

UMBC UGC New Course Request: PHIL 453: The Ethics of Aggregation

Date Submitted: 10/5/2020

Proposed Effective Date: immediately

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COURSE INFORMATION:

Course Number(s)	PHIL 453
Formal Title	The Ethics of Aggregation
Transcript Title (≤30c)	The Ethics of Aggregation
Recommended Course Preparation	PHIL 150 or PHIL 152 or PHIL 350 or PHIL 355
Prerequisite NOTE: Unless otherwise indicated, a prerequisite is assumed to be passed with a "D" or better.	One course in Philosophy with a grade of C or better
# of Credits Must adhere to the UMBC Credit Hour Policy	3
Repeatable?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> NoX
Max. Total Credits	3 This should be equal to the number of credits for courses that cannot be repeated for credit. For courses that may be repeated for credit, enter the maximum total number of credits a student can receive from this course. E.g., enter 6 credits for a 3 credit course that may be taken a second time for credit, but not for a third time. Please note that this does NOT refer to how many times a class may be retaken for a higher grade.
Grading Method(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> XReg (A-F) <input type="checkbox"/> XAudit <input type="checkbox"/> XPass-Fail

PROPOSED CATALOG DESCRIPTION (no longer than 75 words):

This course looks closely at ethical decisions involving trade-offs, where each decision has a cost, as in the case of a runaway trolley that is going to kill people no matter what you do, but you can decide how many. In such cases should we always do the thing that saves the most lives, or is it unfair to think that the numbers alone determine the ethical issue? Are all lives worth the same, and does this force us to think that only the numbers count?

RATIONALE FOR NEW COURSE:

In 1967, the philosopher Philippa Foot triggered what became an enormous discussion in ethics with her development of the infamous trolley problem, in which a runaway trolley will kill five innocent people unless a bystander pulls a lever to divert it to another track, where it will only kill one innocent person, and the question is posed as to what the right decision is: allow the trolley to continue on its way, or divert it. The example has multiple variations that allow important questions to arise about key, morally relevant issues such as the distinction between doing and allowing, foreknowledge, intention, unintended consequences, responsibility, and many others. This course looks at the trolley problem in some detail, but within the context of the more general question of whether and how numbers and aggregations of individuals should count in ethical decision-making. Questions about intrapersonal and interpersonal assessments and comparisons of well-being, and how aggregation should affect these assessments, are key to understanding problems in population ethics as well as climate change. The trolley problem is a powerful magnet for undergraduate students. It instantly attracts attention, puzzlement, and

passionate discussion. PHIL 453: The Ethics of Aggregation will capitalize on this by using important developments in the debate that the trolley problem has generated to motivate and address these larger issues about population ethics and climate change, which arguably are the most pressing issues we face today. We plan to offer PHIL 453: The Ethics of Aggregation every two years and expect it to draw full enrollments from across the campus. It will count towards our Upper Division Certificate in Philosophy, Politics, and Law. We therefore need to have it available as a regular course in the catalog. The course will be taught at the 400-level so that students will have sufficient background in philosophy for engaging with a complex set of issues and debates. The recommended course preparations are our key introductory ethics courses -- PHIL 150: Contemporary Moral Issues, PHIL 152: Introduction to Moral Theory – as well as PHIL 350: Ethical Theory and PHIL 355: Political Philosophy, both of which address questions concerning the ethics of aggregation less fully at the intermediate level as part of survey courses. All these courses will provide solid preparation for PHIL 453, because of their content and also their emphasis on writing. As with all our courses, we want students to have the option of auditing, taking P/F or for a grade.

ATTACH COURSE OUTLINE (mandatory):

See attached syllabus