

Ethics at the End of Life

Personal Choices and Public Policy

Course Description

- In this course, students will be asked to consider new ethical dilemmas generated by advances in science and medicine.
- For instance, our ability to diagnose illness and manage symptoms has far outpaced our ability to cure disease.
- Under these conditions, how should we regard the personal goals and values of patients who are chronically sick, slowly losing cognitive function, or even terminally ill?
- If the confrontation with one's own mortality is, to a large degree, a personal issue, then how should we understand patient pain and suffering?
- While end of life issues raise significant questions about the purpose and limits of scientific research, they also introduce equally important questions about what we can claim ethically about someone *else's* confrontation with mortality.

Course Sections

- *Introduction: Scientific and Ethical Perspectives on End of Life Issues*
- *Unit 1: Dementia, Personhood, and Personal Identity*
- *Unit 2: Neurodegenerative Disorders, Autonomy, and Disability*
- *Unit 3: Physician Assisted Suicide, Continuous Sedation, and Defining Death*
- *Conclusion: Patient Care and the Future of Medicine*

Curricular Fit at XULA

- Philosophy Department - Ethics: General Principles, Health Ethics, Research Ethics (BUILD), Philosophy of Science, Ethics of Genetic Engineering (BUILD)
- Bioethics Minor - Advanced Bioethics course
- Core Curriculum - XCOR 3000 course, and related to a new XCOR 1000 course (New Orleans and the Philosophy of Pharmacy)

Dissemination of Findings

- Book under contract and out in early 2018: *Sedation, Suicide, and the Limits of Ethics* (Lexington Books)
- Digital Humanities database for student research in Advanced Bioethics
- Additional Mellon-funded Research Circles (with Chemistry in 2015 and Biology in 2016)
- Festival of Scholars and XULAnexUS

Assessment

- Assignments: pop quizzes, reflection papers, online discussion board, essay exams, and class participation
- Rubrics: writing, speaking, and sophistication of ethical attitudes
- Ethics Labs: partly-scripted dilemma-based simulations with live actors
- Surveys: student self-reports with data compared across semesters and courses

Possible Challenges

- Finding a suitable textbook or compiling a comprehensive set of readings
- Building a Bioethics Minor
- Encouraging students to enroll in an upper-level Philosophy seminar (without a cross-list)
- Maintaining interest in “heavy” topics over the course of an entire semester