WestVirginiaUniversity.
JOHN CHAMBERS COLLEGE OF
BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS

BCOR 380-006: Business Ethics

Instructor Information

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Office Hours: MW 11:20 AM – 12:20 PM

Office: 2106 – Reynolds Hall

Course Information

Number of Credit Hours: 3

Meeting Times: MWF 9:30 AM – 10:30 AM

Course Overview

Businesses often have mission statements that describe their purposes (e.g., LinkedIn connects professionals, PayPal makes payment solutions). Our question in this course is this: As a future employee, what should your purpose be? And how should that purpose change the way you work?

To help you answer these questions, we'll be learning philosophy—and business ethics in particular—and seeing how they apply to your lives today. In particular, you will regularly complete Purpose Projects, experiential learning assignments that ask you to take something from class, apply it to your life, and write about it. In these assignments, you may create value for yourself or others, reflect on your career ambitions, or confront a moral dilemma. The goal of these Purpose Projects—and the course in general—is to deepen your understanding of how you consume and work, your moral motivations, how for-profit and nonprofit activities compare as ways to do good in the world, and more, so that you can ultimately understand your purpose in the business world.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, successful learners will be able to:

- Apply in-class lessons about business ethics to your life.
- Use critical reasoning to determine how to act ethically in complex business situations.

- Work with others to solve ethical problems and present your solutions to peers
- Define key philosophical terms and legal concepts belonging to the field of business ethics.
- Explain why each link in a product's supply chain has its own unique business ethics issue.
- Explain why ethical behavior in the workplace is an indicator of maturity.

Course Materials

Students will be required to have a WiFi-connected device to access eCampus and for electronic communications with the course instructor. Students must also have access to word processing software such as Microsoft Word or Google Docs as well as presentation software such as Microsoft PowerPoint or Google Slides. All readings will be provided on eCampus by the instructor.

Assessments

Knowledge Checks

- Students will answer three questions after every Monday and Wednesday session about the content for that day.

Purpose Projects

- Reflections on how you applied class lessons to your life under the assigned prompt. More instructions to follow.

Quizzes

- Multiple-choice quizzes over class content.

Case Presentation #1

- Teams will co-write a consultation on a real-world ethical dilemma. They'll then give a short in-class presentation, followed by Q&A from peers and the professor.

Case Presentation #2

- In the last week of class and during the final presentation period, different teams will give another Case Presentation in the same format as the first.

Schedule of Assessments

Assessment	Due Date
Knowledge Checks	Throughout semester

Assessment	Due Date
Purpose Projects	Sep 7; Sep 21; Oct 5; Oct 19; Nov 2; Nov 16; Nov 30
Quizzes	Aug 28; Sep 4; Sep 11; Sep 18; Sep 25; Oct 2; Oct 23; Oct 30; Nov 6; Nov 13; Nov 20
Case Presentation #1	Oct 12 – Oct 16
Case Presentation #2	Nov 30 – Dec 4

Grades

Assessment Weights and Grading

Assessment	Weight	Grading
Knowledge Checks	15%	At the end of Monday and Wednesday classes, students will be asked questions about that day's content. Students must answer them correctly. There is no makeup option for Knowledge Checks. There will be 25 knowledge checks worth 75 points total. Students will then be scored out of 60. This means that students can miss or get incorrect 15 questions (five classes worth) and still receive a perfect score for knowledge checks.
Purpose Projects	30%	Reflections on how you applied class lessons to your life under the assigned prompt. Students graded on following assignment instructions and appropriately answering reflection questions. There are seven in total, lowest grade dropped.

Assessment	Weight	Grading
Quizzes	25%	Multiple-choice quizzes over class content. There are eleven in total, the lowest grade will be dropped. These will be administered electronically in class, but I may switch to another medium (e.g., scantrons or paper and pencil) if needed. If you miss any quizzes, you have until the following week to take them during office hours (e.g., if you miss Q1, you have until 1/30 to take the quiz in office hours. You may do this twice.
Case Presentation #1	15%	Students present an in-class defense of a philosophical position regarding an applied ethics case. Students are graded on presentation, thesis, argumentation, and strength of Q&A.
Case Presentation #2	15%	Students present an in-class defense of a philosophical position regarding an applied ethics case. Students are graded on presentation, thesis, argumentation, and strength of Q&A.

