25 YEARS OF ETHICS IN SOCIETY AT STANFORD UNIVERSITY
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The Bowen H. McCoy Family Center for Ethics in Society

The Bowen H. McCoy Family Center for Ethics in Society

Problems involving ethics are all around us, from the acceptability of the use of drones and intervention in other countries, to debates about our obligations to those in need, to the appropriate standards for political campaigns. Twenty-five years ago, the Program in Ethics in Society was founded to provide a place at Stanford where students, faculty, and the broader community could explore such issues.

As the founding committee understood, doing this constituted a substantial challenge. At the time, ethics played only a small role in the undergraduate curriculum and there were very few faculty on the campus who specialized in it. Even in the philosophy department, there were no tenured ethicists or political philosophers. Nor was it clear that an interdisciplinary endeavor seeking to link ethical reflection with questions in fields like economics, political science, computer science, and biology would be successful. The program also faced the daunting task of trying to create a campus culture that reflects a concern for ethics—not as a hobby, nor as an esoteric specialty, but as part of a student’s everyday life.

Today, our reach extends throughout the campus, and beyond. Ten years ago, the Ethics Center was launched out of an existing program, and five years ago it was substantially reorganized and grew, and it remains central to the Center’s activity today.

While not comprehensive, descriptions of some of our milestone programs are included here to give you a sense of the range and depth of the Center’s work. In this booklet, we celebrate the achievements of the Center and its affiliated undergraduate program.

Our institutional existence has been pivotal in shaping ethical inquiry at Stanford. Through teaching, research, and engagement, we have provided a focus for considering a range of moral judgments, and underscored the need to make them. At the same time, we are aware that there is more work to do. Through our new faculty fellows program, we are playing a critical role to provide a place at Stanford where students, faculty, and the broader community could explore such issues.

Today, our reach extends throughout the campus, and beyond. As the program moves into its next quarter century, we are excited to build on our successes with our undergraduate program and to contribute to the new ethical reasoning requirement for all undergraduates. Ethical questions surface in all domains of inquiry, and in many fields they are newly urgent, especially in engineering, technology, biomedicine, and global justice. As we celebrate our past successes, we also look forward to educating future generations of Stanford undergraduates and broadening the reach of the Center at the university.
"The examination of ethical issues plays a fundamental role in Stanford’s mission of educating responsible leaders. For a quarter of a century, the nationally recognized Program in Ethics in Society and for the past decade the McCoy Family Center for Ethics in Society have provided leadership in this area. Through their many programs and activities, they foster discussion on the critical issues of the day and challenge us to think deeply about their ethical dimensions."

— John L. Hennessy, Stanford University President; Professor of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science

ETHICS BY THE NUMBERS

23 Postdoctoral scholars brought to Stanford
134 Students have written theses since 1992
158 Ethics in Society cross-listed courses offered since 2000
500+ Talks sponsored by the Center

RHODES SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDEES
Rachel Maddow (’95)
Aysha N. Bagchi (’12)
Margaret Hayden (’13)

MARSHALL SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDEES
Michelle Mello (’93)
Rachel Maddow (’95)
Eric Beerbohm (’98)
Joe Shapiro (’05)
ETHICS TIMELINE

Since the mid 1980s, the Stanford community has been engaging with ethics in society. After 25 years — hundreds of talks, dozens of courses, and countless conversations — the Center continues to foster a thriving intellectual culture on campus. The timeline below highlights some of what we’ve been working on over the years.

1986
The Undergraduate Honors Program in Ethics in Society was initiated under the leadership of a “Blue Ribbon” steering committee that included Kenneth Arrow (Economics), Bart Berstein (History), Michael Bratman (Philosophy), Arnold Eisen (Religious Studies), John Ferejohn (Political Science), David Kennedy (History), Pat Suppes (Philosophy), and Lee Yearley (Religious Studies).

Partha Dasgupta was named first Director of the Program in Ethics in Society. He returned to Cambridge University in 1992.

1988
Ethics in Society Program began sponsoring the Tanner Lectures on Human Values. Oxford University Law Professor Ronald Dworkin gave the first Wesson Lectures on Problems of Democracy. His talk was called “Democracy and the Free Market in the New World Order.”

Debra Satz assumed directorship of the Program in Ethics in Society.

