The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

**Subject Description Form**

*Please read the notes at the end of the table carefully before completing the form.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject Code</th>
<th>GEC1C24</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject Title</td>
<td>Ethical Thinking: Theory and Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credit Value</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-requisite / Co-requisite/ Exclusion</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Objectives**

The purpose of this subject is to introduce to the students different facets of human ethical concern, the diversity of ethical perspectives, and the commonly recognized relevant grounds for making moral judgments. The aim is not to indoctrinate them with the right answers to ethical questions. Being ethically mature and responsible are indicated not by liberal or conservative stances, but by the quality of ethical thinking – whether a person is able to reflect seriously on his/her own ethical views, with a healthy balance between sense and sensitivity, and awareness that there are competing ethical perspectives to be given due understanding and consideration. The enhancement of the quality of ethical thinking is the educational goal promoted by this subject.

**Intended Learning Outcomes**

(Note 1) Upon completion of the subject, students will be able to:

(a) apply common ethical concepts and various possible grounds for making ethical claims;

(b) articulate one’s ethical views clearly and with reasons, especially in the term paper (EW);

(c) identify important ethical issues in one’s social life and in the contemporary world, and understand the complexity of such ethical issues and diversity of ethical perspectives, partly from reading the prescribed texts on their own (ER);

(d) respond with both sympathetic understanding and critical thinking to opinions that are different from one’s own, which they will come across both in the lecture and in reading the prescribed texts (ER);

(e) discuss these ethical issues and different ethical perspectives with an acute awareness of their complexity and diversity;

(f) be self-reflective of one’s own ethical views and assumptions and communicate with good sense and reason.

*Please explain how the stated learning outcomes relate to the following three essential features of GUR subjects: Literacy, Higher order thinking, and Life-long learning*

**Literacy:**

In studying each topic, and in particular in preparing to present on a topic, the
students have to read the textbook as well as additional critical essays which contain sustained arguments and contrasting perspectives. The students also have to express themselves clearly, systematically, and with good reasons, in their tutorial presentations and in their individual term papers.

As a “Reading intensive” subject, students will be taught how to perform first a “quick read” to get the general flow of the material, and then how to do a meticulous second (or even third) reading to comprehend and analyze the details of the different perspectives and their supporting arguments.

As a “Writing Intensive” subject, the required minimum length of the term paper is 2,500 words.

All the exercises in reading, writing, public speaking, and rational discussion are conducive to enhancing the literacy level of the students.

**Higher order thinking:**
A number of higher order thinking skills are taught in this subject. The art of making clear, informed, reasoned, and balanced judgments is emphasized and assessed throughout. The discussion of practical issues requires the students to put the thinking skills they have learnt into practice.

**Life-long learning:**
Although only a limited number of ethical issues are discussed in this subject, the same methodology can be applied to other ethical issues that the students may encounter later in life. Learning this subject gives the students the confidence and the skills in thinking about ethical matters, which they can continue to employ after finishing this subject.

### Subject Synopsis/Indicative Syllabus

**(Note 2)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part I: Ethical concepts and approaches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Introduction to ethical thinking: judgments and grounds of judgments; relevant factors in moral consideration; structure of ethical reasoning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Utility: the concepts of “consequence” and “good consequence”; pleasure, preference satisfaction, and welfare; utilitarianism as a moral philosophy; utility as one relevant factor and the sole factor in moral consideration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Rights: the ideas of “rights” and “human rights”; self-ownership, human dignity, and autonomy</td>
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<tr>
<td>d. Duties: examples of moral duties; different kinds of duties; where do duties come from; Ross’s theory of duties; <em>prima facie</em> duties and actual duties; human relationship and duties; the Chinese concept of <em>lunli</em> as a source of human duties; Chinese concepts of duties: <em>benfen</em> and <em>qingfen</em>; ways to resolve conflict of duties; the place of duties in morality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Principles: The Golden Rule; The Golden Rule in different cultures and religions; application of the Golden Rule; Kant’s formulation of universal moral law; Dworkin’s ultimate principle; equal consideration and equal concern &amp; respect; Rawls’s two principles of justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Values: the proper place of social or cultural values in ethics; why human organs should not be commodities for sale; monogamy, homosexuality, bestiality, incest, and social and cultural values</td>
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<tr>
<th>Part II: Ethical issues</th>
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(Form AS 140) 7.2013     GEC1C24_May 2016
a. Abortion: the pro-life and the pro-choice arguments; right to life and right in one’s own person; abortion in America and in Chinese society; the development of the foetus and the concept of a person; Judith Thomson’s defence of abortion; Hong Kong abortion law; mother-child relation

b. Euthanasia and assisted suicide: definition of “euthanasia”; the doctrine of the sanctity of life; Oath of Hippocrates; attitudes towards euthanasia in Hong Kong; professional codes and conducts; arguments for and against euthanasia; terminating futile treatment; doctor assisted suicide

c. Sexual morality: the view that sex is intrinsically evil; St. Paul, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, and Kant’s views on the immorality of sex; three sexual ethics: ethics of purpose, ethics of respect, and ethics of consent; sodomy, fellatio, contraception, masturbation, prostitution, sadomasochism, incest, and bestiality; Confucian conception of sex;

d. Reproductive technology: possibilities opened by IVF (in vitro fertilization); genetic screening, sex selection, surrogate mother, genetic enhancement, cloning; rights issues, harms issues, and social values issues; social intervention of procreation

e. Sexual harassment: the concept of sexual harassment; forms of sexual harassment behaviour; gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion; hostile environment and quid pro quo

f. Environment: external cost; tragedy of the common; complexity and unanticipated consequences; development and sustainability; deep ecology

**Teaching/Learning Methodology**

(Nota 3)

In the lecture, the teacher will introduce the basic approaches, concepts, and methods of ethical thinking. The lecturer will introduce various factors that have to be taken into consideration in making moral judgments. The introduction will be supplemented with illustration of the use of the ethical approach to handle a number of sample ethical issues. In the tutorials, the students will investigate further problems that have not been fully discussed in the lectures. Students are required to take turn to be presenters and commentators.

