

## POLITICAL BIOETHICS

Fall 2022

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GOV 335I • Unique 38430 • Meets Tu/Th 3:30-5 • RLP 0.106 • Writing Flag

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Professor Gregg • [bgregg@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:bgregg@austin.utexas.edu) • Office • Mezes Hall 3.138

Office Hours • *please email for an appointment* • Zoom address:  
<https://utexas.zoom.us/j/5148518069>

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**Course Description** □ The still relatively new field of bioethics has developed two major, complementary branches: moral analysis and clinical application. Our course proposes a third branch that extends the first two with the argument that bioethics is a fundamentally **political** phenomenon, where the term *politics* refers to the contestation of different value-commitments and political “success” involves coping well with abiding disagreement. Bioethics thus involves decisions that cannot be “correct” — but can be procedurally legitimate.

Think of it this way: questions that can have correct answers (even in morally pluralist societies) may not require discussion in the public sphere; rule-following suffices. For example: “Would the subjection of humans to research techniques such as vivisection be ethical?” Such questions are not political. By contrast, questions that can only be answered in terms of the particular value-commitments of the deciders are political in that answers ideally would be generated through critical discussions — not only among experts but among members of the general public. For example: “It is permissible to genetically modify humans to enhance normal capabilities?”

By *experts* I mean scientists (who can answer technical questions such as: Is genome editing possible with precision sufficient to create genetically modified babies? I also mean physicians (who can determine if any medical needs are so compelling as to outweigh the risks). But neither type of expert can address the kinds of questions that a **political community** (no matter how diverse or fragmented) ideally would contribute to, questions such as: Who has the right to decide? Might routine genome editing alter human societies? Are there dangers of exacerbating already existing social inequalities (the better-off would have greater access), or of economic forces (from “genetic marketplaces” to “genetic fashions”)? This specifically *political* bioethics proposes that bioethics should aspire to become a **democratic project** that involves ordinary citizens as far as reasonably possible.

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We read twelve authors and focusing on three issues: (1) the fundamental tension between the twin commitments to truth and justice; (2) the limits of biotechnology's potential to contribute to social justice; and (3) the question: How can we determine guidelines, acceptable to many members of any given community, as to when the subjective preferences of parents and others should be honored, and when they should not, and for what reasons?

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Our seminar is introductory; it presupposes no background.

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**Attendance** □ Students may be absent from class (except as noted) without excuse no more than three times. Attendance is *mandatory* on-September 20, September 27, October 25, November 1, and December 06; *failure to attend any of these dates lowers the student's course grade*.

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**Evaluation** □ A student's course grade will be the average of three essays, each 5 to 6 pages (double spaced, *Times Roman*, font size 12), adjusted for regular, well-prepared, and thoughtful classroom participation. These are concise, thesis-driven essays, carefully written such that all words count. Grading: A = 4.00, A- = 3.67, B+ = 3.33, B = 3.00, B- = 2.67, C+ = 2.33, C = 2.00, C- = 1.67, D+ = 1.33, D = 1.00, D- = 0.67, F = 0.00. Course grades will include pluses or minuses as warranted. No late essays accepted.

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All essays are to be uploaded to the seminar's Canvas site as Word documents in doc or docx but never as pdf.

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**Required Text** □ Julian Savulescu and Nick Bostrom, eds. *Human Enhancement*. 2009. Oxford: Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19-959496-2.

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Two options (among others): (1) inexpensive, used paperback copies available for on-line purchase and (2) the text is available via the Longhorn Textbook Access (LTA) program (<https://www.universitycoop.com/longhorn-textbook-access>), a new initiative between UT Austin, the University Co-op, and publishers to reduce digital course materials' cost: the student is automatically opted into the program (and can easily opt-out) via Canvas

through the 12th class day; if she remains opted-in at the end of the 12th class day, she will be billed via “What I Owe” and have until the end of the 18th class day to pay and retain access to the text, otherwise she loses access after the 20th class day and the charge will be removed.

