

# BUSINESS ETHICS

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## 1 Preliminaries

Email is the best way to reach me, and I will usually respond within 24 hours. If you would like a more immediate response, you can try calling or sending a text message to 267-416-0292. But don't leave a voicemail. I won't get it.

I can meet with students outside of class on Tuesdays between 4:00 - 6:30 pm and by appointment. (071 College Park)

## 2 Mississippi State University Syllabus

The Mississippi State University Syllabus contains all policies and procedures that are applicable to every course on campus and online. The policies in the University Syllabus describe the official policies of the University and will take precedence over those found elsewhere. It is the student's responsibility to read and be familiar with every policy. The University Syllabus may be accessed at any time on the Provost website under Faculty and Student Resources: [provost.msstate.edu/faculty-student-resources/university-syllabus](https://provost.msstate.edu/faculty-student-resources/university-syllabus).

## 3 Readings

Buy Sandel, M. (2012). *What Money Can't Buy* (<https://amzn.com/dp/0374533652>). Get a paper copy of the book, not the kindle or audio book version. The other readings for this course are posted on Canvas.

## 4 Course Description

What if we could remake earth? What would you change? It seems like every other day, astronomers discover some new "Earth-like" planets ... Can you imagine all the possibilities of having a new habitable planet? What would we do with it?

These questions were posed by the journalist Stephen Dubner. He continues,

Maybe we'd use it to raise all our food, and harvest its precious metals and petroleum and lumber. Maybe we'd send all our criminals and political enemies there! Or ... Maybe we'd say goodbye to *this* old Earth and move to that one instead. Earth 2.0: a fresh start. What would *that* look like? After all our trial and error on Earth 1.0, how would Earth 2.0 be different? If we had a chance to reboot our civilization—to build new institutions and systems from scratch—whether on a new planet or this one, what would we do? What would our political and economic and medical and educational systems look like if we weren't stuck with all the residue of the past few millennia? ("[Earth 2.0](#)")

This is one way to begin thinking about Business Ethics. Earth 2.0 isn't about to happen, but, nonetheless, change happens, and we want to be informed about how our world works, the problems, and the possible solutions. Business, economics, and finance (and the moral dimensions of each) are part of the changing—or at least, changeable—world that every inhabitant of earth must, at one time or another, confront. Hence, this course.

There are no prerequisites for this course, and students do not need to be engaged in a business-related course of study to take it.

The course will begin with an overview of the major ethical theories and how moral responsibility may need to be adapted for those in large institutions. Then, we will consider the purpose of the corporation and to whom corporations should be accountable. After that, we will examine two issues that concern the appropriate treatment of employees: pay (both at the top of the pay scale and at the bottom) and sexual harassment. For the last four weeks of the course, we will read Michael Sandel's *What Money Can't Buy*.

If you are having trouble with any part of this course, please email me or come see me outside of class.

## 5 Learning Objectives

Naturally, one objective is to become acquainted with the assigned material. Other, no less important, goals are improving reading comprehension, critical thinking, and writing skills.

## 6 Student Honor Code & Academic Misconduct

Mississippi State has an approved Honor Code that applies to all students. The code is as follows:

As a Mississippi State University student, I will conduct myself with honor and integrity at all times. I will not lie, cheat, or steal, nor will I accept the actions of those who do.

Upon accepting admission to Mississippi State University, a student immediately assumes a commitment to uphold the Honor Code, to accept responsibility for learning, and to follow the philosophy and rules of the Honor Code. Student will be required to state their commitment on examinations, research papers, and other academic work. Ignorance of the rules does not exclude any member of the MSU community from the requirements or the processes of the Honor Code. For additional information, please visit: <http://honorcode.msstate.edu/policy> and <http://students.msstate.edu/studentconduct/>.

**To be clear, students who cheat in any way will be penalized. Cheating includes giving as well as receiving help when such help is not explicitly allowed.** Plagiarism is also a form of cheating. The best way to avoid anything that might be academic misconduct is to put yourself in a position where you don't need to cheat or plagiarize. Don't get behind, and if there are things that you don't understand, give yourself time to figure them out or ask me about them.

