

BACKGROUND

Special topics in Health Policy is an advanced level course offered to students in the BU Prison Education program through Metropolitan College. We offer a variety of ambitious writing assessment methods, which include an ethics paper rubric developed in collaboration with students, peer-to-peer essay review, checklists to evaluate writing skill progression through the semester, and final essay assignments geared towards publication in ethics journals.

The class approaches healthcare policy through the lens of public health ethics. The primary texts for the course are readings from major ethical journals and the book *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* by Michael Sandel, which introduces students to four major ethical theories: Kantianism, utilitarianism, libertarianism and liberalism. Students are assessed throughout the semester on their facility with applying each theory to contemporary public health policies. Our approach to assessment takes into account the unique constraints and opportunities of teaching within a correctional setting; the students do not have access to the internet or visual media (i.e. videos and podcasts).

STUDENT WORK

On utilitarianism

- “In [a capitalist] society, it is generally the citizens with power and privilege who get to decide which pleasures are objectionable; they possess the means to develop systems and institutions which cater to their ideas of happiness... The very notion of neutrality threatens the happiness of those who assume control over such a system.”

On Kantianism

- “To Kant, the moral worth of an action consists not in the consequence of the action, but the intention of it. What matters is the motive. There should not be a law preventing surrogacy or the hiring of surrogates because the motive is parenthood.

On Libertarianism

- “As a libertarian, I firmly believe that if two parties enter into a contract with no coercion and it does not violate individual rights, then the terms of the said contract must be enforced, even in cases of medical surrogacy.”

On Liberalism

- “Dwight Eisenhower was in command of the entire European posting before he became President, and said that no one should be President unless they had served in the military, which falls in line with the liberalism principle or “difference principle” that would prevent a privileged small group from being exempted from service.

On Aristotelianism

- “Aristotle’s teleological conception of justice might support surrogacy. Since babies are the ‘good’ being distributed he would say that the most fertile mothers should have babies, not those who are barren. His counterargument to my claim may be that the virtue of fertility should be honored and the rewards of it should be available to all.”

ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES

PEER REVIEW

- There are multiple opportunities for peer-to-peer review, including one assignment where students will work in triads, and each write a two-page response paper of their two classmates. In this exercise, students will be assessed on the clarity and usefulness of their feedback.
- Our final project for students will be student submission of an ethical paper, op-ed, or letter to the editor of a contemporary ethics journal, and students will be assessed by both peers and faculty on the suitability and quality of their work.

