

PHIL 3109 Syllabus

Engineering Ethics, Section RR

Fall 2026

Instructor Information

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General Course Information

Description

Engineering requires technical skills but also involves something quite different: the ability to think hard about what these skills should be used for, and why. In this course, we will explore the ethical dimensions of professional work in engineering, not as a mechanical exercise in applying pre-existing philosophical frameworks, but as a way of developing the kind of judgment that difficult decisions require. There have been many memorable disasters in the history of engineering (the Challenger explosion, the Exxon spill) that illustrate the importance of ethical thinking. But ethical questions in engineering are not confined to catastrophes. They arise in everyday choices about safety, transparency, and accountability. Thinking hard about these choices is essential for public trust in the technologies that engineers produce.

Mode of Instruction: Lectures Monday and Wednesday 6:00-6:50 PM in DM Smith 115; *required* Friday discussion sections at the following times and places:

- R01: Friday 12:30-1:20 PM in Skiles 317
- R02: Friday 12:30-1:20 AM in Skiles 269
- R03: Friday 11:00-11:50 AM in Skiles 311
- R04: Friday 2:00-2:50 PM in Clough 123
- R05: Friday 2:00-2:50 PM in Skiles 308
- R06: Friday 2:00-2:50 PM in Skiles 269

Course Learning Outcomes

After this course, you should be able to be able to reason carefully about what it means to be a responsible engineer and apply ethical frameworks to real professional situations. In particular, you should be able to:

- Analyze and assess ethical arguments
- Use ethical frameworks to make judgments about problem cases in engineering contexts
- Identify and weigh competing values and stakeholder perspectives in engineering decisions
- Articulate your position on the responsibilities relevant to your profession

Core IMPACTS

Core IMPACTS: Humanities

This course should direct students toward a broad *Orienting Question*:

- How do I interpret the human experience through creative, linguistic, and philosophical works?

Completion of this course should enable students to meet the following *Learning Outcome*:

- Students will effectively analyze and interpret the meaning, cultural significance, and ethical implications of literary/philosophical texts or of works in the visual/performing arts.

Course content, activities and exercises in this course should help student develop the following *Career-Ready Competencies*:

- Ethical Reasoning
- Informational Literacy
- Intercultural Competence

Ethics Requirement

Students should come away with:

- An ability to recognize ethical and professional responsibilities in real-world contexts.
- An ability to assess actions or decisions based on established ethical principles and theories, or through deliberative processes.
- An ability to consider the implications of actions, both broadly (e.g., global, economic, environmental, or societal) and for individuals.

Required Course Materials

You will need to buy one textbook for this course, available through the Georgia Tech Bookstore: Harris, et al., *Engineering Ethics: Concepts and Cases* (6th ed.), ISBN: 9781337670746. You can purchase the book as either an Ebook or paperback. I will also assign supplemental readings, which will be available to you on Canvas.

Website

We will use Canvas to organize the course. All readings and assignments will be organized for you in the “Modules” tab. Scroll down to the appropriate date to find all of the assignments and any supplemental readings for that class.

Grading Policy:

All grading will be done by the Teaching Assistants, with the guidance and supervision of the Instructor.

Final grades will be determined by the following scale:

- A > 90% Excellent
- B 80-90% Above Average
- C 70-79% Average
- D 60-69% Below Average
- F < 59% Unacceptable

Assignments

- Participation = 10%
- Reflections (10 total, 2% each) = 20%
- Short essays (5 essays total, lowest dropped, making 4 essays at 5% each) = 20%
- Exam 1 = 25%
- Exam 2 = 25%

Description of Work

Readings should be completed before class. Make sure to give yourself plenty of time to read the texts, ideally twice. I strongly suggest taking notes to help you remember key points, questions you had, or connections that you made to events or cases outside of class.

