

Bioethics PHIL 244 Sec 1001 Fall 2026

Welcome to Bioethics!

In this course, we'll explore some of the most urgent moral questions in medicine and healthcare—questions that affect real lives and communities. My goal is for you to think critically, engage respectfully with diverse perspectives, and leave with tools you can apply both in and beyond the classroom. I am here to support your learning, so please reach out during Office Hours or by email whenever you have questions or ideas.

Instructor: Dr. Arina Pismenny

Pronouns: they/them and she/her

Email: apismenny@unr.edu

Office: Ansari Building, room 302A

Office Hours: T: 9-10AM; R: 1-2PM, or by appointment

- These are times set aside for you to drop in with questions, discuss course concepts, get feedback on assignments, or just talk about ideas related to the course. You don't need an appointment, but you're always welcome to email me if you'd like to set a specific time.

Class meets on **TR** 1:30PM - 2:45 PM in William J. Raggio Building, room 2009

COMMUNICATION

Please contact me by email. It is best to send an email via Canvas because it tells me which section you are in. In your email, please indicate your name, course and section. Please allow 24 hours for an answer.

I check email on weekdays from 9:00 am to 6:00 pm. If you write after hours or on weekends, please expect a reply during the next business day.

Please address Dr. Arina Pismenny as Professor or Doctor Pismenny.

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND PREREQUISITES

Treatment of such issues as abortion and euthanasia, cloning, genetic screening, just health care, patients' rights, the use of human and animal subjects in research. There are no prerequisites for this course.

In this course, we will examine urgent and often controversial questions at the intersection of medicine, science, and ethics. We will explore foundational ethical theories—such as utilitarianism, deontology, virtue ethics, and care ethics—and apply them to real-world dilemmas in healthcare. Topics will range from genetic technologies and disability rights to reproductive justice, research ethics, and the fair distribution of healthcare resources. Along the way, we will consider how social identities—such as race, gender, sexuality, and disability—shape medical experiences and influence ethical decision-making. The course emphasizes developing your skills in moral reasoning, critical analysis of arguments, and respectful engagement with diverse perspectives, both in writing and in class discussion.

Why this course matters: Bioethics equips you to think clearly and critically about decisions that affect human lives, helping you become a more informed and responsible participant in debates about health, science, and justice.

CORE OBJECTIVES

CO 12 (Ethics): Students will demonstrate understanding of the ethical principles in general or in application of specialized knowledge, results of research, creative expression, or design processes. Students will demonstrate an ability to recognize, articulate, and apply ethical principles in various academic, professional, social, or personal contexts.

CO 9 (Science, technology & society): Students will be able to connect science and technology to real-world problems by explaining how science relates to problems of societal concern; be able to distinguish between sound and unsound interpretations of scientific information; employ cogent reasoning methods in their own examinations of problems and issues; and understand the applications of science and technology in societal context.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. state a thesis about a text in bioethics, and provide evidence and philosophical argument (including replies to counter-arguments) in its defense.
2. analyze at an introductory level some fundamental issues and problems in bioethics.
3. distinguish better and worse reasoning in texts concerned with bioethics.
4. explain the practical implications of an abstract debate in the bioethics literature, especially in the light of recent or evolving scientific/technological developments.

HOW TO SUCCEED IN THIS COURSE

Each learning outcome is supported by readings, in-class activities, and assignments that build your skills step by step. For example:

- **Explain and apply core bioethics principles** → You will practice in weekly Perusall annotations and apply them in your group project.
- **Critically analyze ethical arguments** → You will do this in written work and during in-class discussions.
- **Engage respectfully with diverse perspectives** → You will apply this skill in discussions, peer feedback, and final project Q&A.

COURSE MATERIALS

All reading materials are posted on [Canvas](#). It is your responsibility to download them and read them.

