The origins of professions and of psychology in particular. Accreditation, laws affecting psychology, organization of the profession, licensing certification, and the code of ethics for psychology.

This course will be dialogic and self-reflective, as we explore our relationship to the field and to the ethical principles that serve as a foundation for our actions and perspectives. We have all struggled with or will struggle with ethical dilemmas, and the goal of this seminar is to increase our knowledge of ethical principles and how they are applied, to engage in debate and dialogue about dilemmas and conflicts, and to grow as psychologists in the process of these inquiries. To do this, we must involve ourselves with the material, and seek connections to our own experience. We will also explore salient issues to the profession of psychology that will, as we will see, overlap substantially with ethical considerations.

Ethics can also be considered as a verb. The actions we take and sometimes the actions we don't take, determine how ethical we are. Over the course of this semester, we will endeavor to become more ethical as individuals and professionals. To accomplish this, we are going to monitor ourselves throughout the course of the semester and keep a journal relating to ethical issues. We will articulate our goals and observe our reactions to situations within our research and clinical work, and responses that arise during the assigned readings.

Definitions from the American Heritage Dictionary

**Profession:** 1a. An occupation or career: “One of the highest compliments a child can pay a parent is to choose his or her profession” (Joan Nathan, New York Times Book Review April 30, 1989). b. An occupation, such as law, medicine, or engineering, that requires considerable training and specialized study. c. The body of qualified persons in an occupation or field: members of the teaching profession. 2. An act or instance of professing; a declaration. 3. An avowal of faith or belief. 4. A faith or belief: believers of various professions.

**Ethic:** 1a. A set of principles of right conduct. b. A theory or a system of moral values: “An ethic of service is at war with a craving for gain” (Gregg Easterbrook). 2. ethics (used with a sing. verb) The study of the general nature of morals and of the specific moral choices to be made by a person; moral philosophy. 3. ethics (used with a sing. or pl. verb) The rules or standards governing the conduct of a person or the members of a profession: medical ethics.

**Ethical:** Of, relating to, or dealing with ethics. 2. Being in accordance with the accepted principles of right and wrong that govern the conduct of a profession.

As you know, Dr. Marc Kessler taught this course for many years. This is how he envisioned the course:

The purpose of this course is to familiarize you with issues of psychology as a profession and with professional ethics. We will examine the process of ethical decision-making as well as the outcome. I would hope that by the end of the course your thinking about ethics will be more informed and more critical. In addition we will examine
some of the social/political/doctrinal issues facing psychology as a profession.

In studying both of these areas, professional affairs and ethics, we are chasing ephemera. The issues that we are looking at change as we examine them, they do not remain static for any time. Therefore we need to constantly keep our eyes open for new information on these matters and how things are evolving. – Kessler (2005)

Following in Marc’s footsteps is a daunting and exciting task. I will retain aspects of material and assignments of the course that he taught and introduce new perspectives.

In 1994, noted research and professor of psychology at Carnegie Mellon, Robin Dawes, published House of Cards. This book is a scathing critique of the field at the time. Perhaps he was spurred to write this invective tract by the unfounded media accounts at the time of satanic ritual abuse and repressed memories. In this book written for a popular audience, he makes the following claims:

- Expertise has no bearing on the effectiveness of psychotherapy. That is, paraprofessionals can do it just as good as high priced Ph.D.s, so why do we need so many Ph.D.s
- Licensure provides more protection to the field than the public
- Psychology as a profession has turned it back on science and the profession is graduating scores of unscientific professionals
- Psychologists are not qualified to give expert testimony in forensic contexts.
- Psychologists are obsessed with self-esteem despite little evidence that is the central motivator of human experience.

Should we all just pack it in before the semester gets underway and take up careers in a real profession like plumbing? Were Dawes's claims valid? If so, to what extent has the field moved to address them over the past 12 years? My initial reaction in the form of a hope, and perhaps born of denial, was that the field has moved to address most if not all of these indictments. Unfortunately, as a more recent volume – Lilienfeld, Lynn, & Lohr (2003) Science and Pseudoscience in Clinical Psychology) portrays, we have a long way to go. In fact, the “gap” between scientist and practitioner is supposedly widening. We will endeavor to take an honest and critical look at the issues raised by Dawes (1995) by reading some of his chapters and consuming most of the more recent volume. This reading will, no doubt, launch us into dialogue about a host of issues relevant to the profession of psychology and the ethics it embodies. These critiques touch at the heart of what we do as psychologists. The implications are legion, and will help us to frame our dialogues around issues such as prescription privileges for psychologists (on this issue I will also present a perspective called “knowledge coupling” stemming from my ten years of work at a medical software company). In addition to the prescription, we will look at empirically supported therapies (ESTs), and other critiques of the field (e.g., the antipsychiatry of Scientology). As we look at our own professional development, we must confront the claims and criticisms presented in Dawes (1995) and Lilienfeld et al. (2003) and be mindful of their relationship to ethical behavior. These readings will no doubt stir up some very lively debate, and I am looking forward to this! At the very least, reading them will arm you for a potential conversation at a cocktail party when someone cites evidence that psychology as a professional practice is bogus.

We won’t have enough time to cover all topics relevant to the profession and ethics. It is impossible to know everything related to ethics. We could spend the entire semester on professional issues and, of course, there is much
overlap between issues confronting the profession and ethics. The dilemma of time and material facing us in this class is the same one facing us in our professional context - is there enough time to read and to know everything we are supposed to know? As such, learning ethics is an organic and ongoing process. However, we will familiarize ourselves with the current ethics code, laws and rules of the Vermont Board of Psychological Examiners. We will also get some grounding in the foundations of ethics and spend time working through some dilemmas.

