

Ethics: Society, the Environment and Disasters

AP/DEMS 3707
FALL 2025

Course Information

Course Instructor: Katie Subbotina
(greeting preference is Professor or
Mrs. Katie, or Professor or Mrs.
Subbotina)
E-mail:

Office Hours & Location: no specific
office hours; meetings to be arranged
via email or during class.
Course Time & Days: Mondays, 11:30 to
14:20
Class Location: WC 118
Course eClass site:

Tutorials, Labs and TA Contact Information

N/A

Land Acknowledgment

York University recognizes that many Indigenous Nations have longstanding relationships with the territories upon which York University campuses are located that precede the establishment of York University. York University acknowledges its presence on the traditional territory of many Indigenous Nations. The area known as Tkaronto has been care taken by the Anishinabek Nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and the Huron-Wendat. It is now home to many First Nation, Inuit, and Métis communities. We acknowledge the current treaty holders, the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. This territory is subject of the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement to peaceably share and care for the Great Lakes region ([LA&PS Land Acknowledgement](#)).

Course Overview

Course Description

DEMS 3707 explores the ethical uncertainties and moral complexities that arise in the management of disasters and emergencies. The course develops a foundational understanding of ethical theories, decision-making process, and moral reasoning, with emphasis on their application to real-world emergency management scenarios. Students will consider the moral imperatives of preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation in diverse contexts, both locally and globally. Through case studies, discussions, debates, and reflective analysis, the course fosters applied ethics skills, more competence in addressing challenging issues, and the ability to propose socially responsible policy recommendations in environmental and disaster management.

Pre-Requisites: AP/ADMS 1000 and AP/ADMS/DEMS2700

Course Credit Exclusions (CCE): 3.0

Course Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Identify and apply core ethical theories to a range of emergency management contexts.
- Analyze moral dilemmas arising in preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation phases of emergency management, demonstrating critical thinking and problem-solving skills.
- Evaluate how institutional structures, cultural perspectives, and stakeholder interests shape ethical decision-making, cultivating awareness of professional and organizational dynamics.
- Reflect critically on personal values and professional responsibilities in emergency management practice.
- Develop and communicate ethically grounded policy recommendations that address complex real-world challenges, demonstrating professional reasoning.
- Demonstrate professional skills, including teamwork, facilitation of peer discussions, ethical decision-making, critical thinking, oral and written communication, and self-reflection in emergency management context.

Course Organization

This is an in-person course for Fall 2025, with primarily in-person lectures and computer-mediated activities (electronic learning), supplemented by possibly a few (approximately 1-2) online lectures and activities (depending on the weather and other

circumstances). The course is structured into weekly modules combining lecture, discussion, guest speakers, and student-led engagement. Course readings, real-world case studies, and ethical frameworks form the foundation of in-class activities. A rotating group reflection model ensures all students engage as presenters, respondents, and reflective analysis. Assessments are designed to integrate theory and practice, fostering both collaborative problem-solving and individual critical reflection.

- In-person activities include lectures, discussions, and group work.
- Presentations using PowerPoint will serve to enrich and clarify key course content.
- The eClass page provides course materials; all registered students should be able to access the course at: [eClass.yorku.ca](https://eclass.yorku.ca) using their York Passport IDs and Passwords.
- Structured discussions allow students to explore ethical issues from multiple perspectives, articulate positions, and critically consider different viewpoints.
- Individual and group activities and assignments are designed to enhance learning, develop teamwork skills, and are distributed throughout the term.
- Most written assignments will be submitted via Turnitin in eClass. Students who opt out of Turnitin are asked to email me at least 7 days before the due date and submit assignments via email by the deadline.
- Guest speakers, including practitioners, will provide real-work perspectives relevant to the course topics.

Please note, for every 1 hour of lecture, expect to spend a minimum of 2-3 hours of your own time reading, writing notes, working on assignments, and learning. That means for a 3-hour class per week, expect to spend 6-9 hours of your own time per week.

