, the degrees to which other factors *should* be weighted and balanced against those principles, and concerns arising from the various roles we play in negotiating these issues. What is at stake? Who is affected? How *should* we care and advocate for ourselves and others? *Should* one's role as a practitioner, researcher, patient, family member, third-party payer, policymaker, or citizen adjust one's priorities and obligations with respect to healthcare issues? We will investigate a wide range of topics from multiple perspectives, but it is unreasonable to expect that we will exhaust all the defensible positions a person could take on these complicated issues. Rather, the course aims to increase your understanding of various morally significant challenges relating to health and healthcare, and to provide you tools to develop and justify *your own* views about how to respond to those challenges.

Course Learning Objectives

Bioethics (PHIL 202) addresses the Humanities Domain of UCC-21. As a Tier 2 course, PHIL 235 (1) helps students acquire philosophical knowledge, (2) deepen their understanding of philosophic methodology, (3) apply knowledge concerning ethics to local, regional, national and international contexts, and (4) develop and defend judgments and actions regarding contemporary ethical issues. In order to meet the UCC-21 Tier 2 Humanities Domain course requirements this course uses a variety of active, learning-centered pedagogies, which include writing descriptive and argumentative essays, participating in interactive lectures, reading primary and secondary texts, participating in faculty-structured discussions, and completing various in and out of class assignments.

By the end of the course, students will be able to work independently and/or collaboratively to:

- **create** and **critique** (verbally and in writing) their own understandings of ethical issues, in part by **reflecting** on their assumptions regarding these issues

- **draw** conclusions regarding ethical views by **tracing** consequences of those views and **comparing** the plausibility of various positions
- **make** judgments regarding the plausibility of their ethical views by **defending** the reasoning uses to arrive at those judgments in light of the views of other individuals
- **specify** and **apply** principles of bioethics to complicated issues and cases, and **explain** how those principles function in ethical reasoning about such issues and justifications of related policy proposals
- **integrate** knowledge from diverse sources including public discourse, scientific findings, theoretical models, and philosophical arguments, in the service of **generating** and **communicating** solutions and assessments of bioethical challenges

Course Modality and Structure

This course is taught in an online asynchronous modality, which means that there are no required meetings on specific dates and times. Rather, the course content is delivered via the Canvas learning management system online.

As you proceed through the course, it is important for you to read the "Learning Objectives & Tasks" page for each lesson module. On those pages, I make explicit the course trajectory and the goals for learning within each lesson. **The course content for each Lesson module will become accessible at 12AM(EST) on Monday corresponding to that week.** Within each module, you should complete the course activities in the order they occur, beginning with viewing the page that details the learning objectives and required tasks for each session. I design the course in this way because the ordering of the readings, assignments, and other course activities provide sequential scaffolding for knowledge and analytical skills acquisition, to enhance the learning experience and related outcomes for students. This also instills a similar pace to traditional in-person learning, one week of content at a time.

Required Texts & Course Materials

1. Beauchamp & Childress (2019). *Principles of Biomedical Ethics*. **8th edition**. Oxford University Press.
 - All reading assignments from this text, listed as **PBE** on the course schedule, correspond to the pagination in the 8th edition. So, page numbers from earlier editions are likely to be slightly off.
 - *Principles of Biomedical Ethics* is available for purchase at campus bookstores and online vendors.
2. All additional required (and optional) readings for this semester are distributed online via Canvas. **Students are responsible for accessing the additional required readings on Canvas.**
3. Students may not reproduce, distribute, or publicly post course materials without my permission. Assignments, handouts, and other materials are protected by copyright.

Weighted Course Requirements & Grading Scale

1. Course Activities & Exercises	20%
2. Reading Quizzes	10%
3. Discussion Forums	15%
4. Research Analysis Outline	20%
5. Final Project	35%

*I aim to grade all written assignments within 2 weeks after the deadline.

Grade	Percentage		
A+	100--97%	C	76.9--74%
A	96.9--94%	C-	73.9--70%
A-	93.9--90%	D+	69.9--67%
B+	89.9--87%	D	66.9--64%
B	86.9--84%	D-	63.9--60%
B-	83.9--80%	F	≤ 59%
C+	79.9--77%		

1. Course Activities & Writing Exercises

Philosophy is learned by doing it, so much of the course will be devoted to carefully looking at specific principles, arguments, objections, and intersections with applied issues in bioethics. Throughout the course, you will complete various writing exercises and activities. Some exercises will involve reading a brief story/scenario and writing a concise defense of your judgment about the case, or evaluate the case from multiple perspectives (e.g. patient, provider, family member). Other exercises will involve reconstructing an argument from a reading, and on some you will develop responses to specific prompts. The exercises and activities are lower-stakes assignments, but important learning tools for assessing your understanding of the bioethical principles, arguments, problems, and concepts we are investigating throughout the course. **Activities and exercises jointly count for a possible 20% of your course grade.**

