

Essential Questions: What is Ethics? What does it mean to engage in thoughtful ethical discourse? Where do our moral values come from? Are values universal and unchanging, embedded in the very fabric of existence, or are they the subjective constructs of human thought, defined and shaped entirely by their cultural and historical context? What is the good life? What is right conduct? Is there an ultimate purpose/meaning to life? To what extent are our lives shaped by genetic and/or environmental factors or are human beings free to shape their own destinies? Why is the answer that each of us gives to all of these questions profoundly important to the present and future course of each of our lives?

Texts: This course is anchored by an on-line, web-based curriculum developed by Cushing Academy.

Clarke, Peter and Lance Conrad. "Ethics and Morality"
[<http://penguin.cushing.org/faculty/pclarke/ethics/index.html>]

Film: Eastwood, Clint. "Million Dollar Baby"
Hoffman, Michael. "The Emperor's Club"
Niccol, Andrew. "Gattaca"
Robbins, Tim. "Dead Man Walking"
Zwick, Edward. "Courage Under Fire"

Overview: How do human beings actually think about and make moral decisions? The question of the origin of our sense of right and wrong is perhaps the most basic and important issue in the study of human society. Are principles like justice, kindness, and wisdom an integral part of the natural world to be discovered like any other objective truth or do human beings create these values out of the fabric of their own subjective personal and cultural experience to be modified and changed as situations demand?

This one-term seminar examines the moral and ethical dilemmas that are shaping human existence in modern society. A Web-enhanced curriculum based on powerful, real-world case studies enables students to investigate a broad range of applied ethical issues including abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, stem cell research, and genetic engineering. The course website provides the structure and resources for this seminar; however, in-class discussion, debate and role-plays are at its core. Students focus on the social, political, economic and religious influences at work in everyday decisions. Assessments are varied, including weekly journals, personal position papers, and in-class assignments.

Methods:

The course is designed to give students the opportunity to explore and develop their own moral framework through a series of carefully selected and documented "web quests" and ethical case studies that center on current and emerging 21st century ethical challenges. Through collaborative, anchored inquiry, students learn to effectively research, discuss, listen, debate, collaborate, reflect, write, and express their ethical viewpoints. The goal is not to shape the students' morality with any set agenda but rather to foster their capacity for rigorous ethical discourse and thinking. Hopefully, as a result of the curriculum, each student will be a better informed and educated citizen with the capability to make better decisions in an increasingly complex world. Throughout the course, students will be learning to:

- Confront and examine ethical dilemmas which reflect and/or transcend various paradigms in society today.
- Utilize different ethical orientations to examine the moral complexity of different issues.

- Develop the ability to see historical, economic, and societal facts in context; distinguish underlying systemic movements and trends; and formulate potential solutions in moral, as well as, practical terms.
- Utilize research, journalistic, internet, and historical materials in a discriminating way.
- Develop the ability to weigh evidence and reach conclusions on the basis of facts and reasoned argument, not prejudice.
- Listen carefully and communicate effectively through debate and discussion.
- See the challenges of the 21st Century through a global perspective.
- Develop their capacity to create thoughtful, compassionate, and well-reasoned essays.

Core Units:

- a. The Nature of Ethics, Ethical Discourse, and Ethical Orientations**
- b. Capital Punishment**
- c. Abortion**
- d. Stem Cell Research**
- e. Genetic Engineering**
- f. Euthanasia**