ENVP U6225.001

ETHICS, VALUES AND JUSTICE

Course Overview

What do ethics require of human action in relation to the natural and built environments? The answer to this question varies among stakeholders according to their values, which may be viewed as just or unjust. What are these values, and how are differences among them to be assessed and managed ethically? The complexity of these questions is compounded by a recurrent problem of voice. Some human and nonhuman stakeholders, such as future human generations and nonhuman entities, cannot verbally express themselves. Other human stakeholders, such as unprotected laborers, may have little or no opportunity to voice their standpoints. Others may undertake to do so but are unintentionally or intentionally neglected, misunderstood or misrepresented; while the standpoints of still others may be simply repudiated, censored or otherwise silenced. Despite these difficulties, an increased sense of the need to include ethics in public and private, or public, civic and social organizational and individual decision making has emerged, particularly since the 1980s. At the same time, practical agendas and academic studies increasingly articulate and address ethical processes and issues.

This course will focus upon sustainability ethics, which constitute a second generation of environmental ethics. The course material is organized into three sections. The first will address the rise and transformation of environmental ethics from their first generation, called environmental ethics, to their second generation, called sustainability ethics. Much debated clusters of environmental ethics will be identified, and new directions in sustainability ethics will be introduced. The second and third sections of the course will address two sets of sector-based sustainability ethics. One set includes land, water, air and waste ethics; and the other includes
energy, food, place, consumption and climate ethics. An overall movement from more abstract
debates to more practical applications will be seen. These applications typically involve the
work of “watchdogs”, or monitoring mechanisms, such as grassroots movements that promote
local activism and even citizen brigades, established NGOs that create data-based indicators and
undertake litigation, corporations and shareholders pursuing social responsibility, governmental
institutions providing oversight and regulation, and both traditional and new forms of
investigative media. Students will have the opportunity to conduct research on sustainability
ethics in relation to an organization or sector they select.

Throughout the course, discussion will center upon ethical practice: how can we apply
sustainability ethics, values and justice, and ensure their continued application? What kinds of
initiatives, innovations and proposals can we design to bring individual and institutional goals
into alignment with an array of relevant ethical standpoints, while reducing and negotiating
conflicts among them? The aim is to equip decision makers with the understanding and
vocabulary needed to create and implement plans meeting the ethical requirements of
sustainability.

![Image Credit:](https://www.gscouncil.org/unlocking-the-business-value-of-sustainability-through-innovation/)

**Course Objectives**

Students are expected to learn how to evaluate and manage the competing ethical claims of
stakeholders regarding social, economic and environmental benefits and harms. On completing
the course, students should be able to:

1. identify and assess ethical claims concerning both the biotic whole and distinct
   sectors of sustainability;
2. perceive and map conflict and its resolution or remediation among competing social,
   economic and environmental values;
3. discern and assess values within documents, organizations and standpoints;
4. design incentives or disincentives to alter or maintain values-based claims;
5. frame ethics provisions for sustainability project proposals;
6. identify mechanisms for ethics training and monitoring in the practice of management;
(7) utilize corruption assessment tools and structure anti-corruption provisions;
(8) engage in public discourse in terms of sustainability ethics;
(9) apply sustainability ethics in the context of policy, program and project design,
innovation and change; and
(10) utilize cases and case histories to inform, improve and ground decision making.

**Course Topics and Readings**

In advance of each class, students should become familiar with the relevant materials posted in
the Files section of our Canvas site, reading at least 3 of the 6 scholarly articles listed. Each
week, a relevant web page is also provided as a source of additional information and potential
research.

During each class session, the various items listed will be discussed, and students will have the
opportunity to express their thoughts on them.

**Section I. The Rise and Transformation of Environmental Ethics**

**Week 1. Human Ethics**
*September 6*

Hazleton, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 5-64.


Here and There.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Mifflin Harcourt, 59-74.


**Week 2. Environmental Ethics**
*September 13*

Callicott, J. Baird. 2008. Contemporary Criticisms of the Received Wilderness Idea. In Pt. 3 of
*The Wilderness Debate Rages On: Continuing the Great New Wilderness Debate*, ed. Michael P.

