

PCC 930 : Professional, Legal, and Ethical Issues in Counseling

Schedule: Wednesdays, 6:30 pm–9:30 pm

Modality: Online (mix of synchronous and asynchronous)

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Office Hours: By appointment

Course Summary

This course offers a comprehensive examination of the ethical and legal responsibilities of professional counselors. Grounded in the 2014 American Counseling Association (ACA) Code of Ethics, the course emphasizes ethical decision-making within culturally diverse, relational, and systemic contexts. Students will explore topics such as confidentiality, informed consent, professional boundaries, counselor competence, and the ethical use of technology. Special attention is given to how counselors integrate personal values with professional obligations, navigate complex dilemmas, and promote equity and justice in their work. The course aligns with the 2024 CACREP Standards and prepares students to act with integrity and cultural responsiveness in all areas of professional practice.

Learning Objectives

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

1. Describe the ethical foundations of the counseling profession, including the historical and philosophical bases for ethical standards.
 2. Demonstrate fluency in the ACA Code of Ethics (2014) and apply its principles to real-life counseling situations.
 3. Employ ethical decision-making models in resolving dilemmas related to confidentiality, boundaries, technology, and multicultural dynamics.
 4. Reflect on personal, familial, and cultural influences on ethical reasoning and counselor identity.
 5. Evaluate legal responsibilities across diverse counseling settings, including mandated reporting, duty to warn, and client autonomy.
 6. Analyze emerging ethical challenges related to digital counseling, advocacy, and social justice.
 7. Integrate ethical, legal, and culturally-informed approaches into professional behavior and clinical judgment.
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Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

Aligned with CACREP 2024 Standards: Section 2.F.1 – Professional Counseling Orientation and Ethical Practice

Student Learning Outcome (SLO)	CACREP 2024 Standard	Assignment(s)
SLO 1: Students will identify and interpret the ACA Code of Ethics (2014) and apply its principles to real-world counseling scenarios.	2.F.1.i – Ethical standards and applications in counseling	Assignment 1: Ethics Violation Case Review Assignment 3: Ethical Dilemma Case Presentation
SLO 2: Students will analyze personal and intergenerational ethical influences and how these shape their counselor identity.	2.F.1.l – Professional behavior and self-awareness 2.F.1.e – Multicultural/social justice considerations	Assignment 2: Ethical Genogram Project
SLO 3: Students will apply ethical decision-making models to dilemmas involving boundaries, confidentiality, and diverse cultural or technological contexts.	2.F.1.i – Legal and ethical considerations 2.F.1.j – Technology’s impact on ethical practice	Assignment 1: Ethics Violation Case Review Assignment 3: Ethical Dilemma Case Presentation
SLO 4: Students will construct a comprehensive set of personal practice policies addressing informed consent, use of technology, social media, fees, and cultural responsiveness.	2.F.1.i – Legal and ethical practice 2.F.1.f – Professional organizations 2.F.1.e – Cultural competence	Assignment 4: Ethics-in-Action Plan and Personal Practice Policies
SLO 5: Students will evaluate their attitudes, beliefs, and potential value conflicts related to ethical practice and identify areas for professional growth.	2.F.1.l – Self-awareness and counselor wellness 2.F.1.d – Development of counselor identity	Assignment 5: Inventory of Attitudes and Beliefs & Class Discussion

Required Texts

Cohen, Elliot, D. and Gale Spieler Cohen. **Counseling Ethics for the 21st Century**. Available from: VitalSource Bookshelf, SAGE Publications, Inc. (US), 2018. [978-1506345482 | \$41 rental; \$119 purchase price – Amazon]

Wheeler, Anne, M. and Burt Bertram. **The Counselor and the Law**. Available from: VitalSource Bookshelf, (8th Edition). Wiley Professional Development (P&T), 2019. [978-1556203824 | \$53 ppbk – Amazon]

Herlihy, Barbara, Gerald Corey, and American Counseling Association. 2015. **ACA Ethical Standards Casebook**. Seventh edition. Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association. [9781556203213 | \$35 ppbk – Amazon]

Academic Policies

All students are required to abide by the academic policies detailed in the Academic Handbook for the current academic year. The following policies are of particular importance to the successful completion of one's coursework:

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS

Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary is committed to providing the most accessible learning environment as possible for students with disabilities. Should you anticipate or experience disability-related barriers in the academic setting, please contact the Director of Academic Support and Student Thriving (melanie.baffes@garrett.edu or 847-866-3869) to get started with the established accommodation process. If you are a continuing student who has already established accommodations with Student Access, you should receive a copy of your access letter at the start of the semester when it is emailed to the faculty member of each course you are enrolled in. Please contact your instructors prior to the first class session so the instructor can work with you to implement your disability accommodations. Disability information, including academic accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential under FERPA regulations, so no one other than the access coordinator, Academic Affairs staff, and your professors will see your accommodation letter (2425 Handbook, 13).