Instructor Office Hours and Communication Guidelines

Course announcements will be made at the beginning of lectures and posted on e-Class. If you have questions about course materials or concepts, please use the dedicated Q&A forum on e-Class so that all students can benefit from the discussion. For personal or sensitive matters, you are encouraged to reach out to me as the Course Instructor, Professor Katie Subbotina, via email. Please use formal, professional language and proper grammar in all communications, as this is an important aspect of professional conduct. When sending an email, include **“DEMS3707: [key words regarding the question or issue]”** in subject line. Allow 2-3 business days for a respond. For new topics, please begin a separate email thread rather than replying to an existing email chain. If you would like to meet with me, please request an appointment by email or approach me during class.

Required Course Materials

The Ethical Emergency Manager: Issues, Morality, and Dilemmas. 4th Edition. An e-copy of the book will be provided to students on eClass. Hardcopies can be ordered via Amazon.

Optional Course Materials

Other required or optional reading materials or videos will be available via eClass.

Technical Requirements

Several platforms will be used in this course (e.g., eClass, Zoom, etc.) where students will interact with the course materials, the course director/TA, as well as with each other.

Here are some useful links for computing information, resources, and help:

- [Student Guide to eClass](#)
- [Zoom@YorkU Best Practices](#)
- [Zoom@YorkU User Reference Guide](#)
- [eLearning Getting Started \(LA&PS eServices\)](#)
- [Student Guide to Remote and Online Learning](#)

To determine Internet connection and speed, there are online tests, such as [Speedtest](#), that can be run. If you need technical assistance, please consult the [University Information Technology \(UIT\) Student Services](#) web page or write to askit@yorku.ca.

Course Evaluations

Course Evaluation Chart

Assessment	Due Date	Weight %	Course Learning Outcome
Group Ethical News Reflections	Weeks 3, 5, 9	Presenters: 5%	Apply ethical theories to real-world dilemmas; recognize ethical
		Discussants: 5%	
		Reflectors: 5%	

Assessment	Due Date	Weight %	Course Learning Outcome
		15% of the final grade	blind spots; engage in peer learning
Midterm Ethical Case Exercise and Reflection	Week 7	Active engagement in the exercise: 5%	Apply ethical theory in crisis scenarios; assess cross-cultural and institutional impacts; formulate grounded recommendations.
		Depth and clarity of written reflection: 15%	
		20% of the final grade	
Capstone Ethical Debate	Week 12	Clarity and organization: 5%	Argue ethical positions with rigor and responsiveness; evaluate stakeholder perspectives
		Application of ethical frameworks: 5%	
		Quality of arguments and rebuttal: 5%	
		Engagement and professionalism: 5%	
		20% of the final grade	
Final Reflective Essay with Policy Recommendation	Week after the last class	Ethical analysis: 10%	Integrate theory, personal reflection, and policy analysis into actionable recommendations
		Critical reflection: 7%	
		Policy recommendation: 8%	
		Organization and professional communication: 5%	

Assessment	Due Date	Weight %	Course Learning Outcome
		30% of the final grade	
Participation and Engagement	Ongoing	Attendance: 5%	Demonstrate professionalism, preparedness, and active engagement in class discussions and activities
		Online engagement: 5%	
		Peer Evaluation: 5%	
		15% of the final grade	
		100%	

Detailed grading rubrics outlining criteria for evaluation will be provided for each assignment on eClass prior to the due date of the assignment.

Assessment Descriptions

1. Group Ethical News Reflections (15%)

The class will be divided into consistent nine groups for the entire semester, rotating through three roles across the term:

- **Presenters** (5%): Share an ethically complex news story related to emergency management and lead a structured discussion. Presenters are responsible for preparing discussion materials and guiding dialogue. They are graded based on:
 - Clarity and organization of the presentation
 - Effective facilitation of discussion (engaging peers, asking thoughtful questions)
 - Application of ethical theories and frameworks to the news story
- **Discussants** (5%): Engage actively with presenters through questions, counterpoints, and examples, demonstrating critical thinking and application of ethical frameworks. Discussants are graded based on:
 - Active participation in the discussion (asking questions, offering examples, challenging assumptions)
 - Demonstrated understanding of ethical concepts
 - Constructive engagement with presenters and peers

- **Reflectors** (5%): Write a short (~250 words) in-class reflection on the discussion. Reflections are graded on:
 - Thoughtfulness of insights
 - Engagement with ethical concepts
 - Contribution to the discussion
 - The reflections will NOT be graded based on grammar or writing style. Focus on what you learned, questions you considered, or ethical dilemmas you noticed.

