

The University of North Carolina Wilmington  
Master of Public Administration Program  
Summer, 2009

**PLS 508: ETHICS N PUBLIC LIFE**

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Office Hours: Thursdays: 5:00 – 6:00 p.m.

Class Hours: Thursdays 6:00 – 10:00 p.m. LH 255

**I. COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES**

A strong democracy requires public officials with the ability to lead in an ethical manner. Although the media focuses public attention on ethics violations and failures in leadership at the highest and most visible levels of government and nonprofit organizations, the effectiveness of the vast majority of public and nonprofit sector activity relies on the responsible exercise of discretion by public administrators at every organizational level and setting. Another premise of this course is that ethical leadership is the responsibility of not just elected or formally appointed public leaders, but every public servant and citizen. Examining your own ethical dilemmas can raise awareness of the challenges of being an ethical public servant.

Students will receive a firm grounding in general ethics and relevant leadership theory, but will also study more specifically how these theories apply to government and nonprofit settings. Specifically, ethical leadership in government and nonprofit agencies requires an understanding of the shared nature of power and the multiple sources of responsibility in the public arena. Case studies, biographies of exemplary public administrators, film, and personal reflection will be used to build awareness and understanding.

**II. REQUIRED TEXTS**

Cooper, Terry (2006). *The Responsible Administrator*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Gutmann, Amy and Dennis Thompson (2006). *Ethics & Politics: Cases and Comments*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. 4<sup>th</sup> edition.

Required articles will also be assigned during the semester.

### **III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

#### **A. Contribution to Class (15%)**

Dialogue and participation are central features of this course. You are expected to contribute to class discussion by expressing opinions, asking questions, and challenging each other in a respectful manner. This course will challenge you to engage in authentic dialogue; that is, to be open about your beliefs and the basis for them. You are expected to come to class fully prepared to discuss readings and present any assignments.

Specifically, every student will be required each class to share the following two items for each set of reading assignments:

- The single most important word, sentence or passage from the readings.
- One key question from the readings.

Additionally, each week two different student will be asked to present to the class a news article related to public ethics, with an explanation of how the article relates to a concept from class (copies should be made for each student).

Since it is not possible to contribute to class without being there, attendance is required. If you anticipate missing more than one class or parts of classes (e.g., coming late or leaving early), you should drop the class. You should understand that earning an “A” in this class will require more than merely A’s on papers and exams. Two absences = C and three or more = F on class contribution grade.

#### **B. Journal (15%)**

You must keep a personal journal during the course that reflects on each night of class. Consistent with the purpose of the class, the journal is meant to stimulate personal reflection over class readings and discussion, as well as relevant events experienced in your daily life or in the world. The purpose is to raise awareness of ethical leadership by continuous dialogue.

Guidelines for keeping a journal will be discussed in class. The most important thing to remember is that a journal is not a log (a summary of readings or events), nor a personal diary. A class journal should be personal reflection centered on the readings, current events, or relevant ethical dilemmas in your life. The journal may be handwritten; it is required that a standard 8.5” X 11” bound and lined notebook be used to keep the entries together. Each weekly entry must be a minimum of four handwritten pages (single spaced). If typed, each entry should be two pages (single-spaced). Entries begin the first week of class. Journals must be turned in at the midpoint of the semester for review by the instructor. Note that journals are graded on effort – a poor grade will result from superficial entries, entries less than four pages, or lateness.



- May 28                    **Common Conflicts and Fostering Ethical Organizations**  
                                  Cooper, Chapters 4 & 5  
                                  Film Clip: To Be Determined  
                                  **\*\*Note: Choice of Biography/Autobiography Due\*\***
- June 4                    **Integrating Ethics and Safeguarding Individual Autonomy**  
                                  Cooper, Chapters 6, 7 & 8  
                                  Film Clip: “Patch Adams”
- June 11                   **Practitioner Roundtable**  
**Wrap-up of *The Responsible Administrator***  
                                  Cooper, Chapters 9 & 10
- June 18                   **Ethics Literature Review**  
                                  Readings to be assigned
- June 25                   **Mid-Term Quiz**  
**Discussion of Journal Entries**  
**\*\*\*Note: Journal Entries 1-6 Due\*\*\***  
**Student Presentations on Personal Ethical Case Studies**  
**(Part 1)**  
**\*\*\*Note: Personal Ethical Case Study Write-Up and One-**  
**Page Handout Due\*\*\***

***PART 2: ETHICS & POLITICS CASE ANALYSES & DISCUSSION***

- July 2                    **Violence**  
                                  Readings: See Ethics & Politics attachment
- July 9                    **Affirmative Action, Liberty and Morality**  
                                  Readings: See Ethics & Politics attachment
- July 16                   **Official Disobedience and Policy Analysis**  
                                  Readings: See Ethics & Politics attachment
- July 23                   **Student Sharing of Reflections on**  
**Biographies/Autobiographies**  
  
**\*\*\*Note: Papers and Handouts Due\*\*\***  
  
**\*\*\*Journal Entries 7-10 Due\*\*\***

## Ethics & Politics Cases

(Gutmann & Thompson Book)

### Directions

Now that we have completed the Cooper text and other readings and are armed with a set of ethical concepts, the third part of the class will be reading a set of case studies from the *Ethics & Politics* text and working through the Cooper decision-making model.

We will discuss three cases each week. In preparation for each class, you must read each case and prepare a **2 page** (typed, double-spaced) analysis of each case. The class will be divided into groups each week, and you will spend 20 minutes discussing your case as a group, and then 20 minutes presenting your group's discussion to the class.

Each paper should have the following sections:

- 1) Description of the key aspects of the situation you choose to focus on
- 2) Definition of the ethical issue (this may vary by student interpretation or perspective taken)
- 3) Identification of alternative courses of action (at least three)
- 4) Discussion of relevant moral rules and ethical principles
- 5) Recommended alternative (based on highest priority rule or principle)

### Schedule

- July 2:       **Violence**  
Decision to use the Atomic Bomb (pp. 3-28).  
Interrogating Detainees (pp. 60-70).
- July 9:       **Official Disobedience and Policy Analysis**  
Agent Rowley Blows the Whistle (pp. 226-236).  
The Calculator (pp. 295-303).  
Defunding Organ Transplants in Arizona (pp. 315-332).
- July 16:      **Equal Opportunity, Liberty and Morality**  
Affirmative Action at the Michigan Law School (pp. 397-409).  
Tossing Dwarfs in Illinois (pp. 439-442).  
Making Marriage Gay (pp. 442-458).