

SPPH 538: Application of Ethical Theories in the Practice of Public Health

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

UBC's Point Grey Campus is located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam) people. In light of this fact, I believe that I, as a faculty member of SPPH, have an obligation to include ongoing impacts of colonialism on health equity as a topic in this class.

COURSE INFORMATION

Course Title	Course Code Number	Credit Value
Application of Ethical Theories in the Practice of Public Health	SPPH 538	3

PREREQUISITES AND COREQUISITES

None

CLASS MEETING PLACE AND TIME

Room	Time
SPPH 143	Tuesday, 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM

CONTACTS

Course Instructor	Contact Details	Office Location	Office Hours
Daniel Steel	daniel.steel@ubc.ca	SPPH 163	Wednesdays, 10 to noon Zoom link:

COURSE INSTRUCTOR BIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Dr. Daniel Steel is an Associate Professor in the School of Population and Public Health and the W. Maurice Young Centre for Applied Ethics at the University of British Columbia. Dr. Steel earned his PhD from the Department of History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Pittsburgh in 2002 and joined the Centre for Applied Ethics and SPPH in 2015. His work focuses on values and ethics at the crossroads of science, environmental policy, and public health. He is currently the primary investigator of a SSHRC funded project that explores the ethics of climate change.

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OTHER INSTRUCTIONAL STAFF

Teaching Assistant:

COURSE STRUCTURE

From trade-offs between individual freedoms and population health to disparities along lines of wealth and race, ethical challenges and dilemmas arise throughout the practice of public health. This course introduces theories of ethics and fairness that are relevant for addressing difficult public health decisions and policies. As you will learn, theories rarely provide unequivocal answers to hard ethical problems. Typically, multiple theories, frameworks and concepts can be brought to bear on a given case, and any one of them can be interpreted and applied in more than one way. But learning these ideas and how they connect to real cases is nevertheless very helpful for identifying ethical problems, explaining them clearly, and crafting well-reasoned arguments about what to do.

The first half of the course (weeks 1 through 6) focuses on introducing ethical theories and frameworks relevant to public health, while the second half (weeks 7 through 13) dives into examples of ethical issues that arise in public health practice, such as immunization and the opioid crisis. The midterm exam tests students' knowledge of ethical theories. The final assignment of the course is a term paper in which students describe a concrete public health example, explain how it connects to concepts from class, and develop an argument for a recommendation about it. Further details about assignments are given below under the heading of Assessments of Learning.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon completing this course, students will have improved their ability to:

- Identify and clearly describe ethical issues that arise within public health.
- Explain ethical theories, frameworks and concepts relevant to public health.
- Apply ethical theories, frameworks and concepts in practice to examples of public health policies and interventions.
- Connect empirical research on public health to ethical issues in the process of applying ethical theories, frameworks and concepts to public health examples.
- Analyze and evaluate ethical reasoning with respect to concrete public health examples.
- Support recommendations for public health policies or interventions with cogent ethical reasoning.
- Articulate and communicate ethical reasoning on public health issues with diverse audiences who may not share the student's perspective.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS

Week	Topic	Readings	Assignments Due
Week 1 (Jan 9)	Introduction to Public Health Ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Childress et al., "Public health ethics: mapping the terrain."• Upshur, "Principles for the justification of public health intervention."	None

