

THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA CARVER COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

Bioethics and Humanities Seminar

AN ELECTIVE COURSE AT THE CARVER COLLEGE OF MEDICINE
PROVIDED BY THE PROGRAM IN BIOETHICS AND HUMANITIES

(Course number for medical students: MED:8076:0600)

(Course number for other students: MED:8076:0001)

Course Website: <http://icon.uiowa.edu/>

Syllabus, Fall 2025



COURSE DIRECTOR & INSTRUCTOR:

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1. PURPOSE

The Bioethics and Humanities Seminar is an elective 1-credit course that provides an introduction to topics and themes that are central to bioethics and the humanities in the context of medicine. The course provides considerable breadth through the number of topic areas it covers. It also prioritizes dialogue through small-group discussion, which explains why the class is limited to 12 students in the hope that everyone can regularly participate. Priority for enrollment is given to students at the Carver College of Medicine (CCOM), and then to other students at the University of Iowa (by permission of the instructor).

The Seminar covers a diverse but inter-connected range of topics, including ethical theory, different approaches to ethical reasoning (principles, virtues, consequences), clinical ethics, professionalism and humanism, moral agency, ethical pluralism, ethics in relation to cultural diversity and global health, historical examples of research abuses, technology and the future, narrative ethics, and the use of stories in medicine. Throughout the Seminar, students are encouraged to discuss the real-world relevance of ideas by applying ethical insights to challenges encountered in clinical care.

2. OBJECTIVES

1. Identify key contrasts between ethical approaches based on principles, virtues, and consequences.
2. Recognize the potential of narrative ethics to complement other ethical approaches.
3. Recognize the similarities and differences between ethics, professionalism, and humanism.
4. Identify ways in which ethical pluralism and cultural diversity influence medical practice.
5. Recognize key historical examples of unethical conduct in clinical research.
6. Recognize how stories can enhance ethical and humanistic understanding of illness.
7. Recognize ways in which bioethics and humanities are inter-related and inter-dependent.

3. FORMAT

The course is composed of small group discussions based on readings. Fourteen class sessions, each lasting 50 minutes, will occur **Mondays from 12:00 PM – 12:50 PM in 1121 MERF**. The class will meet on the following dates:

August 25
September 8, 15, 22, 29
October 6, 13, 20, 27
November 3, 10, 17
December 1, 8

4. SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS

Week 1: August 25	Introduction <u>Reading:</u> Pellegrino, E. D. (1993). The metamorphosis of medical ethics: a 30-year retrospective. <i>JAMA</i>, 269(9), 1158-1162.
September 1	<i>Labor Day (no class)</i>
Week 2: September 8	Professionalism and Humanism <u>Reading:</u> Cohen, J. J. (2007). Viewpoint: Linking professionalism to humanism: What it means, why it matters. <i>Academic Medicine</i>, 82(11), 1029-1032.
Week 3: September 15	Principles <u>Reading:</u> Gillon, R. (2003). Ethics needs principles—four can encompass the rest—and respect for autonomy should be “first among equals”. <i>Journal of Medical Ethics</i>, 29, 207-312.
Week 4: September 22	Virtues <u>Reading:</u> Larkin, G. L., et al. (2009). Virtue in emergency medicine. <i>Academic Emergency Medicine</i>, 16(1), 51-55.
Week 5: September 29	Consequences (Utilitarianism) <u>Reading:</u> Garbutt, G., & Davies, P. (2011). Should the practice of medicine be a deontological or utilitarian enterprise? <i>Journal of Medical Ethics</i>, 37(5), 267-270.
Week 6: October 6	Narrative Ethics <u>Reading:</u> Brody, H, & Clark, M. (2014). Narrative ethics: A narrative. <i>Hastings Center Report</i>, 44(1), S7-S11.