The Ethics Across the Curriculum Initiative was launched to integrate high-level moral and political theory with research drawn from the empirical, social, and natural sciences.

1990
Susan Moller Okin, Professor of Political Science (1946–2004), was made Director of the Program in Ethics in Society.

1992
Undergraduate Honors students completed the first theses written in the Program.

1994
MIT linguist, philosopher and social critic Noam Chomsky gave the first Wesson Lectures on Problems of Democracy. His talk was called “Democracy and the Free Market in the New World Order.”

Debra Satz assumed the directorship of the Program in Ethics in Society.

1996
Susan Moller Okin was made Director of the Program in Ethics in Society.

1999
A teach-in on moral relativism took place between noted Stanford professors Richard Rorty and Susan Moller Okin.

2001
Debra Satz and Rob Reich started the Hope House Scholars Program, where Stanford professors and student tutors teach humanities courses to women in a local residential drug and alcohol treatment program. To learn more about Hope House see page 27.

2003
Deborah Rhode was appointed founding Director of the Center on Ethics.

“Clarity about values matters if we’re to understand, much less solve, today’s important public problems — which is why I was happy, when I was dean, to invite the Ethics Center into the Law School. Now, here at Hewlett, I see the centrality of debates about ethics in developing good policy still more starkly, from climate change to questions about family planning, women’s economic empowerment, educational equity, and our obligations to the poor. By bringing extraordinary scholars to Stanford to deepen and enhance research and teaching about values, the Ethics Center plays a critical role bringing us that much closer to making this a better world.”

— Larry Kramer, Stanford Law professor; president of The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
A new Global Justice Workshop for faculty and graduate students was launched to explore issues such as protectionism, human rights, immigration, corporate social responsibility, and development aid. A conference commemorated late Director Susan Moller Okin’s contributions to Political and Feminist Theory. The conference resulted in an edited book on Okin’s work, Toward a Humanist Justice, Oxford, 2009.

First Arrow Lecture in honor of Nobel Laureate Ken Arrow given by Georgetown Law School’s David Luban.

First postdoctoral fellows cohort began at the Center. Over the years, the Center has brought in over 20 fellows and has offered several types of fellowships. (The Center had two initial postdoctoral positions in the early 1990s to support ethics teaching and research on campus.)

Ethics of Food and the Environment series began its three-year stint. Speakers included Michael Pollan (author and UC Berkeley professor), Marion Nestle (New York University professor), and David Kessler (UCSF School of Medicine professor and former commissioner of the Food & Drug Administration).

The Program in Ethics in Society and the Center on Ethics formally merged to create the Center for Ethics in Society. In recognition of a generous endowment, the Center was renamed the McCoy Family Center for Ethics in Society.

Debra Satz was made Director of the Center for Ethics in Society and Rob Reich was appointed Director of the Undergraduate Honors Program in Ethics in Society.

The Spencer Foundation gave the Center a three-year grant for a project on equality of opportunity and education. Betrayed, the first collaboration between the Center and Stanford Summer Theater incorporated theater into the Center’s outreach, followed by additional plays, Copenhagen in 2011 and The Exception and the Rule in 2013.

Ethics and the Professions series began. Through conversations with Dean for Religious Life Scotty McLennan and practitioners of professions such as education, journalism, engineering, and law, the series allows students to engage with the ethical underpinnings of various fields.

The Center entered into a three-year partnership to distribute content with the academic publication, the Boston Review.

Ethics of Wealth series runs 2012 through 2014, including speakers John Tomasi (Political Science, Brown University), Larissa MacFarquhar (New Yorker writer) and Emmanuel Saez (Economics, UC Berkeley).

The Center helped facilitate the new ethical reasoning requirement where undergraduates are required to take a course devoted to exploring ethical inquiry of personal, social, or political questions.

New website was launched.
Years later, the driving force behind the Center for Ethics in Society hasn’t changed. It still enacts the founding principle Rhode envisioned: to be a Center for innovative interdisciplinary work on ethics in society.

**Center for Ethics in Society:** Where did an ethics center fit in at Stanford at that time? Debra Satz had an existing program in ethics geared toward undergraduates, but did you have the feeling that there were ethical issues here on campus that needed to be discussed?

**Deborah Rhode:** Yes, especially regarding the professional schools. There was very little going on around business ethics, engineering ethics, legal ethics, and education ethics. So we primarily focused on those areas. There was a bioethics center that did programming for the medical school but didn’t do much outreach to the general campus on those topics. The idea always was to have both a programmatic and research focus.

