

MEANINGFUL WORK IN A MEANINGFUL LIFE

Co-taught by teams from the GoodWork® Project (Harvard University) and the Institute for Global Ethics (Camden, Maine)

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- To provide a series of experiences and provocations that will help young people think about what is important and/or meaningful to them as they embark on a life of work
- To identify a series of issues that students will need to reflect upon in order to make work and life as meaningful as possible
- To help students develop a practical “Toolkit” of concepts they can use in the transition from education to work and in work-related decision making

OUTLINE OF SESSIONS

February 8: Session 1: Meaningful Work in Your Past

- What work experiences have been particularly meaningful for you? Why?
- What courses have been particularly meaningful for you? Why?
- What work experiences and courses have not been meaningful? Why not?
- What do you now think are the key attributes of “meaningful work”?
- What can I learn from the conversations with peers and family, work experiences, and internships that I have had so far?

February 15: Session 2: Ethical Dilemmas and Moral Choices

- How do you respond to right-versus-wrong moral temptations?
- What about gray areas?
- How do you respond to right-versus-right ethical dilemmas?
- How are these responses different? Which is more important for leadership and good work?
- What do you now think are the decision-making capabilities you will need—once you are *in* the workplace and while you are *finding* suitable work?
- What is moral courage and what role does it play?

March 1: Session 3: Of Characters, Character, and Pathographies

- Whom do you admire? Who are your heroes, role models, mentors?
- Whom do you not admire? What examples can you cite of individuals (whom you know personally, via the media, through study, or otherwise) who are anti-heroes?

- What constitutes a good mentor? What makes an anti-mentor (or tormentor)?
- What do you now think is the relation of “character” to the characters you most or least admire?

March 8: Session 4: Utopias and Dystopias: Why Would You Want to Work There?

- What for you constitutes an ideal workplace? Based on your own full- or part-time jobs or internships, or on your observations of others (family members, fellow students, community members, media descriptions, movies, TV, books, etc.), what constitutes a good organizational culture?
- What makes a workplace ideal or less than ideal? Why does this question matter?
- What are the values of a good workplace? Why are they important?
- How is the role of symbolic conduct significant in a workplace? Why is it important?
- What do you now think are the capacities you will need in the future to distinguish between functional and dysfunctional workplaces?

March 15: Session 5: Responsibility: What You Owe Others Through Work—and What Work Owes You

- Who is responsible for you? Who has been responsible for you? How did they do?
- To whom or what do you feel responsible? For whom do you feel responsible now, in the near future, and in the distant future?
- How will you prepare for future responsibilities?
- What do you think it means to be a responsible worker, especially in a world where you may be asked for *accountability* without being given *authority*?

April 5: Session 6: The Role of Trust and Trustworthiness

- Whom do you trust and why? What allows you to be trustful?
- Why should you be trusted? What makes you trustworthy?
- What would it mean to inhabit and work in a society or workplace without trust?
- How can trust be lost? How can it be regained? Which is easier, and why?
- What do you think is the relationship between courage and trust, and how can these qualities help you during transformative/crystallizing moments (sometimes in crises) when what we value suddenly comes clear?

April 26: Session 7: Stitching Things Together: Moral Perimeters and the Permeability of Spheres

- If there is a common core of values widely shared around the world, why is there so much global dissension, tension, and animosity?
- If architects and engineers find that balance (in the physical world) often requires stress, is that also true for the human experience? Or does balance reduce stress?
- Is it possible to do excellent, ethical, and meaningful work and still balance your family and community life? If it is, what makes it so?

May 10: Session 8: Preparing Your Own Toolkit

This final session asks students to share with the group their Toolkits, which they have been assembling over the semester. The Toolkit should provide helpful frameworks and concepts to allow students to address two key questions:

- What is necessary for you to achieve meaningful work?
- What is necessary for you to achieve a meaningful life?

In this concluding session, students will work together to extract the elements common to their Toolkits. The result will be a kind of “final report” on their collective work that can be shared with others in the campus community, as well as with students in this course in coming years.