

Bergen Community College
Division of Humanities
Department of Philosophy and Religion
Course Master Syllabus

PHR 102 Contemporary Moral Issues

Basic Information About Course and Instructor

Semester and year:

Section Number:

Meeting Times:

Locations:

Instructor Name:

Office Location:

Phone:

Office Hours:

Email Address:

Departmental Secretary: Shailly Mahajan, A-328A, 201-879-3606

Course Description

PHR-102 Contemporary Moral Issues is an introduction to applied or practical ethics. This involves discussions of specific moral problems, issues, controversies, and questions. Topics may include abortion; euthanasia; the death penalty and other punishments; sexual morality; pornography and censorship; discrimination on the basis of race, gender, or sexual orientation; drugs; environmental ethics; the moral status of animals; and the meaning of virtue and vice.

Credits: 3 (3 lectures)

Prerequisites: None

Corequisites: None

General Education Humanities Course

Student Learning Outcomes

As a result of meeting the requirements in this course, students will be able to:

Student Learning Outcome:	Means of Assessment:
1. Accurately summarize, and paraphrase the views of philosophers whose opinions on the nature of morality, or specific moral issues, were studied.	Examinations or quizzes Critical summary essay Argument analysis essay Argument regimentation/reconstruction Compare and contrast essays
2. Locate, evaluate, and integrate information from diverse sources to support ethical analyses.	Research project utilizing the Philosopher's Index or other scholarly search engines of peer-reviewed sources.
3. Construct and defend their own coherent, well-supported ethical views in clear, concise language.	Reflection essays Philosophy in the Wild project
4. Use logical and critical thinking skills to evaluate philosophical arguments, applying these approaches to contemporary moral dilemmas.	In-class debate Argument analysis essay Critical summary essay
5. Participate actively in discussions by listening to, analyzing, and thoughtfully engaging with philosophical ideas and diverse perspectives on moral issues.	Structured debate Guided discussions

Essential Learning Outcomes

	EL1	EL 2	EL 3	EL 4	EL 5	EL 6	EL 7	EL 8	EL 9	EL10	EL 11
SLO 1		X					X	X	X	X	X
SLO 2		X				X			X		X
SLO 3		X							X		X
SLO 4		X					X		X		X
SLO 5	X						X				X

EL1-Effective Speaking
 EL2-Effective Writing
 EL3-Mathematical Reasoning
 EL4-Scientific Reasoning
 EL5-Technological Competency
 EL6-Information Literacy

EL7-Social-Behavioral Analysis
 EL8-Historical Analysis
 EL9-Humanistic Analysis
 EL10-Intercultural Awareness
 EL11-Moral Literacy

*In accordance with the *Standards for General Education Courses at Bergen Community College* (2013), all Gen Ed courses are required to address EL1, EL2, EL6, and EL11 (when appropriate), in addition to the ELO that corresponds to its area of study (EL 3-5 and 7-9).

Signature Assignment:

The following assignment should be taught at least once in all sections.

Critical Summary Essay

The critical summary is a substantial and focused 3-page essay, written in MLA style, about a specific philosophical argument in an assigned reading. The first two parts of this project are *analysis* and the third part is *evaluation*:

1. **Identify and “unpack” some specific supported claim made in the text—this is the**

conclusion of some argument in the reading. Students should briefly explain its meaning through key terms or useful background information, and its importance by how it relates to the rest of the text, or this course, or the philosophical subject matter generally. They must correctly quote and cite the text, but quotations should not be more than 20% of the text.

2. **Explain the support for the conclusion—the premises of the argument.** These could be examples or analogies, common knowledge or special assumptions, definitions, rules of science or logic, even ethical principles or moral theories—anything the author relies on in supporting their claim. (Usually, the author is explicit about this, but sometimes arguments contain important unstated assumptions). Quotes are required in this part of the essay; however, quotes should not be more than 20% of the text, you do have to write on your own here.
3. **Evaluate the argument.** Students should explain why we ought to accept or reject the argument. Students might explain why this is a good philosophical argument, why any reader ought to be convinced by it. They might also defend the argument against a potential objection. If the student thinks we should reject it, they need to explain what's wrong with the argument (which *cannot* be that you just disagree with the conclusion); i.e., they need to explain why *any reader* ought to reject the argument. Quotes are not required here. This is where the student's ideas belong.