Grade Scale

Grade	Percent Range
A	93-100%
A-	90-92.9%
B+	87-89.9%
B	84-86.9%
B-	80-83.9%
C+	77-79.9%
C	74-76.9%
C-	70-73.9%

Grade	Percent Range
D+	67-69.9%
D	64-66.9%
D-	60-63.9%
F	0-59.9%

Course Policies

Students should review the **University Syllabus Policies and Statements**. These policies are adopted by reference into this syllabus.

Attendance Policy

Attendance at all sessions is mandatory. Failure to attend class will result in a 0 on the "Knowledge Check" for that day.

Late Work Policy

Assignments must be submitted by the due dates listed on the schedule. The reason for not granting unexcused extensions is fairness. An extension is unfair to students who do not receive one and thus have less time to earn their grade. I will deduct 5 percentage points for every day the assignment is late. There is no maximum to this penalty.

Use of Artificial Intelligence

The use of artificial intelligence writing software for in-class quizzes and purpose projects is strictly prohibited in this course. Any attempt to treat AI output as a student's own work or failing to identify AI-generated work for these assessments will be treated as academic dishonesty.

The reason for this policy is that the use of content-generating AI to complete assessments makes it such that successful completion of those assessments does not imply achieving this course's learning outcomes.

However, artificial intelligence writing software can be used all portions of case presentations. Students are still responsible for all written material that is submitted, even if it is produced by artificial intelligence.

Readings

There are no required texts in this course. All the readings we'll cover in class are available on eCampus, sorted by Unit. If there are any issues with the files online, please let me know. Also, while I encourage you to read the assigned texts outside of class, I do not expect you to do so for this course. Any material on your quizzes will be covered in class. However, readings will be beneficial for your purpose projects and case presentations.

In-Class Technology

There are no restrictions on the use of technology for note-taking in class. For class, please come prepared with a Wi-Fi-connected device. However, if this technology is distracting to you or others, you may be asked to use a different method of note taking or be asked to leave.

Communications

Students can contact the instructor via email or in office hours. Most student emails will be answered within 48 hours.

Course Schedule

Class Units

Event	Topics/Assignments
Unit 1 (Weeks 1-2)	Why business? A purpose framework for business ethics
Unit 2 (Weeks 3-4)	What should we sell? The purpose of markets Pt. 1
Unit 3 (Weeks 5-6)	How should we sell? The purpose of markets Pt. 2
Unit 4 (Weeks 8-9)	How should we compete? Business and politics
Unit 5 (Week 10-11)	How should we work together? The purpose of the employer-employee relationship
Unit 6 (Weeks 12-13)	What is your purpose as a manager? Fiduciary duty and CSR

Course Schedule

Week 1 - Readings, Topics, and Assignments

Day	Readings	Topics	Assignments	Assignment Deadlines
Aug 19	Brennan et al., 2021, Ch. 6	Course Outline & What Business Ethics Is Not		
Aug 21		Flex Friday		

Week 2 - Readings, Topics, and Assignments

Day	Readings	Topics	Assignments	Assignment Deadlines
Aug 24	Otteson 2019, Ch. 1; Brennan et al, Ch. 2	The Purpose of Business		
Aug 26	Otteson 2019, Ch. 2; Otteson 2019, Ch.3	A Code of Ethics for Business		
Aug 28		Flex Friday	Quiz #1	10:30 AM

Week 3 - Readings, Topics, and Assignments

Day	Readings	Topics	Assignments	Assignment Deadlines
Aug 31	Moriarty 2025	Ineffective Commodities		
Sep 2	Satz 2010, Ch. 4	Noxious Markets		

Day	Readings	Topics	Assignments	Assignment Deadlines
Sep 4		Flex Friday	Quiz #2	10:30 AM

