In this course we will explore the concepts, conflicts, and contexts involved in making ethical decisions in healthcare. We will learn the basic ethical principles of autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice, and apply them to specific case studies. We will explore the various healthcare environments in which difficult and contentious decisions are made, including physician offices, hospitals, hospice, nursing homes, pharmacies, research settings, and health policy settings.

Throughout this course we will seek to understand what ethical decisions are, and then the characteristics of individuals, groups, and settings that are conducive to making ethical decisions. In other words, what factors lead us toward or away from ethical decision-making? We will continually ask to what extent is the content of our decisions driven by personal characteristics (values, beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, skills), and/or the nature of our interactions with others (communication, influence, conformity, leadership, followership), and/or the nature of the environment around us (professional codes of conduct; regulations, policies and other rules; institutional values; the healthcare milieu; and societal, cultural and historical contexts in which healthcare occurs).

There are two ways in which this course will link to studies of leadership. Throughout the course we will consider ways in which leaders are responsible for creating and sustaining healthcare regulations, policies, standards and institutional norms – the healthcare environment in which decision-making occurs. How do good healthcare leaders prevent and ameliorate healthcare crises which entail life-and-death decisions? How can healthcare leaders ensure the commonly held ethical standards are promulgated and self-enforced throughout their institutions? Secondly, we will examine two topics that are currently testing leadership in healthcare in the US – the push for higher levels of healthcare safety (preventing avoidable infections and medical errors in hospitals, for example); and the push to provide affordable access to healthcare for more Americans.
Expectations / grading

I expect honorable and ethical behavior throughout this course. Refer to University policies for more details on standard expectations regarding accommodations for disabilities, the honor code, the definition of plagiarism, etc. If the honor pledge and your signature are required on written assignments and exams as part of University policy, please follow that policy.

Attendance and participation will count for 10% of the grade. I will not make a distinction between excusable and inexcusable absences. “Participation” includes being fully prepared for class (having done readings, assignments, have questions or comments prepared ahead of time); proactively voicing questions and comments that reflect critical thinking about the reading and topics; relating the reading and lectures to other classes, news stories, or events in your life in class discussions; being respectful and attentive (making eye contact, avoiding side-conversations, staying seated, not surfing / texting / emailing) when others are speaking, especially guest speakers. I will not tolerate any disrespectful behavior toward guest speakers.

Brief “response papers” and other assignments will count for a sum total of 10% of the grade. These will require you to demonstrate mastery and critical reflection of the assigned readings. In general these will be 2-3 pages, double-spaced, printed (not emailed), stapled, and handed in during class. In case of absence from class the assignments must be emailed before class-time. More specific instructions will be included with each assignment.

The mid-term exam will be completed just prior to spring break. The exam will include multiple choice, short-answer and long-answer questions. The midterm exam will count for 25% of the grade.

The final exam will also include multiple choice, short-answer and long-answer questions. Multiple choice questions about specific readings and lectures will cover only the latter half of the course, but short- and long-answer questions may include themes and materials from the whole course. The final exam will count for 25% of the grade.

Both the midterm and final exams will most likely be take-home / electronic, not in-person.

Your research paper will focus on a topic that we do not cover in-depth during class sessions and readings. You will be graded both on the written document and your brief oral summary during one of the last class sessions. The paper will be about 10 pages long. Throughout the semester we will discuss appropriate topics, resources, format, and intermediate deadlines. The paper will be due at the last class session (April 20). As with brief papers it must be printed, stapled and handed-in during class. You will also do a brief (10-15 minute) presentation during one of the four class sessions prior to that date. Together the paper & presentation will count for 30% of the grade.
Class sessions – topics, readings, assignments

Jan 10      Introduction and overview
Jan 12      Beauchamp & Childress ch 1: Moral Norms
Jan 17      (Class starts at 4:45)
            Beauchamp & Childress ch 2: Moral Character

*Brief writing assignment due: Review and comparison of 2 “codes of conduct” or “ethical principles” for health-related professions.*

Jan 19      Beauchamp & Childress ch 3: Moral status
Jan 24      Moral status, continued
            Pence, chapters 5 & 6
            Guest speaker – Dennis Matt, PhD HCLD, Scientific Director, Virginia IVF and Andrology Center
Jan 26      Beauchamp & Childress ch 4: Respect for autonomy

*Brief writing assignment due: Ethics journals / article summary*

Jan 31      Autonomy, continued
Feb 2       Beauchamp & Childress ch 5: Non-maleficence
Feb 7       Non-maleficence, continued
Feb 9       Beauchamp & Childress ch 6: Beneficence
Feb 14      Beneficence, continued
Feb 16      Guest speaker — Ken Faulkner, director of pastoral care, co-chair of the Organ Donation Committee, VCU Health System and professor in VCU School of Allied Health Professions (Prof Cassel out of town)
Feb 21      Beauchamp & Childress ch 7: Justice
Feb 23      Justice, continued
            Pence chapter 16
Feb 28      Review / summary
            1-3 possible topics of interest for research paper due
Mar 2       Mid term exam

Mar 7 – Spring Break
Mar 9 – Spring Break
Mar 14  Ethics, leadership and healthcare quality & safety  
(and review of exams)  
**Description of topic (final choice), preliminary sources for research paper due**  

Mar 16  “Dax” -- Case study in autonomy  
Guest speaker – Laurie Lyckholm, MD, Hematology-Oncologist, palliative care physician, director of the HemOnc and Palliative Care fellowship programs, and the Page Professor of Bioethics and Humanities, VCU School of Medicine  

Mar 21  Ethical issues in advanced illness, dying and death  
Pence, Chapters 1-3  
Read & respond to toolkit on American Bar Association website  

Mar 23  Palliative care  
Cassel et al., 2006, “The moral imperative for palliative care”  

Mar 28  Health care reform and the insurance mandate issue  
Reading and possible guest speaker TBA  

Mar 30  US healthcare and issues of justice, continued  
Reading TBA  

Apr 4  **Professor Forsyth – ethics and healthcare research**  

Apr 6  Cancer genetic counseling and ethical issues  
Guest speaker -- John Quillin, PhD MPH MSGC, Cancer Genetic Counselor and Assistant Professor, Dept of Human & Molecular Genetics, VCU School of Medicine and VCU Massey Cancer Center  
Pence chapter 14  
“Facing life with a lethal gene”, Amy Harmon, NYT, 3-18-2007  

Apr 11  Public health and ethics  
Pence chapter 15  

Apr 13  Student presentations  

Apr 18  Student presentations  

Apr 20  Student presentations and review for final exam: **Research papers due**  

Monday April 25 – Final Exam