Course Content:

PHR-102 is designed to introduce students to applied ethics. As such it should focus on philosophical examinations of moral issues, and less on normative ethical theories. Although the specific topics are left to the discretion of the instructor, a typical course will cover such issues as abortion, euthanasia, genetic engineering, surrogate motherhood, the death penalty, animal rights, sexual morality, racial and sexual discrimination, terrorism, cloning, etc.

Original source material by moral philosophers, both classical and contemporary, should be read, including a review of divergent views on at least three moral issues. There should be considerable review of the topics, problems and methods of ethics or moral philosophy.

Students are required to see how at least two of the following moral theories are applied to specific moral questions: virtue ethics, Kantian deontology, utilitarianism and care ethics.

This course may examine other philosophical issues as they relate to social and political philosophy, for example metaphysical questions about personhood, or economic problems, but should contain no more than 20% of these issues, as they may overlap with PHR-101

Introduction to Philosophy and PHR-111 Social and Political Philosophy.

Course Texts or Other Study Materials:

Students in PHR-102 Contemporary Moral Issues must read mostly primary texts. Instructors may also require inexpensive copies of primary texts from the history of moral philosophy, e.g., the Hackett edition of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Instructors may also choose Open Educational Resources (OER) for their courses, to keep student costs minimal. However, instructors should be selective about OER readings, which can sometimes contain dated or inferior translations or excerpts. There are excellent textbook anthologies of primary readings. The following textbooks come recommended by the Department of Philosophy and Religion:

- Lewis Vaughn, editor. *Doing Ethics*. WW Norton and Company, 7th edition 2024.
- Mark Timmons, editor. *Disputed Moral Issues: A Reader*. Oxford University Press, 6th edition 2024.

Research, Writing, and/or Examination Requirement(s):

As a 'General Education Humanities' course, PHR 102 requires students to complete a variety of critical thinking, writing and speaking assignments. It also may require students to employ techniques of scholarly research in some assignments, which may include class discussions and debates requiring the application of critical thinking skills, short in-class essays, out-of-class writing projects (journals, research papers, argument-analysis papers, book reviews, etc.), tests and examinations containing essay components, and so forth. Instructors will respond to, or comment on, student writing in detail.

Grading Policy:

A student's final grade for the course is based primarily on performance on the required work for the course (writing assignments, examinations, class presentations, etc.) and on overall mastery of the material covered in the course. A student's class participation may also be evaluated, and the grade may be used as a factor in determining the student's final grade for the course; but a class participation grade will count for no more than twenty percent (20%) of the final grade. A student's research and writing work will count at least fifty percent (50%) of the final grade.

Philosophy and Religion Departmental Attendance Policy:

All students are expected to attend on time every scheduled meeting of each course in which they are registered. Attendance, lateness policies and sanctions are to be determined by the instructor for each section of each course. These will be established in writing on the individual course outline. Attendance will be kept by the instructor for administrative and counseling purposes. A reasonable makeup policy is left to the instructor's discretion, but good excuses, serious and documented, should be accepted. Make-ups for examinations should be allowed by the instructor if, in the instructor's judgment, the student has presented a good excuse for missing the work. Instructors may penalize work which is late; however, the instructor's policies for make-ups and late work must be clearly specified on the student guide.

Statement on the BCC Philosophy Club:

The Philosophy Club has functioned continuously since the late 1980's. It usually meets on Tuesdays during the Activities Period, 12:30-1:25 PM, but sometimes also on different days and at different times. Students are encouraged to join the club. For further information, contact the Office of Student Life, who can provide contacts for the current club executive board and faculty advisor.

