Outcome: Ethical Perspective: Identify Contemporary Ethical Questions and Relevant Positions

The General Education Faculty Team for the Ethical Perspective developed a set of guidelines to help faculty align their course assignments to the university rubric. They also included samples of assignments.

General Strategies

 Assignments and discussions might facilitate:
  ➢ understanding why people take the value positions that they do
  ➢ use of moral concepts and moral reasoning
  ➢ recognition that some reasons may override other reasons
  ➢ identification of the limits of their own position

 Assignments and discussions might utilize key concepts in moral reasoning:
  ➢ different conceptions about justice
  ➢ different conceptions about freedom
  ➢ trade-offs between liberty and equality
  ➢ moral relativism
  ➢ benefits and harms
  ➢ rights and obligations
  ➢ complexity and interconnectedness of moral problems

 Sample methods for analyzing ethical decisions
  ➢ Try to understand why the participants are doing what they are doing by constructing arguments that would justify their acts or omissions.
  ➢ Determine what goals the participants had and what means they thought would achieve those goals; then determine what goals ought to be achieved and determine what means are best for achieving those goals.
  ➢ Determine what the harms are of various courses of action: to whom would they occur, what kinds are they, and what are their magnitudes?
  ➢ Back off from the case and judge what is best to do: what will minimize harms?
  ➢ Determine how to do what ought to be done in a way that will itself produce more good than harm

* (Wade Robison & Linda Reeser, Ethical Decision-Making in Social Work)

Suggested Pedagogical Approaches

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<th>Instructional Approach</th>
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<td>Use ethical concepts from the news</td>
<td>Is it ever acceptable to shoot another person in the back? If so, when do you think it would be appropriate and if not, why not?</td>
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<td>Analyze Case Studies</td>
<td>General motors and ignition switches</td>
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<td>Facilitate Debates</td>
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France has instituted a ban on full-covering veils in public places. This has been a controversial law. Write a 3-part essay evaluating what we read and discussed about this ban.

1. Martha Nussbaum argued against the so-called ‘burka ban.’ Summarize and evaluate her best argument.
2. Summarize and evaluate Feisal Mohamed’s main argument defending the ban.
3. Finally, state your own view and defend it against a good objection. Your argument should bring up a central issue, such as religious freedom, political equality, or cultural tolerance (or some other issue) and explain how it is relevant to this ban.

Assignment Samples

The following samples give students guidance to respond to all of the levels of the rubric

A. Example from a Philosophy Course

France has instituted a ban on full-covering veils in public places. This has been a controversial law. Write a 3-part essay evaluating what we read and discussed about this ban.

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B. Example from a Critical Thinking Course

1. First, explain why ethical reasoning is fundamental to the policy decisions which must be made regarding climate change
2. Then pick two of the possible value commitments in the following list. For each of those two, describe a climate policy priority which would follow from that value commitment. Justify why that policy is the one that best addresses the given value commitment.
   - Keeping immediate economic costs low and reducing the risk of economic recession
   - Maintaining the well-being of the non-human world
   - Leaving a world for future generations with the same level of threat from weather and climate harms as the world you were born into
   - Minimizing the risks of abrupt change, whether that is environmental, economic, or cultural change
   - Addressing the current needs of the least well-off
3. Finally, say something about which of the commitments in this list you take to be the strongest moral obligation and justify why you value it.

C. Example from a Business Course

1. After reading the case, identify ethical issue(s) that it raises. What is the main issue or issues? Often, an issue arises when there is some sort of necessary trade-off between legitimate interests of various stakeholders (e.g., owners’ interest in profit vs. employees’ interest in higher wages vs. customers’ interest in lower prices).
2. For each issue, select a course(s) of action that will address it. What steps should the actors take to best resolve the issue? Often there is no “perfect” solution; sometimes, there are not even any truly satisfactory solutions. Regardless, what is the best solution given the circumstances?
3. Defend the action(s) based on an appropriate framework. Sometimes, the proposed action may be defended by one or more moral philosophical frameworks (e.g., egoism, utilitarianism) – but remember, every ethical framework has its flaws, and those flaws need to be addressed. So, for example, you should not merely say, “I advocate for course of action X because X is suggested by utilitarianism.” You must also address the weaknesses of utilitarianism as they pertain to your proposed course of action.
The 4-minute video How Wolves Change Rivers (an excerpt of a TED Talk by the English writer and environmental activist George Monbiot) generated more than 1 million hits on YouTube within a week of being posted in February 2014 and has now received over 3.6 million views. Several major news outlets and nonprofit websites have provided positive coverage of this internet sensation, including The Guardian and National Geographic:

- [http://newswatch.nationalgeographic.com/2014/02/16/this-will-shatter-your-view-of-apex-predators-how-wolves-change-rivers/](http://newswatch.nationalgeographic.com/2014/02/16/this-will-shatter-your-view-of-apex-predators-how-wolves-change-rivers/)

The video explores the ecological concept of the “trophic cascade” by examining a series of changes apparently brought about by the 1995 initiative to restore wolves to Yellowstone National Park, especially regarding the relationships between predatory wolves and elk (described in the video as “deer”). However, ecologist Arthur Middleton, who recently co-won a $100,000 prize for his research on how ecological changes in Yellowstone are impacting migratory elk herds, challenges the view that wolves “fixed a broken Yellowstone by killing and frightening elk” in the following editorial:

“Is the Wolf a Real American Hero?” New York Times, 9 March 2014,

- [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/10/opinion/is-the-wolf-a-real-american-hero.html?_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/10/opinion/is-the-wolf-a-real-american-hero.html?_r=0)

The purpose of this assignment is to explore these sharply contrasting views in a bit more detail. Start by viewing the YouTube video, as well as the more detailed (56-minute) National Geographic film Predators: Strange Days on Planet Earth. Read the three short essays in the above links, and then answer the following questions:

1. What is your personal response to How Wolves Change Rivers, and why do you think that the video has received so much positive attention? Feel free to support your view by quoting from public comments posted to YouTube and other media sites providing links to the video. (150-200 words; 30%)

2. How does the National Geographic film Predators compare and/or contrast to How Wolves Change Rivers in terms of its presentation of ecological relationships between predators and prey, especially in Yellowstone? (150-200 words; 30%)

3. What do you consider to be the most thought-provoking comment(s) of Arthur Middleton and why, and how do you respond to his argument that scientists and environmental groups who promote the message of How Wolves Change Rivers risk their credibility and undermine public confidence in their policy recommendations? (200-300 words; 40%)

The following samples provide the opportunity for students to address all levels of the rubric without explicit guidance:

A. **Examples from Research Ethics –**

- Is it wrong for medical researchers, psychologists, and social scientists to use deception in their research methods? Provide an example to illustrate. Would it change your view if research subjects do not realize they are being deceived? Why or why not?

- Describe a case where someone might argue that there should be a moratorium on research. Explain why, for that case, someone would think that scientific research should be halted. Do you agree that this explanation justifies the moratorium? Why or why not?