

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 5:00-5:50 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 PM 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 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 students 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 of your discussion section’s Canvas site. Scroll to the appropriate week to find all of the assignments and any supplemental readings for that class. The lecture Canvas site will be used for announcements to the entire 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:

- $A \geq 89.5\%$ Excellent
- $B \geq 79.5-89.49\%$ Above Average
- $C \geq 69.5-79.49\%$ Average
- $D \geq 59.5-69.49\%$ Below Average
- $F < 59.5\%$ Unacceptable

Note: I round up grades that are within a half of a point of the next letter grade. For example, 89.5 will count as 90.

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 perspectives that you hadn't considered. This means that you should be prepared to speak and may be called on directly. Participation will be measured by Teaching Assistants, who will keep track of students who speak in discussion sections. Students will be graded on the following scheme: excellent (3), satisfactory (2), unsatisfactory (1), or absent (0). Excellent participation reflects consistent and thoughtful engagement in discussion throughout the semester, including asking questions, responding to classmates, and contributing substantively to discussion.

Reflections are short writing assignments (3-5 sentences) that will be due on Canvas. Each reflection engages with the readings for a specific week. The reflections will be due at 12:00 p.m. on the last day of lectures each week so that I can integrate them in the lecture and discussion sections. 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. If you miss one, just choose another reading. The lowest 3 grades are automatically dropped. 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. They are graded as excellent (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 500-1000 word essays in which you will ethically assess a scenario. One of the five short essays will involve an interaction with Jill Watson (see AI policy), in which the AI will role play with you in an ethical decision-making scenario. These are graded as excellent (5), good (4), sufficient (3), insufficient (2), or incomplete (0). An excellent essay is thoughtful and creative. It makes connections beyond what has been explicitly discussed in class and clearly explains the reasons behind its conclusion. A good essay follows the directions and reflects the course materials accurately. The reasons for the conclusions are less clear than an excellent essay's. 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.

Exams will contain a combination of short-answer and multiple-choice questions. The short answer portion will ask straightforward questions about concepts in the readings or ask you to apply a concept by responding to a scenario.

Course Policies

Attendance

Because participation is graded, attendance is required. I do not maintain a separate attendance grade, but absences will affect your participation score.

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.

Policy on LLMs/Generative AI

Our class is participating in the Jill Watson pilot program. Jill Watson is an AI teaching assistant developed by Georgia Tech. Jill Watson is the only AI that is permitted for student use. The reason for this is that I have control over the information that is uploaded, which reduces misleading results. You can use Jill Watson on Canvas to ask questions about the syllabus or course policies, create quizzes for studying, test your understanding of concepts, and receive feedback on drafts. However, no AI can replace your own ethical reasoning or make moral judgments for you. Using any AI-generated text, analysis, or argument in submitted work

without permission constitutes unauthorized assistance. Since the purpose of the course is to help you practice and develop skills in ethical thinking, using it to complete assignments for you will be treated as an academic integrity violation.

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 and/or your Teaching Assistant 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.

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 distracts you, your classmates, and me.

Statement on Student Well-Being

At Georgia Tech, we are concerned about your overall physical, social, and mental well-being. A comprehensive list of wellness related resources has been compiled and maintained by the Office of the Vice President for Student Engagement and Well-being and can be found here: <https://students.gatech.edu/student-resource-guide>[Links to an external site.](#)