Week 4 - Readings, Topics, and Assignments

Day	Readings	Topics	Assignments	Assignment Deadlines
Sep 7	Labor Day Recess, no class		Purpose Project #1	9:30 AM
Sep 9	Brennan & Jaworski 2015	Contested Commodities		
Sep 11		Flex Friday	Quiz #3	10:30 AM

Week 5 - Readings, Topics, and Assignments

Day	Readings	Topics	Assignments	Assignment Deadlines
Sep 14	Zwolinski 2008	Price Gouging		
Sep 16	Galbraith 1958, Ch. XI	Advertising: Dependence Effect		
Sep 18		Flex Friday	Quiz #4	10:30 AM

Week 6 - Readings, Topics, and Assignments

Day	Readings	Topics	Assignments	Assignment Deadlines
Sep 21	Palmer and Hedberg 2013	Advertising: Vulnerable Consumers	Purpose Project #2	9:30 AM
Sep 23	Carson 2010, Ch. 8; Carr 1968	Sales: Deception and Withholding Information in Sales		
Sep 25		Flex Friday	Quiz #5	10:30 AM

Week 7 - Readings, Topics, and Assignments

Day	Readings	Topics	Assignments	Assignment Deadlines
Sep 28		Presentations 1-2	Case Presentation #1	10:30 AM
Sep 30		Presentations 3-4	Case Presentation #1	10:30 AM
Oct 2		Presentations 5-6	Case Presentation #1	10:30 AM

Week 8 - Readings, Topics, and Assignments

Day	Readings	Topics	Assignments	Assignment Deadlines
Oct 5	Stoll 2005	Corporate Free Speech	Purpose Project #3	9:30 AM

Day	Readings	Topics	Assignments	Assignment Deadlines
Oct 7	Brennan 2025	Employee Free Speech		
Oct 9	Fall Break, No Class			

Week 9 - Readings, Topics, and Assignments

Day	Readings	Topics	Assignments	Assignment Deadlines
Oct 12	Hamilton & Hoch 1997	Lobbying	Quiz #6 (online)	9:30 AM
Oct 14	Heath 2004	Market Failures Approach		
Oct 16		Flex Friday	Quiz #7	10:30 AM

Week 10 - Readings, Topics, and Assignments

Day	Readings	Topics	Assignments	Assignment Deadlines
Oct 19	Zwolinski 2007	Sweatshops	Purpose Project #4	9:30 AM
Oct 21	Anderson 2019, Ch.2	Privacy		
Oct 23		Flex Friday	Quiz #8	10:30 AM

Week 11 - Readings, Topics, and Assignments

Day	Readings	Topics	Assignments	Assignment Deadlines
Oct 26	Schwartz 1987	Meaningful work		
Oct 28	Moriarty 2022, Ch.7	Safety		
Oct 30		Flex Friday	Quiz #9	10:30 AM

Week 12 - Readings, Topics, and Assignments

Day	Readings	Topics	Assignments	Assignment Deadlines
Nov 2	Friedman 1970	Stockholder theory	Purpose Project #5	9:30 AM
Nov 4	Freeman 1998; Donaldson & Preston 1995	Stakeholder Theory		
Nov 6		Flex Friday	Quiz #10	10:30 AM

Week 13 - Readings, Topics, and Assignments

Day	Readings	Topics	Assignments	Assignment Deadlines
Nov 9	No class, Instructor Travel			
Nov 11				
Nov 13	Coase 1937; Jensen &	Why the firm?		

Day	Readings	Topics	Assignments	Assignment Deadlines
	Meckling 1976			

Week 14 - Readings, Topics, and Assignments

Day	Readings	Topics	Assignments	Assignment Deadlines
Nov 16	TBD	Student Choice	Purpose Project #6	9:30 AM
Nov 18	TBD	Student Choice		
Nov 20		Flex Friday	Quiz #11	10:30 AM

Week 15 - Readings, Topics, and Assignments

Day	Readings	Topics	Assignments	Assignment Deadlines
Nov 23	Fall Recess, no class			
Nov 25				
Nov 27				

