PAD/UST 634, UST734
Ethics in the Public Sector
Thursday 6:00 – 9:50 pm
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“To be good and virtuous is a noble thing, but to teach others to be good and virtuous is nobler still—and much, much easier.”
Mark Twain

Introduction

The purpose of this course is to provide an opportunity for you to reflect on the ethical dimensions of public and nonprofit management. Since there are few if any dimensions of public and nonprofit management that do not have ethical issues inherent in them, or so this course will suggest, the opportunities for reflection will be almost unlimited.

Unlike some other aspects of professional education for public/nonprofit service, the study of ethics will involve you in thinking about ambiguous questions that by their nature do not have one best answer that everyone can agree on. In contrast to learning how to do statistical tests or how to prepare a performance budget, ethics provides few anchors that will reassure you that you are ‘doing the right thing.’ Many people come to an ethics class expecting that it will provide them with an equation-like rule for ethical decision-making, and in fact, when told that no such thing exists, some people refuse to believe it. On the other hand, faced with ethical dilemmas (which occur daily in public and nonprofit management), you need a sense of how to proceed in thinking them through, and this class is intended to help you find your way to an approach that is right for you.

The foundation stone for ethical action is judgment. Developing sound judgment can only be learned through experience and reflection on experience, your own and that of others. This is because there are no hard and fast standards for ‘good’ judgment. Undoubtedly, your life so far has presented you with many tough situations that required you to exercise your judgment. In that sense, this course is only teaching you something you already know. At the same time, real life often does not provide enough opportunities for reflection on decisions you have already made or actions you have already taken. It is hoped that this course will serve as an extended opportunity for sizing up situations or dilemmas, exercising your judgment about the appropriate action to take, and being able to justify (give reasons for) the actions you select. Through discussions, readings, case examples, and exercises, the class aims to offer you opportunities to reflect on and practice making ethical judgments. Through such practice, you may find yourself less
likely to jump to conclusions in complex situations—or if you do jump to a conclusion, you may be more aware that you are doing just that, and better able to ask yourself whether the conclusion you have jumped to is the right one.

Because the course will not involve you in learning a set of techniques, but rather in practicing a kind of thinking, you may find yourself from time to time feeling confused, cut adrift, or uncomfortable. If you do, rest assured that this is a good sign. Very little real learning or development takes place without some discomfort or confusion. Engaging deeply with the course material will afford many opportunities to clear up confusions and explore questions and issues.

**Required course texts:** (Note extra reading for doctoral students only—marked “D”)

- James H. Jones, *Bad Blood: The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment*
- Henrik Ibsen, *An Enemy of the People*
- Guy B. Adams and Danny L. Balfour, *Unmasking Administrative Evil*
- Rosemary O’Leary, *The Ethics of Dissent*
- (D) Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*

**Readings (on electronic reserve):**

- Alexander, Jennifer, & Sam Richmond, “Can we move beyond the cider house rules?”
- Arendt, Hannah, “Thinking and moral considerations”
- (D) Aristotle, Excerpt from *Nicomachean Ethics*
- Boo, Katherine, “What Mother Teresa could learn in a leather bar”
- The Bybee Torture Memo
- Carter, Phillip, “The road to Abu Ghraib”
- Chandler, Ralph, “The problem of moral reasoning in public administration”
- Dewey, John, “Moral judgment and knowledge” & “The moral self”
- (D) Dostoevsky, “The grand inquisitor,” from *The Brothers Karamazov*
- Finer, Herman, “Administrative responsibility in democratic government”
- Follett, Mary Parker, excerpt from *The New State*
- Friedrich, Carl J., “Public policy and the nature of administrative responsibility”
- Johnson & Kraft, “Bureaucratic whistle-blowing and policy change”
- McSwain, Cynthia and Orion White, “The case for lying, cheating and stealing”
- Stivers, Camilla, “Citizenship ethics in public administration”
- Walzer, Michael, “Political action: The problem of dirty hands”
- Zimmerman, Joseph F., “Ethics in the public service”
Assignments

There are two sets of assignments, one for everyone, and an additional set for doctoral students.

Everyone:

Required reaction paper (4-5 pages, typed double spaced): Prepare a reaction paper to Bad Blood: The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment, in which you address the following questions:

- What is the main ethical issue reflected in the Tuskegee Experiment, as the author presents it? Pick one prominent person involved in the situation and discuss how that person dealt with the ethical issue. State whether you agree or disagree with how that person acted and the basis for your assessment.
- What is the larger significance of this issue for public administration or nonprofit management?

This paper is to be handed in at the beginning of the class on February 16 (or emailed prior to class). No late work will be accepted.

