

## **SPPH 538: Ethical Theories in the Practice of Public Health**

May 11-July 25, 2016

### **Instructor**

Daniel Steel, Ph.D. Associate Professor, W. Maurice Young Centre for Applied Ethics, School of Population and Public Health.

### **Contact Information**

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**Class Meeting Time and Place:** 9 am to 5 pm, May 22, June 3, July 16, room B112, SPPH Building, UBC (2206 East Mall, Vancouver BC, Canada V6T 1Z3).

### **Description**

This course will review ethical discussions, principles and frameworks in relation to ethical issues that arise in population and public health. Ethical theory can help articulate the complexities of ethical issues and structure reasoning around the best responses. But there is no agreement about what ethical theory is the correct one, and different ethical theories emphasize different approaches to ethical concerns. Further, some commentators suggest that population and public health requires ethical principles and frameworks that are different from those in other areas such as clinical ethics, research ethics or professional ethics. This course will help you understand these theoretical disputes while building approaches to ethical issues that are of practical relevance in public health. Students will be expected to read theoretical and case study literature, identify additional literature relevant to their topic, and to present ethical arguments from diverse points of view, including ones with which you disagree. Overall the goal is to increase students' sophistication, decision-making capacity and rigour of reasoning on ethical issues in practice, policy, and research.

### **Texts**

- Angus Dawson (Ed) *Public Health Ethics: Key Concepts and Issues in Policy and Practice*. Cambridge, 2011. (In this course schedule, this text is referred to as *Dawson*.)
- Canadian Institutes of Health Research – Institute of Population and Public Health. (2012). *Population and Public Health Ethics: Cases from Research, Policy, and Practice*. University of Toronto Joint Centre for Bioethics: Toronto, ON. (In the course schedule, this text is referred to as the *CIHR Casebook*.)  
The CIHR Casebook is Available for free online at:  
<http://www.jcb.utoronto.ca/publications/documents/Population-and-Public-Health-Ethics-Casebook-ENGLISH.pdf>.

- All other readings will be posted on the course website ([www.connect.ubc.ca](http://www.connect.ubc.ca)).

### **Topics Covered**

- The concept of public health and its ethical dimensions
- Moral theories relevant to public health: utilitarianism, non-consequentialism, liberalism, and communitarian approaches
- Justice and health inequities
- Specific public health ethics issues including but not limited to: organ donation, environmental determinants of public health, immunization, and HIV testing

### **Course Objectives**

- Gain knowledge of central theories and issues relevant to public health ethics.
- Improve ability to reconstruct complex chains of reasoning.
- Improve ability to connect empirical research on public health to ethical issues.
- Improve ability to write essays that analyze and develop philosophical ideas and arguments in relation to public health issues.

### **Course activities and expectations**

All 3 face-to-face sessions are required and will be held in the School of Population and Public Health – 2206 East Mall, UBC, Vancouver, room B112. The sessions are 8 hours each and will be held on May 22, June 3 and July 16 from 9 am to 5 pm.

Active participation in online discussions is required. Building reasoned opinions based on the different ethical tools in the course is best done by building cases, or making arguments, for particular conclusions, and by providing and receiving constructive criticism. Conversation, disciplined by careful reasoning, is the best way to hone our ability to see issues from multiple perspectives and identify erroneous as well as reasonable conclusions your claims.

### **Grades:**

- Participation in Face-to-Face Meetings (10%): Participation is based on coming to the 3 face-to-face meetings prepared to engage in class activities, such as general class discussions, presentations, and group exercises in which you work together with other students to solve a problem or examine an argument that is related central topics for that day. It is expected that students read the assigned articles, chapters, or case studies prior to each meeting. This is the best way to prepare for class activities, which will connect to major concepts and cases discussed in the readings.
- Blog Posts (10%): For weeks 3 through 7, in which there are no face-to-face meetings, you will be expected to submit weekly blog postings on the course website. At the beginning of each week, I will post notes with discussion

prompts to suggest topics for you to respond to, although you are also encouraged to address other issues you thought of yourself and to comment (politely) on the posts of other students.