Week 16 - Readings, Topics, and Assignments

Day	Readings	Topics	Assignments	Assignment Deadlines
Nov 30		Presentations 1-2	Purpose Project #7 Case Presentation #2	9:30 AM 10:30 AM
Dec 2		Presentations 3-4	Case Presentation #2	10:30 AM

Day	Readings	Topics	Assignments	Assignment Deadlines
Dec 4		Presentations 5-6	Case Presentation #2	10:30 AM

Course Readings

- Anderson, Elizabeth. 2019. “Private Government.” In Private Government: How Employers Rule Our Lives (and Why We Don’t Talk about It), by Elizabeth Anderson, First paperback printing, 37–71. Princeton Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Brennan, Jason. 2025. “Bad Judges: Why Companies Should Not Police Employees’ Extramural Speech.” Philosophy of Management 24 (1): 37–53. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40926-024-00329-9.
- Brennan, Jason, William English, John Hasnas, and Peter Jaworski. 2021a. “Addressing Moral Confusion: Ethics Isn’t Law.” In Business Ethics for Better Behavior, by Jason Brennan, William English, John Hasnas, and Peter Jaworski, 1st ed., 81–98. Oxford University PressNew York. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190076559.003.0006.
- ———. 2021b. “The Business of Business Is Business: How Businesses Serve Society.” In Business Ethics for Better Behavior, by Jason Brennan, William English, John Hasnas, and Peter Jaworski, 1st ed., 13–29. Oxford University PressNew York. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190076559.003.0002.
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- Carr, Albert Z. 1968. “Is Business Bluffing Ethical?” Harvard Business Review 46 (1): 143–46.
- Carson, Thomas L. 2010. “Deception and Withholding Information in Sales.” In Lying and Deception: Theory and Practice, by Thomas L. Carson, 1st ed., 169–81. Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199577415.001.0001.
- Coase, R. H. 1937. “The Nature of the Firm.” Economica 4 (16): 386–405. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0335.1937.tb00002.x.

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- Friedman, Milton. 1970. “A Friedman Doctrine-- The Social Responsibility of Business Is to Increase Its Profits.” New York Times, September 13, 1970, sec. SM.
- Galbraith, John Kenneth. 1958. “The Dependence Effect.” In The Affluent Society, by John Kenneth Galbraith, 124–30. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Hamilton, J. Brooke, and David Hoch. 1997. “Ethical Standards for Business Lobbying: Some Practical Suggestions.” Business Ethics Quarterly 7 (3): 117–29. https://doi.org/10.2307/3857317.
- Hasnas, John. 2010. “The Mirage of Product Safety.” In The Oxford Handbook of Business Ethics, edited by George G. Brenkert, 1st ed., 677–98. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195307955.003.0024.
- Heath, Joseph. 2004. “A Market Failures Approach to Business Ethics.” In The Invisible Hand and the Common Good, edited by Bernard Hodgson, 69–89. Studies in Economic Ethics and Philosophy. Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer Berlin Heidelberg. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-662-10347-0_5.
- Jensen, Michael C., and William H. Meckling. 1976. “Theory of the Firm: Managerial Behavior, Agency Costs and Ownership Structure.” Journal of Financial Economics 3:305–60.
- Moriarty, Jeffrey. 2022. “Ethics at Work, Part I.” In Business Ethics: A Contemporary Introduction, by Jeffrey Moriarty, 1st ed., 134–56. New York: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351016872.
- ———. 2025. “Against the Sale of Homeopathy (and Other Ineffective Medicines).” Journal of Business Ethics 198 (1): 143–53. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-024-05792-y.
- Otteson, James R. 2019a. “A Code of Business Ethics.” In Honorable Business, by James R. Otteson, 1st ed., 67–82. Oxford University PressNew York. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190914202.003.0004.
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- Palmer, David, and Trevor Hedberg. 2013. “The Ethics of Marketing to Vulnerable Populations.” Journal of Business Ethics 116 (2): 403–13. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-012-1476-2.
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- Zwolinski, Matt. 2007. “Sweatshops, Choice, and Exploitation.” Business Ethics Quarterly 17 (4): 689–727. https://doi.org/10.5840/beq20071745.
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