



Business Ethics (BUSI-2070)

Fall 2026–27 · Mondays and Wednesdays, 1:00–2:15 PM · Room [TBD]

Materials will be posted at agoraacademy.io

Course Syllabus

Instructor: James Magnus-Johnston, PhD ABD, McGill University; MPhil, Cambridge University

Double BA Hons in Political Studies, Theatre, and Rhetoric & Communications, University of Winnipeg

Contact: jmagnus-johnston@cmu.ca // c. 204.952.7751 (text)

Office hours: MW 2:30–4:30 PM; TTh 4:00–6:00 PM in D290 (DeFehr Hall, second floor)

Description: Business professionals must not only discover the vision of justice that underlies their business practices, but they also must submit this vision to critical scrutiny. The purpose of this course is to pursue both these aims. We will search for the moral ideals embedded in modern capitalist business practices and we will submit these moral ideals to critical evaluation. The goal is to discover the moral frameworks that can motivate and inform good business today.

Objectives: Demonstrate reasoned judgment when analyzing problems and making decisions, critically evaluate ethical dilemmas in decision-making scenarios, and integrate an understanding of economic, legal, political, and social structures.

Deadline for withdrawal without academic penalty: November 17, 2026.

Reading List

REQUIRED TEXT (ONLINE, FREE)

Byars, Stephen M., and Kurt Stanberry. *Business Ethics*. Houston: OpenStax, Rice University, 2018. Available free at openstax.org.

Supplementary readings are posted on the course website. These are excerpted; read the excerpt, not the full article.

REQUIRED SOFTWARE

In order to improve the quality of feedback and the volume of engagement in this course, each student will be required to sign up to use kritik.io, a platform for peer and group activities in class.

How This Course Works

This course runs on two tracks, and the difference between them matters.

Mondays are textbook days. You read the assigned OpenStax chapter before class, at home. Class opens with a short entry quiz — four short-answer items on the chapter, five minutes, on paper, devices away. The quiz is not designed to be hard if you have read; it is designed to be impossible if you have not. Quizzes cannot be made up, but your two lowest quiz scores are

dropped automatically, no explanation required. Use those two on the weeks when life goes sideways.

Wednesdays are reading days. The supplementary readings are harder than the textbook, so a short period of class time is made available for them. We begin with ten timed minutes of silent reading on paper, devices away, annotating as you go. Ten minutes is deliberately not enough to finish. Students who have read the excerpt beforehand will find the discussion easy; students encountering it cold will get through the opening argument and no further. Both can participate — but the advantage is real, and it is the point. Immediately after the timer, and before any discussion, you write a short handwritten response: one claim the author makes, one question you would put to them, and one connection to Monday’s chapter. These are collected.

Why it is built this way. Reading done outside class cannot be verified, and any written proof of it can now be generated in seconds. So this course does not try to verify your reading. It simply moves the graded moment into the room, where the work is done on paper in front of me. The consequence is straightforward: preparation is rewarded rather than policed, and the only way to be comfortable in this classroom is to have done the reading.

Assignments and Grades

Class participation	10%
Reading log and learning statements	15%
Chapter presentations	20%
Midterm test	10%
Case studies (ongoing)	15%
Final paper	15%
Final paper defence (in class)	5%
Final test	10%

Letter	Percentage	GPA	Descriptor
A+	90–100	4.5	Exceptional
A	85–89	4.25	Excellent
A-	80–84	4	Great
B+	77–79	3.5	Very Good
B	73–76	3.25	Good
B-	70–72	3	Satisfactory
C+	67–69	2.5	Competent
C	63–66	2	Acceptable
C-	60–62	2	Adequate
D	50–59	1	Marginal
F	0–49	0	Failure

An “excellent” assignment (A) would display:

1. Original thinking and a superior grasp of the subject matter
2. A highly developed capacity for critical evaluation, synthesis, and creativity
3. Appropriate descriptions and quotations
4. Organizing and subordinating information well; writing and/or speaking clearly
5. The use of research sources using any recognized style format. For reference, see:

Hacker, Diana. *A Pocket Style Manual*. Eighth edition. Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2018.

Participation in discussions: To foster more active discussions on class readings, your participation will be graded and the instructor will maintain a record of your contributions. You will be graded on the quality and quantity of interaction — that is, not only the volume of interaction, but its quality and consistency. Someone who interacts often but attempts to monopolize the conversation, for instance, may receive a lower grade than someone who contributes regularly and is respectful of the contributions of others. Regular contributions are required. Your participation grades will be posted at the middle and the end of the semester.