- Short Essay (20%): In the Short Essay (1,000 to 1,500 words), you are required to find an article from a peer reviewed journal article not listed on the syllabus that presents some empirical findings related to public health and connect that article to an ethical issue that was discussed in a class. In your essay, you should: (a) describe the central findings of the article you found, (b) describe the public health ethics issue to which you think it is relevant, and (c) explore the relationship between the article and the ethical issue in depth. Regarding (c), you should try to delve as deeply as you can into the connection between the empirical article and the ethical discussion. For instance, suppose your article is about rates of diabetes among aboriginal people, and your ethical issue is health inequities. For the assignment it would not be adequate merely to point out that your article describes an example of a health inequity. You should also connect the empirical details of the article to theories, arguments, or approaches that we have read about in class on this topic. How does the empirical study connect to these philosophical proposals? For example, does it seem to fit better with some than others, and if so, why? Or do some readings suggest grounds for critiquing the researchers' approach (e.g., on the grounds that it tends to overlook some important issues)? *The Short Essay is due Monday, June 27, 5 pm, and should be submitted via the drop box on the course website. I encourage you to send drafts to me ahead of time. If you get me your draft by 9 am Friday, June 24, I will return it to you with comments by the end of the next day.*
- Research Paper Presentation (20%): Each student will give a presentation at the 3<sup>rd</sup> face-to-face meeting on July 16<sup>th</sup>. The purpose of this presentation is to help you get a head start and early feedback on your research paper. Your presentation should explain the central ideas of research paper. What is the topic you will address? What is the specific research question you wish to answer? What is the relevant literature on this topic, and how does your paper aim to contribute to this discussion? See the grading rubric for the research paper presentation posted on the course website for more details. *Prior meeting with me is required; presentations without a prior meeting are not permitted. Meetings can be in person, online (e.g., via Skype), or by sending me a draft of your presentation via email by 9 am Thursday, July 14.*
- Research Paper (40%): In your research paper, you should discuss several sources that represent alternative perspectives on a topic, identify some unresolved problem or question that those contrasting positions address, and you should develop an idea intended to advance the discussion on this issue. For example, you might defend one of the positions from criticisms raised by advocates of the other approaches. Or you might suggest a novel solution to the problem that the previous approaches have overlooked. Your research essay can be on any topic discussed in the assigned readings on the

syllabus. For the research essay, you are required to cite and discuss at least five peer-reviewed articles from journals not assigned as readings on the syllabus that are related to the positions that your essay is discussing. (Of course, you should also cite readings assigned in class.) The length of the research essay should be between 2,500 to 5,000 words, including references and footnotes. Please see the grading rubric on the course website for further details about the expectations for this assignment. The research essay should be submitted via a drop box on the course website. The Research Essay is due by 9 AM, Monday, July 25. *Students are encouraged to send rough drafts for feedback ahead of time. If you get your draft to me by 9 am on Thursday, July 21, I will get you draft back to with comments by the end of that day.*

**Grading Scale**

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|--------|----|
| 90-100 | A+ |
| 85-89  | A  |
| 80-84  | A- |
| 76-79  | B+ |
| 72-75  | B  |
| 68-71  | B- |
| 64-67  | C+ |
| 60-63  | C  |

## Course Schedule

### **Week 1 (May 22 – May 28): Basic Concepts of Public Health Ethics**

**May 22:** First Face-to-Face Meeting (9 am to 5 pm, SPPH Building, room B112)

To make the first meeting productive, it is essential that all students to complete the assigned readings beforehand.

#### Readings:

1. Childress et al. “Public Health Ethics: Mapping the Terrain” (posted on course website).
2. Upshur, “Setting the Stage: Population and Public Health Ethics or Public Health Ethics: Ineffable, Ignorable, or Essential” (CIHR Casebook, pp. 7-20).
3. Dawson, “Resetting the parameters: Public health as the foundation for public health ethics” (Dawson, chapter 1).
4. Dilworth, Cava, and Dawson, “Case 1: Obesity Surveillance in Children” (CIHR Casebook, pp. 22-31).

#### **Itinerary for May 22:**

- 9:00 – 9:15: Introductions
- 9:15 – 10:30: What is special about population and public health?
- 10:30 – 10:45: Break
- 10:45 – 12:00: Perspectives on Public Health Ethics: Childress & Co and Upshur.
- 12:00 – 1:00: Lunch Break
- 1:00 – 2:45: The Liberal Challenge and the Basis of Public Health Ethics: Dawson
- 2:45 – 3:00 Break
- 3:00 – 4:45: Obesity Surveillance Case Study Exercise

### **Week 2 (May 29 – June 4): Harm Reduction, Justice, and Aboriginal Health**

#### Readings:

1. Oviedo-Joekes et al. “Hydromorphone Compared With Diacetylmorphine for Long-term Opioid Dependence A Randomized Clinical Trial” (posted on course website).
2. Christie et al. “Virtue ethics as an alternative to deontological and consequential reasoning in the harm reduction debate” (posted on course website).
3. Anderson et al. “Inequities in Health and Healthcare Viewed Through the Ethical Lens of Critical Social Justice Contextual Knowledge for the Global Priorities Ahead” (posted on course website).
4. Clark et al. “Melq’ilwiye: Coming Together — Intersections of Identity, Culture, and Health for Urban Aboriginal Youth” (posted on course website).