**Center for Ethics in Society:** What was the culture of the Center back then?

**Deborah Rhode:** We saw ourselves as doing innovative interdisciplinary work and trying to be on the cutting edge of issues that would attract an audience. That was the guiding principle: What did we think the community was most interested in hearing about, and what research topics would benefit from the resources at Stanford?

**Center for Ethics in Society:** What are some of the accomplishments you’re especially proud of?

**Deborah Rhode:** The research conferences that turned into books were important moments, and they involved people from Stanford and people outside. There were a number of programs that stand out: one in which we had the journalist Calvin Trillin talk about journalistic ethics. Then we held a celebration of Title IX—its accomplishments and challenges. We had Billie Jean King come, and she nearly filled Maples Pavilion. We had a wonderful program on academic ethics, in which we had several university presidents participating, talking about challenges they faced—that was extremely interesting.

**Deborah Rhode:** I’m extremely proud of what the Center is accomplishing. I’m extremely proud of what the Center is accomplishing. I think it would be great if, in addition to the thematic series that it promotes, it occasionally had interdisciplinary conferences that might result in a book. I think those initiatives would make major contributions to the field.

**Deborah L. Rhode** is the Ernest W. McFarland Professor of Law; the director of the Center on the Legal Professions; and the director of the Program in Law and Social Entrepreneurship at Stanford University.
continued philanthropy, he focused on helping people to voice and defend their ethical values, especially in the professions. He advocated for the creation of a program in ethics at Stanford, and he wanted serious examination of ethics in society to be an interdisciplinary focus.

In 2008, the Program in Ethics in Society merged with the Center on Ethics to combine postdoctoral research on ethics with undergraduate programming and study. That same year, McCoy made a generous gift to the Center, which became the Bowen H. “Buzz” McCoy Family Center for Ethics in Society.

We asked McCoy what drove his interest in ethics in society, how he got involved with ethics at Stanford, and how he would like the Center to grow in years to come.

While hiking through the Himalayas on sabbatical from his work as a partner at Morgan Stanley, Bowen H. “Buzz” McCoy encountered a dying pilgrim. McCoy and a group of trekkers he had just met did what they could to help him, but they had to ascend the mountain quickly, if they were going to go at all.

The moral dilemma of personal values versus the group’s need for expedition heavily impacted McCoy’s perspective on ethics in business. After his retirement in 1990 from a long and successful career, through teaching, writing, and continued philanthropy, he focused on helping people to voice and defend their ethical values, especially in the professions. He advocated for the creation of a program in ethics at Stanford, and he wanted serious examination of ethics in society to be an interdisciplinary focus.

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The Bowen H. McCoy family has been donating to the Undergraduate Honors Program since the early 2000s. In 2008, the McCoy family generously endowed the Center for Ethics in Society.

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We asked McCoy what drove his interest in ethics in society, how he got involved with ethics at Stanford, and how he would like the Center to grow in years to come.
People assume ethics are learned when someone is young, and that they won’t be changed. But my experience in the business world indicates that values can be contextual, and people haven’t thought through the trade-offs that they are going to be asked to make, and haven’t really defined their own values in light of the experiences they have as they get older.

I think a good values-based ethics course gives people confidence in exposing their values to the group and defending their values, helping them decide where they’re going to take a stand on their values, and where to trade off. We all trade off from time to time, and it is important to know when to take your stand, and why you take that stand. And that’s one way that people keep growing all through their mature lives.

Center for Ethics in Society: And in a time where undergraduates are under pressure to focus their studies in STEM—science, technology, engineering, and math—how do you think we can increase student interest in ethics?

Buzz McCoy: What about the ethics of drones? Or stem cells? Or the ethics of professions? What is the ethics of a legal profession? What makes the legal profession different from some other profession? Is there a business ethic? Is there a medical ethic? What is the difference between making money and being in a profession?

Center for Ethics in Society: Barbara, we have the Barbara McCoy postdoc fellowship that we offer. In addition to creating the next generation of ethics scholars, what are you most interested in about the Center?

Barbara McCoy: I care very deeply that the Center provides opportunity for people to hone their awareness of ethical decision making. I think it’s wonderful that the Center attracts such skilled postdocs. We’ve had some excellent ones. It’s fun for us to track their interests.