Week 7: October 13	The Hidden Curriculum <u>Reading:</u> Hafferty, F. W., & Franks, R. (1994). The hidden curriculum, ethics teaching, and the structure of medical education. <i>Academic Medicine</i>, 69(11), 861-71.
Week 8: October 20	Moral Agency <u>Reading:</u> MacIntyre, A. (1999). Social structures and their threats to moral agency. <i>Philosophy</i>, 74(03), 311-329.
Week 9: October 27	Ethics and Cultural Diversity <u>Reading:</u> Fan, R. (1997). Self-determination vs. family-determination: Two incommensurable principles of autonomy. <i>Bioethics</i>, 11(3&4), 309-322.
Week 10: November 3	Ethics and Global Health <u>Reading:</u> DeCamp, M. et al. (2018). Ethical obligations regarding short-term global health clinical experiences: an ACP Position Paper. <i>Ann Intern Med</i>, 168, 651-657.
Week 11: November 10	Ethics and the Past <u>Readings:</u> - Alexander, L. (1949). Medical science under dictatorship. <i>New England Journal of Medicine</i>, 241(2), 39-47. - Jones, J. (2008). The Tuskegee syphilis experiment. In E.J. Emanuel et al. (Eds.), <i>The Oxford textbook of clinical research ethics</i>. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
Week 12: November 17	Ethics and the Future <u>Reading:</u> Sandel, M. (2004). The case against perfection. <i>The Atlantic Monthly</i>, 293(3), 51-62. Note: Final Reflections are due by <i>Thursday, December 5 at 8:00 AM</i>.
Nov. 24-28	Thanksgiving week (no class)

Week 13: December 1	Literature and Medicine <u>Reading:</u> <i>The Death of Ivan Ilych</i>, by Leo Tolstoy
Week 14: December 8	Discussion of Final Reflections <u>Writing:</u> Final Reflections are due by <i>Thursday, December 4 at 8:00 AM.</i> - During this class session, we'll go around the room to allow students to tell each other what they wrote in their paragraph.

5. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

➤ SUMMARY OF COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

- (1) Read the required readings prior to each class (including the reading for Week 1).
(Note: Week 11 has *two* required readings, all the rest have only one.)
- (2) **Submit one question based on the required reading for that week's session** (including the week you serve as discussion leader). **Do this by posting your question to the course Discussions in ICON.** Your question is due by noon on the Sunday prior to each Monday class session. You must post your question to the weekly discussion forum before you are able to see other students' questions. You do not need to reply to other students' questions.
(Notes: a submitted question is *not* required for Week 1, and for Week 11 you only need to submit one question, which can be related to either or both of the two assigned readings.)
- (3) Attend and participate in all class sessions.
- (4) Lead the discussion for one class session.
- (5) Write a **Final Reflection**:

For the last class session, students will write a brief statement (one paragraph will be fine) in answer to the following two prompts:

- 1) Describe the ethical or humanistic value, observation, or idea in this course that has been most novel or meaningful to you, and
- 2) Explain how you think (or hope) this value, observation, or idea will influence your professional work in the future.

Your Final Reflection is due in the ICON dropbox by Thursday, December 4, at 8:00 AM.

Note: During the last class session, we'll go around the room to allow students to tell each other what they wrote in their reflection.

- (6) Complete a post-course evaluation.
- (7) Grading for this course is pass/fail.

➤ **WEEKLY READING ASSIGNMENTS**

The required readings for each week are posted as URL links on the ICON course website (<http://icon.uiowa.edu/>). If for some reason a URL link does not function properly, please email Suzanne Streitz, the course coordinator.

➤ **ABSENCE POLICY: MAKE-UP WORK IS REQUIRED IN CASES OF APPROVED ABSENCES**

No unexcused absences are allowed. The course instructor needs to be notified in advance of an absence (or as soon as possible thereafter) in order to determine whether the absence can be excused. If an absence is determined to be necessary, the student will write a one-page, single-spaced reflection on the assigned reading(s) for the session that was missed.

➤ **CREATING QUESTIONS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION**

Students will read the assigned readings and turn in one substantive question for each class session (except for the first class session). Questions will be posted to a weekly Discussion Forum in ICON. The student discussion leader for each session (see below) will use these questions to guide class discussion. *Questions should be focused on a key assumption, argument, conclusion, or implication of an article, rather than minor points of information or contention.*

➤ **LEADING SEMINAR DISCUSSIONS**

Students will take turns leading class discussions of the assigned readings by:

- (1) Reviewing all the questions posted by the class to that week's Discussion Forum in ICON;
- (2) Organizing the questions in some meaningful way (e.g., by groups based on related topics, themes, or concerns);
- (3) Prioritizing questions (or groups of questions) so that topics thought to be of greatest relevance or interest can be discussed earlier during the discussion;
- (4) Posing the questions and helping facilitate discussion.

