Description

This course asks the student to reflect on several themes: (i) the role of business in society, on a local, national, and global basis, (ii) economic and ethical aspects of acting as a business professional and the responsibilities that these imply, (iii) several models or approaches to "leadership" and their application to business. Moreover, this course asks the student to see the relationships among these three topics, and between them and a meaningful human life. In other words, this is a short course in making connections.

Course materials will be drawn simultaneously from two sources: Each week students will analyze current cases from actual business practice or film and literature, and points or issues in current law, many of which will be short readings provided by the instructor in class on the day of class. These readings will form the texts of the course, Each week students will also read all or part of a classic work (usually from outside business) that explores the same theme from the standpoint of philosophy, psychology, religion, law, or the arts. These readings will form the subtexts of the course. Different instructors may choose different subtexts to give the course their own personal emphasis. In discussions and analyses, students and instructors will synthesize the subtexts with the texts to arrive at an integrative point of view.

This is an interdisciplinary capstone course, building on all prior core coursework, both at the Stern School and in the other colleges. Its goal is to help the student develop a personal sense of business professionalism and leadership, and of how such a person should behave in ambiguous, uncertain situations, balancing self-interests and those of the firm within the larger context of society, ethics, and law.

Class sessions will be include discussion, in-class analyses, role-playing, and one or two guest speakers.

Grading

Each student will keep a journal, containing analyses, commentaries, and ideas relating to the readings, class lectures, and discussion. With the exception of the first week, you will hand in your journal on a weekly basis before class (one page, typed, single-spaced). Late journals will generally not be accepted. (1/3 of final grade)

Each student will hand in a final integrative essay, details TBA. (1/3 of final grade)

To foster critical thinking and analysis, students will routinely present ideas and arguments in class. This class participation will also be graded. (1/3 of final grade)
Topics, Texts & Subtexts

Important Note: You are expected to read any readings listed below and/or distributed in advance prior to the class for which they are assigned. This syllabus will be updated periodically to reflect any changes, along with deadlines and expectations for Parts II and III.

I. Markets, Wealth, Rights, and Meaning

Topics

Human Rights vs. Rights of Property & Right to Contract
Ethics and Contracts
Global Wealth Distribution
Ethics of International Business

Class schedule and subtexts

January 23
• No pre-assigned readings

January 30
• Subtext(s): Smith, Wealth of Nations Book 1 (especially highlighted portions)
• Text(s): “Some Students Use Net to Hire Experts to do Their School Work”

February 6
• Subtext(s): Plato, Euthyphro
• Additional subtext(s): “Sweet as Candy?” (Chocolate Slavery), “Chocolate Update” (Chocolate Slavery 2005)

February 13
• Subtext(s): Gandhi on Economics and Ethics; Dalai Lama, Nobel Peach Prize Speech
• Text(s): “Companies Face Ethical Issues Over Tamiflu”

February 20
• Subtext(s): Chekhov, “Gooseberries”; Bible, Book of Ecclesiastes (selection)
• Text(s): “Tragic End”
II. Profession and Personhood

Topics

Standards of Truth and Disclosure
Loyalty and Side Deals
Loyalty and Whistleblowing
Industrial Espionage & Trade Secrets
Fiduciary Agency to Investors
Professionalism and Human Life

Texts

Cases and stories from current business press concerning whistleblowing, bribery, employee v employer rights to trade secrets and intellectual property, employee privacy rights, fiduciary duties of agents, officers, and directors, relationships with customers, communities, and other members of profession.

Class schedule

• TBA
III. Power, Leadership and Humanity

Topics

Entrepreneurial Leadership
Leadership in Words and Deed
Leadership & Social Responsibility

Texts

Cases taken from current press

Class schedule

• TBA