



MGT 6456
ETHICS IN BUSINESS

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Office Hours (in person or on Zoom)

By appointment. If on Zoom we'll meet here:

<https://vanderbilt.zoom.us/j/8292269831>

In this course we explore management practice and business leadership from an ethical perspective. We will address business ethics not merely as an abstraction involving other people in difficult situations, but as a practical matter as it might affect you. Rather than viewing ethical issues as things that arise occasionally in unusual circumstances, we will explore how ethical concerns color, change, detract, and/or add to your approach to life in work and other organizations, as both leader and member. Drawing on case studies, contemporary events, and our own experiences, we will consider a range of approaches people in business use to assure (and fail to assure) ethical practice. The goal is to cultivate moral imagination—the ability to contemplate ethical challenges from multiple perspectives and envision ethically defensible responses.

MATERIALS

- **Readings, cases, and videos**, all linked from within Brightspace (in “Day by Day Content”).
- **Syllabus.** The information contained in this syllabus document appears in full on Brightspace. So if you rely on Brightspace for day-to-day course information there is no reason to consult this document. Brightspace has it all.
- **The Grid.** A menu item on Brightspace, “The Grid,” links directly to a PDF containing the big chart that is the last page (p. 7) of this syllabus. It shows the entire course at a glance on a single page.
- **Top Hat polling.** At times will use software called Top Hat for anonymous in-class live polling. You participate via smartphone app (or browser). To gain access, before the first day of class go to the **Configure Top Hat** menu item in Brightspace and follow the steps found there.

DELIVERABLES

Ethics is best engaged as a conversation. Accordingly, the time we spend in class is the heart of the enterprise, and class participation is weighted heavily. My ask is that you come to class prepared to share your ideas and insights about topics, cases, and readings. My pledge in return is to keep the day-to-day workload modest and manageable. In addition to class participation, I am asking you to write two short essays, one at around the midpoint of the course, and one at the conclusion. The particulars are below.

- **Participation** (28% of course grade)

The quality of your participation is more important than quantity, although obviously some of the latter is necessary to gauge the former. Good contributions to class discussion are perceptive, relevant, and focused – they respond to the current flow of the discussion, and enhance it.

It is crucial in an ethics course that honest differences can be freely expressed without fear of harassment or recrimination. To cultivate an atmosphere that blends rigorous inquiry with civility, my ask is that you come to class with an open mind, a spirit of intellectual adventure, and a sense of tolerance for views that may depart from your own.

Participation includes discussion prompts and other assigned tasks (via Qualtrics or the Brightspace discussion boards). In week 7 you will be surveyed for input on class participation.

- **Midgame Essay** (34% of course grade) (length = ~900 words)

You have **two options** for this deliverable. It is due at the end of week 4 (November 14).

Option A: REACTION ESSAY

A reaction essay presents thoughts about and reactions to material covered in the readings and/or in class for a given topic. The reaction paper is a concise and coherent statement that integrates (finds common themes, compares-contrasts, etc.) and extends (considers the theme you are writing on in relation to other contexts, situations, issues) readings and/or class discussion. The thing that catalyzes your reaction can be relatively big (e.g., the entire approach taken in class that day) or quite narrow (e.g., one comment that one person made) or something in between. A good reaction paper will advance a coherent central idea, not merely offer a rambling collection of assorted thoughts.

Option B: DAY-OF-ETHICS ESSAY

Submit a paper that documents the ethics of the choices you make during a 24-hour period and reflects on the experience. Choose a 24-hour period for this *before* that period starts. In fashioning your reflection, you can consider these questions (or others of your own): What surprised you about doing this? Is the number of ethical decisions higher or lower than you expected? To what extent do you make the ethical decisions you made with deliberation vs. by impulse or instinct? Are there ethical decisions you encountered but that you didn't include in this write-up?

- **Endgame Essay** (38% of course grade) (length = ~1000 words)

You have **two options** for this deliverable. It is due during exam week (December 14).