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Week 2 (Jan 16)	Utilitarianism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Savulescu et al. "Utilitarianism and the Pandemic." • Marseille and Kahn, "Utilitarianism and the ethical foundations of cost-effectiveness analysis in resource allocation for global health." • Chuang et al., "Quantifying utilitarian outcomes to inform triage ethics: simulated performance of a ventilator triage protocol under Sars-CoV-2 pandemic surge conditions" 	Week 2 Reflection
Week 3 (Jan 23)	Deontology and Virtue Ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dean, "Stigmatization and denormalization as public health policies: some Kantian thoughts." • Rozier, "Structures of virtue as a framework for public health ethics." • Silva et al., "Reciprocity and ethical tuberculosis treatment and control" 	Week 3 Reflection
Week 4 (Jan 30)	The Liberal Challenge to Public Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rajezi, "Liberalism and public health ethics." • Griffiths and West, "A balanced intervention ladder: promoting autonomy through public health action." • M'hamdi, "Neutrality and perfectionism in public health." 	Week 4 Reflection
Week 5 (Feb 6)	Human Rights and Public Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liao, "Human rights and public health ethics." • Hessler, "Public health, human rights and philosophy." • Gennet, "Introducing 'health vulnerability': Towards a human right claim for innovative orphan drugs?" 	Week 5 Reflection
Week 6 (Feb 13)	Justice and Public Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daniels, "Health and inequality, or, why justice is good for our health." • Powers & Faden, "Social justice and public health." • Alang et al., "White supremacy and the core functions of public health." 	Week 6 Reflection
Week 7 (Feb 27)	UNDRIP and Indigenous Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples • Behn Smith and Waters, "Legislation, reconciliation, and water: moving upstream to implement the UNDRIP in BC and promote Indigenous peoples' health." • Sharma et al., "Conducting health research with Indigenous Peoples in a good way." <p>Guest speaker: Riley Bizzotto</p>	Week 7 Reflection Take Home Midterm Exam Available on Canvas 5 pm February 28

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Week 8 (Mar 5)	Environmental Health Ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resnik, “Towards an environmental health ethics.” • Tubert, “Environmental racism: a causal and historical account.” • Kiesselbach & Pissarskoi, “Lowering the consumption of animal products without sacrificing consumer freedom – a pragmatic proposal” 	Midterm Due Midnight Monday, March 4
Week 9 (Mar 12)	Behaviour Modification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Véliz et al., “Sugar, taxes, and choice.” • Anker, “Analysis of the paternalistic justification of an agenda setting public health policy: The case of tobacco plain packaging.” • Kumanyika, “A framework for increasing equity impact in obesity prevention.” 	Week 9 Reflection
Week 10 (Mar 19)	Immunization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Navin and Attwell, “Vaccine mandates, value pluralism, and policy diversity.” • Maclure & Bisson, “The case for the vaccine passport.” • Wilson, “Is trust enough? Anti-Black racism and the perception of Black vaccine “hesitancy”.” 	Week 10 Reflection
Week 11 (Mar 26)	Opioid Crisis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rieder, “Solving the opioid crisis isn’t just a public health challenge—it’s a bioethics challenge.” • Steel et al., “Our life depends on this drug: competence, inequity, and voluntary consent in clinical trials on supervised injectable opioid assisted treatment.” • Duthie et al., “Prescribing safe supply: ethical considerations for clinicians.” 	Week 11 Reflection
Week 12 (Apr 2)	Public Health Research Ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Katikireddi and Valles, “Coupled ethical–epistemic analysis of public health research and practice: categorizing variables to improve population health and equity.” • Buchbinder et al., “Advancing a data justice framework for public health surveillance.” • Fabi & Goldberg, “Bioethics, (funding) priorities, and the perpetuation of injustice.” 	Week 12 Reflection
Week 13 (Apr 9)	Medical Assistance in Dying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Downie & Schuklenk, “Social determinants of health and slippery slopes in assisted dying debates: lessons from Canada.” • Pullman, “Slowing the slide down the slippery slope of medical assistance in dying: mutual learnings for Canada and the US.” 	None
Exams			Term Paper Due Tuesday April 23, 9am

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LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Class time will be focused on active learning exercises such as case study analysis, critical debates, role play, and structured problem solving. Below is a brief description of each type of activity.

