

COMMUNICATING MORAL ISSUES

PHIL 213 • Spring 2024 • Google Drive link [here](#)

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Sign up for office hours [here](#)
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PHIL 213 is a component of Carolina Core. This course satisfies the Effective, Engaged, and Persuasive Spoken Communication (CMS) and Values, Ethics, and Social Responsibility (VSR) requirements.

Overview of the Course

Disagreement is an inevitable part of American life today. Conflicts abound about when life starts and ends, about what we owe to our fellow citizens and all humans, and about what kinds of limits might fairly be put on our freedom. They resurface on our TVs and in our reels, on our campuses and at our dinner tables. Somehow, they seem to intensify by the day, or even the minute.

Yet, despite these enduring disagreements, we must—somehow—live together. How might we navigate these difficult topics? How might we figure out the rules that could govern our shared lives? Most importantly: how can we even begin to talk about these contentious topics when the temperature is already so high? This course invites students to reflect on these questions. Over the course of fourteen weeks, we will learn about some of the most controversial topics in ethics today. At the same time, we will learn about the means by which we might talk about these issues together. Our major goal will be to learn how to listen to *and* move one another.

The course will focus on four major human values: dignity, freedom, community, and equality. We will think about why those values are valuable; we will discuss ethical debates that relate to each value; and we will also consider how we might embody these values in our speech and writing.

Objectives for the Course

Students who successfully complete this course will be able to:

- identify the source and function of values through the investigation of contemporary moral issues;
- demonstrate an understanding of the importance of values and ethics for the self and for contemporary society;
- reflect on how values shape personal and community ethics, and decision-making;
- identify and demonstrate appropriate means of communication for varied audiences and purposes;
- demonstrate the ability to reason clearly in speaking and writing to inform, persuade and exchange views; *and*
- articulate a critical and informed position on an issue and engage in productive and responsible intellectual exchanges that demonstrate the ability to grasp and respond to other positions as well as set forth their own.

In + beyond the classroom

Attendance. You are expected to be in class. Attendance will be monitored with sign-in sheets that you will sign as you walk in. If you need to miss class for an excusable reason, let me know ahead of time by emailing me so that we can talk about how to make up for your absence. You will be completing self-evaluations halfway through the semester and at the end of the semester. If you have excessive absences, I expect that your self-evaluation grade will reflect those absences.

Technology. Devices can impede learning. They can also enhance it. I expect students to be honest with themselves about when and how to use devices to facilitate their learning in class. Please also be aware of the needs of those around you. Note that we will use our devices in class to collaborate and engage with one another at times. Students should let me know if this is an issue for any reason.

Communication with the professor. I am here for you! Please schedule an appointment [here](#) if you would like to meet with me, or email me about another time that would be better for you. You can email me at mnickel@sc.edu. Note that it may take up to 24 hours for me to respond, so plan ahead if there is a pressing matter that you need to email me about regarding an upcoming assignment.

Ten classroom commandments:

1. This classroom is your classroom, a place where you might be formed together.
2. Thou shalt not dominate discussion but ensure that all are able to contribute.
3. Thou shalt not feel the need to be profound or to impress anyone.
4. Thou shalt respect one another's time by being concise in language and by ending on time.
5. Thou shalt honor one another: show one another decency and charity.
6. Thou shalt not hesitate to ask a simple, unsophisticated, or clarifying question.
7. Thou shalt not assume others' knowledge of material that has not been assigned in class.
8. Thou shalt not overlook the role of various biases (like gender biases) in discussion.
9. Thou shalt not dismiss your opponents' views wholesale.
10. Thou shalt not hesitate to acknowledge your own mistakes.

If you feel your classmates have broken these rules, you may mention that in class or any time thereafter. You may let the professor know anonymously about troubling patterns using [this form](#).

Inclusion and diversity in the course

Mutual dependence and expertise. All of us ought to remember, as we read and discuss the material, that we can and must lean on one another as we try to make sense of the moral issues at hand. To be clear, no student is expected to be an expert in ethics or theory. Yet we must also remember that insights don't always come from experts. We always have something to learn from one another.

Diversity statement. It is my goal to create a learning environment that empowers students of diverse backgrounds and perspectives to participate and become ethical citizens of the world. This can be difficult to do, frankly, in the world in which we live, where the views of white, male, straight, cisgender, able-bodied, and wealthy persons are privileged. I have worked resolutely to create a course that addresses this issue. However, as someone shaped by that same world, I know that my own enjoyment of privilege means that I, too, have much personal work to do. Please contact me or submit anonymous feedback [here](#) if you have any suggestions for enabling me to be more inclusive or better honor your various identities. I also appreciate your help enabling me to make our course as inclusive as possible by informing me about:

- a preferred name or identification you would like me to use;
- something you may have heard (from a classmate or the professor) that troubled you; or
- limitations of the course that could or should be addressed.

