Introduction

This class examines ethical issues related to public health research and practice, and explores the social issues that complicate ethical decision making. There are no pre-requisites. This class is open to all students with graduate standing. It is a required course for the MPH in Health Policy, the MPH in Public Health Preparedness, the MSPH in Outcomes Research and the DrPH in Public Health Management.

Course Description

All professional decision making in the health arena involves two components: (1) a technical decision requiring the application of scientific knowledge to health problems and (2) an ethical decision requiring that choices for action reflect the values and interests held by those involved with the health problem. While all decisions reflect some value system, we are sometimes unaware of which guiding values are involved in different choices and what the consequences of the choices are for different stakeholders. Other times, professionals face the need to make choices that conflict with values held by some stakeholders involved in the health problem. In addition, it is frequently the case that social and political circumstances make it difficult to carry out a decision that is in accord with the values of participants. Such social issues can also obscure the ethical consequences of decisions.

Course Objectives

Upon completing this course, students should:

1. Be able to identify ethical issues, points of ethical conflict, consequences of professional decisions and the social issues involved in public health research and practice.
   
   *This learning objective addresses the HCOP2 Competency: Describe the legal and ethical basis for public health and health services.*

2. Be familiar with central concepts in ethical decision making in these areas, e.g., informed consent, conflict of interest, human rights, autonomy, utilitarianism.
3. Be able to reflect critically on their personal values and on the professional obligations of public health researchers and practitioners.

4. Be able to apply moral reasoning skills to resolve ethical dilemmas in concrete public health cases.

Course Reading Material

Reading material will be available online using Blackboard Vista

Course Evaluation

This is a seminar course. **It is expected that students will prepare for each session, attend each session and participate in the discussion in each class period.** We will discuss four specific ethical dilemmas over the semester. Students will select one of these dilemmas to lead a class discussion on identifying open ended problems, another dilemma to lead a discussion on framing open ended problems, and a third dilemma to lead a discussion on resolving open ended problems.

On the day before the discussion begins, students who will be leading one of the components of the discussion will post a short (1-2 page) paper to the assignment box for the problem on Blackboard Vista. These papers will be “published” so that class members can read the papers during the week that the problem is being discussed. Papers will be graded numerically and be worth 15 points. Thus 45 points of the total grade for the course will be based on the papers. In addition, there will be a take home midterm worth 30 points and a take home final worth 25 points. The grade scale for this course is: 90%-100% = A, 80%-89% = B, 70%-79% = C, 60%-69% = D, below 60% = F.

A discussion board will be open on Blackboard Vista to post comments on the papers or class discussions.

Accessibility – Any student with a disability that may need accommodations in order to successfully complete all requirements of this course should visit the Office of Disability Support Services, located in Room 516 of the Hill University Center, extension 4-4205 or at dss@uab.edu. This office is responsible for registering students and ensuring the University’s compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the American with Disabilities Act. Once registered, this office will then inform faculty members of all courses in which the student is enrolled of the students status and the specific nature of any accommodations required. Any student requiring such accommodation should discuss this with the course master and assure that the appropriate correspondence is sent from the Office of Disability Support Services.
Honor Code – As a student in the School of Public Health, you are subject to the SOPH Student Honor Code which can be found in its entirety at http://www.soph.uab.edu/default.aspx?id=844. You are responsible to understand the contents of the Honor Code and to abide by it. Academic dishonesty: Cheating includes but is not limited to the unauthorized use of notes, books or other sources of information; copying the work of another or allowing someone to copy the work of another student during a formal academic exercise (e.g. take home examination, homework assignment or written essay). Plagiarism is the undocumented use of other authors’ words, texts, images, and ideas that don’t come from your own head. Making up sources, altering numbers, statistics, or just a few words of a document is considered plagiarism. Poor documentation or paraphrasing of a source is also considered plagiarism. Unauthorized collaboration is working with others without the specific permission of the instructor on assignments that will be submitted for a grade. This rule applies to in-class or take-home tests, papers, labs, or homework assignments. Students may not collaborate without faculty authorization.

Any violations of the Honor Code will be punished to the full extent allowable under the SOPH Honor Code.