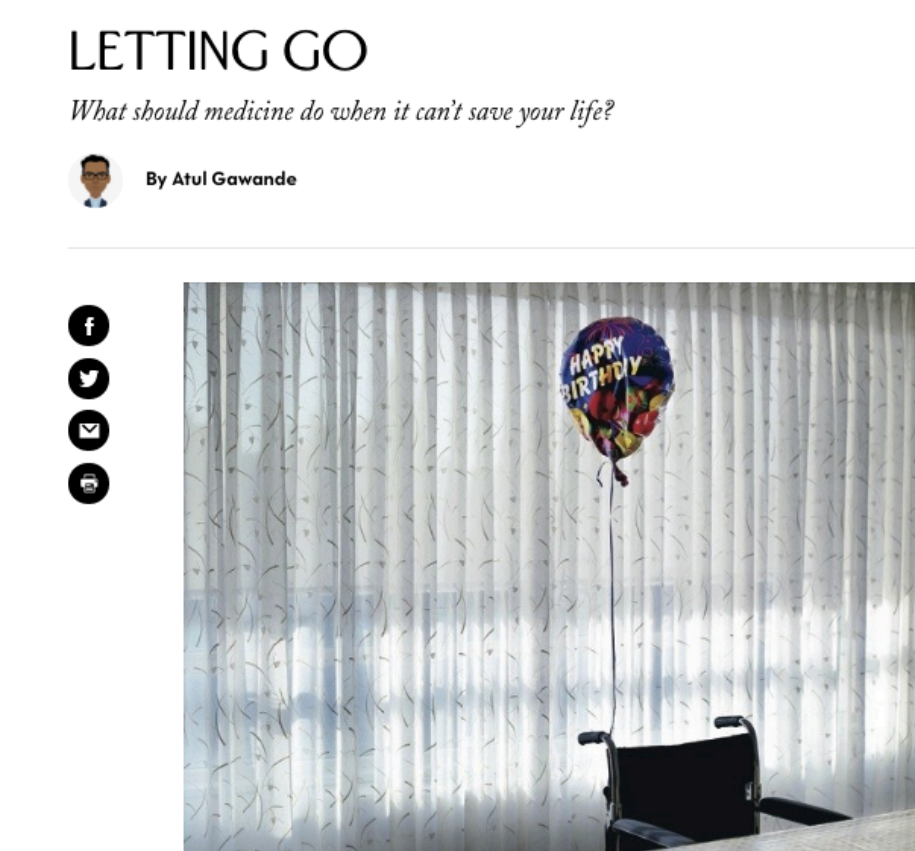
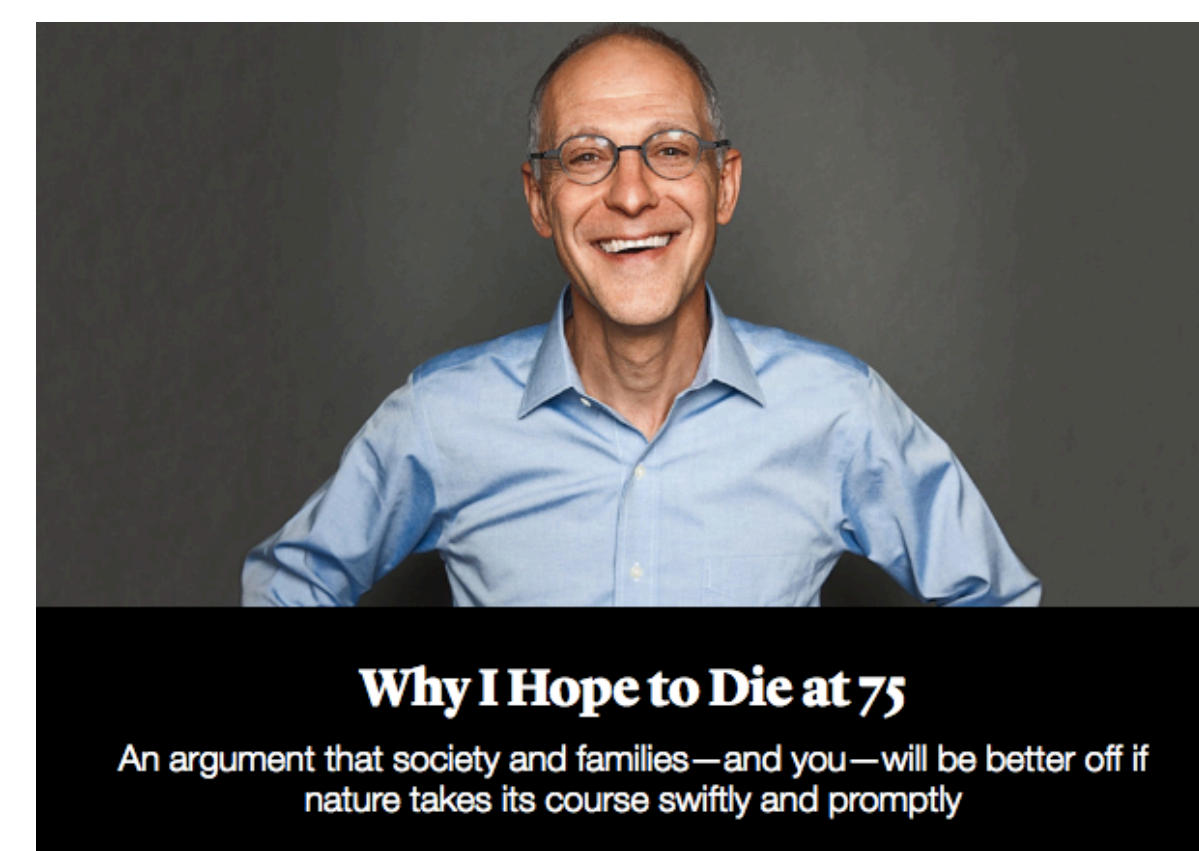
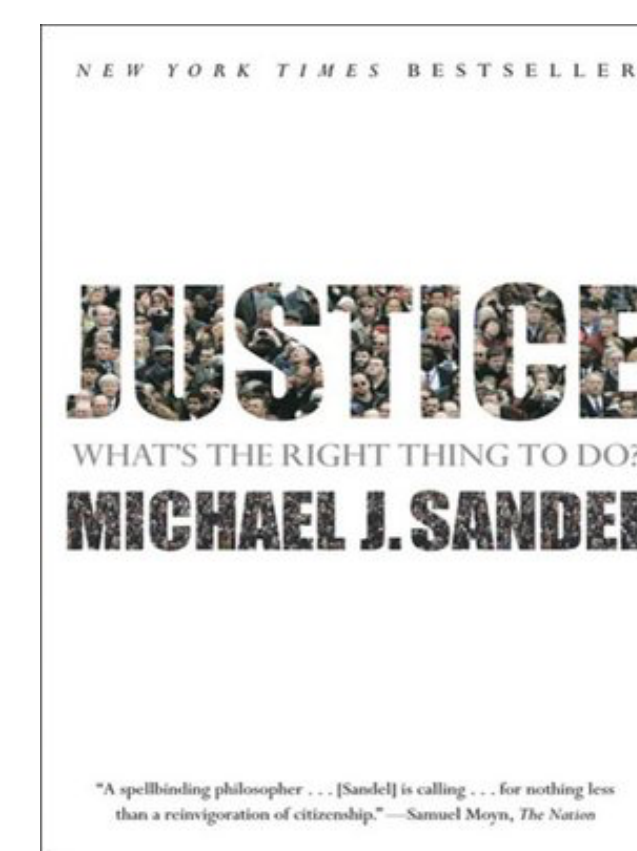
RUBRICS