Other College, Divisional, and/or Departmental Policy Statements:

Statement on plagiarism and/or academic dishonesty:

[Academic Matters - Bergen Community College - Acalog ACMSTTM](#)

Statement on the appropriate use of AI (see the following link for guidance):

[AI-Guidance-Resource-Page.pdf \(bergen.edu\)](#)

ADA statement:

[Disability Services \(Office of Specialized Services\) | Bergen Community College](#)

Sexual Harassment statement:

[HR-003-001.2018-Policy-Prohibiting-Sexual-Harassment.pdf \(bergen.edu\)](#)

Statement on acceptable use of BCC technology:

[Acceptable-Use-Policy.pdf \(bergen.edu\)](#)

Recommended Syllabus Statements from the Office of Specialized Services:

[Syllabus Statements | Bergen Community College](#)

Statement on the purpose and value of faculty office hours.

Accessibility Statement

Bergen Community College is committed to ensuring the full participation of all students in its programs. If you have a documented disability (or think you may have a disability) and, as a result, need a reasonable accommodation to participate in this class, complete course requirements, or benefit from the College's programs or services, contact the Office of Special Services (OSS) as soon as possible at 201-612-5270 or www.bergen.edu/oss. To receive any academic accommodation, you must be appropriately registered with OSS. The OSS works with students confidentially and does not disclose any disability-related information without their permission. The OSS serves as a clearinghouse on disability issues and works in partnership with faculty and all other student service offices.

Student Support Services

Bergen Community College provides exemplary support to its students and offers a broad variety of opportunities and services. A comprehensive array of student support services including advising, tutoring, academic coaching, and more are available online at <https://bergen.edu/currentstudents/>.



Sidney Silverman Library Online Resources:

[Guides BY SUBJECT - LibGuides at Bergen Community College](#)

General Search and Databases: [Library | Bergen Community College](#)

Sample Course Schedule:

This sample version of PHR-102 is topically organized into distinct learning modules. The structure of modules is an opening discussion with a reflective in-class essay, followed by readings in philosophy, an in-class debate and then an exam, considered summative for the module. The final module is the critical summary project.

Week	Topic/Activity/Assignments
1	Module 1: Moral Principles and Moral Theories <u>Required Reading:</u> Timmons "What is a moral theory" and "Dealing with many moral theories" <u>Assessments:</u> In-class reflective writing: case study on the Donner party Canvas quiz on each assigned reading
2-6	Module 2: The Ethical Treatment of Animals <u>Required Reading:</u> Mill: Utilitarianism Singer <i>All Animals are Equal</i> Norcross <i>Puppies, Pigs and People</i>

	<p>Bruckner <i>The Vegan's Dilemma</i> Kant: "The Moral Law" from <i>Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> Timmons: Deontological Moral Theories Gruen <i>Experimenting with Animals</i> Kitcher <i>Experimental Animals</i></p> <p><u>Assessments:</u></p> <p>In-class reflective writing: Case study--Should we exterminate vampire bats? Canvas quiz on each assigned reading Stand Where you Stand (class debate) Exam 2, multiple choice and short essays</p>
7-10	<p>Module 3: Sexual Ethics</p> <p><u>Required Reading:</u></p> <p>Aquinas: <i>Treatise on Law</i> Timmons: Natural Law Theories Finnis <i>Law, Morality and Sexual Orientation</i> Corvino: <i>What's Wrong with Homosexuality?</i> Chadha: Sex and Consent West: <i>The Harms of Consensual Sex</i> McGregor <i>What is the Harm of Rape?</i></p> <p><u>Assessments:</u></p> <p>In-class reflective writing: Should America care about income inequality? Canvas quiz on each assigned reading Stand Where you Stand (class debate) Exam 3, multiple choice and short essays</p>
11-14	<p>Module 4: Free Speech</p> <p><u>Required Reading</u></p> <p>Mill: <i>On Liberty</i> Altman: Speech Codes and Expressive Harm Aristotle: <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> Timmons: Virtue Ethics Lukianoff and Haidt: <i>The Coddling of the American Mind</i> Kate Manne: <i>Why I use Trigger Warnings</i></p> <p><u>Assessments</u></p>
15	<p>Module 5: Critical Summary</p> <p><u>Required Reading:</u></p> <p>None, students should pick a text to work on, providing this to instructors. Peer review in class</p> <p><u>Assessments:</u></p> <p>Critical Summary Project (out of class writing)</p>

*All readings are from Timmons, *Disputed Moral Issues*

Note to Students: This course outline and calendar is tentative and subject to change, depending upon the progress of the class.