

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY  
Department of Sociology  
Sociology 419.03  
Sociology of Bioethics  
Fall 2009

Instructor: Dr. A.W. Frank

Office: SS 916

Email: [frank@ucalgary.ca](mailto:frank@ucalgary.ca)

Office Hours: Tuesday & Thursday 12:30-1:30, or by appointment

Course hours: Tuesday, Thursday, 2-3:15

Sociology Department web page: <http://www.soci.ucalgary.ca>

Emergency Evacuations: In the case of fire or other emergency evacuation of this classroom/lab, please proceed to the assembly point by the Food Court in the Professional Faculties Building.

### Course Objectives

The course has two levels of objectives, one specific and the other generalized. The specific objective is to consider *bioethics* (comprising ethics committees, ethics consultations, public-policy debates, professional folklore, and ethics writing generally) *as an emerging institutional actor within medical policy and practice*. We will be interested in such questions as: Why bioethics emerges; what bioethicists do and don't do, to what effects; and the gaps between what bioethics claims and how it actually works. This inquiry is a subspecialty of sociology of health & illness, drawing especially on ethnographic studies.

The more general objective of the course is to inquire into the values that ground bioethical practice. On what basis do members of groups and collectives uphold the values they base their actions on? Asking this question begins with students' own values: where do these values come from, what are their implications, to what extent can reasoned accounts of these values be offered, and how far can values change, in response to what? Charles Taylor's concept of *hypervalues*—the generally tacit and abstract values that generate and order priorities among lower-level, applied values—will be of central importance in this inquiry. This inquiry falls into a long sociological tradition going back to Emile Durkheim's interest in society's practices for sustaining some degree of consensus over ethics and proceeding through Talcott Parsons' "latent pattern-maintenance".

The course is organized to address issues of bioethics as an institutional actor during our *Tuesday* meetings. We will begin with Guillemin and Gillam's case-based introduction to clinical ethics and then proceed to Eckenwiler and Cohn's collection of bioethicists engaged in self-critique. Finally, we'll study Charles Bosk's collected essays, in which the ethnographic study of bioethics leads to questioning the ethics of ethnography. Thus,

as the course progresses, the interest in bioethics gradually morphs into an interest in sociological ethics.

In our *Thursday* meetings our main text for addressing the derivation of values is the collection *Being Human*, which was compiled as background readings for the (U.S.) President's Council on Bioethics. The readings were originally published on the Council's website (which I hope will not be dismantled, although the Council has been). If all works as it should, the readings in *Being Human* will generate reflections on the issues raised in the Tuesday readings.

### Required Texts

- Marilys Guillemin and Lynn Gillam, *Telling Moments: Everyday Ethics in Health Care*. Melbourne: IP Communications.
- Lisa Eckenwiler and Felicia Cohn, *The Ethics of Bioethics: Mapping the Moral Landscape*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Charles Bosk, *What Would You Do? Juggling Bioethics and Ethnography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Leon Kass, ed. *Being Human*. NY: Norton. (Originally, background readings for the President's Council on Bioethics, chaired by Dr. Kass)

### Internet resources

Bioethicists like the internet, and resources proliferate. I recommend beginning with [www.thehastingscenter.org](http://www.thehastingscenter.org), and linking to Bioethics Forum, a free, weekly, online publication. Each issue contains links for a variety of bioethics blogs and newsletters. Reading Bioethics Forum is a good way to listen in on bioethicists talking to each other and seeing how discrepant perspectives can be on many issues—and a good resource for ideas about term papers. Another excellent resource is the website of the (now defunct) President's Council on Bioethics, which contains testimony from the years of Council hearings (including my own, linked under “professionalism”).

### Course Requirements

Final grades will be based on *three* components; all must be completed to pass the course.

- (1) A take-home examination, distributed in class on Thursday, Oct. 29 and due in class on Thursday, November 5 (no class on Tuesday, Nov. 3, as writing time equivalent to an in-class mid-term). 25% of the final mark.
- (2) Class participation, based on short writing assignments (at least 10) that will be done during class time and serve as the basis of class discussions. 25% of the final mark.
- (3) A term paper, 50% of the final mark, applying the course readings to a topic of the student's choosing. The point is not to present a generic bioethics review of some issue (e.g., stem-cell research), but rather to analyze the sources and effects of different arguments that are central to this issue: a *sociology of* the issue rather than a descriptive review.

- Due date for term papers: Monday, December 14, by 2:00. Turn in papers at the instructor's office, SS 921. (Slide them under the door; putting papers in an envelope is recommended. Include a stamped, self-addressed envelope to have papers returned to you.)

#### Format of final papers:

- Papers should be prepared as if they were article submissions to a journal. All citations should follow the format of *any* major sociology journal *or* the Chicago Manual of Style.
- Papers should be printed, double-spaced, numbered, in at least 12-point font, with pages stapled together (no covers, please). The student's name & ID# should appear on the first page, upper corner.
- Spelling, syntax, and clarity of expression will count in the grade; see "Advice" at the end of this outline.
- Length: papers should be about 15 pp., including endnotes and references. Longer length should be discussed with the instructor.
- Grades and Return of final essays: Papers will *not* be returned through the Sociology Department Office, nor will grades be posted by the instructor (due to FOIP rules). Students who want their papers returned by mail should attach a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Other papers will be available for pick-up during the instructor's Winter Term office hours (TBA). Please do not telephone the departmental office asking for your grade.
- Keep a copy: As in every course, my friendly advice is to keep a printed copy of all work you submit. At some point you should have printed at least one draft to edit on paper; keep that too. Students who might want a letter of recommendation should keep copies of their written term work (again, good advice in all courses).