Center for Ethics in Society: What are some of the ways you’d like the Center to grow?

Buzz McCoy: Well, I think we need to do some more work integrating with the graduate schools at Stanford. Teaching ethics in the graduate schools is uneven and they have silos. Reaching out and improving integration is important. Also, I see a need for reaching out to the alumni community and foreign campuses, and doing more to encourage students to do public service.

Bowen H. “Buzz” McCoy was an owner of Morgan Stanley for 20 years, directing the company’s real estate finance activities for 13 years. A graduate of Stanford University and Harvard Business School, McCoy is the author of The Dynamics of Real Estate Capital Markets: A Practitioner’s Perspective and Living Into Leadership: A Journey in Ethics.

The Buzz is the Center for Ethics in Society’s student-driven news portal. We review events and feature initiatives that are of broad interest. Undergraduate students write the articles, and the Center for Ethics in Society edits and produces the content so that the student writers learn to translate academic subject matter into accessible terms and strengthen the clarity and precision of their writing. The content is published on the Center’s website.

The following article by Stanford student Jack Martinez was written for The Buzz.

THE ETHICS OF MEDICINE

Osterberg and McLennan discuss ethical pitfalls of medicine as business

By Jack Martinez, December 2012

Professor of Medicine Lars Osterberg thinks too many physicians are in the industry for the wrong reasons. “Medicine has become a business,” he said during a conversation with Dean for Religious Life Reverend Scotty McLennan. According to Osterberg, the monetary complications of health care practice are muddling the ethics of medicine.

The conversation ranged from the ethics of universal health care and federal policy to the ethics of plastic surgery. Human Biology majors and medical residents with engineering and humanities backgrounds gathered in Stoney House, the university’s Human Biology themed residence. The Center for Ethics in Society hosted the talk as part of the Ethics and the Professions series.
Before delving into the ethics of health care, McLennan—who has a background in law and medical ethics—said he wanted to address the elephant in the room: Does “professional” mean that it is all about the money?

Osterberg and McLennan agreed there is an aspect of professionalism that goes beyond the money-making part of medicine. The word profession itself, McLennan explained, reaches back etymologically to religious origins. The concept of a “calling” or vocation has a clerical flavor, but has since been secularized into a guild-like concept in which a select, self-regulating group pursues technical expertise in a learned field, for the benefit of society.

Osterberg said that medicine may be the most apropos of the professions when it comes to a discussion of professional ethics because it fulfills the most requirements of the “profession” definition. As a group, he pointed out, physicians are supposed to serve society, self-govern, require examinations, and have a system of licensure—essentially, to put the public ahead of themselves. However, he added, too many physicians forget this because of the profession’s intersection with big business and the profit motive.

Conversation turned to what constitutes legitimate medical practice. Osterberg emphasized that the public service component of medicine is as essential as the technical expertise, adding that some members of the medical community would not even consider cosmetic plastic surgery and concierge practice to be legitimate sectors of the medical profession.

Osterberg’s Swedish origins also give him insight into the political dimensions of the ongoing national debate about universal standards beyond the basic Hippocratic licensure in medical school. Can you really make someone do it for more than just the money? According to Osterberg, Stanford and other elite medical schools have a tendency to emphasize the strength of a student’s science background in the admissions process. Professing a belief in the importance of the mind-body connection in medical care, Osterberg said more needs to be done, both on the political and educational level, to maintain the integrity of medicine as a profession with clear ethical standards.

As Osterberg explained, research suggests that physicians with greater exposure to the arts and humanities tend to be better at interacting with patients and providing care, a fact that the scientific medical establishment needs to take into account. At least one pre-med student agreed, saying she wished there was more discussion of ethics in her classes. She and Osterberg suggested there ought to be an expectation for students focusing on the natural sciences to explore the ethics of their field beyond the university’s general education breadth requirements.

Osterberg believes that, first, the scientific community has to become more convinced of the importance of an interdisciplinary, humanistic approach to the profession of medicine. Does this mean medical schools should start accepting more philosophy majors? “Maybe,” Osterberg said. “But first you have to convince the scientists that they will make better doctors.”

