TOPICS IN WRITING: ISSUES IN BIOMEDICAL ETHICS
WRTG 3020, section 020, Spring 2006

INSTRUCTOR AND OFFICE INFORMATION
Instructor: Don Wilkerson
Office Phone: 303-492-3606
E-Mail: Donald.Wilkerson@colorado.edu
Office: Temp Building, Rm. 202
Office Hours: MW 4:00-5:30 (and by appt.)

COURSE DESCRIPTION
We will use current debates in biomedical ethics and Beauchamp and Childress’s “Four Principles of Bioethics” as a framework for studying the basic elements of an argument and developing your skills as analytical writers and thinkers. You are required to write two papers in this course.

The first is patterned after the MCAT writing test. This assignment introduces you to the elements of a written analysis and gives you an opportunity to address questions of mechanics and style. (This assignment also offers valuable test-taking preparation to students planning to take the MCAT.)

The second paper will be written in commonly used form that is widely adaptable to academic, professional and journalistic writing. This assignment helps you develop a sense of audience and a sense of how to use writing as a means of defining your place in a professional or academic community. You have the choice of (1) refuting a brief essay on a relevant current issue, or (2) analyzing a policy, policy proposal or professional code to show why it is unlikely to achieve its stated ends. I encourage you to choose an issue or policy that is relevant to your field of study or likely future profession. Such an approach gives you an opportunity to apply the skills that you learn in this course to the writing that you will do in your other courses and in your professional life.

COURSE OBJECTIVES
This course is not intended to be a survey course in philosophical approaches to biomedical ethics. The general purpose of this course is to teach you how to read and think critically and how to express your thoughts in a direct and convincing way. The specific goals of this course are to teach you:

- Recognize and evaluate a statement of fact, of arguable opinion, of taste and of dogma;
- State a defensible analytical or argumentative thesis;
- Support the thesis over the course of a brief, 5-12 page essay;
- Use the paragraph as the basic unit of composition and of verbal reasoning;
- Summarize a counter-argument fairly and sympathetically;
- Analyze and refute an argument by addressing the validity of its claims, evidence, and assumptions;
- Weigh and adapt common persuasive appeals in light of the expectations of your audience;
- Craft a conclusion that places your specific argument in a broader social or intellectual context;
- Write simple, clear, economical prose;
- Present purposeful, direct and tactful oral critiques of your fellow students’ writing, and;
- Use writing as tool for building consensus within an informed community.

WORKSHOP FORMAT
This course is a writing workshop. Most of our class time will be spent analyzing and discussing your essays. Every third day you will distribute a draft of your work to your classmates and me. On the following day, we will discuss it in class. The workshop method is designed to:

- Teach you how to analyze and critique the work of others;
- Give you direct audience response so that you can revise and improve your essays;
- Provide you with a method for drafting and revising your essays in your other courses.

You are expected to write multiple drafts of each essay. Each draft should be presented as if it were a final draft. Each draft must be typed, double-spaced and turned in on time. Late drafts are not accepted. I will comment -- in writing and in class -- on each draft. I will grade the final draft only.

DUE DATES FOR FINAL GRADED DRAFTS
(subject to change at instructor discretion)

ASSIGNMENT VALUES


Grading in the PWR is rigorous; however, you are not predestined to receive a C or worse, nor is it impossible to get an A. To receive an A, you must write two stylistically and mechanically flawless papers that defend and develop a line of reasoning that originates with you and not with me. Your best means of getting a good grade is to revise your essays according to the recommendations that I give you during the workshops. That said, you are not guaranteed an A just because you follow my advice. Your relative success or failure is a function of your ability as a writer and thinker and the amount of effort you put into your work.

Please note, this is not a course in basic grammar and syntax. I assume that you have a working understanding of English grammar and usage. If you don’t, you will struggle in this course. If such is the case, I will do my best to direct you to people and resources that can help you.

Plagiarism

Do not plagiarize. Plagiarism is the use of someone else’s words or ideas without crediting them as the source. Anyone caught plagiarizing will be dismissed from the course with a grade of F and may be subject to further disciplinary action by the University. In order to discourage plagiarism, I will not allow you to change the topic of the second paper unless there is time to do two workshops and extensive revisions of the new topic.

Attendance Policy

Because this course is a writing workshop, your class participation is essential to every student’s success in the course. Thus, it is imperative that you attend class. I allow three absences — excused or unexcused. At the fourth absence, I will grade you down one full letter grade, and one full letter grade for each absence thereafter. I don’t make a distinction between excused and unexcused absences. Also, I do not want to hear your explanation for minor absences (minor illnesses, failure to set your alarm clock, heavy traffic, etc.). It is your responsibility to make sure that such things don’t happen more than three times over the course of the semester. I make exceptions to the three-absence rule in the case of an extraordinary situation — i.e. death in the family, prolonged illness, injury, etc. In such instances, I require a written verification of your excuse in order to meet the exception. Typically, absences due to major religious holidays are also exceptions to the policy. Please inform me of such early in the semester. I will take attendance at the beginning of the class. If you are late, you will be marked absent. It is your responsibility to remind me — at the end of the class period — to strike your absence from the record. If you don’t, I will not strike your absence from the record and it will count against your three-absence allowance.

Texts

Course readings will be available through the e-Reserves system of the University Libraries. I will also hand out packets periodically and refer you to relevant web sites. You may access e-Reserve readings by going to http://libraries.colorado.edu/search/?SEARCH=Wilkeson. Be sure that you then click on the hyperlink for 3020 (Biomedical) and not the link for 3020 (Political) or 3030. The readings for the course will be listed alphabetically.


Students with Disabilities

If you have specific disabilities and require accommodations, please let me know by the end of the second class so that your learning needs may be appropriately met. Please provide documentation of your disability to the Disability Services Office in Willard 322 (phone 303-492-8671.)