

## Advice on How to Succeed from 11 Former Students

On my medical ethics Spring 2018 students' final exam, I gave them this bonus question:

Write a paragraph-long letter to students who will take this class with me in the future. Tell them what they need to know to succeed in this class.

What follows are their responses. Reading them may help you succeed.

### Student 21\*

Dear future student,

First off, do not take this class for granted. I know many of us come from majors that are very science focused. There are clear answers and complex problems that over and over again are ingrained into our head. It is consistently pointed out that understanding the hard science is paramount to being a successful physician or healthcare professional. All of this is true, but that is only part of succeeding (in my opinion a small part) in the healthcare field. This class will challenge you to think outside the box, will make you passionate about various topics, and will give you the tools to understand medicine in a completely different perspective. Successful physicians are not just scientists. They are psychologists, philosophers, sociologists, economists, and statisticians to name just a few. This class will allow you to draw upon and cultivate ideas from all those different fields in a way that makes you think deeper about potential decisions we all will have to make one day that involve literal lives in our hands. To succeed in this class, make sure you treat it as an equal to a class like human body in importance, because in the grand scheme of medicine, it really is.

### Student 26\*

My biggest piece of advice for people going into this class is to take some time to be comfortable with your own views and understand that philosophy is about the exploration of ways to think, not a constant attack on a certain type of thought. Too many people take the many views that are talked about in this class as personal attacks on their belief set and respond with either aggression, or with completely shutting out the possibility of the other idea being a valid way to think. This class shouldn't be and isn't a persuasive endeavor, instead it is an exposure to both sides of important topics in a field that is full of controversy. I would also say, please be self-aware enough to see when your own bias is getting in the way of you understanding an idea. That doesn't mean that you have to ditch your bias in order to see the other side, just be aware that, no matter how open minded you claim to be, there are some things that you will be ignorant of and possibly unable to understand because of the angle you are approaching it from. Please understand this about others as well because often, people aren't stupid, they are just struggling to see what is being said in the same light that it is supposed to be presented.

### Student 39\*

Hello Medical Ethics Student:

I'll get right to the point: how will you succeed in this class? This course is unlike many I took at K-State, because it strays from the typical lecture format. It requires that you do more than listen: you must prepare, analyze, and be ready to partake in discussion, because you are a part of the learning and teaching process. The goal of this course is to be truth-seekers, and for that to happen, it's important to consider multiple perspectives. Here are my suggestions to succeed in this course. First, keep an open mind. It's important to be aware how you view a particular topic, but it's also important to consider the perspective of others. It will make you more knowledgeable. Second, do

the readings. Most of them are philosophical and difficult, but Josh doesn't expect you to be able to master them from the first read. Experience them for yourself, so when the topic is discussed in class, you have already struggled with it, so the clarity that will come is much sweeter. This leads to my third suggestion, go to class. You miss out on the meat of the course if you don't. Fourth, prepare for diversity of assignments. You're not going to be doing the same thing all semester, Josh makes sure you are challenged in different ways, whether it's reading, writing, discussion, or interviews. Fifth and finally, don't be afraid to speak up. If you have questions, ask them in class, if you have an application of the topic, tell your peers. The more you participate and speak about the topics, the better you will master them. Good luck, this class was one of my favorites that I had the pleasure of taking at K-State.

#### **Student 45\***

When enrolling in medical ethics, it is important to know that hard work will be rewarded. As the student, you need to take on the responsibility to thoroughly read the articles and come to class prepared to discuss them. It is necessary to read the articles to complete the reading memos and understand the discussions in class to eventually answer the questions on exams. In addition to reading and completing the assignments, it is also important to put on your truth-seekers hat and challenge your own views on the topics discussed in class. This class is structured to help you develop your thoughts and ideas to better shape your arguments and others. The main take away from Medical Ethics is not the grade you receive, but how you seek the (whole) truth and use it to develop a well-structured and thought-out argument to defend your views.

#### **Student 49\***

Hey medical ethics students! I am sure you have heard a lot about this class and some may have had trouble getting into it, but you will be so glad that you have made it in a seat. I have one main tip for this course: prepare yourselves. When I say prepare yourselves, I mean it in a couple of ways. One way is by preparing your time. This class will take quite a bit of time out of your week. Expect that now so that you leave enough time to do the work. Setting aside the necessary time will help you to understand the difficult readings. Another way is to prepare your mind. Some of the readings will be hard to understand. I recommend taking small notes while reading the articles. Those notes will not only help you understand the readings for class time but also will help you on exams. The last way is to prepare for your beliefs to be challenged. Many of the things you will read will be against what you think you believe, but the truth may be that you just do not know enough about the topics to have a formed opinion. It might be difficult to want to read things that challenge your views in this way, but it will help you. Josh will continue to tell you throughout the semester to be truth-seekers, and to do that you need to really dive into all of the readings! The readings will either help you be able to better support your already formed opinions or make you change what you thought your opinions were completely. Be ready for a lot of fun, learning, and eye-opening experiences! Enjoy your semester!

