



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

Nursing 4320

Fall 2026

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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 by the CNO and CNA.
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 blended 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.

Where to get it: Westen Bookstore

<https://bookstore.uwo.ca/textbooksearch?campus=UWO&term=W2026A&courses%5B0%5D=200 UW/NUR4320A>

Cost: \$88.75 (hard copy) \$71.00 (e-book)

Recommended:

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

Weekly Schedule

Content will be released the Friday before each tutorial

Week/ Tutorial	Topic	Course Goals
1 Sept 15	Course Overview: Professionalism, Regulation and the profession	1, 2
2 Sept 22	Continuing competence and lifelong learning – CNO Quality Assurance program.	3, 6, 7, 8
3 Sept 29	Ethical Practice - Theories, frameworks, principles, moral distress/moral residue, code of ethics	4
4 Oct 6	The Legal Context for Practice: - Malpractice - Torts - Negligence - Vicarious liability	4, 5
Oct 13	Fall Reading Week	
5 Oct 20	Legislation - Consent - Substitute decision-maker - Confidentiality and privacy	3, 6, 7
6 Oct 27	MIDTERM	3,6,7
7 Nov 3	Patient Safety - Culture of safety - Excellent Care for All Act - Disclosure of Harm Online only – no tutorial this week	3, 4, 5, 6, 7
8 Nov 10	Ontario regulated health professions legislative framework – Part I: Regulation, Scope of practice, Standards, Fitness to Practice	3, 6, 7
9 Nov 17	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 Nov 24	Establishing, maintaining, and navigating boundaries in the therapeutic relationship: - Therapeutic boundaries - Sexual/physical/emotional abuse of clients	3, 6, 7
11 Dec 1	Issues in the workplace: Incivility, violence, abuse Caregiver rights	6,7
12 Dec 8	New Graduate Nurse Transition: Jurisprudence and NCLEX processes Online only – no tutorial this week	All

Opportunities to Demonstrate Learning

1. Quality Assurance Learning Plan – 10%

Due: October 9, 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.

Deadline Considerations

You are expected to submit this assignment by the deadline listed. Should extenuating circumstances arise, you are permitted to submit your assignment up to 72 hours past the deadline without a late penalty. No Academic Consideration is required for this extension. Students submitting their assessment beyond the extended deadline will receive a penalty of **5% per day** that it is late past the **original deadline**. Academic Consideration requests may be granted only for extenuating circumstances that **began before** the original deadline and **lasted longer** than the extension. Students must not provide medical or compassionate documentation to the instructor and instead must submit in the Student Absence Portal.

2. Midterm Exam – 20%

Date: TBD

Content will cover all course material (including readings) from weeks 1-6.

- Location TBD

Please note that supporting documentation is required if you seek academic consideration for the midterm assessment. Students who are unable to attend the scheduled make-up examination will not be granted an additional sitting. In such cases, the midterm examination will be reweighted to the final examination.

3. Patient Safety Essentials – eLearning course - 5%

Due: Certificate of completion to be uploaded by December 8, 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: November 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.

Deadline Considerations

You are expected to submit this assignment by the deadline listed. Should extenuating circumstances arise, you are permitted to submit your assignment up to 72 hours past the deadline without a late penalty. No Academic Consideration is required for this extension. Students submitting their assessment beyond the extended deadline will receive a penalty of **5% per day** that it is late past the **original deadline**. Academic Consideration requests may be granted only for extenuating circumstances that **began before** the original deadline and **lasted longer** than the extension. Students must not provide medical or compassionate documentation to the instructor and instead must submit in the Student Absence Portal.

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 at a time and location 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%	October 9, 2026 at 11:55 pm
2. Patient Safety Essentials - elearning	5%	December 8, 2026 at 11:55 pm
3. Midterm Exam	20%	October 27, 2026 at 11:30 am
4. Group Case Study Assignment	30%	November 20, 2026 at 11:55 pm
5. Final Exam	35%	During University Final Exam Period

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 tutorials are attended, with consistency.

Scholarly Requirements

In this program, scholarly writing is a requirement. Therefore, all scholarly papers will follow the seventh edition of the Publication manual of the American Psychological Association (2020), which includes guidelines for both content and format. In addition, all other writing will follow APA (7th ed.) format when citing or referring to an author's work or ideas. Failure to do so is unethical and considered plagiarism.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Within this course, students are permitted to use AI tools exclusively for information gathering and preliminary research purposes. These tools are intended to enhance the learning experience by providing access to diverse information sources. However, it is essential that students critically evaluate the obtained information, exercise independent thinking, and engage in original research to synthesize and develop their own ideas, arguments, and perspectives. The use of AI tools can serve as a starting point for exploration, with students expected to uphold academic integrity by appropriately attributing all sources and avoiding plagiarism. Assignments and/or lab reports should reflect the student's own thoughts and independent written work. By adhering to these guidelines, students contribute to a responsible and ethical learning environment that promotes critical thinking, independent inquiry and allows them to produce original written contributions.

