HARVARD KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT

DPI-201: THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF PUBLIC ACTION

Fall 2017

SECTIONS A & D

Lectures

Section A
Mondays and Wednesdays
2:45pm—4pm
L230

Section D
Mondays and Wednesdays
11:45am—1pm
L280

Tutorials

Section A
Thursdays 11:45am—1pm
Thursdays 2:45pm—4pm

Section D
Thursdays 11:45am—1pm
Thursdays 2:45pm—4pm

Office Hours

Mondays 4:15 – 5:15 pm

Instructor

Mathias Risse
Email: mathias_risse@hks.harvard.edu
Phone: (617) 495-9811
Office: Rubenstein 225

Administrative Assistant

Derya Honça
Email: derya_honca@hks.harvard.edu
Phone: (617) 495-1923
Office: Rubenstein 221B

Teaching Fellows

Section A
James Brandt
james.brandt@gmail.com
Office Hours: TBA

Section D
Ted Larson
talarson42@gmail.com
Office Hours: TBA
OVERVIEW

DPI-201 develops in students the capacity for exercising genuine moral agency in their professional lives and understanding how moral considerations are deployed in political contexts. It teaches students how to engage in strategic ethics in the course of practicing public service and creating public value throughout their careers.

Specifically, DPI-201 equips students to:

- Effectively evaluate public policies and procedures from the moral standpoint;
- Realistically integrate moral considerations with economic, managerial, political, and other considerations to arrive at decisions about what ought to be done in specific professional cases;
- Interrogate and assess the values and principles that guide their own thinking;
- Learn how to successfully engage colleagues, superiors, subordinates, and the public in advancing their moral agenda.

DPI-201 is a mandatory requirement for all students seeking a Master’s Degree in Public Policy. It is only open to MPP students.

REQUIREMENTS AND EVALUATION

Class Participation

Weekly Lectures

You are expected to attend every lecture, prepared to discuss the day’s reading assignments and ready to make thoughtful contributions to the learning of your classmates. Conversations will typically occur both as a class and in small groups. Additional activities will include participation in one or more simulations or other role-playing exercises.

Absences will be excused for medical or family emergencies and for religious holidays. Students are expected to schedule interviews, ordinary medical appointments, other academic engagements, and all other business around the lectures. Students are also expected to attend the entirety of each lecture, and so are advised to schedule other courses in a way that allows them to be at each lecture for its duration. Late arrivals and early exits will count as absences.

Laptops are prohibited. Phones and other devices should be silenced. Using a designated e-reader or something like an iPad exclusively to refer to the course material for the day is allowed. Notes should be taken by hand. Food before class if fine but no eating during class is allowed. Beverages are fine.
Weekly Tutorials

Attendance of the weekly tutorial is required. Make sure you schedule electives around them. The tutorials are not review sections. They are instead designed as the place where
1) the theoretical issues of the course are unpacked in greater detail, 2) some of the simulations will be run, to then be debriefed in lecture, and 3) you will have an opportunity to
discuss your own professional ethics cases in order to learn directly from each other how
you wrestled with the challenging moral scenarios that arose in your work. As such, the
tutorials are an invaluable component to the learning necessary to achieve this courses’
goals.

Summary

Class participation counts for 20% of your final grade. Unexcused absences from lectures
and tutorials will weigh heavily against your participation grade.

Lecture Reflections

After each lecture, please submit on the Canvas page for this course a two-to-three para-
graph reflection, along these lines discussed below, due twenty-four hours after the lec-
ture is over. (So, 1pm Tuesdays and Thursdays for deltas, and 4pm Tuesdays and Thurs-
days for alphas.)

Ethical deliberation in groups—the sort of thing we’ll be doing together throughout the
semester—can benefit from regular post hoc reflection. What views were surfaced in a
particular discussion? What is the most charitable understanding of the moral content of
those views—the values and principles that make them up? Does that moral content stand
up to analytic scrutiny? But also: what views weren’t surfaced? What dynamics are con-
tributing to them not being surfaced? Is it structural—time constraints, missed opportuni-
ties, etc.? Is it because it’s an emotionally weighty perspective? Is it because of group dy-
namics? And what is the moral content of these views? Do they hold up to analytic scru-
tiny?