By the end of the term, each group will have completed all three roles, gaining experience in presenting, debating, and written ethical analysis.

There is no way to make up assignments you've missed as they are all based on the in-class content.

2. **Midterm Ethical Case Exercise and Reflection (20%)**

In week 7, students will participate in a crisis-based discussion exercise designed to replicate ethical decision-making under pressure. Using a complex case study, students will analyze competing priorities, explore possible options, and assess impacts on diverse stakeholders.

Following the exercise, each student will submit an individual written reflection (approximately 2 pages, max 800 words) in **SBAR format** (Situation, Background, Assessment, Recommendation). The reflection must:

- Summarize the case and decisions made
- Apply relevant ethical theories and frameworks
- Consider institutional, cultural, or stakeholder perspectives
- Propose a clear, well-reasoned policy or institutional recommendation.

Grading criteria:

- Engagement in the exercise - quality of contributions, collaboration, and application of course concepts in real time
- Written reflection – clarity in describing the ethical dilemma, integration of ethical theories, analysis of institutional or cultural perspectives, and strength of the policy or institutional recommendation

3. **Capstone Ethical Debate (20%)**

In week 12, students will deliver a structured debate on a high-stakes ethical issue related to emergency management. Teams will be formed earlier in the term to allow adequate time for preparation and coordination. Each team will take a position (pro or con), deliver a 5–10-minute argument, and respond with

a 2-minut rebuttal. Debates will be scheduled to ensure all teams have adequate preparation and presentation time.

Grading criteria:

- Clarity, organization, and persuasiveness of the argument
- Use of ethical theories and frameworks to support positions
- Logical coherence and responsiveness in rebuttal
- Evidence of preparation and collaboration as a team

By participating, students will practice skill in argumentation, ethical reasoning, and teamwork, preparing them to defend and evaluate positions in professional contexts where ethical dilemmas are contested.

4. **Final Reflective Essay with Policy Recommendation (30%)**

Imagine you are an emergency management leader asked by your organization to advise on a high-stakes ethical issue recently debated in a strategic planning meeting. Your task is to prepare a concise, well-structured written briefing (approximately 2,000 words) that integrates ethical theory, practical considerations, and your own reflections.

Essay Requirements: The essay will be

- Based on one of the Capstone Ethical Debate topics presented in class. You may choose any topic, including your own team's or one you observed
- Summarize the ethical issue and competing perspectives
- Apply at least two ethical frameworks discussed in the course to evaluate the options
- Reflect on how your understanding of the issue evolved through the course and debate process
- Conclude with a clear, actionable policy or institutional recommendation that could be implemented in a real-world emergency management context.
- Additional guidelines to ensure originality and professional practice:
 - Focus on applied reasoning and analysis, support your arguments with references to class debates, readings, or case studies.
 - Use a structured briefing style (e.g. SBAR) to ensure clarity a concise communication, but flexibility in presentation will be maintained.

Grading criteria:

- **Depth of ethical analysis (10%):** how well ethical theories and frameworks are applied to the issue
- **Critical reflection (7%):** thoughtfulness of insights, integration of personal learning, and awareness of blind spots

- **Practical policy recommendation (8%):** feasibility, clarity, and connection to real-world emergency management context
- **Organization and professional communication (5%):** logical flow, coherence, and professional presentation (grammar/style secondary to analysis)

This exercise mirrors the type of analytical and advisory writing expected from professionals in government, NGOs, or corporate emergency management, where decision must be both ethically grounded and operationally sound.