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**Essays** □ For each of the essays the instructor will provide a list of topics from which students may choose. Students may modify the topic chosen in ways that suit the logic of their argument. Each essay should develop original insights about our authors, in the student’s own and unique voice. Develop those insights by constructing a difficult dialogue between the two authors *from your considered, thoughtful, critical and textually informed perspective*. Your summary of those insights will form your *thesis*. Each essay is thesis-driven, that is, articulates a clear argument or claim and then seeks in every paragraph to make that claim plausible to the reader. All essays are to be uploaded to the seminar’s Canvas site as Word documents in doc or docx and never as pdfs. No late essays accepted.

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- (a) State that thesis within the first paragraph of your essay,
- (b) then defend it with clear, discursive arguments based on your careful, critical reading of the two authors;
- (c) your reading of the authors should practice close textual analysis, whereby you interpret the authors by your own best lights and defend that interpretation.
- (d) Develop your thesis in terms of one thoughtfully chosen concrete example.
- (e) Write as concisely and clearly as possible. Avoid convoluted sentences and overuse of adjectives. Avoid run-on paragraphs. Be mindful of word-choice.
- (f) You must cite the text, multiply, carefully and thoughtfully, as you make claims about it. Provide complete page references for all textual references (APA and MLA formats are equally acceptable).

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**Writing Flag** □ This course provides students experience with writing in an academic discipline: careful, critical, thoughtful analysis of written sources that take competing positions on core issues of the seminar. Students also learn how to defend a clear thesis with good arguments; good arguments use critical, discursive reasoning and draw carefully and thoughtfully on written sources.

- Students have the option to **revise** the first or second assignment for a higher grade, reflecting the instructor's feedback on writing and content. To receive credit, the student must use the program Track Change for the submitted document, and she must develop the essay's *content* substantially *beyond* the instructor's initial feedback. The revised essay is due before 11 pm on December 11 (same as the due-date and due-hour for the third essay).

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- Toward analyzing student writing and to discussing practical means to improved writing, students participate in a required **First Writing Workshop** on **September 27** in which the instructor will discuss (without attribution) drafts of the first paragraph of student essays (to be uploaded to Canvas on September 26 before 11 pm), providing critical feedback useful in writing the first and all subsequent papers. Students are encouraged to ask questions and to make thoughtful contributions to a constructive class discussion oriented on improving student writing in practical ways.
- To the same end, in a **Second Writing Workshop** on **November 1**, students discuss one or two challenges, difficulties, or negative experiences in writing the second essay. Students ask and answer each other's questions about writing for our course, with input from the instructor. Each student is to contribute (via Canvas upload by 11 pm on October 31) a relevant passage from her *second* essay.

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- Students should avail themselves of the **University Writing Center** (512-471-6222), located in the PCL Learning Commons. It offers free, individualized consultation and feedback on student essays.

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- Right to Privacy** ▫ Students are not allowed to make digital recordings of lectures or student presentations.

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### Schedule of Topics & Assigned Readings

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In preparation for our first meeting: no later than Monday, August 22 • Watch *Gattaca* on your own:

*Gattaca* (1h 47m, directed by Andrew Nichol, 1997):

<https://digitalcampus.swankmp.net/univtxaustin352936/watch/5713A9D670F65B26?referrer=direct>

*Synopsis:* Vincent Freeman (Ethan Hawke) has always fantasized about traveling into outer space but is grounded by his status as a genetically inferior "in-valid." He decides to fight his fate by purchasing the genes of Jerome Morrow (Jude Law), a laboratory-engineered "valid." He assumes Jerome's DNA identity and joins the Gattaca space program, where he falls in love with Irene (Uma Thurman). An investigation into the death of a Gattaca officer (Gore Vidal) complicates Vincent's plans. Note the social hierarchy that results from human genetic engineering.

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**Tuesday, August 23 • (*first meeting*) Lecture: Introduction to course and discussion of *Gattaca***

Watch in class: 30-minute lecture by Robin Alta-Charo:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/s52fgwjyy633jxh/Alto%20Charo%20on%20germline%20editing%202022%20May.mp4?dl=0>

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**NOTE: Before 11 pm on the day before class, every student is required to post to Canvas a very brief response to the next day's assigned reading. Failure to submit lowers the student's course grade, with the provision that a student may miss, without penalty, up to three of the required responses to the assigned readings**

