

## PUBP 8833: Ethics & Public Policy

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Course Time: W 3:30-6:15  
Course Location: D.M. Smith 002  
Office Hours: TBD

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### **Course Description:**

Public policies are often proposed and implemented for the purpose of improving the human condition. Proponents of policy interventions might hope to promote human welfare; to increase liberty or freedom; to advance justice or equality, or to protect democracy. But these high-level values – welfare, liberty, justice, equality, democracy, and others – are contested and admit of different interpretations. We might all agree that “improving the human condition” is a good thing – and that the values of welfare, liberty, justice, equality, and democracy should be promoted. But there are rational disagreements about what these values really mean. Philosophers, political theorists, and others have been examining and debating these values, and their different interpretations, for centuries. The premise of this course is these debates matter – not just for academic philosophy, but for public policy. We will examine some of the main interpretations of these values, and the various arguments that have been provided for and against them. And we will consider how these different interpretations relate to public policy. The aim of this course is not to promote any particular conception of any of these values – e.g., to identify the “one true theory of justice” – but rather to help students understand their different interpretations and how they relate to public policy, especially public policies that of special interest to them.

**Texts:** PDF posted on Canvas and Perusall

### **Learning Objectives:**

- **Ethical Awareness:** This course should help to cultivate your awareness of the philosophical dimensions of public policy, especially those relating to moral and political theory.
- **Ethical Knowledge:** This course should help you to develop and deepen your knowledge of important ethical and political theories, frameworks, and concepts – including welfare, liberty, justice, fairness, rights, democracy, and others.
- **Ethical Reasoning & Critical Thinking:** This course should help you to reason and thinking critically about the ethical aspects of contemporary public policy problems.
- **Communication:** This course should improve your ability to communicate, both orally and in writing, in a way that is clear, precise, and supported with reasons. You should improve your ability to do this even if the issues in question are controversial and subject to disagreement.

**Course Format:** The format of this course will be discussion based. We will spend most class sessions in small or large group discussions; I will lecture only as needed. Students will also conduct research projects, which they will present in class. Attendance at all sessions is required.

**Course Requirements:**

Perusall Reading Assignments	25%
Quizzes	30%
In-Class Small-Group Assignments	10%
Final Project	35%

**Grade Scale:**

[90, 100]	A
[80, 90)	B
[70, 80)	C
[60, 70)	D
[0, 60)	F

This should be obvious, but I will not accept work after the semester ends. When the semester has finished, if you are unhappy with your grade, please do not contact me asking to additional work that could change your grade. The answer will be no.

For those who take the class **pass/fail**: in order to receive a grade of “satisfactory,” you must receive a grade of 70% or higher.

**Reading Assignments (Perusall):** Students will be required to read some assigned texts through Perusall, an AI-based learning platform that facilitates good reading practices and collaborative activity. Perusall allows you to comment on texts, pose questions that other students can read, respond to questions and comments, and more. It also assigns you a score for each reading assignment based on the extent of your comments and interactions. Part of your course grade will be calculated from these scores.

**Quizzes:** There will be several short quizzes given over the course of the semester. Each quiz will consist of 2-4 short-answer questions covering material from the readings, lectures, or class discussions. Quizzes will be given at the beginning of class and will last approximately 15 minutes. Please bring paper and a pen for the quizzes.

**In-Class Discussion Assignments:** I will regularly divide students into small groups and ask them to discuss questions that I provide. Following these small-group discussions, I may ask students to report to the rest of the class on how they answered each question. Students will receive credit for successfully completing these assignments. I do not grade them stringently; you will receive full credit if I judge that you have taken the assignment seriously and put full effort into it.

**Final Project:** Students will conduct a research project that examines how different interpretations of fundamental normative values – such as welfare, liberty, justice, equality, and democracy – relate to a public policy issue of their choosing. The primary deliverables for this project are an in-class presentation and a paper. Further details about the project will be provided during the semester.

**Class Participation:** It is expected that you participate regularly in class discussions and, more generally, contribute to a positive atmosphere for intellectual inquiry. This involves contributing to class discussions in both large and small groups, as well as being attentive (both to me and to your classmates), respectful, and considerate. Examples of behavior that detracts from a positive and respectful learning environment include: failure to listen to others, consistent

interruption of others, disrespectful speech or incivility, failure to engage in class discussions (by, for example, doing your thermodynamics homework in class), tardiness, falling asleep in class, etc. While you will not receive a grade for participation, you will most develop a better understanding of the course material, and will likely perform better on quizzes, if you participate actively.

**Attendance:** Attendance at all class sessions is required, unless it is excused – that is, cleared with me in advance or documented. If you have more than one unexcused absence, you will receive a final-grade deduction of three percentage points for each unexcused absence that follows the first. More simply: you get one freebie, and after that, it's three percentage points off for each unexcused absence. If you need to miss multiple class sessions, please reach out to the Dean of Students.

**Student-Faculty Expectations:** 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. See <http://www.catalog.gatech.edu/rules/22/> for an articulation of 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.

**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. For information on Georgia Tech's Academic Honor Code, please visit <http://www.catalog.gatech.edu/policies/honor-code/> or <http://www.catalog.gatech.edu/rules/18/>. Any student suspected of cheating or plagiarizing on any assessed work will be reported to the Office of Student Integrity, which 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 at (404) 894-2563 or <http://disabilityservices.gatech.edu/>, 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.