Academic Year 2025-26 **Term** 1

COURSE CODE: COR 3301
COURSE TITLE: ETHICS AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (1 course unit)

Instructor: Russell Ong
Adjunct Faculty

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Issues of ethics and social responsibility are ubiquitous in our professional and personal lives, and our views on what we believe is 'the right thing to do' shape our expectations of the behaviour of others – from governments to corporate entities to fellow members of society. The pertinence of issues of ethics and social responsibility has grown rapidly in the recent past, with it increasingly being recognized that scandals or failures of (corporate) governance can be traced back to ethical lapses. In view of the real-world importance of ethically sound responses for the reputation and success of governments, organizations and individuals, this course aims to provide students with a solid degree of ethical literacy such that they will be better equipped to:

- Identify issues with an ethical or social responsibility dimension, in a variety of settings and with due attention to the factors that have caused these issues to come to the fore;
- Describe these issues with nuance;
- Employ appropriate analytical tools to engage in thoughtful ethical, practical and civic-minded reasoning. To this end, students will be exposed to the concepts and perspectives associated with leading ethical theories, their promises and drawbacks.

The approach taken in this course is predominantly practical: students will be exposed to a wide range of (contemporary) topics and case studies to uncover and deliberate how questions of ethics and social responsibility are, and should be, dealt with in our daily lives.

PRE-REQUISITE/ CO-REQUISITE/ MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE COURSE(S)
None

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the course, students should be able to:
- identify the ethical issues at stake;
- select and clarify the meaning of relevant concepts;
- select and appropriately apply relevant ethical frameworks to analyse the issues; and
- generate conclusions that are both intellectually persuasive as well as intuitively satisfying.

Students should be encouraged to be comfortable with inconclusiveness – the absence of the "correct" outcome or answer – when debating the views, rationales for, and merits of, choices made under different ethical perspectives.

Ideally, students who have successfully completed this course will be able to serve, regardless of their job descriptions, as ethics resource persons in their organizations, providing advice, when consulted, to their subordinates, peers and superiors on matters of ethics and social responsibility.

RECOMMENDED TEXT AND READINGS

The following materials will be referenced often as part of prescribed readings:

- Gary Chan & George Shenoy (eds.), *Ethics & Social Responsibility: Asian & Western Perspectives,* 3rd ed (McGraw Hill, 2016).

Further (optional) references which students may find helpful include the following materials:

- Michael Sandel, *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009).
- Russ Shafer-Landau, *Fundamentals of Ethics*, 5th ed (Oxford University Press, 2021).
- John R. Boatright, *Ethics and the Conduct of Business*, 7th ed (Pearson New International Edition, 2014).
- Crane & D. Matten, *Business ethics: managing corporate citizenship and sustainability in the age of globalization*, 4th ed (OUP, 2016).
- Laura P. Hartman, *Perspectives in Business Ethics*, 3rd ed (McGraw-Hill, 2005).
- Laura Hartman, Joseph DesJardins & Chris MacDonald, *Business Ethics: Decision-Making for Personal Integrity & Social* Responsibility, 6th ed (McGraw Hill, 2023).
- Arnold, Beauchamp & Bowie, *Ethical Theory and Business*, 10th ed (CUP, 2019).
- Jeffrey Pinsler, *Legal Profession (Professional Conduct) Rules 2015: a commentary*, 2nd ed (SAL Publishing, 2022)

Students are expected to keep abreast of current events, for the purposes of developing their moral imagination and their capacity to consider how concepts of ethics and social responsibility may be applied or may manifest in the real world. Course materials will be supplemented with current events that give rise to ESR-related concerns, as well as associated case studies.

ASSESSMENT METHOD

Individual assessment components will account for at least 70% of the final grade. The assessment components are:

- Individual written assignment: 15 %
- Class participation: 15 %
- Group oral presentation: 20 %
- Final Exam: 50 %

No questions from past year papers or published test banks will be used verbatim for the graded continuous assessments and examinations in this course.

COURSE METHODS

Class instruction and learning will involve a mix of

a. Mini-lectures (typically an introduction to a theme or topic);
b. Presentations on a weekly theme by class members;
c. Class discussion

This course takes seriously SMU's commitment to a participatory style of learning. To that end, instructors will use student-centered learning practices that promote critical thinking and questioning in a mutually respectful classroom environment.