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**NOTE: How to organize required students Canvas posts for your 15-minute discussion section:** Select and edit a few of the submissions and, on that basis, prepare a brief list of points and questions to direct discussion, ones you personally regard as important. In constructing your list, please (1) facilitate critical and textually informed discussion among students about the text; (2) capture something of the diversity in perspective within each week's submissions; (3) encourage student-to-student dialog; (4) use Power Point, if possible; and (5) be creative

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**Readings & Discussion for the First Essay**

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Wednesday, August 24 • Before 11 pm, post a brief response to Juengst, pp. 43-49; failure to submit lowers the student's course grade

**Thursday, August 25 • Lecture on Juengst, What's Taxonomy Got to Do with It?  
'Species Integrity,' Human Rights, and Science Policy, pp. 43-49**

Thursday, August 25 • 3:30-3:45 Student discussion of Juengst, pp. 43-49, organized and led by [student]

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Monday, August 29 • Before 11 pm, post a brief response to Juengst, pp. 50-58; *failure to submit lowers the student's course grade*

**Tuesday, August 30 • Lecture on Juengst, pp. 50-58**

Tuesday, August 30 • 3:30-3:45 Student discussion of Juengst, pp. 50-58, organized and led by [student]

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Wednesday, August 31 • Before 11 pm, post a brief response to Sandel, pp. 71-80; *failure to submit lowers the student's course grade*

**Thursday, September 01 • Lecture on Sandel, Case Against Perfection: What's Wrong with Designer Children, Bionic Athletes, Genetic Engineering, 71-80**

Thursday, September 01 • 3:30-3:45 Student discussion of Sandel, pp. 71-80, organized and led by [student]

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Monday, September 05 (*note: Labor Day; post a day or two earlier if you prefer*) • Before 11 pm, post a brief response to Sandel, pp. 81-89; *failure to submit lowers the student's course grade*

**Tuesday, September 06 • Lecture on Sandel, pp. 80-89**

Tuesday, September 06 • 3:30-3:45 Student discussion of Sandel, pp. 80-89, organized and led by [student]

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Wednesday, September 07 • Before 11 pm, post a brief response to Harris, pp. 131-143; *failure to submit lowers the student's course grade*

**Thursday, September 08 • Lecture on Harris, Enhancements Are a Moral Obligation, pp. 131-143**

Thursday, September 08 • 3:30-3:45 Student discussion of Harris, pp. 131-143, organized and led by [student]

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Monday, September 12 • Before 11pm, post a brief response to Harris, pp. 143-154; *failure to submit lowers the student's course grade*

**Tuesday, September 13 • Lecture on Harris, pp. 143-154**

Tuesday, September 13 • 3:30-3:45 Student discussion of Harris, pp. 143-154, organized and led by [student]

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Wednesday, September 14 • Before 11 pm, post a brief response to Shimazono (entire chapter); *failure to submit lowers the student's course grade*

**Thursday, September 15 • Lecture on Shimazono, Reasons Against the Selection of Life: From Japan's Experience of Prenatal Genetic Diagnosis (entire chapter)**

Thursday, September 15 • 3:30-3:45 Student discussion of Shimazono (entire chapter), organized and led by [student]

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Monday, September 19 • Before 11 pm, post a brief comparison of one aspect in Juengst, Sandel, Harris, and Shimazono; *failure to submit lowers student's course grade*

Tuesday, September 20 • Discussion of Juengst, Sandel, Harris, and Shimazono in preparation for first essay, organized and led by [student]; **attendance required**; *failure to attend lowers the student's course grade*

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No later than Wednesday, September 21 • **Watch Human Nature** on your own (1h 34m; directed by Adam Bolt, 2019) available on-line (*via UT Libraries*):

[https://search.lib.utexas.edu/permalink/01UTAU\\_INST/9e1640/alma991058305662106011](https://search.lib.utexas.edu/permalink/01UTAU_INST/9e1640/alma991058305662106011)

*Synopsis:* A breakthrough called CRISPR has given us unprecedented control over the basic building blocks of life. It opens the door to curing diseases, reshaping the biosphere, and designing our own children. Human Nature is a provocative exploration of CRISPR's far-reaching implications, through the eyes of the scientists who discovered it, the families it's affecting, and the bioengineers who are testing its limits. How will this

new power change our relationship with nature? What will it mean for human evolution? To begin to answer these questions we must look back billions of years and peer into an uncertain future.