#### **Student 57\***

Congratulations on deciding to expand your philosophical understanding of medical ethics! After taking this class I would recommend it to just about every K-State student no matter what your major. Everyone will at one point in their lives have to make a medical decision for themselves or others and it's really important that everyone has a solid framework for understanding how to make these decisions! This class is both challenging and exciting! Every week you will read academic articles that will challenge your ideologies and views and ultimately allow you to grow your understanding and opinions of some very difficult and complicated medical topics. A few keys for

success in this class is to always read the assigned articles, be open-minded and humble during in-class discussions, and don't be afraid to change your mind about something! Taking this class and following those simple rules for success will undoubtedly help grow your competency and understanding of many medically relevant issues!

### **Student 58\***

While taking medical ethics it is important to always keep an open mind. Throughout the course you will be learning about perspectives and concepts that you may have never heard about or considered, but it is crucial that you are always willing to listen to these ideas. If you do not listen to other perspectives and ideas from your own, then you can never truly seek the truth to ethical dilemmas, if you only base your reasoning off one side. In addition, this class allows you the opportunity to become better at critically thinking. As I graduate in a couple days and reflect upon the classes that I have taken throughout my four years, only a select few of them truly challenged me to be better at critically thinking. I think this is an important skill that will be beneficial in the future, and is a skill that is practiced all throughout this course. Take advantage of this opportunity. Spend some quality time writing your reading memos, because I think they can be really beneficial in developing this skill. In addition, by spending quality time on your reading memos you will have a better understanding of the material, and be able to keep up with the class better. Ultimately, medical ethics is a unique course that allows you the opportunity to explore many concepts and ideas. Come to class willing to learn something new and always keep an open mind.

### **Student 59\***

For those of you that are planning on taking this class in the future, there are a few things that you should be sure to do in order to succeed in the class. First, and most important, is to read the readings! Yes, some of them are long and complicated, but class makes so much more sense if you know what everyone is talking about. Even if you just get through the reading once and have no idea what it means, you'll be better off than not reading it. Plus, after talking about the readings in class, they make a lot more sense. Another important thing that helped me is to plan ahead on the reading memos. There is only one due a week, so you have a couple options for which readings to do one on. I found it easiest to look at the readings at the beginning of the week and to decide which one I would rather do a memo on, while also taking my schedule for that week in to account. That way, you don't get stuck on Thursday night with only one option for your reading memo. One last thing—don't be afraid to speak up or ask questions in class cause there's always lots of people that will help you out!

### **Student 60\***

Dearest Josh's future students, I'd like to start by saying this class is very INTERESTING. You'll learn some weird stuff you've never even thought to think about before. Beyond that, I think the key to success in this course is being willing to tackle and evaluate the issues you discuss with an open mind. Nothing you talk about is black-and-white, if it was, why would you even need to take a course over it? This class will give you the tools not only to intelligently argue your own beliefs, but to look at those beliefs critically. Expect to expand your perspective and question some of your most deeply held thoughts on tough issues. If that's something you're willing to do, then you will enjoy this class.

### **Student 61\***

I will start by saying that this class is one of my favorite classes that I have ever taken. I think that unfortunately in college, we as students sometimes take classes that we walk away from and really

haven't gained anything. I can say without a doubt that I have changed as a thinker and a "truth seeker," throughout the progression of this class, but it wasn't without having things in my mind that helped me to succeed. First, open mindedness is a must. While I grew in my appreciation for others opinions and beliefs throughout the semester, you first must be willing to not only hear, but truly listen to those opinions and beliefs without discrediting them due to difference from your own. Second, another thing that helps you to succeed in this class is participation. Discussion is what fuels this class so if you are able to contribute your thoughts then it is very beneficial to everyone in the classroom. The last thing that was beneficial to succeeding in the class is something that is very different from most classes, but to not get caught up in trying to take notes or write down everything that is said during class. Get the main points down that are put on the board, jot a few extra examples down if you need to, but ultimately listen and discuss and this class will hopefully be as beneficial to you as it was to me.

P.S. Don't get scared off by Josh's first day of class speech. He's really cool. While it sounds scary, when you are learning about something you're interested in, it doesn't seem like work ☺

*A final bit of advice that places an appropriate amount of emphasis on the readings...*

### **Student 33**

Dearest Medical Ethics Student,

Congratulations on the beginning of your semester-long journey, you beat the waitlist! Despite what you may have heard, it is not impossible to get an A in this class, Josh (you'll quickly learn that it's just...Josh) is great about giving reminders and guiding his students to success, so do not fret.

Do the readings! If you are **A CTUALLY** doing the readings (which you absolutely should be doing), you will be fine. Do the readings? Yeah, do the readings. Class time will make an incredible amount of sense if you know what the professor is talking about and have a question or comment to help facilitate discussion. Additionally, since you are doing the readings anyway (you noticed that), I would recommend taking notes! Make note of important arguments, points, and supportive evidence, as well as who the author is. This is not only helpful for participating in class, but you are also going to need all of that information for the exams and it's better to do ~45 minutes of reading a week than to do 4,000 hours (that's 167 days) on the week of the exam. Ultimately, this course was designed to challenge your viewpoints and your beliefs. It will help you think about important issues and discover, at least a little bit, who you are and what you value. Allow yourself to be wrong! I was wrong a lot (but I am **N O T** wrong about the readings :) ) and have learned so much about what it means to think critically! I wish you the best of luck!