



Detailed Course Syllabus

Academic Year		Semester	
Study Program	Nursing	Specialization/ Major in	Summer
		Year of Study	1

I. BASIC COURSE INFORMATION

Name of the course:

The Ethics of Vulnerability: Challenges in Healthcare and Beyond

Aim:

The aim is to introduce students to the concept of human vulnerability, particularly in nursing and healthcare contexts, focusing on the accompanying bioethical challenges of diminished autonomy and increased psychosocial complexity of patients.

Content:

The course will examine vulnerability from an interdisciplinary perspective, highlighting its relevance in clinical, relational and societal contexts as a central category in contemporary bioethics. Students will consider the ethical implications of vulnerability at an individual level, in their interactions with patients and within broader socio-cultural and healthcare structures. Particular focus will be given to the role of dialogue in nursing ethics in responding to human vulnerability, as well as to ethical issues related to conditions that exacerbate or diminish human fragility and dependency.

Abbreviation	IZBP287	Code	293947
Status	elective	ECTS	4

Prerequisites

Total Course Workload

Teaching Mode	Total Hours	Teaching Mode	Total Hours
Lectures	30	Seminars	15

Class Time and Place CUC according to the published timetable

II. TEACHING STAFF

Course Holder

Name and Surname	Martina Vuk Grgic		
Academic Degree	PhD, STD.	Professional Title	doc.dr.sc
Contact E-mail	martina.vuk@unicath.hr	Telephone	0041767605212

Office Hours	According to published timetable	Office Outlook Teams
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III. DETAILED COURSE INFORMATION

Teaching Language English

Course Description	<p>This course examines vulnerability as both a lived experience and a socio-ethical construct, shaped by institutional practices and cultural norms. It introduces a taxonomy of vulnerability—distinguishing between inherent (ontological) and pathogenic (structural or situational) forms—and explores their implications for nursing ethics and practice.</p> <p>The course critically engages with the risks of neglecting or instrumentalizing vulnerability in clinical settings, highlighting the ethical consequences for both patients and healthcare professionals.</p> <p>Through the lens of nursing, students will analyze and challenge paternalistic models of care, engaging with alternative frameworks rooted in relational autonomy, human dignity, and ethical responsibility. Ultimately, vulnerability will be explored not only as a condition of care but as a core ethical principle in nursing.</p>
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Expected Educational Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain the multidimensional nature of vulnerability and how it manifests in healthcare contexts • Distinguish between the concept of vulnerability and its lived experience, including its potential positive dimensions (e.g. relational openness and ethical responsiveness) and negative dimensions (e.g. marginalization, manipulation). • Apply ethically sound approaches to addressing the specific needs of more than vulnerable patients • Analyze the impact of healthcare interventions on individual vulnerability, including healthcare workers and people with intellectual and developmental challenges • Evaluate care outcomes with a focus on maintaining the dignity, autonomy and quality of life of nurses and patients
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Textbooks and Materials

Required	<p>Angel S, Vatne S. Vulnerability in patients and nurses and the mutual vulnerability in the patient–nurse relationship. <i>J Clin Nurs</i>. 2017;26(9–10):1428–37.</p> <p>Hurst SA. Vulnerability in research and health care: describing the elephant in the room? <i>Bioethics</i>. 2008 May;22(4):191–202. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8519.2008.00631.x. PMID: 18405317.</p>
Supplementary	<p>Seidlein AH, Kuhn E. When nurses' vulnerability challenges their moral integrity: A discursive paper. <i>J Adv Nurs</i>. 2023 Oct;79(10):3727–3736. doi: 10.1111/jan.15717. Epub 2023 May 26. PMID: 37232274.</p>

Examination and Grading

To Be Passed	Exclusively Continuous Assessment	Included in Average Grade
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Prerequisites to Obtain Signature and Take Final Exam	Course Attendance Seminars Presentations
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Examination Manner	Written Exam + Seminars
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Grading Manner**Detailed Overview of Grading within ECTS**

ACTIVITY TYPE	ECTS Student Workload Coefficient	GRADE PERCENTAGE (%)
Class Attendance	2	0
Seminar Presentation	0,2	10%
Midterm Exam	0,2	10%
Midterm Exam	0,2	10%
Total in Class		30%
Final Exam	1,4	70%
TOTAL ECTS (Classes + Final Exam)	4,0	100%

Midterm Exam Dates	Midterm Exam 1: ; Midterm Exam 2:
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Final Exam Dates	According to published timetable
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IV. WEEKLY CLASS SCHEDULE

Week	Topic
1.	Conceptual Foundations of Vulnerability On the threshold of the notion – the systematic review of the meaning of vulnerability. Vulnerability as a challenge to contemporary bioethics
2.	Vulnerability in Health Care Contexts Vulnerability in health care. Misconceptions and abuses of vulnerability in health care and beyond – an interdisciplinary approach
3.	Vulnerability in Nursing Practice and the Nurse–Patient Relationship Vulnerability in nursing care: Nurse–Patient relationship Encounters with more than vulnerable patients (mental illness, disability, dementia)
4.	Personal and Professional Experiences of Vulnerability Encounters with personal vulnerability in the working space. Vulnerability as strength vs vulnerability as weakness
5.	Caring for one’s Vulnerability: Approaches and Techniques Taking care of one's own vulnerability – an interdisciplinary approach
6.	Ethical Perspectives on Vulnerability Vulnerability as a new ethical principle

Seminars

Week	Topic
1.	Vulnerability and Society – Perspectives from Health and Nursing Care. Understanding Vulnerability: Interdisciplinary Approaches. Vulnerability within Health and Social Care Systems. Nursing Care and the Dynamics of the Nurse–Patient Relationship. Vulnerability in Nursing Care: The Nurse–Patient Relationship Encounters with More Than Vulnerable Patients (Mental Illness, Disability, Dementia). The Lived Experience of Vulnerability in Clinical Practice. Human Dignity, Compassion and Professional Vulnerability. Education of Healthcare Professionals and Society on the Challenges of Vulnerability
2.	The Ethical Dimensions of Vulnerability – Reframing Responsibility and Power in Nursing and beyond. Vulnerability as an Ethical Principle in Health Care and Nursing. Ethical Challenges in the Misuse and Misinterpretation of Vulnerability. Moral Tensions in Professional Practice: Strength, Exposure, and Responsibility. Encounters with Personal Vulnerability. Nurses, Families and Individuals Facing Greater Vulnerability