- **Critical debates:** Student groups will be assigned to different positions on controversial ethical issues in public health. After preparation within groups, students will present to the rest of the class. Each group will present an argument tied to material from the course to support their assigned stance. This activity requires independent thinking about how to justify a position, including positions with which one may disagree. It also encourages respectful dialogue and provides opportunities for students to challenge each other's perspectives and critically analyze ethical reasoning.
- **Role Play / Stakeholder Engagement Simulation:** In this activity, students work in groups to think through the positions and reasons of stakeholders involved in a public health issue. Each student group will be assigned specific objectives, interests, and will be ethical considerations based on their assigned stakeholder role (e.g., government representative, NGO leader, industry representative, community member). Given this role, they must decide what position they would take on the issue and how to make an ethical argument that position.
- **Case study analysis:** Students are provided with real-life case studies that present ethical dilemmas in public health. Students work in groups to analyze the case, identify the ethical issues involved, and propose potential solutions that connect to ethical concepts, frameworks and theories learned in class. Critical thinking and discussion is encouraged to foster deeper understanding of ethical challenges in global health practice.

Through these activities, students will learn to navigate ethical dilemmas and negotiate solutions, fostering a deeper understanding of the differing perspectives and underlying ethical arguments at play in public health contexts.

LEARNING MATERIALS

Students are not required to purchase a textbook for this course. All assigned readings will be available via the course website or through the UBC Library.

Commented [HC1]: This may confuse students. "no text is required" "Readings from TEXT" "Textbook is available in the library." Perhaps if the first sentence was "Students are not required to purchase a textbook for this course. Several readings..." this would forestall some confusion.

ASSESSMENTS OF LEARNING

Students will be assessed based on class participation, a class presentation, weekly reflection pieces, a midterm exam and a term paper.

1. **Class Participation (5%):** Students are expected to attend weekly class sessions having done the assigned readings and ready to participate in class activities. Students should actively and respectfully engage with other students during structured group work exercises, and in discussions among the full class.
2. **Class Presentation (15%):** Each student will be required to give one class presentation in the course of the semester. Presentations should describe a real-world public health example that raises an ethical issue related to the topic of that day's class. Your example should not already be discussed in the readings. Your presentation should lead with the example, describing background facts and research that are relevant to it. Next, you should articulate the ethical problem the

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example raises, making reference to ideas from one or more of the readings assigned for that day. However, you should not attempt to summarize all of the day's readings. Just highlight those ideas that are essential for explaining the ethical issue raised by your example. The purpose of the presentation is to stimulate discussion and thinking about the topic for that day's class.

Presentations should be between 15 to 30 minutes in length. Collaboration with other students is encouraged, but group size should not be greater than 5 for a single presentation. A sign-up sheet for presentations will be posted on Canvas. Finally, consultation with me is required prior to your presentation.

- 3. Weekly Reflections (10% total):** Each student will be required to write a total of 10 weekly reflections of 250 to 500 words. Weekly reflections should engage with examples and concepts discussed in the reading for that week. Prompts for weekly reflections will be posted by 5pm on the Wednesday prior to the week when they are due. For example, the prompt for the Week 4 Reflection will be posted no later than 5pm Wednesday of Week 3 (i.e., January 24). Prompts will suggest topics or issues for you to reflect upon rather than pose questions seeking a specific answer. Moreover, you will be free to write about aspects of the week's reading not mentioned in the prompt if you wish. Weekly reflections will be submitted via Canvas by 2pm on the Monday before class. For example, the Week 4 Reflection will be due by 2pm on Monday, January 29. Reflections will be graded pass (1 point) or fail (0 points): 1 points for reflections that engage with the readings for that week and connect ideas from those readings to examples in ways that highlight or explore ethical issues; 0 for reflections that are less than 250 words, which do not engage with any readings assigned for that week, or which are not submitted. Note that you should not attempt to summarize the week's reading in your reflection. Instead, you should focus on a few key ideas or issues that sparked you interest and explain why found them interesting, relevant, puzzling, or important. Connections to public health examples that have impacted you or which you are familiar with are encouraged. Weekly reflections will be due each week, except for Week 1 (January 9), Week 8 (March 5), and Week 13 (April 9).
- 4. Midterm Exam (30%):** There will be a take home midterm. The midterm exam will be available on Canvas from 5pm, February 28, and will be due no later than midnight Monday, March 4. The midterm exam will test your knowledge of the ethical concepts, frameworks, and theories from the first half of the semester. It will ask you to explain those concepts, frameworks, and theories, including how they differ from one another, and to demonstrate an ability to use them to analyze public health ethics examples. The format of the exam will be short essay questions. There will be 5 questions in total, and you will be required to answer 4 of them. Each answer should be no more than 500 words (excluding references).
- 5. Term Paper (40%):** The final assignment of the semester will be a term paper, due Tuesday, April 23 at 9am via Canvas. The word length should be between 2,000 and 3,000 words, not including references. Please see the course website for further details and guidance on this assignment.

