



Professional, Ethical and Legal Obligations in Nursing: A Critical Appraisal

Nursing 4320

Course Professor:

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N4320 Professional, Ethical, and Legal Obligations in Nursing: A Critical Appraisal

Calendar description:

This course will critically review ethical theories, the legal and ethical aspects of nurses' roles, and nursing's commitment to healthy public policy, social justice, and advocacy.

Expanded description:

This course is organized based on the College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO) Conceptual Framework for Organizing Competencies (CNO, 2014). In this course, learners will critically examine professional practice issues specifically focused on professionalism, nursing regulation, practice standards, ethical and legal aspects of nursing. This course also examines the evolving roles within nursing and addresses professional responsibility and accountability to healthy public policy, social justice, advocacy and patient safety. This course integrates multiple ways of knowing with emphasis on emancipatory knowing.

Course Goals:

1. Examine the leadership and professional culture of the nursing profession
2. Reflect on the historical and contemporary issues and trends in nursing and explore the influence of social, political, and personal power structures in assuming professional roles
3. Develop in-depth understanding of health professional legislation and nursing regulation including professional requirements as outlined in the *CNO Professional Standards & Standards of Practice for Registered Nurses*; *CNO Ethical Values*, and the *CNA Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses*
4. Critically examine selected moral, ethical and legal issues influencing nurses' ability and capacity to provide ethical, safe, knowledge-based quality health care from a health promotion and caring perspective in a variety of settings and contexts, and with a diverse client population across the life span
5. Develop an understanding of the fundamental elements of patient safety and nursing's role in contributing to a culture of patient safety.
6. Engage in learning activities with colleagues that promote debate, collaboration, consultation, cohesion, critical thinking, caring and reflection
7. Incorporate scholarship and critical reflection skills into one's own learning and nursing practice
8. Apply a reflective, inquisitive, self-evaluative, responsible, and accountable attitude and behavior with a commitment to lifelong learning

Major Concepts in the Course:

- Clients
- Health and Healthcare Policy
- Social Justice
- Professionalism: Accountability, Self-regulation
- Ethical Practice
- Communication
- Collaboration
- Relational Practice
- Critical Reflection
- Advocacy
- Social Determinants of Health
- Political Influences
- Patient Safety

Nursing Entry-to-Practice Competencies (CNO, 2020) addressed in the course:

- Clinician – 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.11, 1.15, 1.16, 1.17, 1.18, 1.19, 1.20, 1.23, 1.25
- Professional – 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6
- Communicator – 3.1-3.5
- Collaborator – 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.6, 4.7, 4.8
- Advocate – 5.1-5.6
- Educator – 6.1-6.10
- Leader – 7.1-7.18
- Professional – 8.1-8.7
- Scholar – 9.1-9.3, 9.6-9.8

Interprofessional Competencies (CIHC, 2010) addressed in the course:

- Learners/practitioners understand their own role and the roles of those in other professions, and use this knowledge appropriately to establish and achieve patient/client/family and community goals.
- Learners/practitioners understand the principles of team work dynamics and group/team processes to enable effective interprofessional collaboration.

Nursing Informatics Competencies (CASN, 2012) addressed in the course:

- Use relevant information and knowledge to support the delivery of evidence-informed patient care.
- Use information and communication technologies in accordance with professional and regulatory standards and workplace policies.
- Use information and communication technologies in the delivery of patient/client care.

How this course will contribute to your development as a professional nurse:

This course provides opportunities to explore nursing as a profession, including professional rights and responsibilities, as well as legal and ethical parameters. The course promotes the learners' understanding of the purpose and function of professional nursing regulatory organizations and associations, particularly in relation to ethical and legal elements of professional practice and the maintenance and improvement of the standards of care. Knowledge of course concepts is integrated through interactive learning activities, including analysis of case studies, among other learning strategies. These learning activities are designed to engage learners in critical reflection of professionalization, professionalism, and the professional practice of nursing. Opportunities will be provided for learners to reflect on their professional growth as beginning practitioners and to share their own nursing practice experiences with others.