If your concerns that would be best addressed by a third party, please see USC's Title IX coordinator.

Special needs. If you have any special needs, academic or otherwise, or if you are having a difficult time in the course, please do let me know. Students with disabilities, in particular, should let me know as soon as possible what their specific needs are, so that their rights can be upheld in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. If you are having any other difficulties—moral, spiritual, or personal—that impede your participation in this course, please let me know.

Graded assignments

Students will be primarily graded on the following five speeches. Further details about each of the speeches, as well as rubrics, will be offered when the projects are discussed in depth on the first day of class. For many of the speeches, a written manuscript will be due ahead of time. Each speech will be evaluated on the degree to which it is logically sound, clear, creative, engaging, and effective. *Note that your speeches will be assessed by the professor and your colleagues.*

The award presentation

Introductory speech: in-person and scripted (10%)

First, all students will deliver a two-minute speech in the form of an **award presentation**. You will meet a student in your section and learn about their life. Then you will invent an award that you believe the student deserves and draft a 250-word speech you will use to present that award in class.

The Pecha Kucha talk

Informative speech: in-person, extemporaneous, and using audiovisual aids (15%)

This talk can be about *anything* that pertains to the class—and it should be clear how it relates to the class. As will be discussed in further detail, Pecha Kucha talks always last 6 minutes and 40 seconds, and involve twenty slides that are presented for twenty seconds each. These will be delivered in class.

The explainer video

Informative speech: recorded, scripted, using audiovisual aids (15%)

Students will develop a video of about seven minutes that explains differing views and information related to one of the topics discussed in class. Students should be creative about how to convey information in their videos. Videos will be due two days before we discuss that topic in class.

Court case -or- Rally speech

Persuasive speech: in-person and scripted (15%)

Students will choose between the following two options:

1. A **court case**. This assignment requires students to present the closing arguments of a case before a judge. The specific context of the cases will be discussed in detail on the first day of class. **OR**
2. A **rally speech**. Students who choose to do this module will prepare a campaign rally speech. These rally speeches will be presented in a specific context, also to be discussed in detail on the first day of class.

The Toast

Commemorative speech: in-person and scripted (10%)

Finally, all students will also deliver a 3-5 minute toast on the exam day of the course. These toasts will commemorate a thing, event, or person relevant to our course for the semester. They should be toasts—not *roasts*!—and should be generally enjoyed by your classmates.

In addition to these speeches, students will be asked to respond before each class to the assigned reading, video, or podcast. This will be done in a Google form with 2-4 questions. Students should complete their responses by the **midnight before class**. The first response (as an example) is linked [here](#). There are 32 days with assignments you must respond to, and each student will get two freebies over the semester. Each response will count for ½% of your grade, such that responses count for a total of 15% of your grade. You may receive extra credit if you do all 32 responses.

Grades at a glance

Award presentation	10%
Pecha Kucha talk	15%
Explainer video	15%
Court case or rally speech	15%
Toast	10%
30 responses (½% each)	15%
Attendance + participation	20%

Reading assignments

No textbook purchases are required for this course. All materials are free or on the course website. The only “textbook” that will be used is The Public Speaking Project’s *Public Speaking*.

	Theme	Readings/assignments	Tasks
Introduction			
Jan 8	Introductions	▪ Review syllabus before class	📌 Prepare to introduce yourself
Jan 10	Civility: How to disagree	▪ Teresa Bejan, “ <i>Is Civility a Sham?</i> ” (14 min)	📌 Response
Jan 12	Eschewing obfuscation	▪ George Orwell, “ <i>Politics and the English Language</i> ”	📌 Response 📌 Sign up for speeches
Jan 15: MLK Day – No class			
Dignity			
Jan 17	The value of dignity	▪ Sandel, “ <i>Torture & human dignity</i> ” (7 min)	📌 Response
Jan 19	Hate Speech	▪ Waldron, “ <i>Approaching Hate Speech</i> ” (17 pp)	📌 Response 📌 Award manuscript due
Jan 22	End-of-life issues	▪ Aviv, “ <i>What does it mean to die?</i> ”, mp3 link here (24 pp or 60 min)	📌 Response
Jan 24	Dignity in speech & writing	▪ Meade, “ <i>Engage Your Audience</i> ”	📌 Response
Jan 26	Introducing... your classmates	▪ No assigned reading: award presentations all day	📌 Rehearse your award presentation!
Jan 29	The dignity of convicts + victims	▪ Tollefsen, “ <i>Capital Punishment, Sanctity of Life, and Human Dignity</i> ” (~3 pp) ▪ Feser, “ <i>In Defense of Capital Punishment</i> ” (~3 pp)	📌 Response
Jan 31	Two kinds of respect	▪ Darwall, “ <i>Two Kinds of Respect</i> ” (14 pp)	📌 Response
Feb 2	Court cases	▪ No assigned reading: court cases on life support & hate speech	
Freedom			
Feb 5	The value of freedom	▪ Berlin, “ <i>Two Concepts of Liberty</i> ” (16 pp)	📌 Response
Feb 7	Vaccines	▪ The Experiment podcast, “ <i>The Crime of Refusing Vaccination</i> ” (36 min)	📌 Response
Feb 9	Gun control	▪ NYTimes podcast, “ <i>Lessons in Gun Control</i> ” (30 min)	📌 Response
Feb 12	Abortion part 1	▪ Ezra Klein’s <i>podcast</i> with Kate Greasley (72 min)	📌 Response
Feb 14	Abortion part 2	▪ Ezra Klein’s <i>podcast</i> with Erika Bachiochi (87 min)	📌 Response
Feb 16	Pecha Kucha talks	▪ No assigned reading: Pecha Kucha talks	
Feb 19	Complicating autonomy	▪ Mackenzie, “ <i>Relational Autonomy, Normative Authority and Perfectionism</i> ” (19 pp)	📌 Response
Feb 21	Telling your story	▪ Heather Box and Julian Mocine-McQueen, “ <i>How Your Story Sets You Free</i> ” (59 min)	📌 Response
Feb 23	Rally speeches	▪ No assigned reading: Rally speeches involving abortion, vaccines, and gun control	