These lecture reflections offer at least four opportunities.

First, they provide an opportunity for those who didn’t have a chance to contribute to the
larger group discussion to do so. Given the unavoidable constraints that come with a 55-
60 person professional ethics course, it is simply impossible to bring as many voices into
the conversation as is desirable for any particular class discussion. It’s even harder to do
so when the larger discussion sometimes warrants slowing down, sticking with a point for
awhile, examining its dimensions, etc. And listening, as we know, is just as important as
contributing, but it’s hard to do that properly while vying for a chance to say something.
So this assignment takes some of that pressure off by giving you an opportunity to follow
up on a thread from the discussion that you didn’t get a chance to follow up on in the discussion itself.

Second, many of the ideas put forward in our discussion are dense and complicated. It’s unrealistic to expect them, on the spot, to always be given the analytical scrutiny they deserve. This assignment gives you an opportunity to reflect a little bit longer on one or more of the ideas that came up in the conversation, and then to interrogate them with some care in the reflection.

Third, it would be shocking if all the various perspectives available on an issue were adequately surfaced in a single lecture. This assignment gives you an opportunity to bring into the conversation views that did not make it into the lecture, and to examine them.

Fourth, this assignment gives you an opportunity to step back and look at the work we are collectively doing. How are we surfacing differences? How aren’t we? What dynamics in play are contributing to our learning? What can be improved?

Please do not try to take up each of these four opportunities each time you write a reflection. Pick one to focus on for each reflection submission. And we will be looking for you to mix it up considerably over the course of the semester. If you’re always focusing on group dynamics, you’re likely not devoting enough energy to interrogating perspectives or raising new ones. If you’re never focusing on group dynamics, you’re likely missing some of the inevitable factors that influence the ebb and flow of ethical discussions.

Last, it warrants emphasizing that the point of these reflections is to contribute positively to our learning. It’s not to attack someone, or get the last word in, or rewrite the course, or engage in defensiveness. Curiosity, open-mindedness, and good-faith civil disagreement should be the guiding virtues in doing these reflections. Per Canvas conventions, you will not be able to read the contributions of others until you submit your own. But you are strongly encouraged to take the time to read all the responses before the next lecture.

Lecture reflections are required and will be graded as complete or incomplete. You will not be awarded a grade for the course if you fail to submit more than two.

**Written Assignments**

In addition to case reflections, there are two written assignments that you will need to complete for this course. Each is to be 1000 words, and each will count for 20% of your final grade. Late assignments will not be accepted; failure to meet a deadline will be understood as you receiving an F for that particular assignment. Details regarding these assignments are forthcoming.

All papers are to be submitted online on the Canvas page for this course by **Friday at 5pm** on the day they are due.
Paper One Due Date: Friday Sept. 29  
Paper Two Due Date: Friday Nov 3

Papers are first read by the TF for the course, who will include comments on them through Canvas. Then I will read the papers and then assign grades for the papers. Grades will, roughly, conform to the Harvard Kennedy School recommended grading scale. After I am done grading the papers, your TF will record the grades and the papers will then be unmuted on Canvas. In light of this process, you should expect to have your papers returned to you two to three weeks after you have submitted them.

Final Take-home Examination

The final exam will consist of essay questions that are to be answered in no more than 2,000 words in total. The final exam counts for 40% of your final grade. Late examinations will be heavily penalized. The final exam is take home and will be handed out on Nov 29. It will be due on Dec. 6. Details will be provided during the semester.

TEXTS

All readings for this course will be on the Canvas page for the course.

ADDENDUM I: COURSE CONTENT

It is impossible to teach a course on ethics of any worth, particularly one that aims to engage the world on its terms and not to retreat wholly into the realm of the abstract, that does not regularly touch upon issues that will likely prove challenging for some students. Part of our task as a class will be to learn how to discuss these topics in a productive way. A non-negotiable norm of the course will be that we create a safe space to tackle these matters. Safe, however, does not mean that we will avoid difficult, troubling, upsetting, unsettling and sometimes emotionally charged topics. All care will be taken to confront these issues responsibly. Confront them though we must.