- During the latter part of the course, students’ will also be given the opportunity to construct their own essay rubrics, an exercise intended to foster creativity, collaboration, and engagement.
- Based off of the success of use of checklists within medical practice, we are piloting an essay checklist as a pre-and post-assessment tool for ethical writing, in addition to the above strategies. The same checklist will be used in the middle and end of the course.

INDIVIDUALIZED FEEDBACK

- We provide each student written feedback on the content of argumentation, as well as a 10-item checklist rating students on topics such as clarity, persuasiveness, breadth of argumentation, and reader engagement.

CURRICULUM



- Our primary text is Michael Sandel’s *Justice*. Other readings include a provocative article by Ezekiel Emmanuel (*Why I Hope to Die at 75*), and an article about end-of-life care by Atul Gawande (*Letting Go*)

Class Topics by Week

- Class 1 – Introduction to Ethics
- Class 2 – Public Health and Personal Liberties (Soda tax)
- Class 3 - Resource allocation (influenza, dialysis)
- Class 4 – Resource allocation (dialysis, hepatitis C, aging)
- Class 5 – Personal responsibility and health (West Virginia Medicaid Case example)
- Class 6 – Medical Surrogacy/Military conscription
- Class 7 – End of life care/Palliative care
- Class 8 – Opioids Crisis and Public Health
- Class 9 – Opioid Crisis and Race
- Class 10 – War on Drugs and Public Health
- Class 11 – Autonomous vehicles
- Class 12/13 – Class Projects