Opening and closing polls: Most weeks, class opens with an anonymous one-minute vote on a dilemma connected to that day's chapter, and closes with the same question asked again. Both distributions are shown on screen. These votes are never graded and never attributable to you — the point is to see whether seventy-five minutes of argument moves a room, and if it does not, to ask what would. Your written learning statement is where the reasoning goes; the vote is only the tally. The full term's results are discussed in the final session.

Reading log and learning statements: This combines the Monday entry quizzes with the Wednesday handwritten reading responses. Responses are written by hand in a notebook you use for nothing else, dated and in sequence. Both quizzes and responses are marked complete or incomplete rather than graded for polish: a response counts if it is present, on time, and plausibly your own thinking. Ten of twelve Wednesday responses and ten of twelve Monday quizzes earn full marks. Notebooks are collected twice, on November 4 and December 9, and returned the following week. Nothing here can be submitted late or added retroactively, because the point of the exercise is that it happens in the room.

Chapter presentations: For each chapter, students will prepare a presentation that summarizes the main argument of the reading in order to catalyze in-class discussion. Presentations are intended to be substantive, yet conversational. Those performing the summary will be asked to consider and summarize: the main argument or point; the sub-sections supporting it; and the implications and conclusion. Please also provide a critical analysis, including a series of questions to engage discussion. Consider whether there was a problem with the author's argument — is there something that was not considered? Questions should lead the class to defend or critique the reading and may be posed throughout the presentation or at the end of it. You will be graded by your peers, who recommend a grade to the instructor.

Peer grading: Presentations will be peer-reviewed using a web-based form; grades and feedback will be "crowdsourced" and recommended to the instructor. The instructor reserves the right to adjust grades up or down.

Case studies: Regularly through the term we will conduct an in-class activity using a scenario posed by your text. The scenario will catalyze group conversation, written reflection, and peer review using kritik. Some of these activities may be assigned as homework.

Tests: The midterm and final tests are series of short-answer questions on core concepts, written in class through Populi during the scheduled session, with results returned immediately. There is no scheduled final examination for this course; the final test on December 10 is the last graded event of the term.

Final paper defence: On December 7, in class, you will explain your paper's argument to a small group of classmates in about three minutes and take a couple of questions from them. No notes and no paper in front of you. I will circulate and listen. You will be asked three things: why you chose the topic, what your central argument is in your own words, and what the strongest objection to it is. This is marked out of five on its own, separately from the paper — a clear, confident account of your own thinking earns the marks whatever grade the written paper receives.

Final paper (1500+ words): For this project, students choose a topic they have not presented on before. Write a summary of the main ideas in that topic and provide a case study, report, or example that relates to it. The report should integrate thorough research and include proper citations.

Policies

Final grades: Grades submitted by instructors become final only after they are vetted by the Dean's Council. That process occurs early in January for fall semester grades and early in May for winter semester grades.

Academic integrity: All material referred to in any assignment MUST be appropriately referenced. Plagiarism is a serious matter. Students should be aware of CMU Academic Policies, particularly those regarding academic misconduct (plagiarism and cheating), which apply to all University courses. These are detailed on CMU's website and in the CMU Calendar. For more information on CMU policies regarding grades, academic misconduct, appeals, and other matters, please see CMU's Academic Calendar.

Accessibility: CMU strives to provide a fair and supportive learning environment for academically qualified students with disabilities. If you are eligible for these services or have questions about becoming eligible, please contact Sandra Loeppky, Coordinator of Accessibility Programs, at sloeppky@cmu.ca or 204.487.3300 x.340. In recognition of individuals with asthma, allergies and severe environmental/chemical sensitivities, CMU is striving to become a scent-free campus. Students, staff and guests are asked to refrain from wearing fragrances and scented personal care products at CMU.

Academic support services: Student studying, tutoring, and the Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) program are offered to CMU students free of charge in the Marpeck Mezzanine.

Counselling: University students face many challenges and at times may benefit from having a trained professional to talk to. There are qualified counsellors at CMU who volunteer their services free of charge to students on the CMU campus. Students wishing to book an appointment with a counsellor are asked to contact the North Side Receptionist at 204.487.3300 or info@cmu.ca. Confidentiality is maintained at all times. The counselling office is located at C365 (north side) and is free for CMU students.

