Instructor: Dr. Kristopher G. Phillips   Office Phone: 734.487.0451
Office: Pray Harrold 702-B   Email: kphill50@emich.edu
Student Hours: M: 2:00p-4:00p (office), T: 10:00a-12:00p (zoom), W: 10:00a-11:00a (office) & also by appointment

Class Meets:
W 2:00p - 3:15p in Pray-Harrold 318
This is a 12-week class: we meet from Aug. 25 – Nov. 21

COURSE DESCRIPTION: We may or may not realize it, but we are faced with complicated moral and ethical considerations pretty much all the time. Sometimes the ethical considerations seem relatively straight-forward and mundane, others it can be genuinely overwhelming. Have you ever found yourself looking for a way to think carefully about real-life moral quandaries in a collaborative, team-based environment that promises to both help sharpen your ethical reasoning skills and cultivate the sorts of skills necessary to better understand how to have constructive dialogues about important topics with people you might disagree with? If so, Ethics Bowl is the class for you! The Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl (IEB) is a debate-style competition between teams representing colleges from across the country. Where debate is focused on disagreement and "winning," Ethics Bowl emphasizes collaborative, civil dialogue about the ethical dimensions of real-life cases. The class will introduce practical ethics – drawing from different levels of ethical analysis (theoretical and applied), we will work on cultivating an ethical reasoning "toolkit" which we can then apply to the IEB cases. Students enrolled in the course are welcome (and encouraged!) to join the EMU Ethics Bowl team for the regional competition, however competing with the team is not a requirement of the course.

Course Learning Outcomes
• *Charitable Thinking*: The successful student will begin to approach the positions and arguments of philosophers charitably (i.e. to take seriously and try to understand how a smart, thoughtful, and careful person might hold a view like that). A successful student will begin to understand why, even if it looks at first as if a view must be wrong, there are good reasons for why others might think it is correct.
• *Ethical Reasoning*: The successful student will be able to identify morally salient aspects of every-day ethical conundrums, will weigh them carefully, and will successfully apply meta-ethical, normative ethical, and applied ethical considerations in reasoning through challenging ethical considerations.
• *Verbal Communication*: The successful student will be able to express some abstract and complex philosophical ideas in clear, precise, concise, and logical discussion. The successful student's dialogical abilities will be grounded in the specifics of the cases under consideration, but will draw from a variety of philosophical moral theories.

TEXTS: All required materials for this course are available on Canvas. I expect you to print out each of the readings (or make sure you have a copy on your tablet, computer, etc.) and bring them to class with you so that we can discuss them directly. I will post the cases when they are released, at which point we will discuss them in class. Please make sure to have a way to access the cases in class.

SOME GENERAL ADVICE: This course presupposes a willingness to work hard and think critically about some very difficult problems. Philosophy is hard, you'll see – there really is no shallow end to the pool here. Students who read reflectively and attend class regularly are more likely to remain interested in (and maybe even enjoy) the material, benefit from the class discussions, and develop the philosophical skills and level of comprehension required to continually improve in their thinking. Some notes will be provided every week, but these, the lectures, and class discussion will very likely be hard to follow if you don't do the readings or if you miss previous classes and do not pursue any of the options available for getting caught up. Please take advantage of student hours, get to know your peers, and chat about these issues with folks who are not in the class! I think you'll find that philosophy is best done through dialogue, so build a philosophical community!

Syllabus
PHIL 277-0 (1 Cr.)
Ethics Bowl
Fall 2025

SCHEDULE and READINGS:
You'll notice that there are quite a few readings right up front, then we sort of taper off. That's because we'll want to look at the cases and determine what moral considerations or theories seem the most relevant. So we will discuss possible readings once we have the cases ready to hand. Stay tuned.

Aug. 27   **Introduction: What is Ethics Bowl? Who are We?**
No readings

Sept. 3   **Philosophy, Dialogue, Arguments, and Ethics Bowl**
Robert F. Ladensen: *The Ideal of an Ethical Community* (Canvas)
Nathan L. King: *Why Good Thinking Matters* (Canvas)
Kyle Robertson: *Debating Democracy: Building Argument Programs for Good Citizenship* (Canvas)

Sept. 10   **Fundamentals of Ethics**
Rachel Handley: *Marge and Homer's Ice Cream Argument, or Why Metaethics Matters* (Psyche)
Thomas Metcalf: *Moral Realism* (1000 word philosophy)