Option A: SELF-REFLECTION ESSAY (full details on page 3)

Reflect on your personal and professional ethics. From reading your paper I should be able to glean how the matters we've taken up in this course inform your view of ethics in action going forward, both as a person and as a business professional. [See page 3 for full details.](#)

Option B: ETHICS-IN-ACTION ESSAY (full details on page 4)

Write about an ethical choice point you faced during this mod. The paper should reflect your analysis, judgment, and experience, while also applying learning from the class. The paper should reveal how topics in this course informed your application of ethics in the situation. [See page 4 for full details.](#)

**DETAILS ON ENDGAME OPTION A:
THE SELF-REFLECTION ESSAY**

In the final essay you are asked to reflect on your personal and professional ethics. From reading your paper I should be able to glean how the matters we've taken up in this course inform your view of ethics in action going forward, both as a person and as a business professional. (Are those two things different?)

The assignment has four principal elements:

[1] Discuss your normative ethic:

What philosophical approach(es) to ethical reasoning on matters of moral right and wrong interest you? Which do you prefer, and why? What are the limits or risks of your preferred approach?

[2] Describe your behavioral ethic:

What observations can you make about your own capabilities and limits that may affect how your approach? Consider, for example, how psychological, social, or situational factors may risk blinding or biasing you when moral issues arise. How can you manage these risks?

[3] Illustrate how your normative ethic and behavioral ethic might play out:

Give two or three examples of the kind of choices you might make in coming years as a business or management professional that could present moral challenges. For each discuss how your preferred normative approach will serve (and possibly limit) those choices and what role aspects of your behavioral ethic might play.

[4] Comment on the space that lies between ethics and business ethics:

Element [3] just above asked about examples of moral challenges you might face as a working professional. Are there meaningful distinctions between your personal ethics (in everyday life outside of work) and your professional ethics? Does your preferred normative or behavior ethic differ across the divide between work and non-work?

The paper can be visibly structured by these four elements, or it can be a coherent essay without section divisions that incorporates all four in an eloquent, compelling narrative.

In addition to content from class, you may use examples from your own life and from the lives of others, including (but not limited to) the world of business, to complete the essay.

Length: ~1000 words

Due: Tues., Dec. 14 at 11:59 pm

**DETAILS ON ENDGAME OPTION B:
THE ETHICS-IN-ACTION ESSAY**

Write about a choice point you faced *during this mod* (on or after Oct. 18). It is fine if the circumstances surrounding the choice had origins before the mod, and it is fine if the events involved will continue past the mod, but the specific choice point you write about must have occurred during the mod.

The paper should reflect your analysis, judgment, and experience, while also applying learning from the class. From reading your paper I should be able to glean how the matters we've taken up in this course inform your view of ethics in action, and I should have a sense of the moral foundations and analyses—normative as well as behavioral—that lead you to that view.

In addition to material and content from class, you may use examples from your own life and from the lives of others, including (but not limited to) the world of business, to complete this assignment.

The assignment has four principal elements:

[1] Describe a choice that you made and acted upon this mod.

It has to be an actual situation or circumstance you encountered, leading to a choice of some sort **by you** since the mod began. Give descriptive detail on the situation that will help the reader grasp the circumstance and the choice, and how it lends itself to an ethical analysis.

[2] Analyze normative ethics associated with the choice you made this mod.

This should include the approach to ethical reasoning or analysis that guided (or should have guided!) the choice you actually made. It can also include some attention to alternative ways of thinking about the issue/choice you faced that were in play.

[3] Discuss the factors that influenced you and others involved in this choice.

Consider, for example, psychological, social, and situational factors that might have biased, bound, blinded, or otherwise impacted you and others. Consider the sources of these factors and their relative importance.

[4] Specify how you implemented this choice and what happened.

What did you do, how did you do it? In what ways did you lead others in the effort to implement your choice? What were the consequences? What did you learn from this episode about your own ethics, leadership, or anything else?

The paper can be visibly structured by these four elements, or it can be a coherent essay without section divisions that incorporates all four in an eloquent, compelling narrative.

If you are not sure if some particular incident or choice is suitable for the assignment, don't hesitate to run it by me. Odds are I'll say yes!

