

The University of North Carolina Wilmington  
Master of Public Administration Program  
Spring, 2008

**PLS 508: ETHICS & LEADERSHIP IN PUBLIC LIFE**

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Office Hours: Tuesday & Wednesday: 5:00 – 6:00 p.m.  
Tuesday & Thursday 2:30 – 3:30 or by appointment

Class Hours: W 6:30 – 9:15 LH 111

**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 a 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 either drop the class or expect a low grade on this component of the course). 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.

### **C. Personal Ethical Case Study (15%)**

You must write and present a five-page analysis (typed, double spaced) of a real ethical dilemma you have either personally experienced or observed. The Cooper decision-making model discussed in class (Chapter 2) must be precisely followed. Students will be asked to share their personal cases with the class. A one-page outline must be handed out to the class. \*\*\***Due March 12**\*\*\*

### **D. Book Reflection (15%)**

You must write and present a ten-page paper (typed, double-spaced) discussing how five of the ethical leadership concepts discussed in class are illustrated in a biography or autobiography of a public official (either current or historical). Your chosen person must be cleared with the instructor by the third class. A framework for the paper will be distributed in class. A one-page summary of the five concepts highlighted must be handed out to class. \*\*\***Papers and handout for presentation due on April 23.**\*\*\*

### **E. Mid-Term Exam (20%)**

An in-class short answer/essay style exam will be given on **February 27** to test knowledge of course material in the Cooper text and the ability to apply concepts.

### **F. Ethics & Politics Case Analyses (20%)**

Two page analyses of assigned cases from *Ethics & Politics* casebook must be prepared for each class according to the schedule distributed in Attachment.

## **IV. CLASS SCHEDULE**

Jan. 9                      **Introduction and Course Expectations**  
Cooper, Preface and Chapter 1  
Film Clip: “Primary Colors”

### ***PART 1: THE RESPONSIBLE PUBLIC SERVANT***

Jan. 16                      **Contemporary Ethics and Objective/Subjective Responsibility**  
Cooper, Chapters 2 & 3  
Film Clip: “The Contender”

Jan. 23                    **Common Conflicts and Fostering Ethical Organizations**  
Cooper, Chapters 4 & 5  
Film Clip: “The Green Mile”  
**\*\*Note: Choice of Biography/Autobiography Due\*\***

Jan. 30                    **Integrating Ethics and Safeguarding Individual Autonomy**  
Cooper, Chapters 6, 7 & 8  
Film Clip: “Patch Adams”

Feb. 6                    **Wrap-up of *The Responsible Administrator***  
Cooper, Chapters 9 & 10

***PART 2: READINGS & REFLECTION ON ETHICS & LEADERSHIP***

Feb.13                    **Subordinate Autonomy and the Public Interest**  
Readings to be assigned

Feb. 20                    **Relevant Leadership Theory**  
Readings to be assigned

Feb. 27                    **Mid-Term Exam**  
Discussion of Journal Entries  
**\*\*\*Note: Journal Entries 1-7 Due\*\*\***

March 5                    **No Class: Spring Break**

March 12                    **Student Presentations on Personal Ethical Case Studies**  
  
**\*\*\*Note: Personal Ethical Case Study Write-Up and One-Page Handout Due\*\*\***

March 19                    **Practitioner Roundtable**  
Reflection on ethics from the perspective of local Public servants

March 26                    **Public Life and Personal Conduct**  
Readings to be assigned  
  
**\*\*\*Note: Two Page Reflection on Roundtable Due\*\*\***

***PART 3: ETHICS & POLITICS CASE ANALYSES & DISCUSSION***

April 2

**Violence**

Readings: See Ethics & Politics attachment

April 9

**Affirmative Action, Liberty and Morality**

Readings: See Ethics & Politics attachment

April 16

**Official Disobedience and Policy Analysis**

Readings: See Ethics & Politics attachment

April 23

**Student Sharing of Reflections on  
Biographies/Autobiographies**

**\*\*\*Note: Papers and One-Page Handout Due\*\*\***

**\*\*\*Journal Entries 8-13 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**

- April 2:       **Violence**  
Decision to use the Atomic Bomb (pp. 3-28).  
Why Attack Iraq? (pp. 45-60).  
Interrogating Detainees (pp. 60-70).
- April 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).
- April 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).