How this course will contribute to your development as an interprofessional team member:

This course will provide students with insights as to how nurses enact their professional, legal and ethical obligations within an interprofessional environment. Learners will explore how professional standards guide their interactions with other members of the interprofessional team.

How we will work together:

In this hy-flex course, learning and teaching are a shared responsibility. The instructor's role is to guide, facilitate and support learning. As a learner, it is expected that you will be prepared to actively engage in the course material while grounded in reflective and critical thought. The course and accompanying learning activities are designed to foster discussion, debate, and critical examination of concepts relevant to professional, legal, and ethical aspects of nursing practice. Weekly presence and visits in the course site are expected since messages and updates are posted by the course instructor regularly. Group work will facilitate learning, and your active participation will support collaboration and sharing knowledge together.

Textbooks and other resources:**Required:**

Keatings, M., & Adams, P. (2024). *Ethical and legal issues in Canadian nursing* (5th ed.). Elsevier Inc.

Recommended:

American Psychological Association. (2019). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th ed.). <https://doi.org/10.1037/0000165-000>

Weekly Schedule

Weeks begin on Mondays at 8:00 am and end on Sundays and at 11:55 pm.

Week/ Starts	Topic	Course Goals
1 Jan 9	Course Overview: Professionalism, Regulation and the profession	1, 2
2 Jan 16	Continuing competence and lifelong learning – CNO Quality Assurance program. ONLINE ONLY	3, 6, 7, 8
3 Jan 23	Ethical Practice - Theories, frameworks, principles, moral distress/moral residue, code of ethics	4
4 Jan 30	The Legal Context for Practice: - Malpractice - Torts - Negligence - Vicarious liability	
5 Feb 6	Legislation - Consent - Substitute decision-maker Confidentiality and privacy	3, 6, 7
6 Feb 13	MIDTERM	3,6,7
Feb 20	Winter Reading Week	
7 Feb 27	Patient Safety - Culture of safety - Excellent Care for All Act - Disclosure of Harm ONLINE ONLY	3, 4, 5, 6, 7
8 March 6	Ontario regulated health professions legislative framework – Part I: Regulation, Scope of practice, Standards, Fitness to Practice	3, 6, 7
9 March 13	Ontario regulated health professions legislative framework – Part II: Working with others - Refusing assignments and discontinuing services - Disagreeing with the plan of care - Working with unregulated care providers - Interprofessional collaboration	1
10 March 20	Establishing, maintaining, and navigating boundaries in the therapeutic relationship: - Therapeutic boundaries - Sexual/physical/emotional abuse of clients	3, 6, 7
11 March 27	Issues in the workplace: Incivility, violence, abuse Caregiver right	6,7
12 April 3	New Graduate Nurse Transition: Jurisprudence and NCLEX processes ONLINE ONLY	All

Opportunities to Demonstrate Learning

1. Quality Assurance Learning Plan – 10%

Due: January 30, 2026 at 11:55 pm (*You can begin working on this assignment as soon as the term starts. If you are in placement, it is encouraged that you plan ahead to ensure you can complete this assignment on time.*)

The purposes of this assignment are for you to familiarize yourself with the process of meeting the Quality Assurance requirements for the College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO) by engaging in self-reflection and identifying ways to become a lifelong learner.

Process:

- You will reflect on a situation from your clinical practice that provides an opportunity for growth and development.
- Using the template found on Brightspace, you will complete each section to reflect on your experiences, strengths, and opportunities for professional development.
- Based on your reflection, you will identify two (2) learning goals using the SMART goal format, will identify three (3) learning activities for each goal, and will reflect on the experience of creating a learning plan.
- Completion of the independent study and readings in week 2 will assist you in completing this work.
- Submit the assignment electronically to the assignment tool in the course site – your paper must be in MS Word format on the template provided, using 12 font and single spaced. **Title page and reference list are not required.**
- The file extension for an uploaded assignment must include the student's surname, initial and name of assignment e.g. ClarkJ_Quality Assurance Plan

Criteria for evaluation:

A marking rubric is available on the course site.

2. Midterm Exam – 20%

Date: Feb 13, 2026 @ 0930

- Content will cover all course material (including readings) from weeks 1-5. The midterm will be held in our assigned classroom during class time.