**Writing Requirement:** As a “Writing Intensive” subject, students will be required to produce a substantial term paper of at least 2,500 words, which will undergo several drafts, the first to be submitted by mid-semester, supervised by the ELC. Two grades will be assigned, one by the ELC teacher based upon an assessment of the student’s participation in the drafting process (worth 10% of the total subject grade) and one by the subject teacher based on content (worth 30% of the total subject grade). The final version will be accompanied with a copy of the first draft to assess “progress”.

**Reading Requirement:** A number of short quizzes and/or homework (such as guiding questions) on the prescribed textbook and other required readings will be set to assess students’ understanding of them, especially those parts not covered in the lectures. In the examination, the questions will require students to have sufficient mastery of the content of the required reading which they have to do on their own, as well as the subject-specific knowledge and the generic thinking skills that are taught in the class. In addition, reading books and article not covered in the lectures is required for successfully completing the writing project.
Assessment Methods in Alignment with Intended Learning Outcomes
(Note 4)

Group presentation (10%): students in a small group of 3 or 4 are responsible for a one-hour session of presentation and Q&A.

Individual term paper (40%): students are required to further develop the ideas in their presentation into an individual term paper of at least 2,500 words with a research question and sustained arguments. In order to pass this subject, students must pass the writing component, i.e., attain a minimum grade “D” in the writing component.

Quizzes & homework (10%): Questions in quizzes & homework will be designed to assess students’ understanding of the prescribed textbook, especially those parts not covered in the lectures.

Examination (40%): The students have to answer two essay-type questions, each carrying 20% of the total mark. In writing the essays, the students have to apply the generic skills they have learnt and to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the required readings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific assessment methods/tasks</th>
<th>% weighting</th>
<th>Intended subject learning outcomes to be assessed (Please tick as appropriate)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Group presentation</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>✓  ✓  ✓  ✓  ✓  ✓  ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Individual Term Paper</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>✓  ✓  ✓  ✓  ✓  ✓  ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Quizzes &amp; homework</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>✓  ✓  ✓  ✓  ✓  ✓  ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Examination</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>✓  ✓  ✓  ✓  ✓  ✓  ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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Student Study Effort Expected

Class contact:
- Lectures 26 Hrs.
- Seminars 13 Hrs.

Other student study effort:
- Study team meetings 14 Hrs.
- Reading, writing and self-study 56 Hrs.
- ELC writing support activities 6 Hrs.

Total student study effort 115 Hrs.

Reading List and References

Required Reading: (for a “ER” subject)

1. One of the following sets of reading for writing the term paper (the
following are just some sample topics)

**Prostitution:** What is wrong with prostitution?


**Surrogate motherhood:** What kinds of surrogate motherhood are acceptable and what kinds are not?


**Animal rights:** Do animals have rights? If so, what rights do they have? If not, why not?


**Extramarital sex:** What is wrong with extramarital sex?

Terrorism: Is the terrorist’s choice of using violence as a political weapon ever justified? Is the United States’ use of violence to combat terrorism justified?


Sex without love: Case study: Comment on the moral code of a woman who advocates sex without love. Outline her moral code and discuss whether such a moral code is acceptable or defensible.


2. Quizzes & homework on the following prescribed textbook and some other selected required reading:


Reference List:


Note 1: Intended Learning Outcomes
Intended learning outcomes should state what students should be able to do or attain upon completion of the subject. Subject outcomes are expected to contribute to the attainment of the overall programme outcomes.

Note 2: Subject Synopsis/Indicative Syllabus
The syllabus should adequately address the intended learning outcomes. At the same time over-crowding of the syllabus should be avoided.

Note 3: Teaching/Learning Methodology
This section should include a brief description of the teaching and learning methods to be employed to facilitate learning, and a justification of how the methods are aligned with the intended learning outcomes of the subject.

Note 4: Assessment Method
This section should include the assessment method(s) to be used and its relative weighting, and indicate which of the subject intended learning outcomes that each method purports to assess. It should also provide a brief explanation of the appropriateness of the assessment methods in assessing the intended learning outcomes.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject Offering Department</th>
<th>GEC</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cluster Area</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Human Nature, Relations and Development</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>☐ Community, Organization and Globalisation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>☑ History, Cultures and World Views</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>☐ Science, Technology and Environment</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Medium of Instruction</td>
<td>English</td>
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<tr>
<td>Requirements intended to fulfil</td>
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<tr>
<td>☐ China-Study Requirement (CSR)</td>
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<tr>
<td>☑ English Reading (ER) and English Writing (EW)</td>
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<tr>
<td>☐ Chinese Reading (CR) and Chinese Writing (CW)</td>
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