Wednesday, September 21 • Before 11 pm, post a brief response to *Human Nature*; *failure to submit lowers the student's course grade*

Thursday, September 22 • Class discussion of *Human Nature*, organized and led by [student]

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Monday, September 26 • Post before 11 pm for tomorrow's Writing Workshop: a draft of your first paragraph, containing your thesis statement; *failure to submit lowers student's course grade*

Tuesday, September 27 • Writing Workshop, with constructive and anonymous feedback on student work (without evaluation); *failure to attend lowers the student's course grade*

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### **Readings & Discussion for the Second Essay**

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Wednesday, September 28 • Before 11 pm, post a brief response to Parens, pp. 181-187; *failure to submit lowers the student's course grade*

**Thursday, September 29 • 3:45-4:45 Lecture on Parens, Toward a More Fruitful Debate About Enhancement, pp. 181-187**

Thursday, September 29 • 3:30-3:45 Student discussion of Parens, pp. 181-187 led by [student]

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Saturday, October 01 • 2 pm *Optional*, informal Zoom drop-in to discuss questions about your essay-in-progress

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**Sunday, October 02 • Upload first essay to Canvas before 11 pm** □ I recommend submitting your essay up to three hours before the deadline □ **No late submissions accepted** □ No extensions for students who experience technical difficulties in submitting

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Monday, October 03 • Before 11 pm, post a brief response to Parens, pp. 187-197;  
*failure to submit lowers the student's course grade*

**Tuesday, October 04 • 3:45-4:45 Lecture on Parens, pp. 187-197**

Tuesday, October 04 • 3:30-3:45 Student discussion of Parens, pp. 187-197 led by  
[student]

□

Wednesday, October 05 • Before 11 pm, post a brief response to Savulescu, pp. 211-227;  
*failure to submit lowers the student's course grade*

**Thursday, October 06 • 3:45-4:45 Lecture on Savulescu, Human Prejudice and the  
Moral Status of Enhanced Beings: What Do We Owe the Gods?, pp. 211-227**

Thursday, October 06 • 3:30-3:45 Student discussion of Savulescu, pp. 211-227 led by  
[student]

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Monday, October 10 • Before 11 pm, post a brief response to Savulescu, pp. 227-245;  
*failure to submit lowers the student's course grade*

**Tuesday, October 11 • 3:45-4:45 Lecture on Savulescu, pp. 227-245**

Tuesday, October 11 • 3:30-3:45 Student discussion of Savulescu, pp. 227-245 led by  
[student]

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Wednesday, October 12 • Before 11 pm, post a brief response to Singer, pp. 277-282;  
*failure to submit lowers the student's course grade*

**Thursday, October 13 • 3:45-4:45 Lecture on Singer, Parental Choice and Human  
Improvement, pp. 277-282**

Thursday, October 13 • 3:30-3:45 Student discussion of Singer, pp. 277-282 led by  
[student]

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Monday, October 17 • Before 11 pm, post a brief response to Singer, pp. 283-289;  
*failure to submit lowers the student's course grade*

**Tuesday, October 18 • 3:45-4:45 Lecture on Singer, pp. 283-289**

Tuesday, October 18 • 3:30-3:45 Student discussion of Singer, pp. 283-289 led by [student]

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*Wednesday, October 19 • Before 11 pm, post a brief response to Tannsjo (entire chapter); failure to submit lowers the student's course grade*

**Thursday, October 20 • Lecture on Torbjorn Tannsjo, Medical Enhancement and the Ethos of Elite Sport (entire chapter)**

Thursday, October 20 • 3:30-3:45 Student discussion of Tannsjo (entire chapter), organized and led by [student]

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Monday, October 24 • Before 11 pm, post a brief statement comparing one aspect in Parens, Savulescu, Singer, and Tannsjo; *failure to submit lowers the student's course grade*

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Tuesday, October 25 • In preparation for second essay, student discussion of Parens, Savulescu, and Singer, led by [student]; **attendance required**; *failure to attend lowers the student's course grade*

□

Saturday, October 29 • 2 pm *Optional*, informal Zoom drop-in to discuss questions about your essay-in-progress

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**Sunday, October 30** □ **Upload second essay to Canvas before 11 pm** □ I recommend submitting your essay up to three hours before the deadline □ No late submissions accepted □ No extensions for students who experience technical difficulties in submitting

