

The benefits of multiple assessment approaches for a bioethics course

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Bioethics final year unit – student numbers

- 2004-2005 50
- 2005-2006 80
- 2006-2007 106
- 2007-2008 163

Final Year Bioethics – optional unit

- Anatomical Sciences
- Biochemistry
- Biology
- Biology with Business & Management
- Biology with Science and Society
- Biomedical Sciences
- Biotechnology
- Cell Biology
- Cognitive Neuroscience and Psychology
- Developmental Biology
- Genetics
- Microbiology
- Molecular Biology
- Optometry
- Pharmacology
- Pharmacology & Physiology
- Physiology
- Plant Science
- Zoology

Final year Bioethics unit - Aim

- To provide a stimulating, structured logical approach to ethical issues and to provide a context for practising this.
- To allow students to appreciate the importance of the public's perceptions.
- To be aware of scientific investigations of impact.
- To relate knowledge of modern biology to wider issues.
- To apply good thinking and group ethical principles.

Intended learning outcomes are:

- a greater ability to think in a structured way
- knowledge of the different principles with which different people may approach the same issue
- ability to use these to provide a basis for understanding current issues and novel issues of the future.

Lecture Delivery

- Semester 6
- 6 week block of lectures
- 3 x 1 hour lectures per week

Lecture content

- Informal seminar type approach forms the basis of the unit
- Students are given reading to do each session
- and asked to criticise, discuss material and ask questions during the seminar
- Introduction to ethics and bioethics
- Topics covered reflect to some extent current areas of interest in the field of bioethics

Delivery of Unit

- Faculty of Life Sciences
- Institute for Science Ethics and Innovation

Assessment – Final year unit

3 components to the assessment

1. 55% of the marks allocated to an essay
2. 30% of the marks allocated to an examination of 30 minutes
3. 15% of the marks allocated to an oral presentation in the form of a debate

Assessment – BIOL 30152

55% of the marks allocated to an essay:

- Up to 2,500 word essay on ‘the ethical implications of a biological issue that has been in the news in the last 12 months’
- Own title
- Title submitted by end of week 2
- Title approved by start of week 4
- Students research and write essay
- Submit essay by end of week 7

Essay titles

- The morality of euthanasia.
- The spread of GM crops from multinationals to the 3rd world
- The ethical issues surrounding abortion
- Ethics of embryonic sex selection
- Human embryonic stem cells
- Designer babies, how far should we go?

Essay titles

- Should scientists develop 'synthetic life'
- Should lifestyle choices affect healthcare options?
- The three parent embryo: a true medical breakthrough or just playing God?
- Human-animal hybrid embryos
- Is the fluoridation of water an infringement of our freedom of choice?
- The ethical implications of the cervical cancer vaccine
- Ethics of species reintroduction - reintroducing Beavers into the UK.
- Neuroimaging-an insight to health
- The ethics behind captive breeding programmes in Conservation Biology.
- the ethics of therapeutic forgetting eg in Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Great Ape personhood: the link between rights and responsibilities
- Empathy: an obstacle to our evolution?
- Bioethics in public safety
- Should the use of cognitive enhancement drugs be banned in academic institutions?
- Should millions of GM mosquitoes be released into the wild?
- Is New York right to ban trans-fats
- Use of performance enhancing drugs in sports

Essay titles

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- Great Ape personhood: the link between rights and responsibilities

Essay titles

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Assessment – BIOL 30152

30% of the marks will be allocated to an examination of 30 minutes

- Timetabled examination
- Single short question, answer to be written in 30 minutes
- Require presentation of arguments for and against a particular proposition
- Sample question with similar form to examination question made available on intranet

Assessment – BIOL 30152

15% of the marks will be allocated to an oral presentation in the form of a debate

Using debates as a way of getting students to think about:

- ethics
- further their understanding of ethical theories
- while at the same time developing personable transferable skills, e.g., oral communication

Assessment – BIOL 30152

- Random allocation to teams of 7/8 people
- Random allocation of debate topic
- Teams allocated for/against, 5 minute presentation each and 5 minute question session
- Full details of allocation by end of week 3
- Debate sessions week 5
- All students present, marked immediately (include contribution of self team mark)

15% of the marks will be allocated to an oral presentation in the form of a debate:

Composition of 15% debating mark:

1. Grand debate speech	12.5 %
Grand debate vote	2.5%

OR

2. Grand debate speech	15 %
Grand debate vote	0 %

FEEDBACK

- Oral presentation – peer evaluation, verbal generic feedback, written feedback on individual group performance
- Proposed essay titles – individual written feedback
- Final essay – written feedback

Student feedback comments

- Excellent mark allocation scheme
 - Very good unit, like how you can choose your own essay title
- Variety of assessment types helpful due to final year exam overload!!!

The Future

- Feedback
- Offer unit to other disciplines?
- Maintain interactive nature of unit with increasing numbers