Participation is essential to both the lecture and discussion portions of the class. Part of developing a moral imagination and learning how to make your own ethical judgments is listening to others share perspectives that you hadn't considered. This means that you should be prepared to speak about your questions or reflections and may be called on directly. Participation will be measured by Teaching Assistants, who will keep track of students who speak in class. Students will be graded on the following scheme: excellent (3), satisfactory (2), unsatisfactory (1), or absent (0). Excellent scores are achieved by consistently raising questions that contribute to the discussion and responding to others' points. Speaking in most sessions is satisfactory. Rarely speaking—once or twice during the semester—is unsatisfactory. If you never participate in discussion sections, you will receive a 0. Since participation counts for 10% of your grade, a score of 0 will have significant impact on your final grade.

Reflections are short writing assignments that will be due on Canvas before the lecture. The purpose of reflections is both to improve the lectures and to encourage you to engage with the readings before class. You can choose which readings you want to write reflections for, but you must write 10 total reflections on separate readings for full credit. In your reflections, you can ask a question, explain an insight that you found helpful from the text, or identify a problem with an argument or claim. These should be 3-5 sentences. They are graded as sufficient (2), complete (1), or incomplete (0). Fulfilling the assignment gets you a point, but the extra point is earned with good support for your questions or claims from the texts or examples.

Short essays are 2-3 page essays in which you will explain or compare ethical frameworks or ethically assess a scenario. I will give you a choice of 3 questions to write about. These are graded as excellent (A), good (B), sufficient (C), insufficient (D), or incomplete (0). An excellent essay is thoughtful and creative. It makes connections beyond what has been explicitly discussed in class. A good essay reflects the course materials accurately and expresses an understanding of the texts and course discussions. A sufficient essay answers the question but it is missing critical engagement or lacks an accurate understanding of the course material. An insufficient essay fails to understand or answer the question. I'll put a grading rubric on Canvas and discuss essay expectations in class.

Exams will consist of 10 multiple choice questions and 5 short answer questions. The short answer portion will ask straightforward questions about concepts in the readings or to use a concept to respond to a scenario.

Course Policies

Attendance

Attendance is required. However, attendance as such is not recorded beyond participation notes.

Academic Integrity

Georgia Tech aims to cultivate a community based on trust, academic integrity, and honor. Students are expected to act according to the highest ethical standards. Review [Georgia Tech's Honor Code](#) and the student [Code of Conduct](#).

Any student suspected of cheating or plagiarism on a quiz, exam, or assignment will be reported to the Office of Student Integrity, who will investigate the incident and identify the appropriate penalty for violations.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with learning needs that require special accommodation, [contact the Office of Disability Services](#) (404-894-2563) as soon as possible to make an appointment to discuss your special needs and to obtain an accommodations letter. Please also e-mail me as soon as possible in order to set up a time to discuss your learning needs.

Student-Faculty Expectations Agreement

At Georgia Tech, we believe that it is important to strive for an atmosphere of mutual respect, acknowledgement, and responsibility between faculty members and the student body. [The Student-Faculty Expectations](#) articulate some basic expectations that you can have of me and that I have of you. In the end, simple respect for knowledge, hard work, and cordial interactions will help build the environment we seek. Therefore, I encourage you to remain committed to the ideals of Georgia Tech while in this class.

Policy on Generative AI

There is no need to use generative AI in this course. The only assignments that are done at home are reflections and short essays. Reflections help me fill in gaps or emphasize areas that students care about. Short essays ask you to practice developing your own judgments about ethical problems. Using generative AI would defeat these purposes. For this reason, use of AI will be treated as integrity violations.

Extensions, Late Assignments, & Re-Scheduled/Missed Exams

Extensions and makeup work will only be given for approved institute activities, documented medical emergencies or illnesses, and religious observances. Students who

participate in approved institute activities should get statements from the Office of the Registrar as soon as possible. Students are responsible for contacting the Office of the Dean of Students about medical emergencies or illnesses as soon as possible. Absence due to religious observances should be communicated with me within the first two weeks of class. I will then contact you to discuss deadlines and make-up requirements. These processes help you communicate your needs with me and help me be consistent and fair for all students in the class.

Student Use of Mobile Devices in the Classroom

Please do not use mobile devices during class. It's not only disrespectful, but it also distracts you, your classmates, and me.