Global Bioethics

Spring Semester, 2009, Wednesdays, 6:15-9:15 PM
January 21-March 25, 2009, No class on March 11

Instructor: Gladys B. White, Ph.D.

Course Description

The birth of bioethics as a field of study is generally identified as a mid 20th century phenomenon that largely occurred within the United States. But important issues of moral concern regarding the interface of humanity and technology can only be meaningfully understood in a global context. The purpose of this interdisciplinary course is to conduct ethical analyses of a cluster of cutting edge issues in order to understand the human values and policy issues at stake. Key topics will include: international exchanges of tissues, organs and body parts, the creation of genetic databases, public health ethics including management of communicable disease, occupational safety and health issues, pharmaceuticals and the developing world, nanotechnology and robotics, environmental issues including consideration of animal rights, and sports ethics. Each class or two will be based on at least one important controversy and debate will be encouraged.

Course Outline

January 21, 2009  Basics of Bioethical Analysis

Chadwick et al., Chap. 1, pp. 7-22.
Gastmans et al., Chaps. 1 & 2, pp. 7-42.

January 28, 2009  International Exchanges of Tissues, Organs and Body Parts

February 4, 2009  Creation of Genetic Databases

Chadwick et al., Chap. 24, pp. 365-386.

February 11, 2009  Public Health Ethics: Management of Communicable Diseases

Chadwick et al., Chaps 12-14, pp. 189-240.

February 18, 2009  Occupational Safety and Health/Global Implications

Guest Speaker

Readings, TBA

February 25, 2009  Pharmaceuticals and the Developing World

Chadwick et al., Chap. 9, pp. 145-161 and Chaps., 17-18 pp. 279-309.

March 4, 2009  Nanotechnology and Robotics

Readings, TBA

March 11, 2009  Spring Break

March 18, 2009  Environmental Issues including Animal Rights


March 25, 2009  Sports Ethics plus International Voices in Bioethics: What Organizations Are Most Active?

Readings, TBA.
Required Texts


Optional Text


Course Requirements

Students will be required to submit three short papers of approximately 5 pages each. One paper should consist of a newspaper-type article, similar to those that appear for example in the International Herald Tribune, intended to acquaint the public with a recent scientific advance and its associated ethical issues (3-5 pages). The second paper should consist of a short briefing paper that a staff member might prepare to acquaint an ambassador or other public official in the U.S. about a current bioethics issue and its global implications (3-5 pages). The third paper should consist of a draft policy document that is intended to promote some international cooperation related to one of the issues that we have considered in the course (2-3 pages). In addition to preparing these papers, students are expected to attend class and actively participate in class discussions.