□

**Monday, October 31** • **Post before 11 pm for tomorrow's Writing Workshop: one aspect of writing your second essay that posed a problem or challenge and about which you would like feedback and advice; failure to submit lowers student's course grade**

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**Tuesday, November 01 • Writing Workshop**, focusing on student experiences in writing the second essay; led by [student]; attendance required; *failure to attend lowers the student's course grade*

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### **Readings & Discussion for the Third Essay**

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Wednesday, November 02 • Before 11 pm, post a brief response to Overall, pp. 327-333; *failure to submit lowers the student's course grade*

**Thursday, November 03 • 3:45-4:45 Lecture on Overall, Life Enhancement Technologies: Significance of Social Category Membership, pp. 327-333**

Thursday, November 03 • 3:30-3:45 Student discussion of Overall, pp. 327-333 led by [student]

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Monday, November 07 • Before 11 pm, post a brief response to Overall, pp. 333-339; *failure to submit lowers the student's course grade*

**Tuesday, November 08 • 3:45-4:45 Lecture on Overall, pp. 333-339**

Tuesday, November 08 • 3:30-3:45 Student discussion of Overall, pp. 333-339 led by [student]

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Wednesday, November 09 • Before 11 pm, post a brief response to Wikler, pp. 341-347; *failure to submit lowers the student's course grade*

**Thursday, November 10 • 3:45-4:45 Lecture on Wikler, Paternalism in Age of Cognitive Enhancement: Do Civil Liberties Presuppose Roughly Equal Mental Ability?, pp. 341-347**

Thursday, November 10 • 3:30-3:45 Student discussion of Wikler, pp. 341-347 led by [student]

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Monday, November 14 • Before 11 pm, post a brief response to Wikler, pp. 348-355; *failure to submit lowers the student's course grade*

**Tuesday, November 15 • 3:45-4:45 Lecture on Wikler, pp. 348-355**

Tuesday, November 15 • 3:30-3:45 Student discussion of Wikler, pp. 348-355 led by [student]

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Wednesday, November 16 • Before 11 pm, post a brief response to Brock, pp. 251-263; *failure to submit lowers the student's course grade*

**Thursday, November 17 • 3:45-4:45 Lecture on Brock, Is Selection of Children Wrong? pp. 251-263**

Thursday, November 17 • 3:30-3:45 Student discussion of Brock, pp. 251-263 led by [student]

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*Week of November 21-25: Fall Break*

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Monday, November 28 • Before 11 pm, post a brief response to Brock, pp. 251-263; *failure to submit lowers the student's course grade*

**Tuesday, November 29 • 3:45-4:45 Lecture on Brock, Is Selection of Children Wrong? pp. 251-263**

Tuesday, November 29 • 3:30-3:45 Student discussion of Brock, pp. 251-263 led by [student]

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Wednesday, November 30 • Before 11 pm, post a brief response to Bostrom and Sandberg (entire chapter); *failure to submit lowers the student's course grade*

**Thursday, December 01 • Lecture on Bostrom and Sandberg, The Wisdom of Nature: An Evolutionary Heuristic for Human Enhancement (entire chapter)**

Thursday, December 01 • 3:30-3:45 Student discussion of Bostrom and Sandberg (entire chapter), organized and led by [student]

□

Monday, December 05 • Before 11 pm, post a brief statement comparing one aspect in Overall, Wikler, Brock, and Bostrom/Sandberg; *failure to submit lowers the student's course grade*

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Tuesday, December 06 • Student discussion of Overall, Wikler, Brock, and Bostrom/Sandberg in preparation for third essay, organized and led by [student]; **attendance required; failure to attend lowers the student's course grade**

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Saturday, December 10 • 2 pm *Optional*, informal Zoom drop-in to discuss questions about the third essay

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Sunday, December 11 • Upload third essay to Canvas before 11 pm □ I recommend submitting your essay up to three hours before the deadline □ **No late submissions accepted** □ No extensions for students who experience technical difficulties in submitting

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*Nota bene 1.* Students with **disabilities** may request appropriate accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement • 512-471-6259 • <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/dcce/ssd/> ([Links to an external site.](#)) Also: *Services for Students with Disabilities*: diversity.utexas.edu/disability: ensures that students with disabilities have equal access to academic experiences by determining eligibility and approving reasonable accommodations.