RESULTS

SAMPLE PAPER RUBRIC

ETHICAL REASONING PAPER CHECKLIST

Student Paper: _____

Student Reviewer: _____

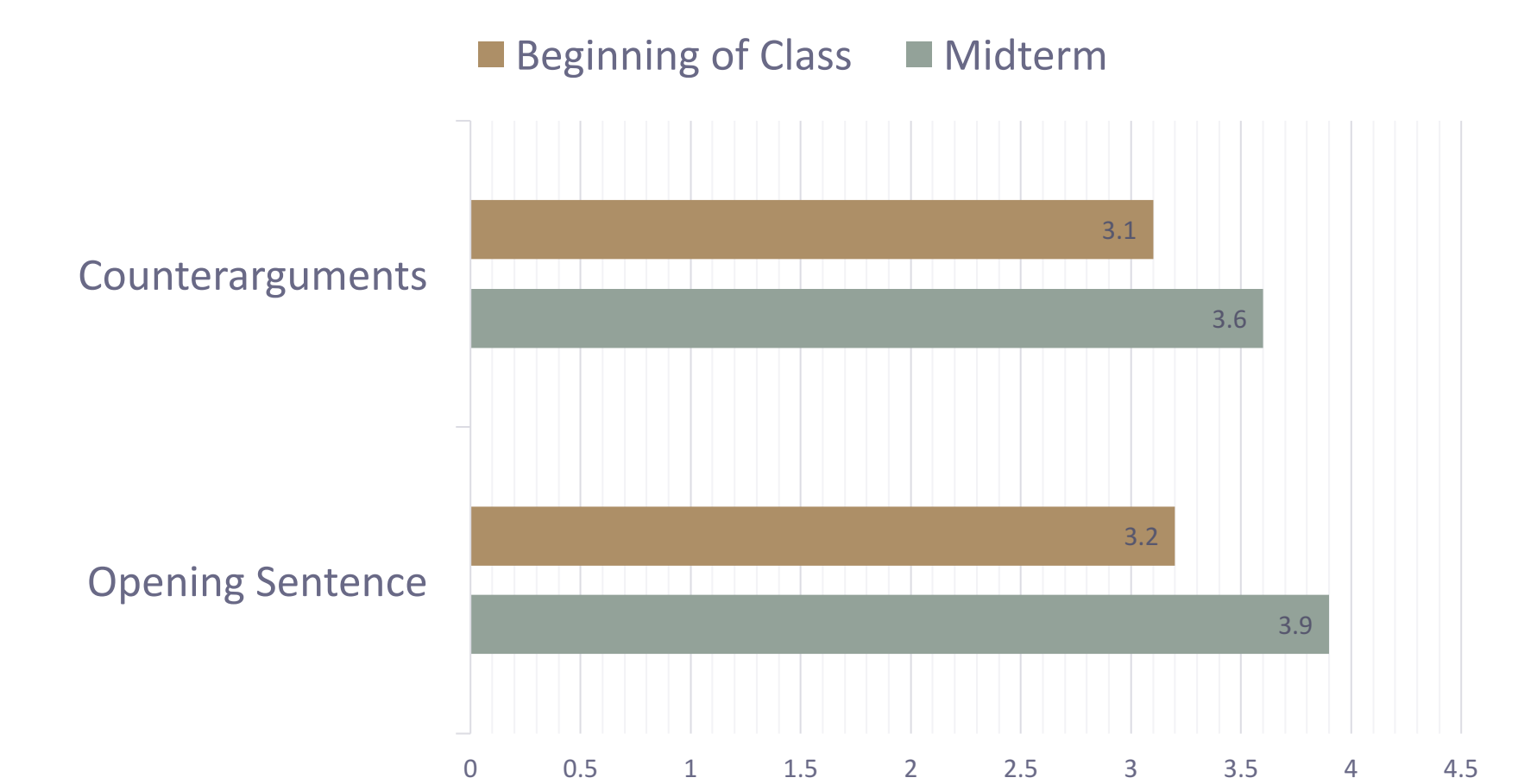
- 1 – Minimally meets the objective
- 2 – Meets most of the objective
- 3 – Meets the objective stated, but does not go above and beyond
- 4 – Exceeds expectations: meets the objective stated, with the utmost clarity and originality

	Student Scoring	Instructor Scoring
Organization		
Opening sentence – Captivates reader with an engaging and informative opening sentence		
Introductory paragraph – Clearly states the ethical issue, how the paper proposes to solve it, and a clear thesis statement		
Paragraph openings – Orients reader to what the paragraph will discuss		
Understanding of ethical theories – References each of the four ethical theories and explains how they apply to the argument		
Counterarguments – Presents counterarguments to the main ethical position, and responds to counterarguments persuasively		
Style		
Grammatically sound		
Uses varied and interesting sentence structures		
Appropriate spelling and punctuation		
Overall appearance of the paper (handwriting, length of paragraphs, use of references)		

Overall Written comments: (Please use the back as well)

- What did the author do well? (Where do you think their argumentation was strongest and why?)
- What could they improve upon? (Where was their argument weakest and why?)
- What questions do you have for them?

Organizational Improvement During Semester



Noteworthy Openings

- “As debates fester with respect to the legality of shared personal property for profit, companies like Uber and Airbnb are challenging legislators’ ideas about the moral implications of unconventional contracts. So is true with the rapidly growing industry of medical surrogacy.”
- “Draft or no draft? Opt out for a fee or no? These are the questions.”

CONCLUSIONS

- The assessment strategies of peer review, rubrics, and individualized feedback has resulted in a high degree of student engagement and formative improvement in essay organization within the semester
- The design of assessments without use of letter grades permits close examination of the content of student argumentation without sacrificing student interest or motivation
- Assessment rubrics can serve as backbone of a continually evolving curriculum to the needs and interests of its students