3. Patient Safety Essentials – eLearning course - 5%

Due: Certificate of completion to be uploaded by April 9, 2026 (no late submissions will be accepted). (*this training is introduced in week 8 but can be completed at any time during the term.*)

Process:

- Visit the following site and enroll in the course.
https://www.healthcareexcellence.ca/en/what-we-do/all-programs/patient-safety-essentials/?_gl=1*_1dczs94*_gcl_au*MjEzOTk1MjI5NS4xNzU2OTE2MjUz
- Complete the training and download your certificate.

- Upload your certificate of completion to the assignments tab on Brightspace no later than the deadline above.

4. Group Case Study Assignment – 30%

Due: March 20, 2026 at 11:55 PM

This assignment will be completed in groups of six (6). The case study assignment can be started **any time after week 3** (ethical practice content), and *it is recommended that you work with other students in your placement block for ease of collaboration.*

The purposes of this assignment are for you to explore, critically analyze, and respond to a current ethical and legal issue facing the profession in today's health care context. This assignment will reflect your ability to work as a group and to apply course theory and concepts to professional nursing practice. Case scenarios, marking rubric and assignment template will be available on the course Brightspace site.

Process:

- Choose **ONE** of the case scenarios provided on the course Brightspace site and use the template provided
- Following the template, summarize the case chosen and one (1) possible course of action
- Complete the analysis of the case by considering the chosen course of action from a theoretical perspective, taking into account the values of the individuals, ethical principles involved and appropriate practice standards/guidelines from the College of Nurses of Ontario
- Describe an alternative course of action and why it was not chosen by the group.
- Reflect on how the process of completing this case analysis will inform your nursing practice in the future
- Use of at least six evidence-informed scholarly articles and other sources of knowledge to justify your analysis
- One student of the group will submit the assignment electronically to the assignment tool in the course site – your paper must be in MS Word format on the template provided
- The file extension for an uploaded assignment must include all students' surname, initial and name of assignment e.g. ClarkJLeeM...Group Case study

Criteria for evaluation:

A marking rubric is available on the course site. APA formatting is required for all references, including a reference list.

5. Final Exam - 35%

Date: During University Final Exam Period

The final exam will be based on course content and will focus on application of learning to situations one might find in practice. The exam will be administered in person at a time to be determined during the final exam period.

Summary of Opportunities to Demonstrate Learning

OPPORTUNITIES TO DEMONSTRATE LEARNING	VALUE	DUE DATE
1. Quality Assurance Learning Plan	10%	Jan 30, 2026 at 11:55 pm
2. Patient Safety Essentials - elearning	5%	April 9, 2026 at 4:00 pm
3. Midterm Exam	20%	Feb 13, 2026 at 9:30 am
4. Group Case Study Assignment	30%	March 20, 2026 at 11:55 pm
5. Final Exam	35%	During University Final Exam Period

Policies

All policies related to assignments are in the Undergraduate BScN Programs Manual on the [Undergraduate Student Information site](#) .

Assignments and Exams

Please refer to the Undergraduate BScN Programs Manual for UWO academic guidelines for penalties for late assignments, re-grading of assignments, and the protocol for missed mid-term or final exams. The Undergraduate BScN Programs Manual is found at [School of Nursing Policies](#)

Support Services

There are various support services around campus and these include, but are not limited to:

1. Academic Support and Engagement - <http://academicsupport.uwo.ca>
2. Wellness and Well-being - <https://www.uwo.ca/health/>
3. Registrar's Office -- <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca/>
4. Ombuds Office -- <http://www.uwo.ca/ombuds/>

The websites for Registrarial Services (<http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>), and the same for affiliated university colleges when appropriate, and any appropriate Student Support Services (including the services provided by the USC listed here: <http://westernusc.ca/services/>) and the Student Development Services, should be provided for easy access.

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western (<https://www.uwo.ca/health/>) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Statement on Gender-Based and Sexual Violence

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you have experienced sexual or gender-based violence (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at:

https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html.

