I – COURSE INFORMATION

Course Overview

Risk and uncertainty touch most aspects of human life. Almost every decision we make have consequences that we cannot fully predict. The seminar explores ethical challenges raised by this fact. Its primary goal is to acquaint students with concepts of risk and uncertainty, problems risk and uncertainty pose for ethics (both ethical theories and moral decision-making), and methods and challenges in evaluating and managing risk and uncertainty in different domains of practical ethics, in particular ethics of biomedical research and ethics of new biotechnologies. Secondarily, it is designed to help students develop analytical and argumentative skills necessary for identifying, examining and resolving ethical dilemmas brought about by risky or uncertain consequences of human actions and decisions. The course covers following topics: (1) risk, uncertainty, and ethics; (2) risk, uncertainty, and the ethics of biomedical research (3) precautionary principle and the ethics of biotechnological hazard.

Requirements and Grading Policy

The final grade will be based on:

(1) Seminar participation (attendance, familiarity with the assigned readings, activity) – 40%

(2) Oral presentation (presentation of a selected problem or reading material) – 30%

(3) Seminar paper (6-8 pages on a selected topic/paper/case/document) – 30%

Attendance will be monitored on weekly basis. Two (2) absences are allowed per semester. Each class absence beyond the two allowed lowers the final grade by one full number grade (e.g. from 5 to 4, or from 4,5 to 3,5).

A ‘5’ grade will require consistent insightful participation in seminar discussions, drawing upon readings and personal experiences, as well as excellent oral presentation and written works demonstrating students’ mastery of the cases, terminology, precepts and principles discussed.

Final grades will be assigned on the following percentages:

100-90% – 5,0; 89-85% – 4,5; 84-75% – 4,0; 74-70% – 3,5; 69-60% – 3,0; 59-0%– 2,0

II - TOPICS AND READINGS
I. RISK, UNCERTAINTY, AND ETHICS

1. Introduction to the seminar.

Introductions reading:

2. Nature of Risk & Uncertainty

Obligatory readings:

Additional readings [for presenters]:

Oral presentation: Definitions and nature of risk & uncertainty, based upon obligatory and additional readings

3. Risk and Ethical Theories

Obligatory readings:


4. Risk and Hypothetical Retrospection

Obligatory readings:


5. Ethics and Conflicts of Risk

Obligatory readings:


6. Risk Perception and Evaluation: Rational Analysis or “Gut Feelings”

Obligatory readings:

Additional readings [for presenters]:

Oral presentation: Role of Affect and Reason in Moral Judgements about Risks, based upon obligatory and additional reading materials.

7. Risk Communication and Public Imagination

Obligatory readings:

Additional readings [for presenters]:

Oral presentations: [1] Fallacies and Myths of Risk, based upon the obligatory and additional papers written by S.O. Hansson; AND/OR [2] Risk and Public Imagination, based upon the obligatory article by Coeckelbergh and the additional paper by Kasperson et al.

II. RISK, UNCERTAINTY, AND ETHICS OF BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH

8. Balancing risks and potential benefits of biomedical research

Obligatory readings:

Additional readings [for presenters]:

Oral presentations: [1] London’s Integrative Approach and its critique, based upon the obligatory paper and the additional text by London; AND/OR [2] Rajczi’s Agreement Principle and its critique, based upon the obligatory article and the additional paper by Rajczi.

9. Minimal risk standard

Obligatory readings:
**Additional readings [for presenters]:**


[●●] Oral presentations: [1] Setting the minimal risk standard, based upon the obligatory paper and the additional texts by Freedman et al. and Wendler; AND/OR [2] Binik’s concept of minimal risk, based upon the obligatory article and the additional paper by Binik.

### 10. Maximal risk threshold

**Obligatory readings:**


**Additional readings [for presenters]:**


[●] Oral presentation: Maximal risk threshold, based upon obligatory and additional reading materials.

### III. PRECAUTIONARY PRINCIPLE AND THE ETHICS OF BIOTECHNOLOGICAL HAZARD

#### 11. Precautionary principle and its critics

**Obligatory readings:**


**Additional readings [for presenters]:**


[●] Oral presentation: Precautionary principle, based upon obligatory and additional reading materials.

#### 12. Precaution and the Morality of Imposing Risks

**Obligatory readings:**


[●] Oral presentation: Morality of Imposing Risks, close reading of *The Price of Precaution*..., Chapter 5.

#### 13. Precaution in Practice

**Obligatory readings:**