GRADES

Measuring your progress in points will make it easy for you to determine your own grade and progress at any time. The total possible number of points for the course is **100**. Final letter grades will be assigned on the standard point/percentage scale:

A: 93–100 | **A–:** 90–92 | **B+:** 87–89 | **B:** 84–86 | **B–:** 80–83 | **C+:** 77–79 | **C:** 74–76 | **C–:** 70–73 | **D+:** 67–69 | **D:** 64–66 | **D–:** 60–63 | **F:** 0–59

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING BREAKDOWN

Syllabus quiz – 0% but required to pass in order to proceed with the course

Attendance – 5%

Participation & Canvas Discussion Board – 10%

- Includes in-class discussion contributions, group work, and weekly Canvas Discussion Board posts (rotating 4 formats: *In-Class Connection*, *Philosophy in the Wild*, *Hot Take & Critique*, and *Role-Play Response*).
- **Note:** Many prompts require details from *our specific class discussions* or original media from your life. Generic or AI-generated posts that fail to reference course-specific material will not receive credit.

Midterm Exam – 25%

Final Project – 25%

Perusall Reading Annotations – 25%

Reflection Journals (done in class & uploaded to Canvas) – 10%

ASSIGNMENTS

Syllabus Quiz (0% of final grade, but required to continue in the course)

You must complete the syllabus quiz on Canvas at the start of the semester. This short quiz checks your understanding of the course policies, assignments, grading, and expectations. It will not count toward your final grade, but you must pass it in order to unlock the rest of the course materials and participate in the class. You must earn 100%; unlimited attempts are allowed.

Attendance (5%)

Regular attendance is essential for success in this course. You may miss up to four class sessions without penalty; each additional unexcused absence will reduce your attendance grade.

Here is what this means. For 4 or fewer absences: Attendance grade = 100% (full attendance grade). For 5 absences: Attendance grade = 100% - 5% = 95%; 6 absences: Attendance grade = 100% - 10% = 90%; For 7 absences: Attendance grade = 100% - 15% = 85%; For 8 absences: Attendance grade = 100% - 20% = 80%; For 9 absences: Attendance grade = 100% - 25% = 75%; For 10 absences: Attendance grade = 100% - 30% = 70%; **For 11 absences or more: Attendance grade = 0% (dropped from the course).**

Attendance will be taken every class. Sometimes via a roll call, sometimes via in-class written submission of a Reflection Journal (see below).

Latenesses will also affect your attendance record. Two latenesses will count as one absence. If you do arrive late, make sure to notify me at the end of the class that you were here. Otherwise, once marked absent, the attendance record will not be changed.

Participation (10%)

Your participation grade reflects your contributions to in-class discussions, group activities, and weekly Canvas Discussion Board posts. Discussion Board prompts rotate between *In-Class Connection*, *Philosophy in the Wild*, *Hot Take & Critique*, and *Role-Play Response*. Many prompts require details from our specific class discussions or original media from your life. Discussion Board participation assignment will be assigned during certain weeks throughout the course.

Midterm Exam (25%)

An in-class exam assessing your understanding of key concepts, theories, and debates from the first half of the semester. The exam will likely be comprised of several short-essay questions.

Final Project (25%)

A collaborative project on an assigned or approved bioethics topic. Groups of 5-6 students will research the issue, develop and defend a clear thesis using course concepts and arguments, and address a few objections. The project includes an in-class group presentation (about 20 minutes plus 10 minutes for Q&A) during the final weeks of the semester, with two presentations per class day. In addition to the presentation, each group will submit their power point on Canvas as well as a group essay demonstrating their defense in written form. The oral presentation is worth 15%, and the essay is worth 10%.

Weekly Perusall Reading Annotations (25%)

Each week, due Wednesdays, you will complete Perusall reading and video annotation assignments designed to support careful reading, critical engagement, and discussion of bioethical issues. For each assignment, students are expected to make substantive annotations that analyze arguments, explain key concepts, raise thoughtful questions, apply ethical frameworks, and engage meaningfully with classmates' comments where appropriate. Simple summaries, highlighting, or brief expressions of agreement do not count toward this requirement.