5. **Participation & Engagement (15%)**

This component assessed students' contributions to class discussions, case-based exercises, peer feedback, and completion of online activities. Regular attendance, engagement with course materials, and active participation are expected and will be factored into this grade.

Grading criteria:

- **Attendance (5%):** students earn marks for attending and actively participating in all scheduled classes (0.5 marks for each class: 10 out of 12 classes)
- **Online engagement (5%):** students complete short quizzes or activities designed to test their understanding of course concepts and ethical theories
- **Peer Evaluation (5%):** students observe teams during the Capstone Ethical Debate and submit a brief evaluation using provided grading criteria. This encourages thoughtful analysis and professional peer feedback.

How to Submit Assessments

Assignment for this course must be received within the timeframe specified for the assignment (see Course Schedule) and are to be handed in via eClass.

Late Work Policy

Students are automatically granted a 48-hours extension (including weekends) on assignments without needing to provide an explanation. To use this extension, simply **notify me by email before the original deadline**. No confirmation is required, just submit your assignment within 48 hours after the original deadline.

If additional time beyond the 48-hour period is needed, you are to submit an outline or draft of the assignment **before the original or extended deadline** (provided you follow

the guidelines to request the automatic extension). I will work with you to create a plan that allows you to complete the assignment successfully. The earlier you notify me; the more flexibility I can provide.

If no draft is submitted or you fail to notify me of the extension before the deadline, late submission penalties apply: 5% per 24-hours period, starting from the original due date. For example, if the assignment is due Friday at 11:59pm and you notified me that you were using the 48-hour extension (due Sunday at 11:59pm), but submit on Sunday at 10:14am, a 10% deduction will apply.

Final deadline: unless individual accommodations have been arranged before the due-date, assignments will not be accepted more than 7 days after the original deadline.

Please note that both the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies and the School of Administrative Studies require that grades follow a pre-determined distribution. Final grades may therefore be adjusted to comply with these requirements.

Missed Tests and Exams

If a student misses an assignment, they must contact the course director via e-mail as soon as possible to arrange for a replacement evaluation. Because most assignments are based on in class discussion, there cannot be made up directly; instead, a replacement evaluation of equivalent scope and grading will be required. For group-based assignments where students can take on different roles, partial grades may be awarded based on the work completed.

How to Use Citations in this Course

Citations are to use the APA 7 system (APA Style Overview, YorkU Libraries).

Resources to help with citations:

- [I need to cite and reference, Learning Commons](#)
- [Drop-in Research Support](#), YorkU Libraries
- [Writing Centre](#)
- [SPARK Student Papers & Academic Research Kit](#)

Grading

The grading scheme for this course conforms to the 9-point system used in undergraduate programs at York University. For a full description of the York grading system, visit the York University [Academic Calendar](#).

Grade	Grade Point	Percent Range	Description
A+	9	90-100	Exceptional
A	8	80-89	Excellent
B+	7	75-79	Very Good
B	6	70-74	Good
C+	5	65-69	Competent
C	4	60-64	Fairly Competent
D+	3	55-59	Passing
D	2	50-54	Marginally Passing
E	1	40-49	Marginally Failing
F	0	0-39	Failing

Course Schedule

Important Dates

Explore the York University [Academic Calendar](#) to find a list of important dates, such as class start/end dates, drop deadlines, holidays and more.

Weekly Course Schedule

Week	Readings and Activities	Assessment Due Dates	Learning Outcomes
Week 1 Sep 8 WC 118	Intro to course; ethical decision-making warm-up; Hurricane Katrina case study		Understand course scope, key ethical terms, and recognize moral uncertainty (“gray zones”)