Community & Common Goods			
Feb 26	The value of community	▪ MacIntyre, “ <u>Is Patriotism a Virtue?</u> ” (18 pp)	📌 Response
Feb 28	Immigration	▪ Macedo, “ <u>The Moral Dilemma of U.S. Immigration Policy</u> ” (19 pp)	📌 Response
Mar 1	Immigration pt 2	▪ Walzer, “ <u>Membership</u> ” (31 pp)	📌 Response 📌 Mid-semester eval due
Mar 11	Environmental commons	▪ Bisht, “ <u>Free-Rider Problem Explained</u> ” (10 min) ▪ Hardin, “ <u>The Tragedy of the Commons</u> ” (6 pp)	📌 Response
Mar 13	Gene editing	▪ Ezra Klein’s podcast on <u>CRISPR</u> (58 min)	📌 Response
Mar 15	Pecha Kucha talks	▪ No assigned reading: Pecha Kucha talks	
Mar 18	Health care	▪ Fourth Branch podcast, “ <u>Medicare for All?</u> ” (65 min)	📌 Response
Mar 20	Community in speech & writing	▪ Ramsey, “ <u>Using Language Well</u> ”	📌 Response
Mar 22	Court cases	▪ No assigned reading: court cases on gene editing, environment, and immigration	
Equality			
Mar 25	The value of equality	▪ Nagel, “ <u>Equality</u> ” (22 pp)	📌 Response
Mar 27	Global equality	▪ Singer, “ <u>Famine, Affluence, & Morality</u> ” (15 pp)	📌 Response
Mar 29	Distribution of resources	▪ Radiolab, “ <u>Playing God</u> ” (59 min)	📌 Response
Apr 1	Affirmative action	▪ NYTimes podcast, “ <u>How Affirmative Action Changed Their Lives</u> ”	📌 Response
Apr 3	Reparations	▪ Coates, “ <u>The Case for Reparations</u> ” (17 pp)	📌 Response
Apr 5	Moral status of animals	▪ Norcross, “ <u>Puppies, Pigs, and People</u> ” (17 pp)	📌 Response
Apr 8	Equality in speech & writing	▪ Dhanesh, “ <u>Speaking to a Global Audience</u> ”	📌 Response
Apr 10	Equality of what?	▪ Sen, “ <u>Equality of What?</u> ” (26 pp)	📌 Response
Apr 12	Rally speeches	▪ No assigned reading: rally speeches involving affirmative action & animals’ rights	
Integrating values			
Apr 15	Balancing values	▪ Charles Taylor, “ <u>The Diversity of Goods</u> ” (16 pp)	📌 Response
Apr 17	Crucial conversations	▪ Joseph Grenny, “ <u>Mastering The Art of Crucial Conversations</u> ”	📌 Response
Apr 19	Pecha Kucha Talks	▪ No assigned reading: Pecha Kucha talks	
Apr 22	Final review	▪ No assigned reading	📌 Final self-eval due

Note: this syllabus, assigned readings, rubrics, and other materials for the course are available on Blackboard and on our course’s Google Drive site at [this link](#).