Student Code of Conduct

The purpose of the Code of Student Conduct is to define the general standard of conduct expected of students registered at Western University, provide examples of behaviour that constitutes a breach of this standard of conduct, provide examples of sanctions that may be imposed and set out the disciplinary procedures that the University will follow. For more information, visit <https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/board/code.pdf>

Attendance

Students are expected to demonstrate professional responsibility through regular attendance at, and participation in, all course learning activities. Much of the learning that takes place is a result of preparation and engagement with the material, as well as active dialogue with colleagues and faculty. Students are expected to organize their schedules such that weekly preparation for class is completed, and classes are attended, with consistency.

Attendance for clinical learning experiences is mandatory. Students missing more than 2 labs, **regardless of the reason**, will be given an unsuccessful course outcome. Students **will not** receive a written warning of their absences. The student will be notified of an unsuccessful course outcome by the course coordinator following the third absence from lab. Please visit the SON SharePoint site for further information about this and other school policies:

[Undergraduate Program Site](#)

Absence from Course Commitments

Students must familiarize themselves with the Policy on [Academic Consideration – Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs](#)

Students missing course work for medical, compassionate, or extenuating circumstances can request academic consideration by completing a request at the central academic consideration portal. Students are permitted one academic consideration request per course per term **without** supporting documentation. Note that supporting documentation is **always** required for academic consideration requests for examinations scheduled by the office of the registrar (e.g., December

and April exams) and for practical laboratory and performance tests (typically scheduled during the last week of the term).

Students should also note that the instructor may **designate** one assessment per course per term that requires supporting documentation. This designated assessment is described elsewhere in this document. Academic consideration requests may be denied when flexibility in assessment has already been included. Examples of flexibility in assessment include when there are assessments not required for calculation of the final grade (e.g. 8 out of 10 quizzes), when there is flexibility in the submission timeframe (e.g. 72 hour no late penalty period), or when timed assessments (e.g., quizzes) are available over an extended period of time (e.g., when you are given a 72 hour time period to start – and finish – the assessment).

Please note that any academic considerations granted in this course will be determined by the instructor of this course, in consultation with the academic advisors in your Faculty of Registration, in accordance with information presented in this course syllabus. Supporting documentation for academic considerations for absences due to illness should use the [Student Medical Certificate](#) or, where that is not possible, equivalent documentation by a health care practitioner.

Accommodation for Religious Holidays

Students should review the policy for [Accommodation for Religious Holidays](#). Where a student will be unable to write examinations and term tests due to a conflicting religious holiday, they should inform their instructors as soon as possible but not later than two weeks prior to writing the examination/term test. In the case of conflict with a midterm test, students should inform their instructor as soon as possible but not later than one week prior to the midterm.

Special Examinations

A Special Examination is any examination other than the regular examination, and it may be offered only with the permission of the Dean of the Faculty in which the student is registered, in consultation with the instructor and Department Chair. Permission to write a Special Examination may be given on the basis of compassionate or medical grounds with appropriate supporting documents. To provide an opportunity for students to recover from the circumstances resulting in a Special Examination, the University has implemented Special Examination dates. The Faculty of Health Sciences has set School-specific dates for these Special Examinations. Please speak with your instructor about the date on which the Special Examination for this course will be held.

Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following website: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_under_grad.pdf.

Plagiarism

Student work is expected to be original. Plagiarism is a serious academic offence and could lead to a zero on the assignment in question, a zero in this course, or your expulsion from the university. You are plagiarizing if you insert a phrase, sentence or paragraph taken directly from another author without acknowledging that the work belongs to him/her. Similarly, you are plagiarizing if you paraphrase or summarize another author's ideas without acknowledging that the ideas belong to someone else. All papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between Western University and Turnitin.com (www.turnitin.com).

Use of Artificial Intelligence for the Completion of Course Work

Within this course, you may only use artificial intelligence tools (e.g., "ChatGPT") in ways that are specifically authorized by the course instructor. All submitted work must reflect your own thoughts and independent written work.

Re-submission of Previously Graded Material

Without the explicit written permission of the instructor, you may not submit any academic work for which credit has been obtained previously, or for which credit is being sought, in another course or program of study in the University or elsewhere.