Each Perusall assignment is graded on a 0–3 scale (0 = no or minimal engagement; 3 = strong, substantive engagement). Scores are generated automatically based on the quality, quantity, and distribution of annotations, as well as timely engagement with the material. There are 19 Perusall assignments over the semester. To keep these assignments low-stakes, the lowest 6 scores will be dropped automatically.

To enroll in Perusall, follow this link: <https://app.perusall.com/join/PISMENNY-2TVDM> and enter code PISMENNY-2TVDM.

Reflection Journals (10%)

You should always take notes in class. I will be asking you to spend 5 minutes or so in class or after class to write on a specific question. Then I will ask you to read what you wrote aloud to the class. Reading your response aloud will contribute to the class discussion. You will also need to upload your in-class reflections into the journal entry on Canvas during the allocated time in class. You may do so by typing up your response and uploading it in .doc, .docx, or a .pdf format. You may also take a picture of your hand-written reflection journal response, and upload the picture of your work on Canvas. Your responses should be about 100-200 words. You should keep track of the dates on which you've written your reflections, and the question you were attempting to answer. This exercise will also help you track your thoughts throughout the semester. It will be fun to track your progress throughout the semester. The response should be checked for grammar and spelling.

COURSE POLICIES

Late Work will not be accepted, and missed assignments cannot be made up except in cases of documented extenuating circumstances. To qualify for a make-up, you must: (1) notify in advance when reasonably possible, or as soon as circumstances permit, (2) provide a formal written excuse, and (3) complete the make-up within one calendar week of the original due date.

Acceptable reasons for absence from or failure to engage in class include illness; Title IX-related situations; serious accidents or emergencies affecting the student, their roommates, or their family; special curricular requirements (e.g., judging trips, field trips, professional conferences); military obligation; severe weather conditions that prevent class participation; religious holidays; participation in official university activities (e.g., music performances, athletic competition, debate); and court-imposed legal obligations (e.g., jury duty or subpoena). Other reasons (e.g., a job interview or club activity) may be deemed acceptable if approved by the instructor.

For all planned absences, a student in a situation that allows an excused absence from a class, or any required class activity must inform the instructor as early as possible prior to the class. For all unplanned absences because of accidents or emergency situations, students should contact their instructor as soon as conditions permit.

Note taking: Research shows that note taking significantly improves students' ability to remember and understand the material they have learned. When taking notes, you should write down ideas. *You should **not** be copying the text of the slides, as the slides are available on Canvas, and you are wasting time re-writing them.* Instead, you should be summarizing the material in your own sentences. This is a very good way to learn. You should always take notes in class.

Hand-written notes are superior to typed-up notes because writing notes by hand engages your mind to a much greater extent than typing does. For this reason, I recommend to all of you to write your notes by hand.

Electronic devices class policy: To help us create an engaging and focused environment, please keep laptops, phones and smart watches off during class. Tablets with a stylus may be used for note-taking only. Using a phone during class without prior approval may result in being asked to step out and losing attendance points. Students with approved accommodations may use devices as needed.

Content accessibility: This course may leverage 3rd party web/multimedia content. If you experience any issues accessing this content, please notify me as soon as possible.

Generative AI Use:

This course assumes that all work submitted by students, which includes all process work, drafts, brainstorming artifacts, final works – will be generated by the students themselves, working individually or in groups as directed by course assignment instructions. This policy indicates the following constitute violations of academic honesty and “cheating”: any unauthorized use of generative AI tools (such as ChatGPT and similar), as outlined in UNR Academic Integrity Policy ([UAM 6,502](#)).

Some assignments may authorize use of such tools but will be expressly described in the assignment instructions. For the purposes of those assignments, specific instructions will be provided on the use of generative AI tools regarding the type of work being allowed (i.e. brainstorming, drafts, final works, etc.). Please email me for any questions or concerns.