Note: The purpose of our discussions is not to cover everything in the reading(s) or address all submitted questions; rather, it is to engage questions the student leader thinks are of greatest relevance and interest. The course director will help facilitate and inform the discussion as needed.

At the first class meeting, you'll be asked to sign up to lead one class session.

The following table is included on this page so all students and faculty can keep a record of the schedule of student leaders for each week.

SCHEDULE OF STUDENT LEADERS (OR CO-LEADERS) FOR CLASS SESSIONS

Session Dates	Topic	Session Leader(s)
August 25	Introduction	Dr. Kaldjian
September 8	Professionalism and Humanism	
September 15	Principles	
September 22	Virtues	
September 29	Consequences (Utilitarianism)	
October 6	Narrative Ethics	
October 13	The Hidden Curriculum	
October 20	Moral Agency	
October 27	Ethics and Cultural Diversity	
November 3	Ethics and Global Health	
November 10	Ethics and the Past	
November 17	Ethics and the Future	
December 1	Literature and Medicine	
December 8	Discussion of Final Reflections	Dr. Kaldjian

6. RESOURCES

Internet Resources:

American Medical Association: Code of Medical Ethics:

<https://www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/ethics/code-medical-ethics-overview>

American Academy of Pediatrics: Section on Bioethics:

<https://services.aap.org/en/community/aap-sections/bioethics/>

American College of Physicians: Ethics Manual:

<https://www.acponline.org/clinical-information/ethics-and-professionalism/acp-ethics-manual-seventh-edition-a-comprehensive-medical-ethics-resource/acp-ethics-manual-seventh-edition>

American Psychiatric Association Principles of Medical Ethics and Opinions

[Opinions of the APA Ethics Committee \(June 2025\)](#)

Bioethics Research Library at Georgetown University: <http://bioethics.georgetown.edu/>

Presidential Commission for the Study of Bioethical Issues:

<https://bioethicsarchive.georgetown.edu/pcsbi/node/851.html>

University of Washington: Bioethics Topics: <https://depts.washington.edu/bhdept/ethics-medicine>

For more resources: <http://www.medicine.uiowa.edu/bioethics/resources/>

7. ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND THE HONOR CODE

Absolute academic and professional integrity must be the hallmark of all health care professionals. The profession demands that medical personnel monitor themselves and each other in order to produce quality individuals whom the public can trust and who are competent in their chosen field.

The **Honor Code** of the Carver College of Medicine states:

“The Honor Code demands that community members tell the truth, live honestly, advance on individual merit, and demonstrate respect for others in the academic, clinical and research communities.” Defined infractions of the Honor Code include cheating, plagiarism (conscious and unintentional), and fabrication.

The Student Policies section of the Carver College of Medicine **Medical Student Handbook** says this about plagiarism:

“Students are expected to do their own work at all times. In no instance should the work or words of another individual be represented as one’s own. All quoted material, regardless of source, must be properly cited and full attribution given to the author. Information obtained from the Web must give the full URL of the actual page accessed and the date accessed.”

Plagiarism of ideas can occur when the work of others is paraphrased (as opposed to a direct quotation). Ideas are as important as the literal statements that express them. When you appropriate ideas or statements from other people, their authorship must be acknowledged.

In this course, these academic standards will be upheld. Any behavior suggesting deviation from the spirit or letter of these standards will be investigated and, if confirmed, treated appropriately. A student who is found guilty of cheating, plagiarism, or fabrication will fail the Course.

8. POLICIES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Requests for special accommodations for examinations or other course requirements must be addressed through a specific protocol coordinated centrally by the Carver College of Medicine’s Medical Student Counseling Center. The College’s *Policies for Students with Disabilities* provides that students who seek the modification of seating, testing, or other course requirements must contact the Medical Student Counseling Center at the beginning of the academic year to implement the process for determining appropriate accommodations. Any student who believes that he or she may qualify for special accommodations should contact the Counseling Center immediately.