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*Nota bene 2.* Assignments processed by TurnItIn, a tool that compares submitted material to an archived database of published work to check for potential plagiarism. Academic dishonesty will be treated in line with the University Honor Code at <http://registrar.utexas.edu/catalogs/gi09-0/ch01/index.html>

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*Nota bene 3.* Requirements, deadlines, & syllabus apply to all students equally □ If by *discrimination* we mean *to treat different students differently*, positively or negatively, on a basis other than individual merit, then please note that I do not discriminate by allowing some students to post after the deadlines or by providing some students preferential treatment in any other way.

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## University Resources for Students

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- Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC) crisis line: available 24/7 at (512) 471-2255
- Sanger Learning Center: [ugs.utexas.edu/slcc](http://ugs.utexas.edu/slcc): main resource for academic support
- [utexas.edu/behavior-concerns-advice-line](http://utexas.edu/behavior-concerns-advice-line): provides students an opportunity to discuss concerns about another individual's behavior
- University Health Services: [healthyhorns.utexas.edu](http://healthyhorns.utexas.edu): provides medical care and patient education to students
- Counseling and Mental Health Center: [cmhc.utexas.edu](http://cmhc.utexas.edu): provides counseling, psychiatric, consultation, and prevention services that facilitate students' academic and life goals and enhance their personal growth and well-being
- Counselors in Academic Residence (CARE): [cmhc.utexas.edu/CARE.html](http://cmhc.utexas.edu/CARE.html): licensed mental health professionals who provide support for students struggling emotionally and/ or academically
- Center for Students in Recovery (CSR): [recovery.utexas.edu](http://recovery.utexas.edu): provides a supportive community where students in recovery and in hope of recovery can achieve academic success while enjoying a genuine college experience free from alcohol and other drugs
- Wellness Network: [wellnessnetwork.utexas.edu](http://wellnessnetwork.utexas.edu)(Links to an external site.): brings together advocates for health and wellness from across UT Austin to share information, strategies, and resources
- Voices Against Violence (VAV): [cmhc.utexas.edu/vav.index.html](http://cmhc.utexas.edu/vav.index.html): offers comprehensive violence prevention and response programs
- Gender and Sexuality Center: [diversity.utexas.edu/genderandsexuality](http://diversity.utexas.edu/genderandsexuality): provides opportunities for all members of the UT Austin community to explore, organize, and promote learning around issues of gender and sexuality
- Office for Inclusion and Equity: [equity.utexas.edu](http://equity.utexas.edu): advances a diverse, equitable, and supportive campus culture through their commitment to fulfilling the spirit of equal opportunity laws and policies, as well as building awareness within the University community
- Title IX: [titleix.utexas.edu](http://titleix.utexas.edu): supports the University's mission to create and maintain an educational and work environment free from all forms of sexual harassment, sex discrimination, exploitation and intimidation where all students, faculty, and staff can learn, work and thrive. Note that Senate Bill 212 (SB 212) requires the professor and the TAs to report for further investigation any information concerning incidents of sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking committed by or against a UT student or employee ("Title IX incidents"). Federal law and university policy also requires reporting incidents of sex- and gender-based discrimination and sexual misconduct. Hence we cannot keep confidential information about any such incidents that you share with us. Should you need to talk with someone who can maintain confidentiality, contact University Health Services (512-471-4955 or 512-475-6877) or the UT

Counseling and Mental Health Center (512-471-3515 or 512-471-2255). Report any Title IX incidents to the [Title IX Office](#)([Links to an external site.](#)).

- [UT Night Rides](#)([Links to an external site.](#)), an after-hours rideshare, provides a Lyft away from campus between the hours of 11 pm and 4 a.m., free to UT community members.
- [Sure Walk](#)([Links to an external site.](#)) provides walking companions or rides to UT community members upon request from the hours of 7 pm and 2 am Sure Walk does not provide walks or rides starting FROM off-campus or West Campus locations. It provides walks or rides TO off-campus and West Campus locations if within the [service area](#) ([Links to an external site.](#)) and if they originate from an on-campus location. Sure Walk also provides walks or rides from any on-campus location to any on-campus location.