Other reaction papers (4-5 pages, typed double spaced): You will be required to hand in two additional reaction papers during the semester. In each paper you will discuss some issue raised by the reading for a particular class session. If there is more than one reading for a particular night, you should discuss all the readings for that night. The papers will be evaluated based on your demonstration of your understanding of the material for that session and your ability to apply it to a thesis or problem of your choosing. You may select which class session readings to discuss, but in each case the papers are due no later than the beginning of the class under discussion. No late work will be accepted.

Midterm and Final Exams: There will be a midterm and a final exam. Both exams will be take-home exams, consisting of several essay questions requiring you to reflect on course material and/or analyze a case situation. These will be open book exams; you are free to consult any books or articles or class notes, but not any other person.

Additional assignment for doctoral students only:

Doctoral students will present summaries of several additional readings to the class and engage the class in discussion of them. These include Aristotle, Ethics (excerpts), Machiavelli, The Prince, and Dostoevsky, “The grand inquisitor” (excerpt from The Brothers Karamazov). Summary/discussions should take 30-45
minutes of class time. Presenters should strive to summarize the readings accurately, fill in background, prepare questions for discussion that bring out the significance of the readings for public administration, and lead the discussions. All doctoral students should read the additional assignments and participate in planning the presentations/discussions, but the actual presentations and discussion leadership can be split as they wish (approximately equal shares, though).

**Class Schedule**

1/19: Introduction to the course, review of the syllabus.

1/26: The nature of ethical reflection:
Dewey, Moral judgment and knowledge
Arendt, Thinking and moral considerations

2/2: The ethics of rules and codes:
Zimmerman, Ethics in the public service
Chandler, The problem of moral reasoning in public administration
ASPA Code of Ethics

2/9 NO CLASS

2/16: Discussion of Bad Blood
Excerpt: Miss Evers’ Boys (film)
Hand in reaction papers.

2/23: The ethics of decision-making: Professionalism
Ibsen, Enemy of the People
Machiavelli, The Prince (doctoral student summary/discussion)

3/2: The ethics of decision-making: Administrative discretion
Friedrich, Public policy and the nature of administrative responsibility
Finer, Administrative responsibility in democratic government
Film: “Billy Budd”
Midterm exam handed out

3/9: Cider House Rules (film)
Midterm exam due (Hand in at start of class or email before class)

3/16: SPRING BREAK


3/30: “Evil” and public administration:
Adams & Balfour, Unmasking Administrative Evil
Film: “Conspiracy”

4/6: Evil in public administration:
Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib: Carter
The Bybee memo
Film: “The Road to Abu Ghraib”

Dostoevsky, The grand inquisitor (Doctoral student summary/discussion)
Walzer, Political action: The problem of dirty hands
Whistle-blowing: Johnson & Kraft

4/20: Ethics of relationship, continued: Individual and organization
O’Leary, The Ethics of Dissent

4/27: Ethics of relationship, continued: Individual and community
Follett, The New State (excerpt)
Stivers, Citizenship ethics
Boo, Mother Teresa

5/4: Ethics as a practice of the self
Dewey, The moral self
McSwain and White, The case for lying, cheating and stealing

5/11: Final exam due

**Expectations**

Come to class regularly and be on time.
Read the material assigned for each class session.
Participate actively in class discussions and other activities.
Do the written assignments and hand them in on time.

Because the entire course is based on active discussions and the exchange of differing viewpoints, its success depends on your willingness to meet the above expectations.

Late written work: Late work will not be read (and therefore credit will be forfeited) except in case of extreme emergency. If this happens notify the instructor. The way to avoid lateness for other reasons (such as pressures at work or assignments for other classes) is not to wait until the night before to do the assignment. Since you can choose when to hand in all but the first reaction paper, this should not be a hard standard to meet.
Class participation: There’s more to participation than just showing up. Ask questions. Comment on something someone else just said. Participation does not require brilliance, it requires engagement with the material and with the ongoing discussion. Sitting silent for the whole semester will have a negative effect on your grade, not to mention your learning.

Being absent from class, of course, leads to “silence” in class. There is no maximum number of absences permitted, but it will be difficult to get full credit for class participation unless you attend regularly.

You can expect the instructor to be prepared, read your work promptly and return with feedback (generally within one week), be available outside class for consultation and conversation, and be responsive to suggestions and input, both critical and positive.

**Grading**

Your grade for the course will be apportioned as follows:

**Master’s degree students:**
- Reaction papers: 25%
- Mid-term: 25%
- Final: 25%
- Class participation: 25%

**Doctoral students:**
- Reaction papers: 15%
- Mid-term: 25%
- Final: 25%
- Summary/discussions: 25%
- Other class participation: 10%