University of North Texas

Ethics and Society
PHIL 1400
Fall 2026

INSTRUCTOR:
Kumari Neelu (she/her)
Neelu.KumariNeelu@unt.edu
Office Hours: By Appointment Only
Office Location: ENV 375J

CLASS SCHEDULE:

PHIL 1400.007 Tue-Thurs 12:45 PM to 2:05 PM, Lang 316
Location **on the map**
PHIL 1400.008 Tue-Thurs 2:20PM to 3:40 PM, Wh 315
Location on the map

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The Ethics and Society course is designed to introduce students to several philosophical approaches to the question of how we should live in society and how societies must be organized. It examines several approaches to morality such as moral relativism, consequentialism, social contract theory, Kantian ethics, virtue ethics, and care ethics. Throughout the course, we will deal with a central question: What do we owe one another and why? All of these approaches are applied to a variety of issues that arise in everyday life, including virtue, action, justice, protest, gender, race, religion, technology, and social media. The course emphasizes careful reading and thoughtful discussion. The classroom decorum requires mutual respect, intellectual openness, constructive disagreement, and the development of well-supported moral judgments.

COURSE OUTCOMES:

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Describe major ethical theories and their central concepts.
- Explain and evaluate the arguments associated with major ethical theories.
- Distinguish moral claims from factual claims, preferences, emotions, and social conventions.
- Apply ethical theories to contemporary social and political issues.
- Develop clear, defensible philosophical arguments in writing and discussion.

Required materials: There are no required textbooks for this course. All required readings will be provided via Canvas.

Recommended texts: Rachels, James, and Stuart Rachels. *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*. 9th ed., McGraw-Hill Education, 2019

Vaughn, Lewis. *Doing Ethics: Moral Reasoning, Theory, and Contemporary Issues*. 6th ed. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2021.

GRADE ASSESSMENT:

Your Performance in the Ethics and Society course will be assessed through the following components, each contributing to your final grade as follows:

Attendance (12.5%): Attendance is mandatory in this class and will be marked every class session. An attendance sheet will be circulated during each class meeting, and students are responsible for initialing next to their own names to be marked present. Absences are generally treated equally; there is no distinction between "excused" and "unexcused" absences, and documentation is not required except for university-approved absences. Documented university-excused absences will be handled in accordance with university policy. Students who arrive significantly late or leave significantly early may be marked absent at the instructor's discretion. Students who miss more than 12.5% of class meetings are not eligible to earn an A in the course. Signing in for another student or allowing another student to sign in on one's behalf, constitutes academic dishonesty. Any student involved in attendance fraud will receive a zero for the semester participation grade, which is worth 12.5% of the final course grade. If you are having a family emergency or feeling sick, please contact me as soon as possible.

Class Participation (12.5%): This course depends on active engagement with the texts and with one another. In this course, participation does not mean having the "right" answer or speaking frequently; rather, it involves demonstrating preparedness, attentiveness, and thoughtful engagement with your course materials. Quality of contribution is key!

Quizzes (25%): There will be Five quizzes on Canvas. None of the quizzes is meant to be exhaustive; rather, they are meant to ensure that students are keeping pace with the course and doing the assigned readings. Quizzes are multiple choice and true/false questions taken directly from the readings.

Assignments (Midterm and Final Papers– 50%): You will write two papers for this course, each worth 25% of your overall course grade. We will discuss each paper's topic, writing tips, and expected format in class closer to the respective due dates.

Grade Breakdown

Attendance	12.5%
Class Participation	12.5%
Quizzes	25%
Midterm Essay/Project	25%
Final Paper	25%

Total	**100%**

Grading Scale

A	90 - 100%
B	80 – 89%
C	70 – 79%
D	60 – 69%
F	0 – 59%

Late Assignment Policy: Late assignments are (*generally*) **not** accepted except in *rare* cases where you've spoken with me well in *advance* of the due date. I am happy to extend deadlines (within reason) for those who have a legitimate reason for needing an extension. If you expect that you will struggle to meet the deadline for any coursework, please contact me *in advance* (i.e., more than 24 hours beforehand!) to arrange possible alternative deadlines. In the case of emergencies, please communicate with me. If you expect that you may need to take an incomplete grade, please contact me ahead of the last week of the semester.

EXTRA CREDIT: There are two (2) guaranteed extra credit opportunities.

#1. Completing the optional syllabus quiz (on Canvas). See course schedule for due date/time.

#2. Completing the SPOT (CTE) at the end of the semester. More details will be provided towards the end of the semester. Each opportunity is worth .5 percentage points, totaling a potential 1 percentage point increase towards your final course grade.

Additional extra-credit opportunities may be offered at the instructor's discretion.