Sept. 17   **Cases 1 and 2**

Sept. 24   **Cases 3 and 4**

Oct. 1   **Cases 5 and 6**

Oct. 8   **Cases 7 and 8**

Oct. 15   **NO CLASS: Fall Break**

Oct. 22   **Cases 9 and 10**

Oct. 29   **Cases 11 and 12**

Nov. 5   **Cases 13 - 15**

Nov. 12   **Practice Round 1**

Nov. 19   **Final Practice**

Optional: **Saturday Nov. 22**   **Central States Regional Ethics Bowl**

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ASSIGNMENTS, EVALUATION, POLICY:

"Extrinsic motivation, which includes a desire to get better grades, is not only different from, but often undermines, intrinsic motivation, a desire to learn for its own sake" – Alfie Kohn (1999), *Punished by rewards: The trouble with gold stars, incentive plans, A's, praise, and other bribes.* Rev. ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Let's Talk Motivation: In recent years I have become increasingly unhappy with grades as a measure of anything at all. I often tell my students that it's probably easy to get an A in my class – you can relatively easily "hack" my grading system and figure out the "formula" for writing a paper for me. Once you figure it out, getting an A on papers in my classes is easy. But I don't want you to get an A by "hacking the system." I want you to push yourself to learn new things because you found something you're excited about and wanted to try to go beyond what's comfortable and familiar. I've long thought that an A- or a B+ that was the result of taking risks was worth more than a safe, but well-written A paper.

In short, grading is not a good measure of learning, and the focus on grades distracts from the real goal of education. If you're aiming for a specific grade, you're not aiming to get the most out of your educational opportunities.

Evaluation: You are responsible for working with me to determine your final grade in this class. We will come to an **agreement** based on formal self-assessments, the collected feedback you received from me over the course of the semester, and a final discussion. It's really important that you develop a clear sense of the quality of your own work and how to evaluate it. It's a difficult skill to master and requires tremendous self-awareness. That's why we're going to work together to ensure that the assessment reflects the work you've done over the course of the term.

Participation: Because this is principally a discussion-based course (and because it's only 1 credit), you will be primarily evaluated by your participation in the class. Meaningful participation will look different depending on your background familiarity with philosophical ethics, but regardless of your background you will be expected to engage regularly in the in-class discussions about the various cases.

Case Briefs: To ensure that you're well-prepared to discuss the material, I will ask you to prepare "case briefs" for each week's cases. I will provide further details of what a brief will look like in class, but the basic idea is that you will identify the salient moral features of the case, consider the sorts of questions one might ask about the moral features of the case, and consider potential responses to those questions. I will ask that you submit your briefs 24 hours in advance of our meeting so that I have time to review them prior to the meeting.

Practice and Scrimmages: Additionally, while participation in the regional competition is optional, you will be expected to participate in our practice rounds and scrimmages between our team and other schools' teams. You will not be graded on the outcome of the practice or scrimmages, but I hope you will improve as you become more familiar with the structure of the competition. The key things I'm looking for are the dialogical virtues that we will discuss in opening weeks of the course.

Final Reflection Paper: The idea behind Ethics Bowl, as you will find out, is to practice what I'm calling "dialogical virtues" – the sorts of character traits required to engage in civil dialogue about potentially difficult but important social, political, and moral disagreements. As such, I would like you to write a final

reflection following the conclusion of the class. Reflect on the ways that you have seen yourself engaging with others, both in Ethics Bowl and beyond, and share any insights you've had about how it is that you interact with those with whom you disagree. I will provide more details for how to structure this reflection as we get closer to the end of the course.

Late Work: I get that life happens and things sometimes take longer than we anticipate. As a result, I will accept late work for up to 24 hours after the deadline with no questions asked. I ask that you do your best to meet the deadlines – please consider that I too am a busy person with a life outside of school, and that I have to budget and schedule time carefully. If too many people turn in papers late, it throws off my plans and creates more work for me. Please try to be mindful of the work you create for others. If you are going to need more than 24 hours, you must contact me we can discuss how to move forward.

Academic Dishonesty Academic dishonesty of any kind is expressly prohibited. Engaging in academic dishonesty of any kind will result in failure of the course, a referral to the [Office of Wellness and Community Responsibility](#) for disciplinary action, and a deeply uncomfortable final conversation at the end of the term. You're already paying an awful lot of money to take this class, and I am committed to helping you develop the philosophical, intellectual, and personal skills to the best of your ability. Engaging in any form of cheating really cuts against the whole purpose of the whole education thing.
I don't like doing this, and let me be clear – I trust you. I am not going to look to bust you, and I do not see our professional relationship as adversarial. If you're struggling and you don't know what to do, how to cite sources, etc. **please come talk to me**.