#### Note on potential distress

The nature of the course involves discussion of topics that are often sad and sometimes tragic. These include not only dying and devastating illnesses, but also more everyday conditions including disability, obesity, and lifestyle choices. For most students, at least some of these discussions will have personal implications, and it can be distressing to have the rest of the class engage in a critical, reflective discussion. Moreover, it's the nature of the course to call into question deeply held values by treating these as objects of sociological analysis. *Students who anticipate or experience emotional distress as a result of course readings, discussions, or assignments should consult the instructor.* Distress is a normal part of dealing with these issues—complete lack of personal distress would be troubling. Bioethicists often find their work distressing, and how they deal with that is a topic for our discussion.

#### Reading Schedule

September 8 – course introduction  
 September 10 – Eckenwiler & Cohn (E&C), Part I  
 September 15 – Guillemin & Gillam (G&G), chapters 1-3  
 September 17 – *Being Human* (BH), chapter 1  
 September 22 – G&G, chapters 4-6  
 September 24 – BH, chapter 2  
 September 29 – G&G, chapters 7-9  
  
 October 1 – BH, chapter 3  
 October 6 – EB, Part II  
 October 8 – BH, chapter 4  
 October 13 – EB, Part III  
 October 15 – BH, chapter 5  
 October 20 – EB, Part IV  
 October 22 – BH, chapter 6  
 October 27 – EB, Part V  
 October 29 – BH, chapter 7 (Mid-term take-home exam distributed)  
  
 November 3 – Take-home exam, no class  
 November 5 – BH, chapter 8 (exams due, in class)  
 November 10 – EB, Part VI  
 November 12 – BH, chapter 9  
 November 17 – Bosk, chapters 1-2  
 November 19 – BH, chapter 10  
 November 24 – Bosk, chapters 3-4  
 November 26 – Bosk, chapters 5-6  
  
 December 1 – Bosk, chapters 7-8  
 December 3 – Bosk, chapters 9-10  
 December 8 – Bosk, chapter 11 & Postscript

**Exam Policies** (not applicable in this course, but mandatory for inclusion): You must provide advance notice to the instructor if you are unable to take an exam. All requests for deferral of an examination due to health reasons must be accompanied by written documentation as outlined in the University Calendar and should be obtained while the student has the physical or emotional problem rather than after recovery. Deferred exams may be allowed in the following circumstances: illness, domestic affliction or religious conviction. If you have missed an exam for a legitimate reason, you will be able to write a “make up” exam as close to the original exam as possible. The date and location will be at the convenience of the Sociology Department. Travel arrangements and misreading of the syllabus are not valid reasons for requesting a deferred exam. Deferred exams will not be granted if it is determined that just cause is not shown by the student.

**Ethics Research:** Students are advised that any research with human subjects--including

any interviewing (even with friends and family), opinion polling, or unobtrusive observation--must have the approval of the Departmental Ethics Committee. In completing course requirements, students must not undertake any human subjects research without discussing their plans with the instructor, to determine if ethics approval is required.

**Academic Misconduct:** cheating is regarded as a serious academic offense. Students are advised to consult the University Calendar, which presents a Statement of Intellectual Honesty and definitions and penalties associated with cheating, plagiarism, and other academic misconduct.

**The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP)** legislation disallows the practice of having students retrieve assignments from a public place, e.g., outside an instructor's office or the Department main office. Term assignments must be returned to students individually, during class, or during the instructor's office hours; if a student is unable to pick up her/his assignment s/he may provide the instructor with a stamped, self-addressed envelope to be used for the return of the assignment.

**Safewalk:** The University of Calgary provides a "safe walk" service to any location on Campus, including the LRT, parking lots, bus zones, and campus housing. For Campus Security/Safewalk call 220-5333. Campus Security can also be contacted from any of the "Help" phones located around Campus.

#### **Academic Accommodation**

Students with a disability, who require academic accommodation, need to register with the Disability Resource Centre (MC 295, telephone 220-8237). Academic accommodation letters need to be provided to course instructors no later than fourteen (14) days after the first day of class. **It is a student's responsibility to register with the Disability Resource Centre and to request academic accommodation, if required.**

#### Handing in Papers Outside of Class, Return of Final Papers, and Release of Final Grades

1. When students are unable to submit papers at class, they should make arrangements to hand in their papers directly to the instructor or teaching assistant rather than at the Sociology Department main office.
2. Final papers will not be returned through the Sociology Department main office. The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) legislation disallows the practice of having students retrieve assignments from a public place, (i.e., outside an instructor's office, the department office, etc.). Students who want their final papers returned by mail must attach a stamped, self-addressed envelope with the paper. Otherwise final papers will only be available for pick-up during the instructor's office hours at the end of this term or the beginning of the next term.

3. Final grades are not posted by the Sociology department. They are only available online.