Jack Martinez is a classics major concentrating in Greek and Latin language.
ARROW

The Arrow Lecture Series on Ethics and Leadership is named in honor of Nobel Laureate Kenneth Arrow, the Joan Kenney Professor of Economics and Professor of Operations Research, emeritus. Professor Arrow has made many contributions to welfare economics, social choice theory, and collective decision making. He is also a founding member of the Ethics in Society Honors Program. Arrow’s former student Patrick Byrne (PhD ’94) endowed the series in honor of his professor.


The audience listened carefully during a recent Arrow Lecture with economist Esther Duflo.

TANNER

The Center collaborates with the Office of the President to host the Tanner Lectures on Human Values at Stanford. The Tanner Lectures were established by the late American scholar, industrialist, and philanthropist, Obert Clark Tanner. The Tanner lectureships, which are comprised of annual lectures and seminars, are held at nine universities.


WESSON

Each year the Center brings to Stanford a notable scholar to deliver a set of lectures pertaining to problems in democratic theory and practice. These lectures are endowed by the late Robert Wesson, a political scientist and Hoover Institute Fellow.


The center reaches out across campus, and many programs and departments are important partners. Some of our recent collaborators include:

- Stanford Humanities Center
- Department of Religious Studies
- Ho Center for Buddhist Studies
- Creative Writing Program
- Department of Art and Art History
- Cantor Arts Center
- Stanford Institute for Creativity and the Arts
- Taube Center for Jewish Studies
- The Center for International Security and Cooperation Program on Human Rights
ETHICS OF FOOD AND THE ENVIRONMENT
This series, which ran from January 2008 through May 2012, focused on a number of issues concerning the relationship between the food the world produces and the environment in which it is produced. In other words, how do our food choices impact animal welfare, global warming, personal health, and the future of our planet? Our aim was to show that the question “What’s for dinner?” raises important and complex moral questions.

Lectures included UCSF School of Medicine professor David Kessler’s “The End of Overeating: Taking Control of the Insatiable American Appetite,” former Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Kathleen Merrigan’s “Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food,” Indiana University political scientist Elinor Ostrom’s “Understanding Social Ecological Systems,” and Stanford Professor of Interdisciplinary Environmental Studies and Biology Stephen Schneider’s “The Climate Change Problem: Science, Ethics, and Policy.”

ETHICS AND WAR
In an effort to stimulate campus discussion and reflection, the Center launched its Ethics and War initiative in the fall of 2011. The series, which ran through May 2012, featured philosophers, writers, journalists, historians, social scientists, human rights activists, and policy makers who have grappled with the hard moral questions raised by wars. We also produced two plays dealing with issues of war and its aftermath.

Lectures included Pulitzer Prize–winning author Richard Rhodes’s “The Ethics of Violence in War,” Rutgers University philosophy professor Jeff McMahan’s “What Rights May We Defend by Means of War?” Oxford philosophy lecturer Cecile Fabre’s “Living with the Enemy: The Ethics of Belligerent Occupation,” and the Institute for Advanced Study’s Avishai Margalit on “Proportionality in War.”

ETHICS OF WEALTH
Human beings have sought to amass wealth, but they have also condemned it as a source of corruption. Social science, theology, and philosophy have long been home to intense debates about the implications of wealth for happiness, virtue, justice, and democracy. Artists and writers have also critically explored the relationship between money and humanity. Starting in fall 2012, the Center has explored the ethical questions at the heart of wealth: Does wealth make people happy? Is inheritance legitimate? What are the moral obligations of the wealthy to those in need? What is the relationship between financial success and a flourishing human life?


ETHICS AND THE PROFESSIONS
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ETHICS AND THE PROFESSIONS
Stanford students leave campus and embark on careers in a variety of fields. In Fall 2012, the Center launched a yearlong series called Ethics and the Professions to better prepare students for their careers. In this series, Stanford Dean for Religious Life Scotty McLennan and a faculty member or practitioner from a particular profession discuss the ethical implications of various fields, something students are rarely exposed to in the classroom. Professions examined include business, education, engineering, journalism, law, and medicine.

Speakers have included Stanford scholars such as Lars Osterberg on medicine, Denise Pope Clark on education, and John Kunz on engineering.
The Hope House Scholars Program with a Community Partnership Award, which recognizes individuals and programs that have formed successful community partnerships between Stanford and its neighbors. The Hope House Scholars Program is not a one-way program where Stanford faculty bring their expertise to people who have no expertise. This is actually a program where two groups that have been relatively isolated from each other come together and think about important questions of values and ethics and history and each have insights to offer.