Week	Readings and Activities	Assessment Due Dates	Learning Outcomes
Week 2 Sep 15 WC 118	Excerpts on utilitarianism & deontology; theory application workshop (quarantine vs. treat)		Build ethical theory foundation for structured decision-making
Week 3 Sep 22 WC 118	Virtue ethics, care ethics, moral injury; triage scenario and dilemma mapping	Group Ethical News Reflection (Round #1) Reflection due in class	Apply multiple ethical frameworks to dilemmas; recognize ethical blind spots
Week 4 Sep 29 WC 118	Sendai Framework; film analysis on ethical traps; Indigenous flood risk case		Identify ethical traps; explore more leadership and planning ethics
Week 5 Oct 6 WC 118	World Health Organization Ethical Risk Assessment; wildfire recovery discussion; Role-play: triage/ evacuation; wildfire recovery funding stakeholder mapping	Group Ethical News Reflection (Round #2) Reflection due in class	Conduct ethical risk assessment using a stakeholder lens
Week 6 Oct 13	No class – Reading week		
Week 7 Oct 20 WC 118	Midterm Policy Discussion Exercise Global Justice in Disaster case; Ebola and cultural conflict	Midterm Policy Discussion Exercise and Reflection	Apply ethical theory in crisis; assess cross-cultural impacts Analyze competing priorities and stakeholder considerations

Week	Readings and Activities	Assessment Due Dates	Learning Outcomes
Week 8 Oct 27 WC 118	Journal article on equity in crisis policy. Discussions: vaccine allocation vs shelter allocation; stakeholder mapping and discussion on equity, efficiency, and autonomy in policy-making	Written reflection (SBAR format, max 2 pages/800 words)	Balance equity, efficiency, autonomy in policy-making
Week 9 Nov 3 WC 118	Red Cross guidelines; Fukushima case; World Health Organization AI Ethics Guidelines, AI Now Institute report. Discussion: late warning dilemma, AI triage discussion; wildfire evacuation alert case	Group Ethical News Reflection (Round #3)	Assess institutional ethics and leadership in high-pressure context Evaluate ethical risks and benefits of technology in emergency management
Week 10 Nov 10 WC 118	Case studies on ethical failures in disasters. Reverse ethics activity; end-of-life care scenario		Critique ethical failures and propose more ethical alternatives
Week 11 Nov 17 WC 118	Multi-stakeholder dilemma.		Argue ethical positions with rigor and responsiveness to opposing view
Week 12 Nov 24 WC 118	Capstone Ethical Debate – Presentations	Presentations in class (5-10 min arguments + rebuttal)	Demonstrate ethical argumentation; evaluate stakeholder perspectives

Week	Readings and Activities	Assessment Due Dates	Learning Outcomes
Week 13 Dec 1 WC 118	Community engagement ethics.		Integrate theory, lived experience, and policy recommendations for community-level ethical practice
Final assignment Dec 8		Final Reflective Essay with Policy Recommendation	

Course Policies

Please review the course policies in this section. All students are expected to familiarize themselves with the following information:

- [Student Rights & Responsibilities](#)
- [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#)

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is a fundamental and important value of York University. To maintain a fair and honest learning environment, you are responsible for understanding and upholding academic integrity in all courses and academic activities. You are encouraged to connect with reliable [on-campus resources](#) that support your coursework and academic honesty. To better understand the serious consequences of breaching academic honesty policies, familiarize yourself with the [Senate Policy on Academic Conduct](#). You can learn more about upholding academic integrity in your courses by exploring [SPARK: Academic Integrity Module](#), [LA&PS Academic Honesty](#) and [Academic Integrity for Students](#).

Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI)

Students are not permitted to use generative artificial intelligence (AI) in this course. Submitting any work created (in whole or part) through the use of generative AI tools will be considered a violation of York University's [Senate Policy on Academic Conduct](#). Using AI apps such as ChatGPT, GPT-3, DALL-E, translation software among others to complete academic work **without your instructor's knowledge or permission**, is

considered to be a breach of academic honesty. For more information, please review [AI Technology & Academic Integrity: Information for Students](#).