Length: ~1000 words

Due: Tues., Dec. 14 at 11:59 pm

COURSE POLICIES

COVID QUARANTINE ABSENCES

If you are unable to attend class due to mandated COVID quarantine, please contact me in advance of class for information on keeping up with course content. It may be possible for quarantined students (only) to view a class live via Zoom. This option, if made available, will involve live viewing at the time of class; sessions will not be recorded. Quarantined students attending via Zoom are asked to keep video on and audio muted. I cannot guarantee that you will be able to participate.

TECHNOLOGY

In class the use of portable electronic devices (laptops, tablets, smartphones, smartwatches, very small microwave ovens) is generally disallowed except under two circumstances: (1) for consulting a course reading or notetaking, and (2) when I say it is allowed (e.g. smartphones for in-class polling). I ask that you please silence devices completely (not vibrate).

It is not permissible to use any audio or video capture technology to record a class session, either in person or (in the case of COVID quarantine viewing) remotely.

Although it's low-tech as technology goes, I insist that you bring the **name tent** that you have been provided to class **every day**. If you forget yours, no problem: grab a whiteboard marker and make one. I have a tendency to avoid calling on students wishing to speak in class when there is no name card in front of them.

SECTION SWITCHING

Attend the section (9:50 am or 11:40 am) in which you are enrolled; discretionary section switching is not permitted. Exceptions are made only with advance permission for a legitimate reason. Do not just show up for the other section figuring it's okay. It's not.

WRITTEN DELIVERABLES

Logistics:

- Submit papers electronically via Brightspace (the "Assignments" menu item).
- Submit as docx or pdf; use font size ≥ 11 pt and please use line spacing of 1.5 or double.
- Cite sources using some acceptable style guide (e.g., Chicago Manual of Style or MLA).
- Word-count numbers associated with deliverables are guidelines, not caps (or minimums).
- Late papers lose 10% of points for each 8 hours past due. After 40 hours, it fails.

Expectations:

The papers you write for this course, like most forms of written communication produced by managers and other humans, should be precise, organized, logical, and appropriately supported. Also, style matters: errors of spelling and grammar are unacceptable. Turn in a clean, clear, sourced paper. Please.

Passage:

Passing the course requires satisfactory completion of each deliverable attempted (“satisfactory” is defined as 50% of available points) and required prompts. If an essay is so deficient that it earns less than half the available points I will let you write a new one. If you blow off the prompts you will be asked to write an extra 1000-word paper before you can pass the course.

MGT 6456 AND THE HONOR CODE

Students are bound by the Honor Code for all work completed in this course. Specifically:

- Written work submitted should be entirely your own, completed without assistance of others.
 - Written work must use appropriate citations to signify when arguments or analyses rely on the ideas or insights of others (including assigned readings).
 - For deliverables that involve writing write about actual events, it is a violation of the honor code to fabricate circumstances or otherwise rely on events that didn’t actually occur.
 - Use of materials in any format from other sections of this course or a similar course taught at any time in the past, at Vanderbilt or other universities, is a violation of the Honor Code.
 - It is an honor violation to falsify the attendance sign-in sheet if one is used in class.
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WELLNESS

We are committed to facilitating the learning of students at the graduate level, which entails a commitment to students’ overall physical, mental, and emotional wellness. In that light:

Any student with a learning disability or related concern should contact the professor to discuss learning needs and action plans. Students who need reasonable accommodations to succeed academically should contact Vanderbilt’s [Student Access](#) office.

Congruent with Owen and Vanderbilt University’s nondiscrimination, anti-harassment, and anti-retaliation policies, if you believe that a member of the Vanderbilt community has engaged in prohibited discrimination, harassment, or retaliation, contact the VU [Title IX Office](#) or the VU [Equal Opportunity and Access Office](#).

The [Student Care Network](#) is an umbrella network of services and resources pertaining to health and wellness available to all Vanderbilt University students. The [Office of Student Care Coordination](#) is the first point of contact for any student with an academic, personal, emotional, medical, or other concern.

