

**Course Design Enhancement Grant Application
Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning
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2. PHL 210 – Ethics (formerly PHL 160)
Department of Philosophy
Avg. enrollment = 25-30 (this course is typically at capacity, which will be 22 as WP)
2+ sections offered every semester
3. This course is a major and minor requirement for the Philosophy program. It also fulfills the L6 general education requirement and the writing process requirement. It is open to students at all levels with no pre-requisite.
4. I will be redesigning this course for two primary reasons:

1. **Philosophy Major Revision:** As part of the revision of the Philosophy major just enacted, the course has been designated as a writing process course. While the course has traditionally been taught with an emphasis on written work as the primary means of evaluation, my goal is to create a course that brings rational argumentation and process writing together in a coherent and well-articulated fashion – the development and writing of ethical arguments will be presented and practiced in a way that demonstrates how reasoning and writing are not separate and discreet processes, but in fact interdependent.

2. **Developing a New Pedagogical Approach to Ethics:** As part of my own philosophical and pedagogical research, I have been developing what I call a “phenomenological” approach to the teaching of ethics. Phenomenology is the school of philosophy that attempts to reveal and articulate the conditions that make our understanding of any situation (a life experience, a text, etc.) possible. While ethics in Anglo-American circles is traditionally taught through an “applied ethics” approach (one that presupposes established ethical “theories” that are merely applied to dilemmas one might face), such an approach already assumes that the ethical dilemma is clear and need only be subjected to a theoretical perspective in order for it to be overcome. My goal is to teach students how to recognize and articulate ethical dilemmas (a situation where 2 or more ethical principles come into conflict and present no easy resolution), particularly where we might not even recognize a dilemma at all. Thus, a phenomenological approach allows one to argue for a solution to the dilemma only after one has fully understood and articulated the conditions that make it a dilemma in the first place. In this way, one is truly practicing ethics as the critical thinking about morals, rather than just simply applying moral theories.

5. Here are some new ideas for achieving the goals stated above:

- **Incorporation of new media content:** in the past, I have used films as a vehicle to introduce particular ethical topics (genetics, labor, violence, citizenship) and provide a content on which to reflect and develop arguments in conjunction with primary texts. As part of this proposal, I would like to use shorter format media content (primarily from news programs, debates, etc.) as a source not only for topics, but also for examples of ethical arguments that are valid and (often times) not valid. This will require the development of an efficient technological means to collect, store, and deliver this content to the class (either for viewing during class time or as web-based content for viewing as homework), and time spent identifying and collecting a broad array examples that will cover a number of the topics and themes discussed in class. I would also like to provide students with a means of identifying and presenting their own examples (either in class time or as part of a written assignment) that can be drawn from the media in their own research. To this end, I hope to work with members of our IT staff to learn ways to capture and utilize this digital media content.

- **Developing a tool for the assessment and interrogation of moral principles:** one of the ways that I hope to engage students at the personal level is to begin the course with a detailed assessment of their own moral principles and viewpoints. This will serve two purposes: 1. it will make them more aware of their moral commitments, thus providing them with a starting point from which to begin the phenomenological investigation I mentioned above; and 2. it will allow them to trace their own ethical awareness throughout the semester as they subject their moral principles to philosophical scrutiny, identify the conditions that make such principles possible, identify any potential contradictions in their principles, and come to accept and/or reject those principles based on good philosophical reasoning rather than unreflective habit.

To this end, I want to implement an evaluative tool (a survey, perhaps) that they will take at the beginning of the course, and then take again at the end of the course. I hope to consult with Dr. Patricia Werhane, one of my former graduate professors and Director of the Institute for Business and Professional Ethics at DePaul University, in order to develop a valid and effective tool for this purpose. She is currently editing a collection of essays about new approaches to business ethics and has in the past been a great resource when thinking about teaching ethics in classroom.

- **Writing Rubric/Assessment Tool:** students will be required to write three arguments in this course. I want to develop a model of process writing that allows them to bring moral principles into question and write arguments that flow from this questioning rather than try to avoid it. This, I believe, is the heart of good argumentation, as it requires the students to argue not only from the standpoint of his/her already accepted moral principle, but more importantly, entertain a number of valid viewpoints and assess the pros and cons of each. To this end, I will develop a writing rubric that will place particular emphasis on the identification of an ethical dilemma, the ability to articulate why there is a dilemma in the first place, and the full consideration of alternative viewpoints and counter-arguments. Such a rubric, while particular to this course, will be modeled on the rubric and descriptors already employed by the general education program.

6. Outcomes for this course will be evaluated through the assessment of students' written arguments and will employ the models and rubric mentioned above. I currently keep examples of students papers from my ethics courses, so I hope, in at least an informal way, to compare the work from this updated version of the course to examples of work from prior courses to see if students improve in some of the key areas that will be the focus of the new rubric: identification of an ethical dilemma, articulation of the conflicting principles that make it a dilemma in the first place, and the full engagement with alternative viewpoints and counter-arguments.

7. I am committed to this project for the entire summer, as I have no major travel plans (personal or professional) from May-August. I look forward to the opportunity to share these ideas with my colleagues and learn from their research as well.