The chart below shows the relationship between the course learning outcomes and the course assessments.

Course Learning Outcome	Assessment
Identify and clearly describe ethical issues that arise within public health.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Explain ethical theories, frameworks and concepts relevant to public health.	2, 4, 5

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Apply ethical theories, frameworks and concepts in practice to examples of public health policies and interventions.	1, 2, 4, 5
Connect empirical research on public health to ethical issues in the process of applying ethical theories, frameworks and concepts to public health examples.	2, 5
Analyze and evaluate ethical reasoning with respect to concrete public health examples.	2, 4, 5
Support recommendations for public health policies or interventions with cogent ethical reasoning.	1, 4, 5
Articulate and communicate ethical reasoning on public health issues with diverse audiences who may not share the student's perspective.	1, 2, 5

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

UBC provides resources to support student learning and to maintain healthy lifestyles but recognizes that sometimes crises arise and so there are additional resources to access including those for survivors of sexual violence. UBC values respect for the person and ideas of all members of the academic community. Harassment and discrimination are not tolerated nor is suppression of academic freedom. UBC provides appropriate accommodation for students with disabilities and for religious observances. UBC values academic honesty and students are expected to acknowledge the ideas generated by others and to uphold the highest academic standards in all of their actions.

Details of the policies and how to access support are available on [the UBC Senate website](#).

RESPECTFUL ENVIRONMENTS:

SPPH is committed to providing a positive education experience free from discrimination. If you have had an experience in this course where you feel unsafe, have been mistreated or have witnessed mistreatment, please let us know. If you want to raise this beyond the course instructor the School recommends the following. You may contact your academic supervisor, the education manager for your program or the Associate Director-Education. You may also report your concerns to the Faculty of Medicine Office of Respectful Environments, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (REDI) at <https://mistreatmenthelp.med.ubc.ca/> Both SPPH and the REDI Office have procedures in place for recording and acting on reports of mistreatment in the educational environment.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Plagiarism: Plagiarism, whether intentional or unintentional, is a form of academic misconduct that can have serious repercussions for your grade in this course and your academic life. As outlined in the

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UBC Calendar (<https://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,54,111,1745>), and as defined within UBC policies (<http://learningcommons.ubc.ca/resource-guides/avoiding-plagiarism/>), students must be careful to avoid plagiarism wherein one submits or presents the work of another person as their own. This includes self-plagiarism (also referred to as dovetailing or double-dipping), in which one uses one's own previously conducted work (e.g., assignment, published paper, conference presentation) in whole or in part without properly referencing it and/or without prior approval from the current instructor. Students are responsible for becoming familiar with the many different forms that plagiarism can take (e.g., accidental plagiarism, self-plagiarism or dovetailing, patchwriting) so they may avoid it. For more information, see:

- <https://www.grad.ubc.ca/current-students/dissertation-thesis-preparation/plagiarism>
- <https://academicintegrity.ubc.ca/regulation-process/academic-misconduct/>
- <https://academicintegrity.ubc.ca/about-academic-integrity/glossary/>

The use of Chat GPT or other generative AI tools is NOT permitted for assignments in this course. It is not allowed for weekly reflections, class presentations, the midterm exam, or the term paper. Failure to follow this policy will be considered a violation of UBC's policy on academic misconduct.

LEARNING ANALYTICS

Canvas records data about student interaction and engagement with the course website. This data will be used to help the instructor better understand the level and nature of student engagement, and may be used to make minor changes to course structure, Canvas formatting and organization, and other possible revisions to improve the course and student engagement.

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