Sign-ups for Pecha Kucha talks, 6 minutes 40 seconds each (for reference)

February 16	Pecha Kucha talks on various topics	Seven students: _____ _____ _____
March 15	Pecha Kucha talks on various topics	Seven students: _____ _____ _____
April 19	Pecha Kucha talks on various topics	Six students: _____ _____

Sign-ups for explainer videos (for reference)

Due Date	Topic	Two students each
February 5	Explainer video on vaccines	_____ _____
February 7	Explainer video on gun control	_____ _____
February 12	Explainer video on abortion	_____ _____
February 27	Explainer video on immigration	_____ _____
March 13	Explainer video on health care	_____ _____
March 16	Explainer video on environmental issues	_____ _____
March 18	Explainer video on gene editing	_____ _____
March 27	Explainer video on resource distribution	_____ _____
April 1	Explainer video on affirmative action	_____ _____
April 3	Explainer video on reparations	_____ _____

Sign-ups for court cases and rally speeches: in-person persuasive speech (for reference)

February 2	First court case on ending life support (14 min, 7 min each side)	Two students, <i>on opposing sides</i> : _____
	Second court case on hate speech (14 min, 7 min each side)	Two students, <i>on opposing sides</i> : _____
February 23	Rally speeches on abortion (7 minutes each)	Two students, <i>on opposing sides</i> : _____
	Rally speeches on gun control (7 minutes each)	Two students, <i>on opposing sides</i> : _____
	Rally speeches on vaccines (7 minutes each)	Two students, <i>on opposing sides</i> : _____
March 22	Third court case on gene editing (14 min, 7 min each side)	Two students, <i>on opposing sides</i> : _____
	Fourth court case on environmental commons (14 min, 7 min each side)	Two students, <i>on opposing sides</i> : _____
	Fifth court case on immigration (14 min, 7 min each side)	Two students, <i>on opposing sides</i> : _____
April 12	Rally speeches on affirmative action (7 minutes each)	Two students, <i>on opposing sides</i> : _____
	Rally speeches on animals' rights (7 minutes each)	Two students, <i>on opposing sides</i> : _____

Contexts for court cases and rally speeches (for reference)

	Event	Context
February 2	1 st court case on ending life support	Aden Hailu, a freshman at University of Nevada, was declared braindead after she did not wake up from an emergency surgery. Her father is objecting to the hospital's plan to remove her from life support in Nevada state court. What should be done? One student will argue on behalf of Hailu's father; another will argue on behalf of the hospital.
	2 nd court case on hate speech	In 2016-7, high school students Cedric Epple and Kevin Chen shared insulting and racist posts on a private Instagram account. These included photos of Black classmates with nooses photoshopped around their necks. After their posts were discovered by the school district, they were suspended and later expelled. Did those penalties violate their rights?
February 23	Rally speeches on abortion	The state of South Carolina has just passed a ban on abortion after six weeks. Some think this is a major victory in the movement to end abortion; others think it is an unconstitutional and/or unethical restriction of many Americans' autonomy.
	Rally speeches on gun control	A former member of Parkland High School shot and killed seventeen people and wounded 17 others in a matter of minutes. In the aftermath of the shooting, many young people are calling for increased gun control measures. On the other hand, others argue that those measures are unconstitutional and unjustly constrain Americans' freedom. What should be done?
	Rally speeches on vaccines	As vaccines become available in the aftermath of COVID, the legislature of South Carolina is considering laws that would prohibit vaccine mandates. Some claim that requiring those on campus be vaccinated violates their bodily autonomy. Others claim that it unfairly marginalizes those who are or have family members who are immunocompromised. Which approach should voters support?
March 22	3 rd court case on gene editing	(Note: this is a fictional scenario.) Similarly to the Chinese scientist He Jiankui, an American scientist, Jerome Watters, edited the genomes of two embryos to prevent them from suffering from mitochondrial disease. Watters has pioneered a promising cure to a deadly and tragic disease, but broke the law in doing so. What penalties should this scientist face?
	4 th court case on environmental issues	Sixteen teenagers in Montana are suing their state government for approving projects that are likely to exacerbate climate change. They claim that in permitting these developments the government is violating their right to a "clean and healthful environment," per the state's constitution. Has the state violated their rights?
	5 th court case on immigration	The President has instituted a rule that asylum seekers in the United States must demonstrate that they have applied for asylum in another country. Some claim that this violates US and international law. Biden's administration says the policy is necessary to deter illegal immigration. Is the policy constitutional? Does it contravene the US community's values, or does it keep the US community safe?
April 12	Rally speeches on affirmative action	The Supreme Court just outlawed admissions practices at a slew of universities. Those schools who design their admissions decisions to foster racial diversity in their institutions will no longer be allowed to do so. Some argue this ruling exacerbates racial inequality; others say it promotes fairness. Is affirmative action morally acceptable or not?
	Rally speeches on animals' rights	(Note: this is a fictional scenario.) Following other European nations and the European Commission, the United States is considering whether to institute a ban on factory farming. The ban would eliminate animal caging and chick culling, which some say are cruel and unethical practices. Farmers worry that this would drastically increase food prices. Should the U.S. outlaw such practices?