

## E Focus requirement

You have to complete one Contemporary Ethical Issues (E) Focus course at Mānoa to graduate. E courses are offered at the 300- and 400-level.

## What use is ethics?

Everyone has been and will again be faced with a situation requiring ethical deliberation and judgment, either directly or indirectly. Some training is necessary because

- it is not always obvious when an ethical situation presents itself. A situation involving ethics can be made worse by ignorance and neglect.
- knowledge of a decision-making process for ethical judgments can enable efficient and appropriate resolution.
- problems can be *avoided* by conducting study, work and professional life according to ethical rules or norms.
- ethical training builds good character by enabling good judgment.

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# CONTEMPORARY ETHICAL ISSUES

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## Information for Students



## What is ethics?

Ethics involves *how* we should live. It is not just about choosing between right and wrong. Rather, ethics gives us an understanding of the context for decision-making.

The words “morality” and “ethics” are often used interchangeably. There are no strict rules, but “morality” tends to be about good vs. bad and right vs. wrong, whereas “ethics” tends to focus on the all-important decision-making process.

It is never easy to describe exactly what ethics is because “ethics” gets used differently by various disciplines. Contemporary Ethical Issues (E) Focus courses will usually involve one or more of the following branches of ethics:

**Meta-ethics** -- investigates the nature and meaning of ethical judgment with a focus on historical development.

**Normative Ethics** -- considers how moral values *should* be determined and seeks one or more guiding principles.

**Applied Ethics** -- applies ethics in specific situations. This can also be called professional ethics.

## What should I do when faced with an ethical decision?

### 1. Identify the issue.

Ethical considerations are always “in play.” Yet it is not always clear how ethical considerations are being applied. Ethics is only one part of the decision-making process. Ethics is not the same as justice, science, feelings or cultural norms.

### 2. Research the issue.

Identify some facts that everyone can agree upon before moving towards a decision.

### 3. Evaluate possible actions, for example:

- “Which option will produce the most good and do the least harm? (The Utilitarian Approach)
- Which option best respects the rights of all who have a stake? (The Rights Approach)
- Which option treats people equally or proportionately? (The Justice Approach)
- Which option best serves the community as a whole, not just some members? (The Common Good Approach)
- Which option leads me to act as the sort of person I want to be? (The Virtue Approach)”

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### 4. Assess the outcome.

Living ethically is an ongoing effort. It is important to reflect carefully on the impact of decisions on all stakeholders.

## Topics that might be covered in E Focus courses

Business and finance

Civil rights

Colonialism and war

Environmental sustainability

Food and water

Globalization and culture

Human and animal research

Journalism and media

Legal reasoning and justice

Patient or client rights

Terrorism and torture

## Online resources

- **Markkula Center for Applied Ethics**  
[www.scu.edu/ethics](http://www.scu.edu/ethics)  
A forum for discussion and research in all areas of applied ethics. This site has introductory and advanced resources.
- **Ethics in All Walks of Life**  
[ethics.berkeley.edu/disciplines/general.html](http://ethics.berkeley.edu/disciplines/general.html)  
This site offers resources on ethics in politics, business, medicine, law, society and science.