Policies

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

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, in the [Academic Calendar \(westerncalendar.uwo.ca\)](#).

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).

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.

Academic Considerations and Absences from Lectures and Assessments

Religious Accommodation

When a course requirement conflicts with a religious holiday that requires an absence from the University or prohibits certain activities, students should request (in writing) any necessary academic considerations at least two weeks prior to the holiday to the academic counsellors in their Home Department. Additional information is provided in the [Western Multicultural Calendar](#).

Academic Accommodation

Please contact the course instructor if you require lecture or printed material in an alternate format or if any other arrangements can make this course more accessible to you. Students with ongoing accommodation needs within this course are also encouraged to contact [Accessible Education](#), which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The policy on Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities can be found [here](#).

Academic Consideration

The University recognizes that a student's ability to meet their academic responsibilities may, on occasion, be impaired by extenuating circumstances that are medical or compassionate in nature. These extenuating circumstances may be acute (short term), or it may be chronic (long term), or chronic with acute episodes. In all cases, students are advised to consult with the academic counsellors in their home units, at their earliest opportunity. Academic counsellors may refer students to [Accessible Education](#) for ongoing academic accommodations.

Most forms of academic consideration require documentation, and this documentation is to be submitted to academic counsellors within five (5) business days of their return to academic responsibilities. Any such documents will be retained in the student's file, and will be held in confidence in accordance with the University's [Official Student Record Information Privacy Policy](#). Once the petition and supporting documents have been received and assessed, appropriate academic considerations shall be determined by academic counseling, in consultation with the student's instructor(s). Academic considerations may include extension of deadlines, waiver of attendance requirements for classes/labs/tutorials, arranging Special Exams or Incompletes, re-weighting course requirements, or granting late withdrawals without academic penalty. Academic considerations shall be granted only where the documentation indicates that the onset, duration and severity of the illness are such that the student could not reasonably be expected to complete their academic responsibilities. (Note – it will not be sufficient to provide documentation indicating simply that the student “was seen for a medical reason” or “was ill.”).

Whenever possible, students who require academic considerations should provide notification and documentation in advance of due dates, examinations, etc. Under no circumstances are students expected to submit rationales for (or documentation of) any absences, to course instructors. Students are, however, required to follow-up with course instructors, in a timely fashion, to identify the ways in which the academic consideration will be implemented.

Examination Conflicts

A student completing tests or examinations with flexible submission times (e.g., where one or more evaluation is a take-home assessment) cannot request alternative arrangements unless a conflict cannot be avoided by rescheduling writing the exam to a different time within the window specified by the instructor. This applies to direct conflicts as well as “heavy load” conflicts (e.g., three exams within a 23-hour period). The student should discuss any concerns

about a potential conflict and/or request academic considerations with their academic counselling unit prior to the deadline to drop a course without academic penalty

In the case of online tests and examinations, use of a “Conflict Room,” wherein student can write two proctored exams concurrently, will be interpreted as arrangements for continuous proctoring.

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

If there is an event 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

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](#)

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 be referred for investigation of a Scholastic Offence, per the policy listed above. The typical first-offence penalty for possession of a prohibited device is zero on the test or exam.

Any student found with a prohibited device will be referred to the Director of the Arthur Labatt Family School of Nursing for a Scholastic Offence, with the recommendation that they receive a grade of zero on this assessment.

You **MAY NOT** use any electronic devices (e.g., calculators, cell phones, tablets, cameras, smart glass, smart watches, or iPods) during this exam. These devices **MUST** be left with your belongings at the front of the room. They **MUST NOT** be at your test/exam desk or in your pocket.

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.

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.

Mental Health

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to [Wellness at Western](#) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Land acknowledgement

We acknowledge that Western University is located on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee and the Lūnaapéewak, on lands connected with the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum between the Anishinaabeg and Haudenosaunee and the London Township and Sombra Treaties of 1796.

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 (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) endure in Canada, and we accept responsibility as a public institution to contribute toward revealing and correcting miseducation as well as renewing respectful relationships with Indigenous communities through our teaching, research and community service.