Additional Support: If you are struggling with anything at all during the semester, please communicate with me. I have appointment-based office hours. To do well in this class, you need to keep up with class readings, be an effective teammate in your group discussions, and not only be physically present in class but come to class willing to engage with course materials and peers. If you need individualized help to improve writing skills, UNT's Writing Center offers free tutoring to help students with structure, grammar, punctuation, citation styles and paper outlines. Students who consistently struggle to achieve desired grades on written assignments are advised to take advantage of this service which is included with tuition. Interested students should email writingcenter@unt.edu, call 940-565-2563, or stop by Sage Hall 150 to schedule an appointment.

Reaching Me: Course announcements and updates will be posted on Canvas. If you have a question, please check the syllabus and Canvas first (chances are the answer is already there). If you still need to reach out, the best way to contact me is through Canvas Message rather than Outlook/Student e-mail. I do my best to respond within 48 hours Monday through Friday. Messages about information already listed in this syllabus or on Canvas may not receive a reply.

When you message me on Canvas, include:

- The time our class meets in the subject line and your course section. (e.g., PHIL 1400 and the [Section #]).
- Include: Your full name and clear question in the message body.

Course Content and Sensitive Topics: The readings we do and the topics we discuss in this class might be upsetting/triggering at times. Please let me know if you find a particular topic especially difficult and you feel that you cannot be in class or complete the reading for that week.

The class schedule is subject to change *as needed throughout the semester. Students will be notified accordingly if/when the schedule changes. You are responsible for keeping up with adjustments to the course schedule, assignments, or policies as communicated by the instructor.*

Emergency Communications: UNT utilizes a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students of critical information in the event of an emergency, such as severe weather, campus closures, and health and public safety emergencies (e.g., chemical spills, fires, or violence). In the event of a university closure, please refer to Canvas for contingency plans for covering course materials. If Canvas is unavailable during the emergency, please contact me via email for more information.

Academic Integrity: A primary goal of this course is to develop the ability to think critically and independently. To do so, I expect you to generate your ideas, views, and critiques of our reading materials. Thus, **the use of generative AI or AI assisted writing tools on an assignment may result in a zero, at the instructor's discretion**. AI includes any and all platforms like ChatGPT, Grammarly, etc. Keep in mind that written assignments are checked through Canvas's Turnitin feature. Given the possibility of false positives, I strongly recommend maintaining a record of your drafting process, such as through Google Docs, which tracks "version history." If you are unsure what constitutes academic dishonesty, please refer to the University of North Texas (UNT) guidelines on academic dishonesty. https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003

Acceptable Student Behavior: Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in inappropriate behavior will be directed to leave the classroom, and the instructor may refer the student to the Dean of Students for consideration of whether the student's conduct has violated the Code of Student Conduct. The university's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including university classrooms, electronic classrooms, labs, discussion groups, and field trips. The Code of Student Conduct can be found on the University of North Texas (UNT) webpage.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities (ODA Statement):
The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodations for students with disabilities. Students seeking reasonable accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with a reasonable accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request reasonable accommodations at any time; however, ODA notices of reasonable accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of reasonable accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member before implementation in each class. Students are strongly

encouraged to deliver letters of reasonable accommodation during faculty office hours or by appointment. Faculty members have the authority to ask students to discuss such letters during designated office hours to protect the student's privacy. For additional information, refer to the Office of Disability **Access** website (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access/index.html). You may also contact ODA by phone at (940) 565-4323.

Retention of Student Records: Student records concerning this course are maintained in a secure location by the instructor of record. All records, including exams, answer sheets (with keys), and written papers, submitted during the course are retained for at least one calendar year after course completion. Coursework completed via the Canvas online system, including grading information and comments, is also stored in a safe electronic environment for one year. You have a right to view your individual record; however, information about your records will not be divulged to other individuals without the proper written consent. You are encouraged to review the Public Information Policy and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) laws, as well as the university's policy, which can be found on the university website according to these mandates.

Succeed at UNT: The University of North Texas (UNT) strives to provide you with a high-quality education and a supportive environment that fosters your academic growth and development. As a faculty member, I am dedicated to supporting your academic success. How to succeed at UNT. Show up. Find Support. Get advised. Be prepared. Get involved. Stay focused. To learn more about the campus resources and information on how you can achieve success, go to the UNT Success webpage.

Student Evaluation of Teaching: Student feedback is an important component for any course. The Student Evaluation of Teaching (SETE) is a requirement for all organized classes at the University of North Texas (UNT). This short survey will be made available at the end of the semester, providing you with an opportunity to evaluate how this course is taught.

Important University Dates: https://registrar.unt.edu/sites/default/files/fall-2026-academic-calendar.pdf

UNT Academic Dishonesty:
https://policy.unt.edu/sites/policy.unt.edu/files/06.003%20Student%20Academic%20Integrity.pdf