I include the following quotation in each of my syllabi.

Learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much just by sitting in class listening to teachers, memorizing prepackaged assignments, and spitting out answers. They must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences, apply it to their daily lives. They must make what they learn part of themselves. Chickering, A & Gamson, Z. F. (March 1987) Seven principles for good practice. AAHE Bulletin 39: 3-7.

TEXTS ::

APAMonitor and American Psychologist (current issues)

Suggested Reading ::


ASSIGNMENTS ::

1. Ongoing Review of APA Monitor, American Psychologist. Monthly Assignment: (September, October, November). Each month choose one article from the current issue of each of these publications. Preferably, the articles should address a professional issue, rather than a report of research. Submit a 1-2 paragraph write-up on each of the articles. Your write-up might address some or all of the following:

- why topic/article is of interest to you
- main points of article
- whether you agree or disagree with the position taken
- questions the article raises for you
- experiences you have had that reflect or are related to this topic
- what other issues are related to this topic
- why should we discuss this article in class
- why is this topic being raised now
- current context
- historical influences
- significance to the field, society

Your write-up should reflect your thoughts, musings, contemplations of the issues raised by the article. Please type the write up (from Kessler, 2005).

2. Keep a journal or a set of notes to yourself about issues that you think are important - particularly those that reflect your own ethical principles, philosophy, and behavior. At the end of the semester I am going to ask you to reflect back on the issues that we read about and discussed, and to choose at least 4 of those that you think are most important to you and/or to the profession (from Kessler, 2005). Please submit a 15 to 20-page reflection on the issues you have chosen. Integrate them with the readings (i.e., cite the
articles and chapters) and use APA style. What I would most like to see is your personal struggle with the issues as they relate to and are inspired by the readings. Make sure to include the cited linkages between your ideas/struggles and the readings, the personal struggle to deal with an ethical dilemma, and a behavioral plan of action for the future to address your issues.

**Grading Policy::**

Everyone is expected to read all the assigned materials and to be prepared to discuss them in class. Obviously, if you are not in class, you will not be able to discuss them. Therefore, attendance is a component of your grade (14%). Participation will comprise another component of the final grade. Each student will receive a rating for participation on a 3-point scale: vigorous, adequate, and insufficient participation (16%). Having said this, participation should be cogent and timely (i.e., speaking for the sake of increasing your participation grade may not improve your participation grade). The American Psychologist and Monitor article reviews (12%). The personal journal will comprise the remaining 38%. The final 20% will be based on a take-home 100-item multiple choice ethics exam, based on the Bersoff text.

**AGENDA::**

**Week One :: 30 August :: Welcome and Opening Dialogues**

- Introductions
- What does it mean to be ethical?
- What are your concerns to date?
- What are your concerns for the future?
- Overview of the course and syllabus.
- Priming Ethical Dialogue – review of case dilemmas.
- Excerpts from the movies *Deconstructing Harry* and *Prime* (time permitting)

**Week Two :: 6 September :: The Psychology Profession: Ideals and Indictments**


**Week Three :: 13 September :: Can We Be Both Scientist and Practitioner?**

Lynn, and Lohr (Eds.), *Science and Pseudoscience in Clinical Psychology*, 17-38.


Cummings, N. (?) An open letter to Doctoral Students in Psychology. *Graduate Student Newsletter*. APA

**OPTIONAL READINGS:**


**Week Four :: 20 September :: The Dodo Bird and Empirically Supported Treatments (ESTs)**


**Week Five 27 :: September :: Expertise and the Pursuit of Prescription Privileges**


Checkout these Scientology and other websites critical of psychiatry and psychology:

http://www.scientology-kills.org/bipolar.htm
Week Six :: 4 October :: Ethical Foundations and Pedagogy


Week Seven :: 11 October :: Ethical Documents and Procedures

Vermont Board of Psychological Examiners: Laws and Rules. The Vermont Laws and Rules can be found at: [http://www.vtprofessionals.org/](http://www.vtprofessionals.org/)


**Week Eight :: 18 October :: Confidentiality, Privilege, and Privacy**


Tarasoff v. Regents of the University of California (Tarasoff II). In Bersoff (Ed.) *Ethical conflicts in psychology* (3rd edition), 167-71.


Week Nine :: 25 October :: Confidentiality, Privilege, and Privacy :: HIPPA


APA HIPPA Privacy Rule Primer
APA HIPPA Security Rule Primer
APA HIPPA Transaction Rule Primer

Week Ten :: 1 November :: Multiple Relationships


Week Eleven :: 8 November :: Psychological Assessment & Forensic Settings


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**Psychological Ethics and the Politics of the war on Terror:**


**Week Twelve :: 15 November :: Ethics in the Academy**


The University of Vermont and Fletcher Allen Health Care on-line tutorial for the protection of human subjects in research. At: http://www.uvm.edu/irb/tutorial/index.html

OPTIONAL READING:


22 November – Thanksgiving Recess

Week Thirteen :: 29 November :: Therapy and Other Forms of Intervention


**Week Fourteen :: 6 December :: The Business of Psychology (including Marketing and Practice Development)**

Documents from APA Practice ([www.apapractice.org](http://www.apapractice.org))