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: This course maintains a strict policy on academic integrity to foster an environment of trust, respect, and intellectual honesty. Academic dishonesty undermines not only individual achievement but also the collective academic standards of our community. Violations of this policy may result in a failing grade for the assignment and a notification to the Academic Dean, per institutional guidelines.

Forms of Academic Dishonesty

1. **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism includes the uncredited use of another person's words, ideas, or work, whether from a published source, another student, or unauthorized use of AI-generated content.

Example: Copying sections from a peer-reviewed article or website without proper citation, or presenting AI-generated text as your own without acknowledgment.

2. **Unauthorized Collaboration**

While collaborative learning is encouraged, submitting work that was completed with unapproved assistance or jointly with others as individual work is prohibited.

Example: Working with a classmate on an assignment intended to be completed individually, unless explicitly permitted by the instructor.

3. **Fabrication and Falsification**

Creating or altering data, results, or sources in any form is dishonest.

Example: Inventing sources, fabricating data for an empirical study, or altering quotes to support an argument.

4. **Unauthorized Use of AI Tools**

The use of AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, DALL-E, etc.) is only allowed for specific assignments where explicitly permitted and must be cited appropriately. All AI-generated text, data, or images must be clearly acknowledged as such.

Example: Using an AI program to generate portions of a paper without instructor approval or without citation is considered dishonest.

5. **Multiple Submissions**

Submitting the same or substantially similar work for credit in more than one course without the explicit approval of all instructors involved is prohibited.

Example: Reusing a paper or project previously submitted for another class without notifying the instructor.

Consequences of Violations

Any instance of academic dishonesty will result in a failing grade for the affected assignment. A formal report will also be filed with the Academic Dean, who will take appropriate follow-up actions in accordance with university policy. Repeat offenses may result in further disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal from the program.

It is the responsibility of each student to uphold these standards and seek clarification when uncertain about the integrity of any action or use of resources.

ASSIGNMENTS AND LATE WORK: All assignments should be completed, on deadline and as assigned, in order for a student to pass the course. Late papers and other assignments will be accepted without penalty only in extreme and documented situations, such as a death or serious diagnosis in the family, a lengthy illness, or other emergencies. Please plan ahead so that an acute emergency (e.g., brief illness, computer problems, pastoral emergency) does not interfere with submitting the work on time. Unexcused late assignments will be accepted for one week following the due date with a penalty of 10 percentage points for each day the paper is late.

EXTENSIONS: For Masters students, extensions, if granted, are normally for four weeks following the last day of class in spring and fall semesters or the final due date for coursework for January and summer terms. Extensions may not exceed three months following the end of the term. (2425 Handbook, 21)

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION: Attendance and participation are key to having meaningful and productive class activities and discussions. Because this course emphasizes discussion, students are expected to attend every class and come prepared to discuss the material for the day.

At minimum, “participation” means attending class regularly, being on time, reading the assigned material before class, and being ready to engage in any class activities. Participation will be assessed a variety of ways throughout the semester (but not limited to):

- In-class discussion and activities: You will be assessed on the quality and quantity of your participation in-class activities and discussions.

- Instructor Assessment: Throughout the course of the semester, you will be evaluated on your engagement both in class and through the outside requirements.

COURSE COMMUNICATION: In this course, we are committed to cultivating a respectful and supportive learning environment. This space will allow for meaningful exchanges where each voice is valued, and where diverse perspectives are recognized as sources of enrichment, growth, and understanding. The following commitments guide our interactions, helping to create a constructive and inclusive environment:

- Commitment to Mutual Learning: We are here to learn from one another, embracing the rich insights that each of us brings to the course. Engaging with an open mind, we will listen actively and engage in dialogue rather than debate, ensuring that we hear and consider each other's perspectives.
- Recognition of Diversity: We recognize that each of us has unique social identities, backgrounds, opinions, skills, interests, and values. While differences may sometimes feel challenging, we acknowledge them as integral to a more creative, aware, and empathetic learning environment. We commit to respecting these differences, fostering a culture that values each person's voice and lived experience.
- Respect for Perspectives and Experiences: We will approach each discussion with respect for our varying interpretations, experiences, and viewpoints. In sharing ideas, we will express our thoughts without diminishing the contributions of others, acknowledging that each perspective is part of a broader tapestry of understanding.
- Assumption of Good Intentions: In moments of misunderstanding or disagreement, we will assume that everyone is contributing to the best of their ability. We commit to addressing each other with generosity and to engaging with one another's best selves, recognizing that each of us holds only a partial and evolving view of others.
- Generosity and Discretion: We respect the shared vulnerability that often accompanies academic and personal discussions, especially regarding sensitive matters. Therefore, we commit to exercising discretion and avoiding the sharing of sensitive information outside this space unless we have received direct consent from those involved. Our focus is on fostering a trusting, safe environment where all feel free to engage authentically.

LANGUAGE USE: In all writing and class discussions, use inclusive language and think critically about language use. Particularly, this course affirms people of all gender expressions and gender identities. If you prefer to be called by a different name than what is on the class roster, please let us know. Feel free to correct us on your preferred gender pronouns.

AI Policy

This course uses AI in the following ways:

Not Allowed	Allowed with appropriate acknowledgment	Allowed and no acknowledgement needed
<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Generative AI help with papers (generating topics, ideas, outlines, arguments)· Generative AI help with writing (paraphrasing, summarizing, generating language for assignments)· Editing, polishing, or revising paper drafts· Presentation design· Research· Note-taking	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Language translation· Language assistance for non-native English speakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Generative AI help with reading (summarizing or outlining reading assignments)· Proofreading· Citation generation

You must consult the professor(s) for uses not mentioned above.

To properly cite the use of AI in Chicago/Turabian style, access this link:

<https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/qanda/data/faq/topics/Documentation/faq>

COURSE GRADING:

Assignment		Weight
Participation		10%
Inventory/Reflection		5%
Ethical Genogram	Visual Genogram	10
	Written Reflection	15
Violation Case Review		20%
Group Case Presentation		10
Final: Ethics in Action Plan		30
Total:		100%

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS:

Assignment 1: Self-Inventory and Ethical Insight Discussion

Objective:

To promote self-awareness around ethical sensitivities, personal values, and potential blind spots that may influence counseling practice. Students will complete the **Inventory of Your Attitudes and Beliefs About Ethical Issues** (Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 2023) and reflect on its implications for ethical reasoning and professional development.

Instructions:

1. **Complete the Inventory** titled “*Inventory of Your Attitudes and Beliefs About Ethical Issues*” found ACA Ethical Standards Casebook.
(If your version of the textbook does not include the full inventory, I will provide a PDF version.)
2. After completing the inventory, write a **2–3 page reflection** that addresses the following:
 - Which responses surprised you or felt challenging?
 - Where do your personal beliefs align or diverge from professional expectations?
 - How might your beliefs shape your ethical responses in counseling situations?
 - Identify one area of potential growth or conflict that you want to monitor in your development as a professional counselor.
3. **Come prepared for a class discussion or small group dialogue**, where you will share insights from your reflection in a respectful, confidential environment. You will not be required to disclose your answers—just the **themes or tensions** that emerged for you.

Assignment 2: Ethical Genogram Project

Objective:

To critically examine the familial, cultural, and systemic roots of your ethical worldview and how these might influence professional practice.

Instructions:

Students will create a visual **ethical genogram** and respond to inclusive narrative prompts exploring personal and inherited decision-making frameworks, then analyze how these intersect with professional ethical standards. [See [addendum](#) for more information]

Deliverable: Genogram diagram + 5–7 page reflective paper

CACREP Alignment: 2.F.1.l (Professional behavior), 2.F.1.e (Multicultural issues), 2.F.1.i (Ethical and legal considerations)

Assignment 3: Ethical Dilemma Case Presentation

Objective:

To strengthen ethical decision-making and collaborative dialogue through case-based application of ethical frameworks.

Instructions:

1. In pairs or small groups, develop a **hypothetical ethical dilemma** based on realistic clinical or school counseling scenarios (e.g., dual relationships, telehealth complications, conflicting cultural values).
2. Prepare a **15/20-minute in-class presentation** that:
 - Introduces the dilemma clearly and concisely.
 - Identifies **at least three applicable ACA ethical standards**.
 - Applies **one ethical decision-making model** (e.g., Forester-Miller & Davis).
 - Offers a resolution and justifies it using ethical reasoning and potential cultural considerations.
 - Engages classmates in discussion.