Ground Rules

In this classroom, students will be asked to regularly engage in respectful discussions on a variety of topics. In order to maximize the effectiveness of these discussions and enhance the learning experience for all students, the following ground rules for discussions and general classroom participation will be adopted:

- Listen respectfully, without interrupting.
- Listen actively and with a genuine desire to understand other points of view.
- Critique ideas, not people.
- Speak with care and respect, and understand that your words impact others.
- Do not monopolize discussions.
- Support your positions with reliable evidence.
- Commit to learning and sharing information.
- Be open and willing to change your perspectives based on what you learn from others.
- Recognize that each person comes to a discussion with experiences that are different from your own.
- Recognize that there are different approaches and ideas for solving problems.
- Avoid blame, speculation and inflammatory language.
- Avoid generalizations about social groups.
- Avoid assumptions about any member in the class.
- Do not ask individuals to speak for their (perceived) social group.

COURSE SCHEDULE (SUBJECT TO CHANGE)

Date	Questions/Goals	Reading	Assignments
INTRODUCTION			
Week 1 8/25, 8/27	What is philosophy? What is Bioethics? What is a good argument?	Gary Seay and Susana Nuccetelli, "From Vaccination Ethics to Bioethics and Ethics"; "The Tools of Ethical Inquiry"	Syllabus quiz due 8/28 . Practice Perusall due 8/28 Reflection Journal Discussion Board
MORAL THEORY			
Week 2 9/1, 9/3	What is Deontology, Utilitarianism, Virtue Ethics, and Care Ethics?	Daan Kennis et al. Ch. 2 – Moral Theories	Perusall due 9/2 Reflection Journal Discussion Board
APPROACHES TO ETHICS			
Week 3 9/8, 9/10	<u>Recap</u> : What are the key features of the ethical theories discussed? What is intersectionality?	Patrick Grzanka et al. "My Bioethics Will Be Intersectional or It Will Be [Bleep]"	Perusall due 9/9 Reflection Journal Discussion Board
PATERNALISM			
Week 4 9/15, 9/17	What is principlism, and how do its principles apply in healthcare? When is it justified to override patient autonomy?	G. M. Trujillo, Jr., " Principlism in Biomedical Ethics: Respect for Autonomy, Non-Maleficence, Beneficence, and Justice "; Dax Cowart and Robert Burt, "Confronting Death: Who Chooses? Who Controls? A Dialogue between Dax Cowart and Robert Burt"	Perusall due 9/16 Reflection Journal Discussion Board
HUMAN SUBJECT RESEARCH			
Week 5 9/22, 9/24	What ethical violations occurred in Tuskegee? How can racism distort research? How do physicians' duties to individual patients conflict with the goals of	<u>Watch</u> : Ugly History: The U.S. Syphilis Experiment - Susan M. Reverby <u>Read</u> : Allan M. Brandt, "Racism and Research: The Case of the Tuskegee Syphilis Study"; Samuel Hellman and Deborah S. Hellman, "Of Mice but Not	Perusall due 9/23 Reflection Journal Discussion Board

	randomized clinical trials?	Men: Problems of the Randomized Clinical Trial”	
ABORTION			
Week 6 9/29, 10/1	What makes abortion morally (im)permissible? How should the moral status of the fetus and the rights of the pregnant person be balanced in shaping abortion law and policy?	Judith Jarvis Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion”; Don Marquis, “Why Abortion is Immoral”	Perusall due 9/30 Reflection Journal Discussion Board
ABORTION CONT.			
Week 7 10/6, 10/8	What are some key effects of abortion policies on lives and wellbeing of pregnant patients?	Bonnie Steinbock, “Abortion”	Perusall due 10/7 Reflection Journal Discussion Board
MIDTERM WEEK			
Week 8 10/13, 10/15	Review and consolidate understanding of key bioethics concepts and moral theories. Demonstrate comprehension and critical analysis through the midterm exam.	10/13 In-class Midterm Review 10/15 In-class Midterm Exam	
EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES AND DISABILITY ACTIVISM			
Week 9 10/20, 10/22	What are the ethics of selecting traits with genetic technology? How do Deaf perspectives challenge genetic interventions? Should parents be able to choose disabilities for their children?	Read: Julian Savulescu and Guy Kahane, “The Moral Obligation to Create Children with the Best Chance of the Best Life”; Carol Padde and Jacqueline Humphries, “Who Goes First? Deaf People and CRISPR Germline Editing” Watch: Heather Artinian, “Not the hearing or Deaf world”	Perusall due 10/21 Reflection Journal Discussion Board