Continuity plan: Faculty and students should plan to stay home when ill and follow public health requirements for respiratory illness. When students cannot come to class, please seek notes from the designated note-taker. If the instructor cannot be in class, an announcement will be made in Moodle, and we will use the video platform to communicate via videoconference.

AI use — with citation only. Students are permitted to use artificial intelligence tools on take-home assignments in this course if every use of AI-generated material incorporated into the assignment is properly cited. Citation should look like this: "This paper benefited from the use of [tool], created by [company], for [purpose: drafting, clarifying concepts, etc]." Note that quizzes and reading responses are written in class on paper without devices, and that tests are written in class through Populi. AI assistance is neither possible nor permitted for any of these.

Elder in Residence. CMU's Indigenous Elder in Residence is available to meet with any student who would like to have a conversation. If you would like to meet with him one-on-one, you can reach out to him directly to set up a time. See the Student Hub for details on availability and booking.

Schedule

See agoraacademy.io for live updates. Textbook readings are done at home. Short periods of class time will be made available for the supplementary readings — the shaded rows below. Mondays are green, Wednesdays blue.

Date	Track	Topic and reading
WED Sept 9	Textbook	Course introduction · Ch. 1, Why Ethics Matter
MON Sept 14	Textbook	Ch. 2, Ethics from Antiquity to the Present
WED Sept 16	Supplementary	Friedman, “The Social Responsibility of Business Is to Increase Its Profits” · Bowie, “Business Ethics and Philosophy”
MON Sept 21	Textbook	Ch. 3, Defining and Prioritizing Stakeholders — in-class stakeholder negotiation (roles assigned in advance)
WED Sept 23	Supplementary	Messick, “Social Categories and Ethics” · Hartman, “In-Groups and Fairness: Comments on Messick”
MON Sept 28	Textbook	Ch. 4, Society, the Environment, and Government
<i>WED Sept 30</i>	—	<i>NO CLASS — CMU closed, National Day for Truth and Reconciliation</i>
MON Oct 5	Textbook	Ch. 5, The Impact of Culture and Time
WED Oct 7	Supplementary	Agle et al., “Superior Stakeholder Theory” · Heath et al., “Business Ethics and (as) Political Philosophy”
<i>MON Oct 12</i>	—	<i>NO CLASS — CMU closed, Thanksgiving Day</i>
WED Oct 14	Assessment	MIDTERM TEST
MON Oct 19	Textbook	Ch. 6, What Employers Owe Employees
WED Oct 21	Supplementary	Bowie, “A Kantian Theory of Capitalism” · Hartman, “Can We Teach Character?”
MON Oct 26	Textbook	Ch. 7, What Employees Owe Employers
WED Oct 28	Supplementary	Moore, “Humanizing Business: Virtue Ethics” · Azola, “The Possibility of Virtue”
MON Nov 2	Textbook	Ch. 8, Recognizing and Respecting the Rights of All
WED Nov 4	Supplementary	DEBATE DAY — Zheng, “The Failure of the DEI-Industrial Complex” · “Backlash Against DEI” — READING NOTEBOOKS COLLECTED
<i>Nov 9–13</i>	—	<i>NO CLASSES — Fall Reading Week (CMU closed Nov 11, Remembrance Day)</i>
MON Nov 16	Textbook	Ch. 9, Professions Under the Microscope
WED Nov 18	Supplementary	“What, After All, Is Leadership?” · Reynolds, “Moral Awareness and Ethical Predispositions”
MON Nov 23	Textbook	Ch. 10, Changing Work Environments and Future Trends
WED Nov 25	Supplementary	Warren, “Constructive and Destructive Deviance” · Treviño, “Program Influence on Behaviour”
MON Nov 30	Textbook	Ch. 11, Why Ethics Still Matter
WED Dec 2	Supplementary	Haidt et al., “Affect, Culture, and Morality” · Bostrom and Yudkowsky, “The Ethics of Artificial Intelligence”
MON Dec 7	Assessment	FINAL PAPER DEFENCES — small-group defences in class; test review
WED Dec 9	Supplementary	Greenberg, “Employee Theft as a Reaction to Underpayment Inequity” · Hartman, “The Commons and the Moral Organization” — READING NOTEBOOKS COLLECTED
THURS Dec 10	Assessment	FINAL TEST — Thursday running on a Monday schedule