2. Reading Quizzes

Careful reading is an important skill to develop, and reading philosophy is particularly challenging (see "How to Read Philosophy" document). Completing your reading assignments is a necessary course activity, which helps prepare you to engage in discussions, and successfully complete various writing exercises and activities. To ensure that students do the reading, periodically I give short quizzes related to readings and will identify the specific sections covered by the quiz. The quizzes will be easy if you made an effort to do the reading (even if you didn't understand it completely) but will be challenging for those who fail to do the assigned reading. I allow you two attempts, allowing you to go back and re-read passages and re-take the quiz, to ensure that you understand important sections from the reading before reading/listening to my lecture, completing an exercise related to the reading, or participating on a forum. **Reading quizzes are worth a possible 10% of your course grade.**

3. Discussion Forums

There are 9 discussion forums throughout the semester, but **each student is only required to participate on 5 of the forums.** So, you can choose 4 forums to skip, based on your own schedule, your level of interest in different course topics, or simply to balance your workload with other activities for this course. For the forums on which you choose to participate, you

will be asked to reflect, in 4-5 sentences, on one or more questions related to our readings/lecture content and then *respond to two* of your classmate's posts. There are further instructions for the reply posts on each forum. **These discussions are graded pass/fail.** As such, they serve as low-stakes opportunities to share ideas with your peers, engage course content in creative ways, raise objections to arguments, express puzzlement, try out different perspectives, and interact with online classmates. **Discussion forums jointly count for a possible 15% of your course grade.**

4. **Research Analysis Outline**

There will be 3 opportunities during the semester for students to develop a structured outline assignment, which will involve research, analysis, application of principles, and formulating an argument related to a specific problem in bioethics. Due to the level of involvement required for this type of assignment, students are only required to complete 1 outline and opt-out of the others; this element of choice also allows you to focus on a topic of greater interest to you. For each of the 3 outline opportunities, I provide detailed instructions, guidelines for successful completion, and a range of more specific topics/problems in that area of bioethics on which you can choose to concentrate the research for your outline and argument(s). Your outline will serve as a foundation for your final project or paper, so you should keep that in mind when choosing your topic. **The Research Analysis Outline counts for a possible 20% of your course grade.**

5. **Final Project**

The final project will utilize feedback from your research analysis outline to develop an argumentative essay on one of your topics of choice, engaging the arguments of others, and incorporating relevant research to support your analysis. You may choose to frame your argument(s) as a policy proposal, advocating for a particular solution to the problem in bioethics on which you are focusing. You are tasked with synthesizing additional research and instructor feedback from your Research Analysis Outline to revise and develop into a well-reasoned, carefully composed, and self-critical piece of writing or other finished product (see options below). Further details, instructions for a revision process, and rubric will be provided to prepare students for this significant assessment of course learning objectives.

I understand that students often thrive when working with different modalities, so I offer the following options for your finished Final Project: a) you can write a 2000-3000 word essay developing your argument(s) or policy proposal from one of your research outlines, b) create a presentation with slides and voiceover audio advancing your argument(s) or policy proposal, c) create a podcast-style audio recording of your argument(s) or policy proposal, or d) create a video in which you present your argument(s) or policy proposal. Audio or video recordings should be a minimum of 10 minutes runtime, in order to fully satisfy the argumentative and research-related criteria for the project. Note: all project options should include a written component (e.g. a revised/edited/expanded version of your outline, from which you developed the presentation/audio recording/video), as well as a works cited/bibliography of all sources consulted and cited in your research. If you have other questions or concerns about the final project, contact Prof. Bowen by email. **The Final Project counts for a possible 35% of your course grade.**

COURSE POLICIES

Participation and Timeliness

Your regular participation and timeliness are important to your academic success. In online courses this takes the form of participation in discussion via forums and other electronic means provided. As this is an online course, it is up to every student to stay on track and not fall behind. You must be self-motivated and disciplined to meet all due dates. Developing a routine is essential. All assignments are expected to be submitted by a specific time and date. If you are struggling to meet a deadline, please contact Dr. Bowen via email. Assignments submitted late may be subject to a reduction in points, at the instructor's discretion.

University Statement and Disability Accommodations

We are committed to ensuring that all members of the community are welcome, through valuing the various experiences and worldviews represented at Ball State and among those we serve. We promote a culture of respect and civil discourse.

Disability Accommodations Statement

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, please contact the instructor of record as soon as possible. Ball State's [Disability Services Office](#) coordinates services for students with disabilities; documentation of a disability needs to be on file in that office before any accommodations can be provided. Disability Services can be contacted at 765-285-5293 or dsd@bsu.edu.

Freedom of Expression

In this course, we are committed to fostering a learning environment that values intellectual diversity, encourages free expression, and promotes open inquiry. As members of the Ball State Community, we treat each person in the Ball State community with civility, courtesy, compassion, and dignity and respect and learn from differences in people, ideas, and opinions. Please review Ball State University's [Statement on Freedom of Expression](#), the resources on Ball State's [Freedom of Expression webpage](#), and Ball State's [Beneficence Pledge](#).

