Yale University  
School of Medicine  
Department of Epidemiology and Public Health

HPA 546A  
“ETHICAL ISSUES IN PUBLIC HEALTH”  
Course Syllabus  
Fall, 2011  
Mondays 1:00 p.m.–2:50 p.m.  
LEPH Room 115

Bruce Jennings  
Phone: 914.231.7200  
Fax: 914.231.7201  
e-mail: bruce.jennings@yale.edu

Course Description  
Public health policy is always the product of controversy. Scientific considerations blend with political and ethical conflicts in public health. Questions of autonomy, liberty, individual rights, power, coercion, justice, discrimination, stigma, community and the common good are central to public health policy and practice. This seminar will explore (Part I) how paradigms of political/moral discourse—libertarian liberalism, contractarian rights theory, egalitarian liberalism, utilitarianism, and communitarianism—intersect with paradigms of public health legitimacy and practice—the statist/“police powers” model, the human rights model, and the civic model. The seminar will then discuss (Part II) the “application” of ethics and political theory to selected public health issues, such as: the social determinants of illness, the social construction of the experience of illness, infectious disease control and emergency planning, health promotion and behavior modification, justice and access to health care, public health genomics, and climate change.

Course Objectives  
Upon successful completion of this course students will: (1) understand the theoretical basis for ethical and political controversies in public health policy and practice; (2) comprehend professional ethical norms and standards in public health; (3) critically evaluate the theoretical foundations and principles of public health ethics; (4) critically and systematically apply ethical theories and principles to practical decisionmaking issues in public health policy and practice, and (5) be able to demonstrate skills of ethical reasoning and decisionmaking in written form and in verbal argumentation.

Course Requirements  
Students will write three papers and make at least one class presentation.

Two of the papers will be short analytic papers (6-8 pp.) one on the pros and cons of utilitarianism as an ethical theory based on a discussion of a novel, Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*, and the second a discussion of ethical issues raised by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger*. 
The third paper will be a somewhat longer paper on the ethical aspects of a selected public health policy or practice issue, such as those selected for class discussion in the course (see below) or on a topic of the student’s choosing, in consultation with the instructor.

Students will also be asked to prepare oral presentations for various class sessions. These presentations will provide short summaries and pose critical questions about selected assigned readings for the course.

Finally, class attendance and active participation in seminar discussion are very important parts of the educational goals of this course, and will be taken seriously. There will be no exams.

*Note that class will not be held on September 19 and October 31. Please use this time to catch up on assigned reading or to work on your next paper.*

The course grade will be based on a combination of the paper grades (~70%) and class participation (~30%), including the class presentation(s), which will not be graded separately.

**Course Readings**

Course readings will be drawn principally from the books listed below, and from material that can be downloaded from the course website [cited as YC*V2 Resources].

Five books should be purchased:


and notes.

(New and used copies of these books can also be purchased through Amazon.com related sellers for considerably reduced prices.)
Course Schedule and Reading Assignments

September 12  
Overview of the Course

Readings:  
G. Hardin, “The Tragedy of the Commons,” [YC*v2 Resources] (Also in Gostin, pp. 365-369)  
G. Hardin, “Extensions of The Tragedy of the Commons,” [YC*v2 Resources]  
“Ten Things to Know about Health” [YC*v2 Resources]  
Nuffield Council, Public Health: Ethical Issues, 1-10 [YC*v2 Resources]  
Holland, Public Health Ethics, pp. vi-7  
Sandel, Justice, pp. 3-31  
M. Boylan, “The Moral Imperative to Maintain Public Health” [YC*v2 Resources]

Part I: Conceptual Landscape for Ethics and Public Health

September 19  No Class

September 26  Normative Frameworks in Public Health

Readings:  
Holland, Public Health Ethics, pp. 7-59.  
Jennings, “Frameworks for Ethics in Public Health” [YC*v2 Resources]

October 3  Three Models of Public Health: Statist, Human Rights, and Civic

Readings:  
Gostin, Public Health Law and Ethics, pp. 23-58; pp. 135-167; 233-281  
A. Cudd, “Contractarianism,” [YC*v2 Resources]  
Jennings, “Civic Professionalism and Civic Health” [YC*v2 Resources]

October 10  Utilitarianism and Liberalism: The Millian Paradigm

Readings:  
John Stuart Mill, On Liberty, chs. 1, 4,5, [YC*v2 Resources]  
John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, chs. 1-2 [YC*v2 Resources]  
Sandel, Justice, 31-166  
Nuffield Council, Public Health: Ethical Issues, 11-28; 29-41 [YC*v2 Resources]  
Jennings, “Public Health and Liberty” [YC*v2 Resources]

October 17  Community and the Common Good
Readings

Sandel, *Justice*, pp 185-207; 244-270
Jennings, “Public Health and Civic Republicanism” [YC*v2 Resources]
D. Bell, “Communitarianism,” [YC*v2 Resources]

**FIRST PAPER on Hard Times DUE—October 21**

Part II: Ethical Aspects of Public Health Policies and Practice

October 24 Ethical Implications of the Social Determinants of Health

Norman Daniels, Bruce P. Kennedy, and Ichiro Kawachi, “Justice is Good for Our Health,” in Gostin, *Public Health Law and Ethics*, pp. 35-40

October 31 No Class

November 7 Controlling Infectious Disease: Individual Rights and the Common Good—Vaccination, Social Distancing, and Quarantine


November 14 Health Promotion and Behavior Modification

Holland, *Public Health Ethics*, pp. 87-134

November 21 Fall Recess; No class

SECOND PAPER on *The Spirit Level* DUE November 18

November 28 Climate Change/Environmental Problems

Readings: H. Frumkin and AJ McMichael, Climate Change and Public Health [YC*v2 Resources]
Resources
Recommended: NIEHS, *A Human Health Perspective on Climate Change* [YC*v2 Resources]

December 5  Reading Period Begins

THIRD PAPER DUE—December 16