EPISTEMIC AND AFFECTIVE INJUSTICE IN HEALTHCARE			
Week 10 10/27, 10/29	What is epistemic injustice in healthcare? How do emotional norms in healthcare harm chronic pain patients?	Havi Carel and Ian James Kidd, "Epistemic Injustice in Healthcare: A Philosophical Analysis"; Arina Pismenny, "Pain, Power, and Policing: Emotional Injustice in Healthcare"	Perusall due 10/28 Reflection Journal Discussion Board
CARE ETHICS AND EMOTIONAL LABOR			
Week 11 11/3, 11/5 Possible Lilley Museum Trip TBC	What does care ethics add to healthcare ethics? Is emotional labor an obligation in medicine? Can caring too much harm care?	Julie Childers and Bob Arnold, "The Inner Lives of Doctors: Physician Emotion in the Care of the Seriously Ill"; Charlie Kurth, "Should Doctors Care About Their Patients?"	Perusall due 11/4 Reflection Journal Discussion Board
HEALTHCARE ACCESS AND ALLOCATION			
Week 12 11/10, 11/12	Is there a right to healthcare? What reasons justify guaranteeing everyone a basic level of healthcare?	Norman Daniels, "Justice, Health, and Healthcare"; Jan Narveson, "The Medical Minimum: Zero"	Perusall due 11/11 Reflection Journal Discussion Board
FINAL PROJECTS IN-CLASS WORKSHOPS			
Week 13 11/17, 11/19	Develop and refine final project ideas, arguments, and structure. Provide and receive constructive peer and instructor feedback.		
THANKSGIVING BREAK			
Week 14 11/24, 11/26	Engage in independent reading and reflection on course materials. Prepare questions or insights for upcoming discussions and assignments.		

FINAL PROJECT PRESENTATIONS			
Week 15 12/1, 12/3	Present and defend your final project to the class. Engage in critical discussion and respond to peer questions.	<u>Presentations:</u> 12/1: Groups 1 & 2 12/3: Groups 3 & 4	<u>Presenting Groups:</u> Submit your PowerPoint & Peer Reviews by the end of your presentation day <u>Non-presenting students:</u> Submit your presentation assessments on Canvas
FINAL PROJECT PRESENTATIONS			
Week 16 12/8	Present and defend your final project to the class. Engage in critical discussion and respond to peer questions.	<u>Presentations:</u> 12/8: Groups 5 & 6	<u>Presenting Groups:</u> Submit your PowerPoint & Peer Reviews by the end of your presentation day <u>Non-presenting students:</u> Submit your presentation assessments on Canvas
FINAL PROJECT ESSAYS			
DUE 12/12	Write up your presentation project in essay form as a group.		Upload your essay on Canvas

UNIVERSITY POLICIES AND RESOURCES

Academic Integrity

The University Academic Standards Policy defines academic dishonesty and mandates specific sanctions for violations. See the University Academic Standards policy: UAM 6,502.

Policy and resources: [UNR Academic Standards](#)

Disability Services

Any student with a disability needing academic adjustments or accommodations is requested to speak with me or contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) as soon as possible to arrange for appropriate accommodations. The DRC is located in the Pennington

Student Achievement Center, room 230, phone: (775) 784-6000, email: drc@unr.edu.

More info: [UNR Disability Resource Center](#)

I am committed to creating a course that is inclusive in its design. You are encouraged to contact me about issues in the class and to get help. I also welcome feedback that will assist me in improving the experience for all students. If, at any point in the term, you find yourself not able to fully access the space, content, and experience of this course, we encourage you to contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC). It is never too late to request accommodations—our bodies and circumstances are continuously changing. By making a plan through the DRC, you can arrange accommodations without disclosing your condition to course instructors.