Course Schedule

Introduction

1. August 18: What are ethics, what constitutes an ethical dilemma, what is meant by moral reasoning?

2. August 23: Identifying open ended problems

   **Readings:**
   
   

3. August 25: Framing open ended problems

   **Readings:**
   
   
   Brown, MT Chapter 3, “The Logic of the Ethical Process.” In The Ethical Process, an Approach to Controversial Issues New Jersey:
4. August 30: Resolving open ended problems


Brown, MT Chapter 4, “Evaluating Arguments from Different Ethical Approaches.” In The Ethical Process, an Approach to Controversial Issues New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1999

If you would like more practice on moral reasoning, complete the tutorial on open-ended problem solving, found at http://www.wolcottlynch.com/Tutorial.html

Research Ethics

5. September 1: What is research and what are research ethics?


No class Sept 6 – Labor Day

6. September 8: Data Integrity


Titus et al “Repairing Research Integrity” Nature 2008;453:980-982

7. September 13: Publication Practices


8. September 15: Conflict of Interest


Raines, B. “BP Seeks Scientists for Gulf Legal Team” Birmingham News, 7/16/10

Review Conflict of Interest Review Board web page http://main.uab.edu/show.asp?durki=30255

9. September 20: Dimensions of Informed Consent


Taylor, T. “The Nuremberg Doctor’s Trial” in Mann et al (eds) Health and Human Rights, A Reader 1999 Routledge,


September 21, 5:00 PM – written assignments due for Sept 22 discussion

10. September 22: “Should parental consent be required for research on archived state newborn blood spot data?” – part 1


September 26, 5:00 PM – written assignments due for Sept 27 discussion
11. September 27: “Should consent be required for research on state newborn blood spot data?” – part 2

12. September 29: What are the personal and community benefits of research?


October 3, 5:00 PM- written assignments due for October 4 discussion

13. October 4: “Should the Kennedy-Krieger Lead Abatement Study Have been done as designed?” – part 1


October 5, 5:00 PM- written assignments due for October 6 discussion

14. October 6: “Should the Kennedy-Krieger Lead Abatement Study Have been done as designed?” – part 2

15. October 11: Public Health and Clinical Research in Developing Countries.


16. October 13: Politics and Research


Schmidt, P. “Big Tobacco Stikes Back at Historian in Court” Chronicle of Higher Education 11-13-09

Midterm Take home exam – Due October 20, No class October 18

Public Health Practice Ethics

17. October 20: What ethical theories and values apply to public health issues?


18. October 25: Autonomy vs. Paternalism in Public Health – the case of health promotion


19. October 27: Reciprocal duties in public health disasters

20. November 1: The Harm Principle, Civil Rights and Human Rights View of Infectious Disease Control


Fee, E. and Parry M. “Jonathan Mann, HIV/AIDS and Human Rights” J Public Health Policy 2008:29;54-71

November 2, 5:00 PM – written assignments due for Nov 3 discussion

21. November 3: “Should public health authorities have preemptively detained Andrew Speaker? Should they have provided transportation for him to return and enter isolation?” – pt 1

Readings: Summary of New York Times articles about the Andrew Speaker MDR TB incident

November 7, 5:00 PM – written assignments due for Nov 8 discussion

22. November 8: “Should public health authorities have preemptively detained Andrew Speaker? Should they have provided transportation for him to return and enter isolation?” — pt 2


24. November 15: The Oregon Reform

**Readings**

Oberlander, J. “Health Reform Interrupted: The Unraveling of the Oregon Health Plan” *Health Affairs* 2006;10.1337 w96-w105

**November 16, 5:00 PM – written assignments due for November 17 discussion**

25. November 17: “Should the state be the sole purchaser and distributor of seasonal flu vaccines? Pt 1.

**Readings:**

Smith, S. “Cases of swine flu higher among city blacks, Hispanics” *Boston Globe* 8/18/09


**November 21, 5:00 PM – written assignments due for November22 discussion**


*No class November 24 – Thanksgiving holiday*
27. November 29: Professional Codes of Ethics in Public Health


28. December 1: Public Health Ethical Standards in Risk Communication


29. December 6: Wrap-up discussion

Take Home Final due December 13.