RESARCH-BASED ETHICS ESSAY: Defining Ethical Business and Administrative Practices

“In the wild, there is no health care. In the wild, health care is ‘Ow, I hurt my leg. I can’t run. A lion eats me and I’m dead.’ Well, I’m not dead. I’m the lion; you’re dead.”
-- Dwight Schrute, The Office

OVERVIEW: In addressing English 203’s focus on humanities and ethics, this first project will move us towards interrogating and interpreting ethical dilemmas that arise in business and administrative settings. We will work with two cultural documents, Henrik Ibsen’s An Enemy of the People and the documentary Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room, from which we will extract ethical situations for discussion and exploration. Business Writing: A Guide to English 203 at the University of Kentucky offers a broad introduction to ethics, and I will guide you towards specific ethical systems, theorists, and sources that you can possibly use to interpret the situation you choose.

DIRECTIONS: In this essay, you are to analyze a situation brought up in either An Enemy of the People or Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room. Your task is not to write a summary or literary analysis; rather, you are to explore a specific situation brought up in the film that allows you to explore what is right and what is wrong and to create an argument about how the ethical dilemma could have been more appropriately handled. You should develop your own angle for exploring the situation, but considering the following questions may be useful:

- What responsibilities do all the players in the situation have? To whom are they responsible?
- What is at stake for the various players in the situation? Are there certain consequences and/or losses that are acceptable in this situation?
- How do you know what is right? What are the bases of your ethical values?
- Who would disagree with your view of what is right? What would they say in disagreeing with you? How would you reply to these challenges?

As you consider the above questions and ones of your own, you should think about forces that act upon the situation, which could include nature, markets, human nature, laws of societies, ideas of progress, social norms, etc. Please do not try to summarize the entire play or documentary; instead, you should focus on one particular ethical dilemma presented in the work. Chapter 5 in our text should help guide you through the process of writing this essay, as it gives advice for developing a thesis, describing the situation, identifying an ethical course of action, and defending or explaining your position.

SOURCE REQUIREMENTS: You should reference the play or film in describing the ethical dilemma that you are analyzing. Moreover, you must include at least two other well-selected sources that help you interpret the specific situation or that help you define an ethical system.

LENGTH: 5 full pages of text minimum. Acceptable fonts: Helvetica, Times New Roman, News Gothic, or Arial; sizes 10-12 pt. The works-cited page does not count toward fulfilling this requirement; essays may exceed this length requirement, but they should be no longer than 7 full pages. You may include graphics, but they do not count towards the 5 page requirement. Essays under 5 full pages will be considered incomplete and will receive a failing grade.

MANUSCRIPT REQUIREMENTS: For this essay, you are to use MLA (PH 21), APA (PH 23), or Chicago (PH 24) style to format your essay and document your sources. Your essay should be double-spaced. Choose the manuscript form that you are the most familiar with, and be sure to use that form consistently throughout your essay.

GRADE WEIGHT AND CRITERIA: Your research-based ethics essay will count 25% towards your final course grade. Remember, essays receiving below a C must be revised and resubmitted in accordance to the “C” or Above Policy. A failure to revise will result in a failing grade for the course. Your grade will be based on the following criteria: (1) fulfillment of assignment, (2) content development, (3) organization, (4) style, and (5) GSP proficiency (grammar, spelling, and punctuation). I will further explain grading criteria in class. Also, please review the evaluation info on the course web site.
PLAGIARISM: Plagiarists use someone else’s words, images, ideas, or sentence structure without giving proper credit through documentation. Plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the project, and, in major cases, for the course.

UNIT 1 TENTATIVE SCHEDULE: This schedule does not include everything we will be doing in class, but it does outline our readings and major project due dates for project 1. Please be sure to have reading assignments read for the day they are listed on the schedule. Bring all books used for a day’s reading/assignments to class with you on that day.


Week 1
R 1/11 Course introduction and overview. Introduction to Ethics Project.

Week 2
T 1/16 Read: BW – “Introduction,” vii-x and Chapter 1
R 1/18 Read: BW – Chapter 5 and PH – Chapter 10

Week 3
T 1/23 Read: An Enemy of the People – Preface and Act 1
R 1/25 Read: An Enemy of the People – Acts 2 and 3
Due: In the format of a memo (see Penguin pp. 172-74), write 1 page single-spaced in which you explain to your classmates and me ways in which the dilemma presented in An Enemy of the People is still relevant today.

Week 4
T 1/30 Viewing: Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room
R 2/1 Viewing: Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room
Due: Synthesis paper - Pick one of the ethics-focused journal articles listed on the course web site and write a 1-page single-spaced paper on how the article relates to your understanding of the Enron scandal.

Week 5
T 2/6 Read: PH chapters 26 and 27
Due: Penguin exercises 26.2 and 27.2
Due by e-mail at 9:00 PM: Research-based ethics essay proposal (directions on course web site)
R 2/8 Read: PH chapters 28 and 29
Due: Penguin exercises 28.2, 29.2, and 29.5
Bring to class: Questions and concerns about your research-based ethics essay

Week 6
T 2/13 Due: ___ copies of your ethics essay rough draft to exchange for peer workshop
R 2/15 PEER WORKSHOP

Week 7
T 2/20 DUE: Research-based Ethics Essay