

A Philosophical Approach to Teaching Ethics in Non-Philosophy Courses

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When ethics courses are taught in philosophy departments across the country, often entire semesters are devoted to teaching students diverse ethical theories, critically evaluating those theories, and then using the diverse theories to examine specific ethical issues. Exposing students to a variety of perspectives on ethics in this way helps students to think more carefully and critically about ethical dilemmas. However, in many science and professional programs, there is not the time nor the credits available to require students to take a full semester course in ethics. Instead, ethics modules must be inserted into courses devoted largely to other topics. How can one teach students to think critically about ethics in just a few class periods? In this session, I will offer suggestions for how to condense the best components of a philosophical approach to ethics into short modules that can be used in a variety of classroom settings. This pedagogical approach has been developed from my own experience over the course of twenty years of teaching ethics courses to students who are not majoring in philosophy. Specifically, I will demonstrate how one can introduce ethical theory in the form of diverse frameworks for analyzing case studies. By familiarizing students with a few different frameworks for analysis, their strengths and their limitations, the students will begin to think more carefully and critically about the ethical assumptions they and others bring to the discussion.