Balogh, Brian. 2002. Scientific Forestry and the Roots of the Modern American State: Gifford


Web Page: The Smithsonian Channel Commemorates the 50th Anniversary of the Wilderness Act https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BIX8mQPd12Y

**Week 3. Earth Justice**

*September 20*


**Week 4. Biocultural Ethics**

*September 27*


**Section II. Sector-Based Sustainability Ethics (A)**

**Week 5. Land Ethics**

*October 4*


Web Page: Global Land Outlook 2017–UN Convention to Combat Desertification  
https://knowledge.unccd.int/glo

**Week 6. Water Ethics**  
*October 11*


Web Page: Water Integrity Network—Annual Report 2017  
http://staging.win.lat.webfractional.com/2018/07/02/2017-annual-report-available/

**Week 7. Air Ethics**  
*October 18*


**Week 8. Waste Ethics**  
*October 25*


**Section III. Sector-Based Sustainability Ethics (B)**

**Week 9. Energy Ethics**  
*November 1*


Web Page: Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative—Progress Report 2018

**Week 10. Food Ethics**

*November 8*


Web Page: Codex Alimentarius International Food Standards—UN Food and Agriculture Organization
**Week 11. Place Ethics**  
*November 15*


Web Page: On Care for Our Common Home 2015—Encyclical  

**Week 12. Thanksgiving Holiday**  
*November 22*

**Week 13. Consumption Ethics**  
*November 29*


Web Page: World Happiness Report 2018

**Week 14. Climate Ethics**

*December 6*


Web Page: The World Justice Project—Rule of Law Index 2017-2018

**Week 15. Student Presentations**

*December 13 [or sooner]*

**Course Materials**

Required reading materials are indicated under weekly topics in the Files section of our Canvas site, typically as PDFs. They have been selected from a broad range of highly contemporary relevant literature. To access a reading, simply click on the title in the Files section. It usually takes significantly under a minute for the article to appear fully, depending upon the strength of internet connectivity and the type of browser used.
In addition, for the purpose of review, PPTs used in class will be posted weekly in the Files section of our Canvas site.

**Course Requirements and Grades**

Course requirements are listed below, together with their grade point values.

1. **Class Attendance:** Attendance will be given a maximum weight of 13%. One grade point will be given for each attended class session. Attendance should be timely and regular. An absence is excused only with (a) prior e-mail notification for a critical documented purpose, or (b) emergency verification. Attendance should be professionally “attentive”, or without distracting use of electronic or other equipment.

2. **Class Participation:** Participation will be given a maximum weight of 26%. Two grade points will be given for active participation in each class session. Active participation includes both (a) raising questions and offering comments connected meaningfully to ongoing discussion; and (b) introducing readings by sharing highlights and considerations pertaining to them. In view of the large size of the class, each student should aim to participate cogently at least three times during the semester (once in each of three different weeks) on the basis of prior contemplation of the relevant material.

3. **Discussion Entries:** Discussion entries posted on our Canvas website in the Discussion section will be given a maximum weight of 26%. A maximum of two grade points will be given for the timely preparation and posting of an informative, perceptive, coherent and cogent essay-style statement pertinent to the reading material assigned for a class session. One such statement should be prepared in advance of each class session. The statement is due by Wednesday, 2 p.m. before the Thursday class to which it pertains. Students should consider the possibility of accomplishing their readings and posting their statements over the weekend prior to any class.

4. **A Report:** A report focusing on a clearly framed, specific case of innovation in or deviation from sustainability ethics in a public, civic or private organization will be given a maximum weight of 35%. The report should explain why the relevant conduct or policy is ethical or unethical, with reference to the sustainability ethics addressed in the course. The report should explain how the conduct or policy demonstrates “best practices” or “corrupt practices”. It should be submitted both online and in paper copy by Tuesday, December 11, at 11:59 p.m. Informal presentations on student reports will be scheduled for Thursday, December 13, during the usual class time framework.

Additional details regarding course requirements will be posted, as needed, in the Assignments section of our Canvas site.

Each student’s points for all requirements (class attendance, class participation, discussion entries and the report) will be totaled, and a class curve will be established. Final grades will be provided on a letter grade scale.
Statements of University Policy

Academic Integrity Statement

The School of International and Public Affairs does not tolerate cheating and/or plagiarism in any form. Those students who violate the Academic Integrity and Community Standards will be subject to the Dean’s Disciplinary Procedures. The standards can be viewed online at: 
http://studentconduct.columbia.edu/

Please familiarize yourself with the proper methods of citation and attribution. Columbia provides some useful resources online; we strongly encourage you to familiarize yourself with these various styles before conducting your research:
http://library.columbia.edu/research/citation-management.html

Violations of the Academic Integrity and Community Standards will be reported to the Associate Dean for Student and Alumni Affairs.

Facilities Accessibility Statement

Columbia is committed to providing equal access to qualified students with documented disabilities. A student’s disability status and reasonable accommodations are individually determined based upon disability documentation and related information gathered through the intake process. For more information regarding this service, please visit the University’s Health Services website at:
http://www.health.columbia.edu/disability-services

Page 1 Image Credits:
http://wolfweb.com/?p=289
https://countrygate.files.wordpress.com/2012/04/dandelions.jpg

Page 2 Image Credit:
https://www.gscouncil.org/unlocking-the-business-value-of-sustainability-through-innovation/