In the 12 years that the program has run, program co-founder and Center Director Debra Satz remarked that it’s unclear who benefits the most from the program. “Everyone who goes through these courses leaves feeling empowered and transformed by the experience,” she said.

This collaborative effort between the Program in Ethics in Society and Stanford Continuing Studies focuses on themes like ethics, social justice, and moral responsibility. The courses allow the women of Hope House to engage in college-level coursework as part of their rehabilitation and recovery.

The partnership has garnered considerable media attention and in 2004 Stanford’s Office of Public Affairs granted the Hope House Scholars Program with a Community Partnership Award, which recognizes individuals and programs that have formed successful community partnerships between Stanford and its neighbors.

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“Being a postdoc at the Center was a privilege. I met great people, I had time to read and write, and to attend excellent philosophical events. My current students are benefiting from what I learned while at Stanford. I cannot imagine a better postdoctoral program.”

— Zofia Stemplowska, former postdoc fellow

“The Center for Ethics in Society is an ideal place to mature as a scholar. Center events continuously raised new questions for research and brought us in contact with leading scholars in the field. Conversations in the hallways, over tea, and at formal and informal lunches were sources of intellectual stimulation and career advice. The professors affiliated with the Center provided valuable mentorship and support. The Center provides the ideal launching pad for a scholarly career in applied moral and political philosophy. I owe a great deal of my own scholarly development to my time at the Center for Ethics in Society.”

— Joseph Mazor, former postdoc fellow

WHERE IN THE WORLD ARE FORMER ETHICS POSTDOCS?

Sam Arnold  
Assistant Professor in Political Science, Texas Christian University

Kendra Bischoff  
Associate Professor in Sociology, Cornell University

Mark Cladis  
Associate Professor of Philosophy, University of Toronto

Tom Dougherty  
Lecturer in Ethics in Philosophy, The University of Sydney

Sarah Hannan  
Assistant Professor in Political Science, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg

Nicole Hassoun  
Associate Professor of Philosophy, State University of New York, Binghamton

Hugh Lazenny  
Lecturer in Political Philosophy, University of Glasgow

Joseph Mazor  
Lecturer in Political Science and Philosophy, London School of Economics

Brad McHose  
Lecturer in Interdisciplinary Arts & Sciences, University of Washington, Tacoma

Allegra McLeod  
Associate Professor of Law, Georgetown Law

Kieran Oberman  
Chancellor’s Fellow, School of Social and Political Science, University of Edinburgh

Avia Pasternak  
Lecturer in Political Theory, University of Essex

Zofia Stemplowska  
Lecturer in Political Theory, Asa Briggs Fellow, Worcester College, University of Oxford

Jean Thomas  
Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Law, McGill University

Brian Berkey  
UC Berkeley

William Braynen  
University of Arizona

Mark Budolfson  
Princeton

Hyunseop Kim  
New York University

Alex Levitov  
Princeton

Julie Rose  
Princeton

Liam Shields  
University of Warwick

Patrick Taylor Smith  
University of Washington, Seattle

2013–2014 POSTDOCS AND WHERE THEY EARNED THEIR PHD

Brian Berkey  
UC Berkeley

William Braynen  
University of Arizona

Mark Budolfson  
Princeton

Hyunseop Kim  
New York University

Alex Levitov  
Princeton

Julie Rose  
Princeton

Liam Shields  
University of Warwick

Patrick Taylor Smith  
University of Washington, Seattle
UNDERGRADUATE ETHICAL REASONING REQUIREMENT

Starting in 2013, Stanford undergraduate students are required to take one course that devotes a majority of course time either to exploring ethical theories, or to applying ethical theories to important personal, social, or political questions. The Center plays an exciting role in helping to facilitate the new Ethical Reasoning Requirement.

Why does Stanford need such a requirement for undergraduates? Human conduct, individually and collectively, involves ethical notions that call for our attention and reflection. Those notions include standards of right and wrong action, judgments about which human ends are worth pursuing, and ideas about valuable qualities of human character. Ethical inquiry explores moral rights and responsibilities, fairness and decency, personal virtue and vice, the worthiness of individual choices and the rightness of public policies. An ability to reason about ethical issues, draw defensible conclusions, and assess competing ethical claims is fundamental to individual development and to effective social participation.