ADDENDUM II: ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Students are encouraged to re-familiarize themselves with all material relating to academic integrity found here:

http://www.hks.harvard.edu/degrees/registrar/procedures/integrity

This course operates under the expectation that all students understand and will comply with the code of behavior discussed at length under the topics found at the page linked to above.
COURSE SCHEDULE

1. Introduction
Wednesday, August 30

- Dennis Thompson, “What is Practical Ethics” https://ethics.harvard.edu/what-practical-ethics

Part One
Theoretical Foundations

2. Moral Theory: Consequentialism, Deontology, Virtue Ethics
Friday, September 1

- Joshua Greene, “Trolleyology,” Chapter 4 in Moral Tribes.

3. Moral Foundations Theory
Wednesday, September 6


4. Theories of Justice
Monday, September 11


5. Political Ideology and Identity Politics
Wednesday, September 13
• Noel O’Sullivan, “Conservatism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*.
• Michael Freedon and Marc Stears, “Liberalism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*.
• Christopher Achen and Larry Bartels, *Democracy for Realists*, Chapters 8-9.

**Part Two**

Practical Ethics: Acting Within Institutions and Organizations

**6. Doing the Most Good**
Monday, September 18

- Case: The Woman in the Corridor

**7. Exercising Leadership**
Wednesday, September 20

- Case: Seizing the Moment: Soaring Hopes & Tough Constraints in Myanmar’s Unfolding Democracy

**8. Standing on Principle**
Monday, September 25

- Case: Bart Stupak and the Passage of the ACA

**9. Maintaining One’s Integrity**
Wednesday September 27
• Case: The Prison Master’s Dilemma

10. Pushing Your Cause
Monday October 2

• Case: Divided We Stand: Gay Marriage Rulings and Official Disobedience.
• Martha Nussbaum “The Costs of Tragedy: Moral Limits of Cost-Benefit Analysis”

11. Revealing Organizational Wrongdoing (Roleplaying Session)
Wednesday October 4

• Case: Edward Snowden Hero or Traitor?
• Rahul Sagar, “Against Moral Absolutism.”

12. Taking Extreme Measures
Wednesday, October 11

• Frantz Fanon, selections from *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), 2-4, 5-7, 23-24, 42-44, 50-52.

13. Attacking Political Opponents (Simulation Debrief)
Monday, October 16

• No Readings

14. Governing with an Agenda
Wednesday, October 18

15. Disasters and Collective Responsibility
Monday, October 23

• Naomi Zack, “The Disadvantaged and Disaster” in Ethics for Disaster.
• Joel Feinberg, “Collective Responsibility” in Doing and Deserving.

16. Researching Medicine
Wednesday, October 25

• Case: Placebo Trials in Africa

17. Distributing Scarc Resource (Simulation Debrief)
Monday, October 30

• No Readings

Part Three
Practical Ethics and Policy: Making the World a Better Place

18. Improving Public Health (Roleplaying Session)
Wednesday November 1

• Cass Sunstein, “Fifty Shades of Manipulation” in The Ethics of Influence.

19. Pursuing a Living Wage
Monday, November 6

- Case: Minimum Wage
- Dan Ariely, “Wealth Inequality in Motion” Video http://danariely.com/2013/03/09/wealth-inequality-in-motion/

20. Advancing Global Economic Justice
Wednesday, November 8

- Mathias Risse, “Do We Owe the Global Poor Assistance or Rectification?,” Ethics and International Affairs, Vol. 19, No. 1, pp 9-18.

21. Free Speech and Social Advocacy
Monday, November 13

- Case: National Socialist Party v. Village of Skokie

22. Pursuing Social Justice
Wednesday, November 15

- Case: Eric Garner and the NYPD
- Charles Mills, “White Ignorance”

23. Immigrating To Another Country (Debate)
Monday, November 20

- Mathias Risse, “On the Morality of Immigration”
- Michael Blake, “Discretionary Immigration”
24. Saving the Environment
Monday, November 27

- Simon Caney, “Climate Change and Non-Ideal Theory” in *Climate Justice in a Non-Ideal World*
- Jonathan Pickering, “Moral Language in Climate Politics” in *Climate Justice in a Non-Ideal World*.

***REQUIRED: Special Tuesday, November 28 Simulation: Patient Zero II***

25. Negotiating in a Supreme Emergency (Simulation Debrief)
Wednesday November 29

- No Readings