Mental Health Support

There are times when you may experience difficulties in life, and you may benefit from seeking help. Mental health services are available to you as a student at no additional cost through Counseling Services at the Pennington Student Achievement Center. This includes same-day in-person and telemental health initial consultations, brief individual counseling, and group counseling sessions. Limited same-day appointments can be scheduled online via [Counseling Services](#) or by calling 775-784-4648. Additional brief drop-in "Let's Talk" student consultations are also available in the Counseling Services Annex located at the southwest corner of Great Basin Hall.

Civil Rights & Equal Access

The University of Nevada, Reno is committed to providing a safe learning and work environment for all. If you believe you have experienced discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic/dating violence, or stalking, whether on or off campus or need information related to immigration concerns, please contact the University's Office of Civil Rights & Equal Access.

More info: [Office of Civil Rights & Equal Access](#)

Academic Success Services

Your student fees cover usage of the [University Math Center](#), [University Tutoring Center](#), and [University Writing and Speaking Center](#). These centers support your classroom learning; it is your responsibility to take advantage of their services. Keep in mind that seeking help outside of class is a sign of a responsible and successful student.

Statement On Failure to Comply with Policy

In accordance with section 6,502 of the University Administrative Manual, a student may receive academic and disciplinary sanctions for failure to comply with the policy, including this syllabus, for failure to comply with the directions of a University Official, for disruptive behavior in the classroom, or any other prohibited action. "Disruptive behavior" is defined in part as behavior, including but not limited to failure to follow course, laboratory, or safety rules, or endangering the health of others. A student may be dropped from class at any time for misconduct or disruptive behavior in the classroom upon the recommendation of the instructor and with the approval of the college dean. A student may also receive

disciplinary sanctions through the Office of Student Conduct for misconduct or disruptive behavior, including endangering the health of others, in the classroom. The student shall not receive a refund for course fees or tuition.

Recording Policy

- **Student-created recordings:** Surreptitious or covert recording of class or unauthorized audio recording of class is prohibited by law and by Board of Regents policy. This class may be videotaped or audio recorded only with the written permission of the instructor. In order to accommodate students with disabilities, some students may have been given permission to record class lectures and discussions. Therefore, students should understand that their comments during class may be recorded.
- **Instructor-created recordings:** Class sessions may be audio-visually recorded for students in the class to review and for enrolled students who are unable to attend live to view. Students who participate with their camera on or who use a profile image are consenting to have their video or image recorded. If you do not consent to have your profile or video image recorded, keep your camera off and do not use a profile image. Students who unmute during class and participate orally are consenting to have their voices recorded. If you do not consent to have your voice recorded during class, keep your mute button activated and only communicate by using the "chat" feature, which allows you to type questions and comments live.

Campus closures and delays:

In the event of class cancelations or delays caused by inclement weather conditions, fire/smoke conditions, or other unforeseen emergencies, the safety and well-being of students are the University's top priority. Official notifications will be disseminated through the University website and other official channels with details related to any campus delays or closures.

In the event of a campus closure, you will be informed as to whether the class will be offered remotely or if it will be canceled. If the class is canceled, you will receive information on how to address any missed course content.

Students facing significant impacts due to these events are encouraged to communicate with their instructor for potential accommodations.

Religious Observance – Students with religious or cultural observances that coincide with this class should notify the instructor in writing by the second week of the semester to discuss arrangements for making up missed work.

Veteran Services – Veterans, active-duty military, and military-connected students are encouraged to connect with the [UNR Veteran Services Office](#) for resources and assistance.

Diversity and Inclusion Statement – The University of Nevada, Reno actively supports a diverse and inclusive campus culture because diversity in all of its forms makes for a stronger and healthier University.

Land Acknowledgment – We acknowledge that the University of Nevada, Reno is situated on the traditional homelands of the Numu (Northern Paiute), Wašiw (Washoe), Newe (Western Shoshone), and Nuwu (Southern Paiute) peoples.