Some examples of methods of student-centered learning (and applied ethics) include: use of case studies; the analysis of relevant statutes, international conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Convention against Corruption (CAC), and codes of conduct of local and foreign

companies; in-class debates; group and individual presentations; project work; small group on-the-spot discussions; and role-playing. Wherever applicable, relevant comparative materials will be used.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Week No.	Topic	Readings (tba)
1	**Contemporary relevance of ethics, core themes in ethical decision-making** Highlighting the importance of ethics across a variety of settings: professional, corporate, governance and qua citizen/consumer. Familiarizing students with core themes at stake in ethical decision-making (e.g. relativism, objectivism, moral disagreement).	
2	**Normative ethics – Session 1** Equipping students with theoretical knowledge about pertinent ethical theories, such as Kantian ethics, Aristotelian ethics, utilitarianism, Rawls and distributive justice, libertarianism, natural law theory, Confucianism.	
3	**Normative ethics – Session 2** Equipping students with theoretical knowledge about pertinent ethical theories, such as Kantian ethics, Aristotelian ethics, utilitarianism, Rawls and distributive justice, libertarianism, natural law theory, Confucianism.	
4	**Vocational and professional identity and ethics** Workplace discrimination, workplace privacy, whistle-blowing, conflicts of interest, sexual harassment, duty of loyalty, role-differentiated morality v integrated morality.	
5	**(International) business ethics and corporate social responsibility Session 1** Analysis of Milton Friedman's free-market arguments vis-à-vis stakeholder theorists, Nozick's libertarianism; aspects of supply chain management such as environmental protection, human rights, modern slavery, natural resource-sourcing; tax evasion; infringement of intellectual property rights; corruption and bribery. Reference may also be made, amongst others, to the ISO 26000, the Global Compact, statutes governing corruption/bribery with extraterritorial effect like the Singapore Prevention of Corruption Act, the U.N. Bribery Convention, the U.S. Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, and the U.K. Anti-Bribery Act.	
6	**(International) business ethics and corporate social responsibility Session 2** Analysis of Milton Friedman's free-market arguments vis-à-vis stakeholder theorists, Nozick's libertarianism; aspects of supply chain management such as environmental protection, human rights, modern slavery, natural resource-	

	sourcing; tax evasion; infringement of intellectual property rights; corruption and bribery. Reference may also be made, amongst others, to the ISO 26000, the Global Compact, statutes governing corruption/bribery with extraterritorial effect like the Singapore Prevention of Corruption Act, the U.N. Bribery Convention, the U.S. Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, and the U.K. Anti-Bribery Act.	
7	**Environmental ethics and sustainable living** Possible topics include the idea of remote responsibility and the precautionary principle; environmental ethics and relationships with other species (biocentric perspective); conservation and waste disposal; production of 'green' products and services; Hannover Principles or Professional Code of Ethics for Sustainability Professionals; local self-reliance.	
8	**Mid-term Break**	
9	**Advertising/marketing ethics** Advertising of controversial products (tobacco, alcohol, diet aids); methods of advertising, including truth in advertising, and protecting vulnerable audiences such as children, the elderly, and the poor. This discussion can extend to ethical issues that arise in the context of e-commerce.	
10	**Technology ethics** Possible topics include data collection, storage and privacy; responsibilities regarding the use of autonomous systems; mass surveillance; algorithm bias; problems arising from the technical and moral black box.	
11	**Group Presentations and Class Discussion**	
12	**Group Presentations and Class Discussion**	
13	**Revision and Exam Preparation**	
14	**Revision Week**	

Note: The above syllabus/schedule is meant only as a guide and is subject to amendment.

DROPPING A COURSE

Students are reminded to follow the dates and procedures of add/drop modules found in https://smu.sharepoint.com/sites/oasis/SitePages/RO/All-About-BOSS.aspx#parentHorizontalTab5
UG and JD students need to drop the electives via BOSS unless otherwise instructed by the School for specific electives (e.g. Moots).

Students who fail to follow the correct procedures and stipulated timelines for dropping their modules will obtain a "W' or "F' grades as indicated on OASIS.

Do note that a "W" and 'F' grade is reflected **permanently** on a student's transcript.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Academic Integrity

All acts of academic dishonesty (including, but not limited to, plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, facilitation of acts of academic dishonesty by others, unauthorized possession of exam questions, or tampering with the academic work of other students) are serious offences.

All work (whether oral or written) submitted for purposes of assessment must be the student's own work. Penalties for violation of the policy range from zero marks for the component assessment to expulsion, depending on the nature of the offense.

When in doubt, students should consult the instructors of the course. Details on the SMU Code of Academic Integrity may be accessed at https://smu.sharepoint.com/sites/oasis/SitePages/DOS-WKLSWC/UCSC.aspx or *OASIS -> CAMPUS LIFE & EXCHANGE -> CONDUCT & DISCIPLINE -> UNIVERSITY COUNCIL OF STUDENT DISCIPLINE -> SMU CODES OF CONDUCT*.

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Accessibility

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Digital Readiness for Teaching and Learning (DRTL)

As part of emergency preparedness, instructors may conduct lessons online via the Zoom platform during the term, to prepare students for online learning. During an actual emergency, students will be notified to access the Zoom platform for their online lessons. The class schedule will mirror the current face-to-face class timetable unless otherwise stated.