

DEMS 6070: Disaster Ethics

Course Instructors: Prof. Mark Schwartz and Prof. David Etkin

General Description:

This course will examine ethical theory as it applies to issues and uncertainties associated with disasters and emergencies. Students will develop an understanding of the ethical decision-making process and moral reasoning. They will have the opportunity to explore the moral imperatives associated with emergency management in a variety of contexts, both locally and globally. The emphasis of the course is on applied ethics and the development of moral competence in response to issues, and implications for socially responsive environmental and disaster management.

Many decisions related to society, the environment, and disasters reflect the accepted morality and ethics of society. Some disciplines, such as engineering, medicine and nursing have a code of ethics that must be adhered to and ensure a standard level of practice competence. As yet, however, many other professions, such as disaster & emergency management do not have an accepted code of ethics - yet ethical principles and their application are essential to the discipline. This course will explore different ethical theories such as utilitarianism, deontology, social contract theory, environmental ethics, religious ethics and virtue ethics. As well, an understanding of the fundamental ethical concepts of beneficence, nonmaleficence, autonomy, truthfulness, justice, and integrity will be developed.

The above theory will be applied to a variety of issues that affect society and the environment, including issues related to how each depends upon the other. Within disaster theory, how ethics relates to the practice of Disaster Risk Reduction will be explored, specifically considering such issues as how to allocate scarce resources, the worth of human life, triage and duty to future generations.

Learning Objectives: The student will:

1. Gain a knowledge of the historical and ethical foundations of Western ethics and how this may create conflicts with global perspectives.
2. Develop a basic level of ethical competence in relation to disaster and emergency management through increasing their understanding of key ethical concepts.
3. Develop an understanding and acceptance of uncertainty, ambiguity and conflict in disaster and emergency management.
4. Increase their understanding of personal and professional ethic in the disaster context.

The first 6 lectures in the course will address ethical theory, and will be taught by Prof. Schwartz. The second 6 lecture will address issues or ethical dilemmas that will be chosen collaboratively. The class formats will be a debate structure followed by class discussion.

Evaluation:

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| 1. Debates & Presentation | 50% |
| 2. Workshop Report | 10% |
| 3. Term Paper | 40% |