If you have any further questions about what constitutes cheating, either ask me or see the University's policy on academic dishonesty. (I am happy to answer any questions about what is and is not allowed. But ask me before you do something questionable.)

## 7 Two Other Rules

1. Cell phone use, including texting, is not allowed in class.
2. You may not use a laptop or tablet in class.

You may, at the very beginning of class, put upcoming assignments into your phone. But besides that exception, I should never see a cell phone or an open laptop during class. These rules are designed to benefit you. Although you (sitting in class) may not perceive texting as rude or distracting, the person who is addressing you will usually interpret it negatively. This applies, not only to professors, but to the people you will work with and work for once you graduate. Learning to manage when you look at and use your phone is a good habit to develop now.

Laptop use can also, in some situations, be perceived as rude, and often it is obvious that the laptop user is not just taking notes. But more importantly, using a laptop creates an enormous barrier to paying attention. Every student who uses a laptop in the classroom

spends time on things that are not related to class (email, Facebook, etc.). Consequently, these students get little or no benefit from being in the classroom, and the students' grades indicate as much. (And don't think that you're good at "multi-tasking." You're not. The human brain doesn't work that way.)

## 8 Schedule

See the Google calendar in Canvas for the exact schedule. The calendar is also available [HERE](#).

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<b>Weeks 1 - 3</b>	<b>An introduction to ethics</b> Johnson, "What is ethics anyway?" Sandel, "Introduction" in What Money Can't Buy Luban et al., "Moral responsibility in the age of bureaucracy"
<b>Weeks 4 &amp; 5</b>	<b>The purpose of the corporation</b> Friedman, "The social responsibility of business" Freeman, "Managing for stakeholders"
<b>Week 6</b>	<b>test 1</b>
<b>Weeks 7 &amp; 8</b>	<b>The role of government</b> Hacker & Pierson, "The case for the mixed economy"
<b>Weeks 9 &amp; 10</b>	<b>Paying employees</b> MacKenzie, "Mythology of the minimum wage" LaBossiere, "In Defense of the Minimum wage" Moriarty, "Do CEOs get paid too much?"
<b>Week 11</b>	<b>Sexual harassment</b> May, "Sexual harassment and solidarity" Leeser & O'Donohue, "Defining sexual harassment"
<b>Weeks 12 - 15</b>	<b>Moral limits on markets?</b> Sandel, What Money Can't Buy, chapters 1 - 4 Zwolinski, "The ethics of price gouging" Helbing and Mankiw on externalities
<b>Exam Week</b>	<b>test 2</b>

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## 9 Coursework & Grading

Letter grades will be assigned using the standard Mississippi State scale (an A is 90 – 100 percent, a B is 80 – 89 percent, a C is 70 – 79 percent, etc.). The grades will be set based on

this coursework and these percentages:

quizzes & homework assignments: 45 percent

reading response papers: 20 percent

two tests: 35 percent

All of the quizzes and tests in this course will be open book and notes—your own notes, not someone else's. Most weeks, there will be an in-class group quiz, and about every other week, there will be a homework assignment. Quizzes and other weekly assignments cannot be made up or submitted late, but your two lowest quiz or homework grades will be dropped.

In the last four weeks of the course, you will read Michael Sandel's *What Money Can't Buy*, and each of those weeks, you will submit a 2 - 3 page reading response paper. Each of those weeks, you will also have an article to read that will be the primary focus of the class meeting. There will not be any extra credit at the end of the course. Therefore, you should do as well as you can throughout the semester.

**Attendance** This section is a face-to-face instructional class. Please refer to [Academic Operating Policy 12.09](#), regarding attendance expectations and accommodations. While attendance is not specifically included in the course grade calculation, you are expected to attend every class. If you (1) miss a class, (2) have the proper documentation demonstrating that the absence should be “excused,” and (3) miss an in-class assignment, you will be given an alternate assignment.