

## Ethics Essay Topics

### **General instructions:**

Read your chosen case over carefully. Note what ethical principles or issues are at stake. Your assignment is to state clearly what these are, who the stake holders are, and propose a resolution. The resolution should be what you feel is the right course of action. If your chosen field has a professional code of conduct, or an ethics statement, I recommend you make use of that to help inform your answer. If you do not find a suitable question under your program of study, see me. You may be able to use one from another program; you are welcome to read over those from other fields to see whether there would be an appropriate one. In all cases, you should certainly research the case to see whether there is "more to it" than meets the eye. Many of them are based on actual situation-types, and so careful research would turn up interesting angles to explore. You will be graded on the depth and originality of your research, as well as on your presentation of the various factors of the case.

### **Pure & applied science**

1) You are a recently graduated B.Sc. chemist with specialization in synthetic organic chemistry. The last 3 months you have been seeking your first after-university job. You see a lucrative position developing explosives for the Department of National Defense advertised in a local paper. Do you apply for this job?

2) You are a recently hired civil engineer working for a construction firm. At several planning meetings, the senior engineer at the company fudges several calculations. You redo his calculations and find out that his procedure would actually come dangerously close to violating a safety margin acceptable in the industry, and not wide of it as he was presenting. What do you do? Suppose it becomes clear that the calculation fudges were not errors.

3) You are employed as a pharmaceutical chemist in a large company. Your particular branch is developing drugs to fight cancer. One day you come to work and find your workplace picketed by animal rights activists, who charge that your company should not test their products on animals. They are barring the entrance to the company and harassing employees as they try to enter. Security cannot call the police for trespassing as they are on the sidewalk, not on company property. Use this case as a jumping off point to research the area of using animals for scientific and technological research. If you are not interested in pharmaceutical chemistry, you may replace it with a case in psychology/neuroscience instead.

### **Health science, Nursing, RAT, etc.**

1) You are a nurse employed at a large hospital and are in the room when a newly admitted patient is diagnosed with a certain illness. A physician prescribes a certain drug you believe based

on your clinical experience to be contraindicated in the condition in question. What do you do?

2) You are a GP physician conducting a routine examination of a patient you have known for some time. She is suffering from a minor ailment easily treatable by antibiotics but rather unpleasant if left untreated. When you ask her whether she is currently using any "alternative medicines" she becomes defensive and says that these are "natural", and hence, she thinks, good for her. What now?

3) You are a biology student studying for the PhD in plant physiology. As part of your program, you are required to take a breadth requirement course outside of botany. As the department is small, this generally means a zoology course. Unfortunately, all the suitable zoology courses require dissection of animals, something you have always opposed. You feel that you should be exempt from taking the zoology course for this reason. Your academic supervisor tells you that all students must take the course in order to receive their degree. Explore this case.

#### **Communications/Fine Arts**

1) You are currently a freelance graphic designer who has been a few months without a contract. A large corporation approaches you to do some slides for a presentation concerning their impact on the water supply in the area. As you study the case, you come to the conclusion that the corporation wants you to help them lie to the public officials that they will be presenting to. Should you take the case?

2) Employed as a reporter for a major newspaper, you are assigned by your boss to cover a scientific conference happening in your city. You interview a few of the physicists involved, and do not understand effectively anything of what they are talking about at the conference. How should you write up the story?

3) A local newspaper calls your latest art exhibit "trash" and berates the federal government for funding it. You would otherwise have been unemployed during the time in question. Explore this issue.

#### **Social Science, Commerce, Business Administration**

1) Working as an accountant, a big client offers to pay you double your salary if you falsify his income tax return. Discuss this case.

2) You are working as a sociologist for the government and have recently finished gathering the data on the effectiveness of a make-work program in a poor community. When you run your analysis, you find that the program has been negatively effective (i.e., outcomes are worse than they would be if nothing had been done). How do you present your findings?

3) You are a manager at an electronics firm. During your pre-sales

testing, your technicians discover that 25% of samples have a defect that causes product failure. Already behind schedule, you consider releasing the product anyway. What next?

### **Computer Science Technology, Digital Systems, etc.**

1) You are working as a programmer for a software company. You are currently working on the newest version of some popular piece of software. One day, your competition announces that they will be releasing their latest and greatest 1 month ahead of your schedule. Management tells you to skip 6 weeks of user testing in order that your product may be released prior to your competition. What now?

2) You are an engineering technician who tests printed circuit boards for an electronics firm. During your pre-sales testing, you discover that 25% of samples have a defect that causes product failure. Nevertheless, management wants to ship the product, as it is already behind schedule. What next?

3) You are a software developer at a major corporation. Shortly after you sign off on the latest product, you are using it yourself and find a rather nasty bug. What do you do?

### **ECE, SCC, etc.**

1) Employed as a day care worker, you are alarmed when a certain parent has been late to pick up their child by 20 minutes 6 times now. What next?

2) One of your charges has drawn a picture of him being swallowed up by the ground and says that this happened to him on the weekend. Discuss this case.

3) You are a counselor that works with the mildly mentally handicapped children from a local school once per week. One of the parents of a non-handicapped child at the school approaches you at "Meet the teacher night" and insists that you admit her child into your program. When you inform her (by whatever means is usual) that her child does not need the service, she insists and tells you that she will be seeing your supervisor about this matter. What do you do?

### **Liberal Arts**

1) You are a classicist at a major university, but without tenure. While exploring the countryside of your favourite ancient civilization, you find some fragments of a previously lost work of a very important figure. Knowing that you cannot legally take them out of the country, you wonder what to do as the local government is unlikely to support investigation of the find.

2) You teach philosophy at a small college. One day a student approaches you after a lecture on Plato's *Apology*. She tells you that she was waiting for you to discuss how Socrates was black, and was hoping you would bring this up for class discussion next time. What do you tell the student?

3) You have just finished writing a wonderful new book for a big university press which carefully discusses an underappreciated area in art history. You are awaiting your complementary copies, when another publisher's flier arrives and are horrified to see that an almost identical sounding book with a remarkably similar title has just been released by the other publisher. Discuss.