Deliverable: Presentation slides and short written summary

CACREP Alignment: 2.F.1.i (Ethical considerations), 2.F.1.j (Technology), 2.F.1.e (Multicultural awareness)

Assignment 4: Ethics Violation Case Review

Objective:

To analyze a real case of ethical misconduct by a licensed counselor and reflect on professional accountability, ethical standards, and preventative practices.

Instructions:

1. Select one **publicly documented case** of an ethical violation involving a professional counselor (LPC, LMHC, LPCC, etc.) from your **state's licensing board** (or another U.S. jurisdiction if relevant).
2. Write a **4–6 page paper** that includes the following:
 - Summary of the case: nature of the violation, setting, population served, and sanction imposed.
 - Specific **ACA Code of Ethics (2014)** principles that were violated (cite relevant standards).
 - Discussion of the underlying ethical, legal, and relational issues in the case.
 - Reflection on the counselor's possible thought process and decision-making.
 - Your analysis of how the violation could have been prevented.
 - Implications for your future practice.

Deliverable: Chicago/Turabian/APA-formatted paper

CACREP Alignment: 2.F.1.i (Ethical and legal considerations), 2.F.1.f (Professional organizations), 2.F.1.l (Professional behavior)

Assignment 5: Counselor Ethics-in-Action Plan and Personal Practice Policies

Objective:

To integrate your ethical worldview and professional identity into a practical framework for counseling practice. This assignment blends personal reflection with the development of concrete, ethically sound practice policies aligned with the ACA Code of Ethics (2014). You will articulate how you plan to uphold ethical standards across various domains of practice and decision-making.

Instructions:

Part 1: Personal Ethics-in-Action Statement (4–5 pages)

Write a reflective narrative that includes:

- A statement of your core professional values and how they align with the ACA Code of Ethics (2014).
- Exploration of 1–2 areas where you anticipate ethical challenges (e.g., boundaries, dual roles, value conflicts).
- Discussion of how personal, cultural, or familial influences may affect your ethical decisions.
- Your plan for accountability, consultation, self-care, and lifelong ethical growth.
- The role of cultural responsiveness, humility, and social justice in your ethical commitments.

Part 2: Personal Practice Policy Framework (4–5 pages)

Draft a set of written personal practice policies that reflect ethically and legally informed standards in the following areas. Where applicable, cite ACA Code of Ethics sections and/or state regulations.

Include at minimum:

1. Informed Consent
 - What will be included (limits of confidentiality, treatment methods, rights and responsibilities, record keeping, etc.)
2. Use of Technology & Telehealth
 - Platforms used, encryption/privacy standards, emergency protocols, limits to confidentiality
3. Social Media and Digital Boundaries
 - Policies on friend/follow requests, public engagement, responding to reviews or messages
4. Fee Structure & Financial Transparency
 - Sliding scales, missed appointment policies, payment methods, handling of billing
5. Confidentiality and Mandated Reporting

- Policies on disclosures, supervision, consultation, and state-specific mandates
- 6. Cultural and Religious Sensitivity
 - Statement on inclusivity and how culturally competent care will be integrated

7. Professional Boundaries and Dual Relationships

- Examples of situations you might encounter and your approach to navigating them

This framework should be clear, specific, and ready for adaptation into real-world private practice, agency, or ministry-based counseling work.

Deliverable:

One combined document (8–10 pages total), formatted, clearly separated into Parts 1 and 2. References to the ACA Code of Ethics (2014) and any state board laws should be cited as appropriate.

CACREP Alignment:

- 2.F.1.i – Ethical and legal considerations in counseling
- 2.F.1.f – Professional organizations and credentialing
- 2.F.1.l – Professional behavior and self-care
- 2.F.1.e – Advocacy and multicultural/social justice considerations

Date	Session #	Theme/Focus	Readings from Required Texts			Assignment Due
			The Counselor and the Law	Counseling Ethics for the 21st Century	ACA Ethical Standards Casebook	
	1	Introduction to Professional Ethics /Decision-making Models	Part I		· Evolution of the ACA Ethical Standards and the <i>Casebook</i> · Foundations of Codes of Ethics	
	2	The Counselor as a Person and as a Professional	Chapter 2	Chapter 1		Reflection: Inventory of Your Attitudes and Beliefs About Ethical Issues [Casebook]
	3	Values and the Helping Relationship	Chapter 3	Chapter 2	A.4.b;	
	4	Multicultural Perspectives and Diversity Issues		Chapter 10 Chapter 14	A.2.c; A.2.e; B.1.a; B.2.b; B.2.c; C.5	Ethical Genogram Project
	5	Client Rights and Counselor Responsibilities	Chapter 7 Chapter 11	Chapter 3	A.1.a; B.1.b	Case Presentations [?]
	6	Confidentiality: Ethical and Legal Issues	Chapter 5	Chapter 5 Chapter 13	B.1.c; B.1.d; B.2.d; B.2.e;	Case Presentations [?]
	7	Managing Boundaries and Multiple Relationships	Chapter 10	Chapter 9	A.5.a; A.5.b; A.5.c; A.5.d; A.5.e; A.6.a; A.6.b; A.6.c; A.6.d; A.6.e	Case Presentations [?]
	8	Professional Competence and Training	Chapter 4		C.; C.2.a-h; C.4.a-f	Ethical Case Review
	9	Ethical Issues in Supervision	Chapter 12	Chapter 10 *	F.1-F.11.c	Case Presentations [?]