THE PROGRAM IN ETHICS IN SOCIETY

Operating under the umbrella of the Center for Ethics in Society, the Undergraduate Honors Program in Ethics in Society offers undergraduates in any major the opportunity to write a senior honors thesis. The program is grounded in moral and political philosophy, but it extends its concerns across a broad range of traditional disciplinary domains. The program is guided by the idea that ethical thought has application to current social questions and conflicts, and it seeks to encourage moral reflection and practice in areas such as business, international relations, law, medicine, politics, science, and public service. The Program attracts students from all corners of campus who are committed to studying important ethical issues in an interdisciplinary cohort.

Each year the Program is made up of a purposefully small cohort of about 10 students. Seniors in the Program spend their last year as undergraduates writing honors theses under the guidance of a postdoctoral fellow scholar in addition to their thesis advisor.
Michelle Mello 1993
Michelle Mello studied political science and applied ethics as an undergraduate. Her interest in the ethical intersections of law, policy, and medicine inspired her to complete her honors thesis, “Achieving Equity of Access to Health Services: The Ethical Mandate for Change in the U.S. Health Care System,” through Stanford’s Program in Ethics in Society in 1993. Her studies continued at Oxford University, where she received a Master of Philosophy in Comparative Social Research in 1995, and then at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she completed her PhD in Health Policy and Administration in 1999. She received a JD from Yale’s Law School in 2000. Today, she is a professor of Law and Public Health at the Harvard Department of Health Policy and Management. Her research spans issues such as disclosure of medical errors, appropriate roles for government in curbing obesity, and ethical issues in human research.

Rachel Maddow 1994
Rachel Maddow, now the host of MSNBC’s The Rachel Maddow Show, crystallized her career in activism at Stanford, where she received her undergraduate degree in public policy in 1994. Her honors thesis, “Identifiable Lives: AIDS and the Response to Dehumanization,” helped chart her course to become one of the nation’s leading advocates of gay rights.” In 1995, she became the first openly gay person to receive a Rhodes Scholarship and went on to obtain her Doctor of Philosophy degree at Oxford University. Maddow recently returned to Stanford for the first time in two decades to give a talk organized by the Center. She spoke about the value of studying the humanities and about her book, Drift: The Unmooring of American Military Power.

Eric Beerbohm 1998
A native of Belmont, California, Beerbohm graduated from Stanford in 1998 with a BA in Political Science and MA in Philosophy. His senior Ethics in Society thesis was, “Welfare Justice: A Rawlsian Response to the Personal Responsibility Act of 1996.” Beerbohm went on to be a Marshall Scholar, and then received a Master of Philosophy degree from Oxford University and a PhD from Princeton. Currently, he serves as the Frederick S. Danzinger Associate Professor of Government at Harvard and is director of the Edmund J. Safra Graduate Fellowships in Ethics.

Nandini Gandhi 2001
Nandini Gandhi was raised in Sacramento, California, and graduated from Stanford in 2001. A major in biological sciences, she wrote her Ethics in Society honors thesis on the ethics of sorting elementary school students by ability. After graduating, she traveled on a Fulbright Scholarship to Bombay, India, where she studied women’s reproductive health education at the TATA Institute of Social Services. Continuing her deep commitment to global health and service, Gandhi attended medical school at the University of California, San Francisco, graduating in 2006. She completed her residency at the University of Iowa and later became a fellow in Pediatric Ophthalmology at Duke University, where she was named Fellow of the Year in 2010–11. Today, Gandhi works in an academic medicine practice at the University of California, Davis, where she focuses on pediatric ophthalmology and adult strabismus.

Mattie Johnstone Bekink 2001
Before becoming an esteemed legal practitioner and academic, Mattie Johnstone Bekink wrote an honors thesis, “Freedom and Responsibility: The Right to Reproductive Autonomy and China’s One-Child Policy,” through the Program in Ethics in Society. After graduating in 2001, Bekink went on to receive her JD from the Georgetown University Law Center in 2005 and was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship, which took her to Doha, Qatar, to continue her studies. She worked as an associate in an international arbitration and litigation group and as a fellow at the Center for Human Rights and Global Justice at the NYU Law School. Her interest in Chinese ethics sent her abroad again, where she was the deputy country director of the Chinese Bar Association’s Rule of Law Initiative China Program. Afterward, she became an independent consultant working on rule of law. She was affiliated with NYU Law School’s Asia Law Institute and served as a special advisor to Chinese human rights activist Chen Guangcheng after his arrival in the United States. She is currently deputy director, NYU Public Affairs, Global Programs & Sites, based in Europe.
Joe Shapiro 2003