If you're not sure whether using an AI app for your academic work is acceptable, it is recommended that you:

- Carefully review the guidelines for your assessments
- Check for any messages from your instructor on eClass
- Ask your instructor or TA if they are permitting the use of these tools

Turnitin

To promote academic integrity in this course, students will normally be required to submit their written assignments to Turnitin (via the course's eClass site) for a review of textual similarities and the detection of possible plagiarism. In so doing, students will allow their material to be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database, where they will be used only for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of the Turnitin service are described on the Turnitin.com website. York students may opt out of using Turnitin. If you wish to opt out, you should contact your instructor as soon as possible.

Accessibility

York University is committed to creating a learning environment which provides equal opportunity to all members of its community. If you anticipate or experience any barriers to learning in this course, please discuss your concerns with your instructor as early as possible. For students with disabilities, contact [Student Accessibility Services](#) to coordinate academic accommodations and services. Accommodations will be communicated to Course Directors through a Letter of Accommodation (LOA). Accommodations for tests/exams normally require three (3) weeks (or 21 days) before the scheduled test/exam to arrange.

Religious Observance Accommodation

York University is committed to respecting the religious beliefs and practices of all members of the community and making reasonable and appropriate [accommodations to adherents for observances of days of religious significance](#). Should any of the dates specified in this syllabus for course assignments, tests, or deadlines conflict with a date of religious significance, please contact the instructor not less than two (2) weeks (or 14 days) prior to the date for which accommodation is sought. If the requested accommodation is for an exam or falls within the formal examination periods, you must

complete and submit a [Religious Accommodation Agreement](#) at least three (3) weeks (or 21 days) before the start of the exam period.

Intellectual Property

Course materials are designed for use as part of this particular course at York University and are the intellectual property of the instructor unless otherwise stated. Third-party copyrighted materials (such as book chapters, journal articles, music, videos, etc.) have either been licensed for use in this course or fall under an exception or limitation in Canadian copyright law. Students may not publish, post on an Internet site, sell, or otherwise distribute any course materials or work without the instructor's express permission. Course materials should only be used by students enrolled in this course.

Copying this material for distribution (e.g., uploading material to a commercial third-party website) may lead to a charge of misconduct according to York's [Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities](#), the [Senate Policy on Academic Conduct](#), and/or legal consequences for copyright violations.

Student Support and Resources

York University offers a wide range of student supports resources and services, including everything from writing workshops and peer mentorship to wellness support and career guidance. Explore the links below to access these on-campus resources:

- [Academic Advising](#) is available to provide students support and guidance in making academic decisions and goals.
- [Student Accessibility Services](#) are available for support and accessibility accommodation when required.
- [Student Counselling, Health & Wellbeing](#) offers workshops, resources, and counselling to support your academic success.
- [Peer-Assisted Study Sessions \(PASS\) Program](#) provides student study sessions for students to collaborate and enhance their understanding of course content in certain courses.
- [Student Numeracy Assistance Centre at Keele \(SNACK\)](#) supports students in courses involving math, stats, and Excel.
- [The Writing Centre](#) provides multiple avenues of writing-based support including drop-in sessions, one-to-one appointments, a Multilingual Studio, and an Accessibility Specialist.
- [Centre for Indigenous Student Services](#) offers a community space with academic, spiritual, cultural, and physical support, including writing and learning skills programs.

- [ESL Open Learning Centre \(OLC\)](#) supports students with building proficiency in reading, writing, and speaking English.
- [Learning Skills Services](#) provides tips for time management, effective study and learning habits, keeping up with coursework, and other learning-related supports.
- [Learning Commons](#) provides links to supports for time management, writing, study skills, preparing for exams, and other learning-related resources.
- [Roadmap to Student Success](#) provides students with timely and targeted resources to help them achieve academic, personal, and professional success.
- [Office of Student Community Relations \(OSCR\)](#) is responsible for administering the [Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities](#) and provides critical incident support.
- [Peer Mentorship](#) helps students transition through their first year by connecting them with upper-year students. The mentors can help find supports and resources. They also lead a community hub on campus.
- [goSAFE](#) is staffed by York students and can accompany York community members to and from any on-campus location, such as the Village Shuttle pick-up hub, parking lots, bus stops, or residences.

For a full list of academic, wellness, and campus resources visit [Student Support & Resources](#).