Use of Statistical Pattern Recognition on Multiple Choice Exams

Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

Accessibility Statement

Please contact the course instructor if you require material in an alternate format or if you require any other arrangements to make this course more accessible to you. You may also wish to contact Accessible Education (AE) at 661-2111 x 82147 for any specific question regarding an accommodation or review [The policy on Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#)

Correspondence Statement

The centrally administered e-mail account provided to students will be considered the individual's official university e-mail address. It is the responsibility of the account holder to ensure that e-mail received from the University at their official university address is attended to in a timely manner. Students are further expected to attend to announcements presented through Brightspace, and to read emails generated in this way.

Use of Electronic Devices

During Exams

Unless you have medical accommodations that require you to do so, or explicit permission from the instructor of the course, you may not use any electronic devices (e.g., cell phones, tablets, cameras, smart glass, smart watches, or iPods) during ANY tests, quizzes, midterms, examinations, or other in-class evaluations. **These devices MUST either be left at home or with your belongings at the front of the room. They MUST NOT be at your test/exam desk or in your pocket. Any student found with a prohibited device will receive an automatic grade of zero on the test or exam.**

During Lectures and Tutorials

Although you are welcome to use a computer during lecture and tutorial periods, you are expected to use the computer for scholastic purposes only, and refrain from engaging in any activities that may distract other students from learning. From time to time, your professor may ask the class to turn off all computers, to facilitate learning or discussion of the material presented in a particular class.

Brightspace

All course material will be posted to OWL Brightspace: <https://westernu.brightspace.com/>. If students need assistance with OWL Brightspace, they can seek support on the [OWL Brightspace Help](#) page. Alternatively, they can contact the [Western Technology Services Helpdesk](#) online or by phone at 519-661-3800 or ext. 83800 for technical support. Current versions of all popular browsers (e.g., Safari, Chrome, Edge, Firefox) are supported with OWL Brightspace; what is most important is that you update your browser frequently to ensure it is current. All JavaScript and cookies should be enabled.

Copyright and Audio/Video Recording Statement

Course material produced by faculty is copyrighted and to reproduce this material for any purposes other than your own educational use contravenes Canadian Copyright Laws. Unless explicitly noted otherwise, you may not make audio or video recordings of lectures – nor may you edit, re-use, distribute, or re-broadcast any of the material posted to the course website.

Contingency Plan for an In-Person Class Pivoting to 100% Online Learning

In the event of a situation that requires this course to pivot to online content delivery, all remaining course content will be delivered entirely online, either synchronously (i.e., at the times indicated in the timetable) or asynchronously (e.g., posted on Brightspace for students to view at their convenience). The grading scheme will **not** change. Any remaining assessments will also be conducted online as determined by the course instructor

Note that disruptive behaviour of any type during online classes, including inappropriate use of the chat function, is unacceptable. Students found guilty of Zoom-bombing a class or of other serious online offenses may be subject to disciplinary measures under the Code of Student Conduct.

Online Proctoring

Tests and examinations in this course may be conducted using a remote proctoring service. By taking this course, you are consenting to the use of this software and acknowledge that you will be required to provide **personal information** (including some biometric data) and the session will be **recorded**. Completion of this course will require you to have a reliable internet connection and a device that meets the technical requirements for this service. More information about this remote proctoring service, including technical requirements, is available on Western's Remote Proctoring website at: <https://remoteproctoring.uwo.ca>.

Social Media

Students who post information on social media related to their any examinations will be reported to the Associate Dean of Health Sciences as this demonstrates a breach of client privacy and confidentiality and violates the Student Code of Conduct. Such behavior may compromise a student's standing in the program.

Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that Western University is located on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak and Attawandaron peoples, on lands connected with the London Township and Sombra Treaties of 1796 and the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum. With this, we respect the longstanding relationships that Indigenous Nations have to this land, as they are the original caretakers. We acknowledge historical and ongoing injustices that Indigenous Peoples (e.g. First Nations, Métis and Inuit) endure in Canada. We accept that as Registered Nurses and an employees of a public institution, we have the responsibility to contribute toward revealing and correcting miseducation as well as renewing respectful relationships with Indigenous communities through our teaching, research and community service.