Day-by-day class schedule is found on the next page →

The grid on the next page is available in Brightspace by hitting “The Grid” in the main navigational menu.

THE GRID - MGT 6456, Fall 2021, Mod 2

Everything in this grid matches what is found in the "Day by Day Content" section of Brightspace.

Week	Class	Date	THEME	READ/CASE	DO	ONLINE DISCUSS
1	Tues.	Oct. 19	OVERTURE	READ: "The Drowning Child and the..."	WATCH the course welcome video (2.5 minutes) INSTALL and configure Top Hat polling software.	
	Thurs.	Oct. 21	ETHICAL BOUNDARIES	READ: "Introduction to Ethical Reasoning"	The MGT 6456 ethics survey on Qualtrics (by Fri, Oct. 22, 11:59 pm)	
2	Tues.	Oct. 26	MORAL ARGUMENT	CASE: "The Kidney Case" READ: "What Isn't For Sale"	Rank the eight kidney candidates from highest to lowest; submit online by Sun. 10/24 at 11:00 pm	
	Thurs.	Oct. 28	MORAL AGENCY	CASE: "Making Target the Target" READ: "How Do I Know If I Am Morally..."	Answer this question → about the Target case in a discussion board post.	<i>Was Target wrong to get involved in the HB2 controversy?</i>
3	Tues.	Nov. 2	BEHAVIORAL ETHICS	READ: "Why Traditional Approaches to..." READ: "Ethics Beneath the Surface" READ: "A Note on Moral Disengagement"	WATCH: "The Moral Lives of Babies" (13 minutes)	
	Thurs.	Nov. 4	ETHICS OF DECEPTION	CASE: "Is It Ever OK to Break a Promise?" READ: "The Lies We Tell at Work..."	Answer this question → about the "Is It Ever" case in a discussion board post.	<i>What should Sameeer do, and why?</i>
4	Tues.	Nov. 9	ETHICS OF HIRING	CASE: "Hiring Ethics" READ: "Stop Screening Job Candidates'..."	Complete the online VIGNETTES by Sun, Nov. 7 at 5 pm.	
	Thurs.	Nov. 11	ETHICS OF INCLUSION	CASE: "I Am in Room 523" READ: "Note on Human Behavior..."	Ponder this case question: <i>What should the board of the organization do now?</i>	

MIDGAME	- The first essay is due Sunday, Nov. 14 at 11:59 pm
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5	Tues.	Nov. 16	ETHICS OF WORK	READ: "The Ethics of Wages" READ: "The Future of Work Should Mean..."	WATCH: "The Bank Job" (26 minutes)	
	Thurs.	Nov. 18	CORRUPTION	CASE: "Fast Building" READ: "Values in Tension: Ethics Away..."	Answer this questions → about the Fast Building case in a discussion board post	<i>If you were Andrew Smith, would you accept the offer? Why?</i>
6	Tues.	Nov. 30	ETHICS OF TECHNOLOGY	READ: "We Should Hold Tech Giants to..." READ: "AI Makes Decisions We Don't..." READ: "Clearly Facebook is Very Flawed..."	WATCH: "Are We Automating Racism?" (22 minutes)	
	Thurs.	Dec. 2	ETHICS OF VOICE	CASE: "Gender and Free Speech at Google" READ: "Speechless at Work"	Answer this question → about the Google case in a discussion board post	<i>Was it the right call when Google fired Damore?</i>
7	Tues.	Dec. 7	ETHICS OF MARKETING	READ: "Why Surge Prices Make Us Mad" READ: "The Tricky Business of Advertising..." READ: "How to Tell if a Company's Claim..."		
	Thurs.	Dec. 9	(UN)ETHICAL CULTURE	READ: "What Was Volkswagen Thinking?" READ: "The Dirty Dozen..." READ: "We Shouldn't Always Need..."	Complete the online class participation survey by Friday, Dec. 10 at 11:59 pm	

ENDGAME	- The class participation survey is due Friday, Dec. 10 at 11:59 pm
	- The second essay is due Tuesday, Dec. 14 at 11:59 pm