5. Shum et al. "Case 8: First Nations Drinking Water Policies" (CIHR Casebook, pp. 92-102).

**June 3:** Second face-to-face meeting

**Itinerary for June 3:**

- 9:00 – 10:30: Research on Harm Reduction for Opioid Users. **Guest Speaker: Eugenia Oviedo-Joekes, School of Population and Public Health, UBC**
- 10:30 – 10:45: Break
- 10:45 – 12:00: The Ethics of Harm Reduction: Consequentialism, Deontology, and Virtue.
- 12:00 – 1:00: Lunch Break
- 1:00 – 2:45: Critical Social Justice and Public Health. **Guest Speaker: Paddy Rodney, School of Nursing, UBC**
- 2:45 – 3:00: Break
- 3:00 – 4:45: Colonialism, Justice and Aboriginal Health.

**Week 3 (June 5 – June 11): Goals of Public Health: Aggregates and Inequities**

Readings:

1. Brülde, "Health, disease and the goal of public health" (Dawson, chapter 2)
2. Wilson, "Health Inequities" (Dawson, chapter 12).
3. Wolch, Byrne, and Newell, "Urban green space, public health, and environmental justice: The challenge of making cities 'just green enough'" (posted on course website).
4. Pederson et al. "Case 5: Equitable Consequences? Issues of Evidence, Equity and Ethics Arising from Outdoor Smoke-free Policies" (CIHR Casebook, pp. 59-69).

Blog Post 1 Due June 10

**Week 4 (June 12 – June 18): Health Risks and Precaution**

Readings:

1. John, "Risk and precaution" (Dawson, chapter 4).
2. Kessel and Stephens, "Environment, ethics and public health: The climate change dilemma" (Dawson, chapter 9).
3. Korfmacher et al. "Public Health and High Volume Hydraulic Fracturing" (posted on course website).
4. Sedgwick and Yanicki "Case 15: Alberta oil sands: A toxic mixture of bitumen and economic prosperity" (CIHR Casebook, pp. 164-175).

Blog Post 2 Due June 17

## **Week 5 (June 19 – June 25): Behavior Modification, Paternalism, and Stigma**

### Readings:

1. Ashcroft, “Smoking, health and ethics” (Dawson, chapter 5).
2. Griffiths and West, “A balanced intervention ladder: promoting autonomy through public health action” (posted on course website).
3. Courtwright, “Stigmatization and Public Health Ethics” (posted on course website).
4. Ciliska et al. “Case 12: Use of Evidence for Program Decision Making: Resources for Tobacco Cessation” (CIHR Casebook, pp. 133-143).

Blog Post 3 Due June 24

## **Week 6 (June 26 – July 2): Gender and Public Health**

**Short Essay Due Monday, June 27, 5 pm.** Please submit your Short Essay via the drop box on the course website.

### Readings:

1. Baylis, Kenny, and Sherwin, “A relational account of public health ethics” (posted on course website).
2. Wells et al., “Associations of economic and gender inequality with global obesity prevalence: Understanding the female excess” (posted on course website).
3. Flemming et al., “Real men don’t: Constructions of masculinity and inadvertent harm in public health interventions” (posted on course website).
4. Murti and Berger, “Case 9: School based HPV vaccination for girls in Ontario” (CIHR Casebook, pp. 103-113).

Blog Post 4 Due July 1

## **Week 7 (July 3 – July 9): Vaccination and Infectious Disease Control**

### Readings:

1. Verweij, “Infectious disease control” (Dawson, chapter 6).
2. Dawson, “Vaccination ethics” (Dawson, chapter 8).
3. Gostin, “Law, Ethics, and Public Health in the Vaccination Debates Politics of the Measles Outbreak” (posted on course website).
4. Murti and Berger, “Case 10: Mandatory Immunization of Local Public Health Employees” (CIHR Casebook, pp. 114-122).

Blog Post 5 Due July 8

## **Week 8 (July 10 – July 17): Screening**

### Readings:

1. Newson, “Population screening” (Dawson, chapter 7).
2. Biller-Andorno and Jüni, “Abolishing mammography screening programs? A view from the Swiss Medical Board” (posted on course website).
3. Coldman et al., “Pan-Canadian study of mammography screening and mortality from breast cancer” (posted on course website).
4. Filiatrault et al. “Case 13: Using personalized letters of invitation to increase participation in cervical cancer screening” (CIHR Casebook, pp. 144-152).

### **July 16:** Third face-to-face meeting

#### **Itinerary for July 16 meeting:**

- 9:00 – 10:30: Ethical Challenges of Screening Programs
- 10:30 – 10:45: Break
- 10:45 – 11:30: The Case of Mammography
- 11:30 – 12:00: Student Presentation
- 12:00 – 12:45 Lunch Break
- 12:45 – 2:45: Student Presentations
- 2:45 – 3:00: Break
- 3:00 – 5:00: Student Presentations

**Research Essay is due by 9 AM, Monday, July 25.** The research essay should be submitted via the drop box on the course website.