Date	Session #	Theme/Focus	Readings from Required Texts			Assignment Due
			The Counselor and the Law	Counseling Ethics for the 21st Century	ACA Ethical Standards Casebook	
	10	Issues in Theory and Practice	Chapter 6 Chapter 9	Chapter 6 Chapter 8	B.2.a; B.6.a-I; C.3.a-f	Case Presentations [?]
	11	Ethical Issues in Couples and Family Therapy		Chapter 7	A.78; B.4.b; B.5.a-c	
	12	Counseling in Cyberspace	Chapter 8	Chapter 11 Chapter 12	H.1-H.6.d	
	13	Community and Social Justice Perspectives			A.7.a; A.7.b;	Final: Ethics in Action Plan

Genogram Addendum:

Part I: Creating the Ethical Genogram (Visual Component)

Use traditional genogram conventions to chart at least **three generations** (if possible) of your family or chosen kinship structure. Use **color codes, shapes, or symbols** to represent the following:

- **Profession or vocation** (indicate any helping professions)
- **Known moral or ethical dilemmas faced** (e.g., whistleblowing, caregiving, infidelity, civil disobedience)
- **Ethical/religious/spiritual values held** (e.g., integrity, loyalty, compassion, justice, forgiveness, obedience, independence)
- **Patterns of secrecy, silence, or disclosure**
- **Cultural, legal, or religious contexts** influencing decisions

Optional: Include mentors, spiritual leaders, or non-biological figures who shaped your ethical worldview.

Tools: You may use hand-drawing, PowerPoint, Genogram software (e.g., GenoPro), or Canva.

Part II: Reflective Analysis (5–7 Pages)

Respond to the following prompts in narrative form. Use specific examples and integrate insights from your genogram and lived experience:

Ethical Influences and Decision-Making Styles

1. **How did a key parental or caregiving figure in your early life approach difficult moral or ethical decisions?**
Describe their decision-making style in **2–3 descriptive words**.
2. **Describe how another significant caregiving figure approached ethical challenges.**
How did their style compare or contrast with the first figure you mentioned?
3. **Recall a time when someone in your family or community made a difficult ethical or moral decision.**
Who was involved? What was the situation? How did it impact your views?
4. **Can you recall a time when an ethical or moral decision was avoided or deferred when it seemed needed?**
What factors do you believe contributed to that avoidance?
5. **Where do you think the first figure's ethical style came from?**
Were there stories, traditions, or experiences that influenced it?
6. **How about the second figure's decision-making style?**
What cultural, historical, spiritual, or familial factors shaped them?

7. **Were there tensions or disagreements in your family or community about how to approach complex moral issues?**
How were these differences handled? Who tended to have the final say?
 8. **Beyond your family, who shaped your ethical worldview?**
Think of mentors, elders, spiritual leaders, or teachers. What was their influence?
 9. **What cultural, religious, philosophical, or other systems influenced your ethical outlook?**
How did they shape your beliefs, positively and/or negatively?
 10. **Were you ever in a situation during your youth where you challenged a rule or norm?**
What happened? How did those in authority respond? What message did that send?
 11. **In general, how was discipline or accountability handled in your home or community growing up?**
Was it consistent or unpredictable? Harsh or compassionate?
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Facilitation and Synthesis Prompts

1. **What insights have you gained about how your upbringing influences your ethical decision-making today?**
2. **Have these influences changed or evolved over time?**
If so, how?
3. **Given what you've uncovered, what types of ethical dilemmas might be challenging for you to navigate professionally?**
What internal values or inherited narratives might be activated?
4. **What resources—internal or external—can you draw upon to support ethically sound, culturally sensitive decision-making?**
5. **What commitments can you make now to continue growing as an ethically grounded and culturally responsive counselor?**