A Note on AI, Large-Language Models, and Their Use Using AI tools appropriately is supposedly a big part of our cultural development at this point in our history. This class is focused on building your philosophical skills, especially interpreting, designing, and critiquing arguments and theories. AIs can sort of do some of these things (not all that well though), but there are myriad reasons *not* to employ them in place of doing the work yourself. One such reason is that allowing an AI to do any part of the coursework for you is not just cheating yourself out of the opportunity to get better at philosophy (that is, thinking, reading, writing, and being a person), it is failing to do what the assignment is asking you to do – display and develop *your* philosophical abilities. **As such, I ask that you *do not* use AI, LLMs, or such tools on any assignment** (this includes ChatGPT, some versions of Grammarly, Gemini, and others). I want to see how *you* think – and writing *is* thinking.
Thus, if there is good reason to believe an AI did the work for you, any of the following may well occur: you will be asked to meet to discuss the work, you will be asked to redo the work without the help of generative AI, you will receive an incomplete for the assignment, or you will fail the class. In class we will discuss further reasons to refrain from having AI do the work *for* you.

Classroom Conduct: The classroom constitutes a community of which we are each an important part. The very foundation of philosophy as a discipline is the ability to charitably listen, understand and represent the views of ourselves and others. Philosophy as a discipline requires careful dialogue. As such, respect for your fellow student, your instructor, and the course is of critical importance. We can, should, and will disagree with one another often, but this *MUST* be conducted with respect. As such threatening behavior, offensive language (including "hate speech") will not be tolerated.

Attendance: I do not have a formal attendance policy, but philosophy is hard even if you come to class. AND! The in-class assignments cannot be made up, so skip at your own risk. You are responsible for information that I offer in lecture that is not in the readings. I will not provide notes for absences so get to know your classmates.

OTHER IMPORTANT POLICIES & RESOURCES

University Policies In addition to the articulated course specific policies and expectation, students are responsible for understanding all applicable university guidelines, policies, and procedures. The EMU Student Handbook is the primary resource provided to students to ensure that they have access to all university policies, support resources, and student's rights and responsibilities. Changes may be made to the EMU Student Handbook whenever necessary, and shall be effective immediately, and/or as of the date on which a policy is formally adopted, and/or the date specified in the amendment. Electing not to access the link provided below does not absolve a student of responsibility. For questions about any university policy, procedure, practice, or resources, please contact the Office of the Ombuds: 248 Student Center, 734.487.0074, emu_ombuds@emich.edu, or visit the website at www.emich.edu/ombuds. CLICK HERE to access the University Course Policies

Disability Resource Center I warmly welcome any of you who have disabilities. Students with medical, psychological, learning or other disabilities desiring academic adjustments, accommodations, or auxiliary aids must contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC). The DRC works collaboratively with students, faculty, and staff to create an accessible, sustainable, and inclusive educational environment.

Recording Class I will not record class meetings and I ask that you also please refrain from recording the class meetings without prior, explicit, written permission both from me and from your classmates (except as necessary as part of a university approved accommodation. Students with such accommodation must inform me prior recording *any* class activity. Regardless of accommodation, all students must stop recording during small group work unless they obtain written permission from the members of their group prior to recording. Any approved recordings are exclusively reserved for the student's own private use.

University Library Research support is available to all students, 24/7. This includes getting started with research, identifying sources to search, developing search strategies, evaluating resources, and more. See https://www.emich.edu/library/help/ask.php for all of the ways in which you can get help with research. Some University Library services have changed, and may continue to change, in response to the pandemic. Please check for current information at https://www.emich.edu/library/news/covid.php

University Writing Center The University Writing Center (UWC) offers writing support to all undergraduate and graduate students. In doing so, we value the diversity of our campus and honor all students and the languages they bring with them to the university.

Holman Success Center Provides Academic Support through a variety of virtual and in-person services.

Sexual Misconduct Prevention & Response Office (formerly Title IX Office): Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex under any education program or activity receiving federal financial aid. Sexual assault and sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination prohibited by Title IX. What you need to know about Title IX

Student and Exchange Visitor Statement The Student Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) requires F and J students to report numerous items to the Office of International Students & Scholars (OISS)

Disclaimer: Information contained in this syllabus, other than the grading, late assignments, makeup work, and attendance policies are subject to change, with advance notice, as I deem appropraite.