Joe Shapiro’s 2003 honors thesis on the ethics of kidney sales in the developing world is required reading for most Ethics in Society juniors. An economics major who grew up in Portland, Oregon, Shapiro exhaustively researched kidney sales in the slums of South India. Shapiro worked as a TA in a medical ethics course at Stanford before taking a job at the World Bank, where he worked with policy makers in Mexico and Paraguay to analyze health and education policies. A Marshall Scholar, Shapiro received an MSc in Economics for Development at Oxford in 2006 and another MSc in Statistics at the London School of Economics in 2007. In June 2013, he completed a PhD in Economics at MIT, where his dissertation research analyzed how trade policy affects climate change and how ideas from research on international trade can help evaluate environmental regulation. He is currently an assistant professor in the Department of Economics at Yale University, where his research focuses on the intersection of environment and energy economics, trade, and health.

Eric Pai 2003

Eric Pai graduated from Stanford in 2003 with a degree in economics and political science. In addition to joining the Phi Beta Kappa honors society, Pai wrote a thesis, “Disability, Work, and Equality: Applying Democratic Equality to the Americans with Disabilities Act.” After leaving Stanford with honors, he graduated from Yale Law School in 2006, where he was a member of the Board of The Yale Law Journal and editor-in-chief of the Yale Journal on Regulation. Currently, Pai is an associate in the litigation department of Morrison & Foerster’s Palo Alto office. His practice focuses on intellectual property litigation, with an emphasis on patent litigation.

Jason Shen 2009

Jason Shen studied biological sciences as an undergraduate and completed an honors thesis titled “Who Gets the Goods? The Ethics of Organ Distribution Policies.” Shen was a competitive gymnast, but he suffered a major knee injury in 2008. Dauntless, he made an aggressive recovery and went on to help Stanford win an NCAA championship as team captain in 2009. The same year, he received his master’s degree in Biology and became the chief operations officer of the Stanford Daily, where his efforts helped the newspaper revitalize itself and expand its audience. After leaving Stanford, he attended the highly prestigious Y Combinator program for aspiring entrepreneurs. His experiences there allowed him to co-found the acclaimed community ridesharing service Ridejoy in 2011. He was named a Presidential Innovation Fellow in 2013 and is currently working in Washington, D.C., where he is assisting the Smithsonian Institution’s efforts to digitize its assets and reach a broader public.

Alexander Berger 2011

Alexander Berger graduated from Stanford in 2011 with a BA in Philosophy and an MA in Policy, Organization, and Leadership Studies from the Graduate School of Education. His Ethics in Society honors thesis explored the significance of education rights in school finance litigation. After graduation, Berger began work as a research analyst for GiveWell, an organization that rigorously evaluates the effectiveness of charities.

Margaret Hayden 2013

Originally a native of Brunswick, Maine, Margaret Hayden came to Stanford in 2009 to study Human Biology. Here, her interest in the intersection of medicine, anthropology, and ethics brought her to the Center for Ethics in Society where she completed an honors thesis titled, “The Ethics of Conceptualizing Serious Mental Illness: Schizophrenia and the Limitations of a Brain-Based Model.” In addition to being a member of Stanford’s varsity squash and varsity sailing teams, Hayden served as a patient advocate and clinic coordinator at the Mayview Community Health Center in Palo Alto. Her commitment to exploring the deeply ethical issues of mental health treatment coupled with her passion for service to the community resulted in her being named a 2013 recipient of the Rhodes Scholarship. She plans on pursuing her master’s degree in anthropology at Oxford University.

“The Ethics in Society Program and the McCoy Center for Ethics in Society have been invaluable to the educational program of Stanford and to the clarification of the ethical problems inherent in the functioning of society. The honors students have been challenged to develop breadth and depth in their theses, because they have to consider both the technical aspects of the problems they address and the broad ethical considerations they have to bring to bear.”

—Kenneth Arrow, Nobel Laureate in Economics, Professor Emeritus of Economics and of Operations Research
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