Communication

Questions of a personal nature, such as questions about your grade or anything personal intended for the instructor, please use your BSU email. The instructor will typically respond to messages within 48 hours of receiving them.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism and cheating on exams and assignments will not be tolerated. As stated in the *Ball State Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities*, "Honesty, trust, and personal responsibility are fundamental attributes of the University community. Academic dishonesty by a student will not be tolerated, for it threatens the foundation of an institution dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge." Students caught cheating or plagiarizing will receive zero credit for the assignment or exam on the first offense. This includes any illicit use of large-language model (LLM) generative AI assistance (e.g. Chat-GPT, Gemini, Snapchat My AI, Microsoft CoPilot) on course assignments, since submitting AI-generated text as one's own work constitutes

plagiarism. Students will automatically receive a failing grade for the course on the second offense. Claiming ignorance of what constitutes plagiarism and/or academic dishonesty will not be considered a valid excuse by the instructor. If you have any doubts as to what constitutes cheating or other academic misconduct, do not hesitate to see me at once or consult the *Student Code*, Part VII "Student Academic Ethics Policy", available online at: <http://cms.bsu.edu/about/administrativeoffices/studentrights/policiesandprocedures/studentcode/viiethicspolicy>

AI Policy

As stated above, in the Academic Integrity policy, this course prohibits any illicit use of large-language model (LLM) generative AI assistance (e.g. Chat-GPT, Gemini, Snapchat My AI, Microsoft CoPilot) on course assignments, since submitting AI-generated text as one's own work constitutes plagiarism. Generative AI is a tool, and like any tool it has both acceptable and illicit uses. For the purposes of this writing-intensive course, most uses of generative AI are illicit and prohibited. You should be attempting to develop your critical thinking and argumentative writing skills in this course, and generative AI is mediocre in both of those areas. The output is often littered with factual inaccuracies, hallucinated content, and lacks a unique voice; developing one's own voice in writing is a valuable skill and a mark of mature writing. (See the full AI Policy on Canvas for additional information.)

Etiquette Statement

Please remember the following in all forms of communication in this course:

- Be mindful to not use language that could be considered abrasive or offensive.
- Keep all writings and correspondence as professional as possible.
- Keep writing to a point and stay on topic.
- Double-check all writing to make sure that it clearly conveys the exact intended message.

TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Become familiar with the class interface before the semester begins and seek help if necessary. BSU provides resources to help you. A lack of Canvas knowledge is not an acceptable excuse for late or incomplete work.

Technical Equipment:

In order for you to be successful in this type of course (e.g. online delivery, distance education), you will need the technology listed in the "Technology for Online and Distance Education Students."

Technical Assistance:

For support with Canvas, there are multiple sources of help available within Canvas: Canvas Support Hotline (for Students) 1-844-803-6635, Canvas Student Orientation, Chat with Canvas Support, Support Services for Online Students, and Canvas Guides.

If you have other technical questions, you can contact Ball State's Help Desk. In addition, the Help Desk staff has put together many how-to video clips in its Tech Clips section that can

guide you through many of the most common questions. The helpdesk can be contacted at: 1765-285-1517 or email at helpdesk@bsu.edu.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Writing Center at Ball State: One key to improving your writing is getting feedback and revision suggestions on your text during the writing process. All writers improve with practice and feedback, so as a student in this course, you are encouraged to use the Writing Center (in Robert Bell 295 during weekdays, Bracken Library First Floor West in the evenings, or online during any of their regularly scheduled hours) to get additional feedback on your writing. The Writing Center offers free planning, feedback, and accountability sessions (in person and online) to all students composing essays, reports, reflections, research projects, web content, lesson plans, slideshows, poster presentations, resumes, and other digital or print texts. Students can schedule an appointment by going to www.bsu.edu/writingcenter, stopping by Robert Bell 295, or by calling 765-285-8370. Online and in person appointments are available seven days a week; however, plan ahead because appointments book quickly!

The Learning Center: The Learning Center offers free Tutoring and Academic Coaching for many courses at Ball State. Students can make appointments for online (Zoom) or in-person (NQ 350) appointments. To make an appointment, visit myballstate.bsu.edu and click on “Navigate” in the Academic Tools section, or just go directly to bsu.navigate.eab.com.

The Basic Needs Hub: If you are having difficulty affording enough food, do not have a safe and reliable place to sleep, and/or experiencing an emergency or crisis, help is available through the [Basic Needs Hub](#). The Basic Needs Hub has information, resources, and provides individualized support to students. To talk with a supportive staff member about your experience, receive one on one assistance, or learn more about resources, you can submit a [Basic Needs Assistance Form](#).

Course Schedule: Assignment details, including instructions, relevant readings, due dates, and grading criteria/rubrics are posted and updated on Canvas. Please check Canvas regularly to stay informed and on track. To support a learning experience that is responsive to the needs, interests, and pace of our class community, the course schedule may shift over the semester. In such cases, students will be notified. The most current version of the schedule will always be available on Canvas. I encourage you to check Canvas regularly for updates and contact me if you have any questions.

This syllabus is subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances.