UNCC300 MODULE 4:
CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES TO HUMAN DIGNITY

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MODULE 4: CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES TO HUMAN DIGNITY

In this module, we will be working towards the achievement of:

Learning Outcome 1: demonstrate a reflective, critical awareness of personal identity and values; and

Learning Outcome 3: investigate and evaluate a topic or issue in which the dignity of the human person is a critical factor; and

Learning Outcome 4: identify and assess how commitment to the dignity of the human person may be part of his or her personal and professional understanding and practice now and in the future; and

Graduate Attribute 1: demonstrate respect for the dignity of each individual and for human diversity (which you will do through the content of the module);

Graduate Attribute 4: think critically and reflectively (which you will do through the skills processes involved in completing the activities);

Graduate Attribute 7: work autonomously and collaboratively (which you will do through the skills processes involved in completing the activities); and

Graduate Attribute 8: locate, organize, analyse, synthesise and evaluate information (which you will do through the skills processes involved in completing the activities).

WARNING
Topics considered in UNCC LEO materials and in class discussions may be disturbing for some students.

If you are affected, please contact your Campus Leader and or the University Counselling Service.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are advised that this site may include voices or images of people who have passed away. It may also contain links to sites that may use images of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people now deceased.
4.1 PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL CHALLENGES

Much of the material in these final stages of the unit requires you to think reflectively. Go to the resources for Graduate Attribute 4 and download the “Thinking Reflectively” tools.

Work through them to develop your skills.

As we note in those resources, in reflective thinking, we look at the whole picture with its network of relationships (informational, the natural world and human):

- You and your biases/perspectives
- The content, the skills
- Other colleagues, and their biases and assumptions
- Your context, the specific job, and client/ customer/ patient/ student
- What actually happened in this mix?
- Are/were you satisfied with the outcome of an event/situation?

When you undertake the activities that focus on personal and professional challenges, try to keep in mind that it is the capacity to undertake reflective thinking that is being developed. Try to avoid the mindset that reflective thinking is not for practical people who live in the “real” world. Developing a sophisticated capacity for reflective thinking is actually crucial to your future success: in your personal and professional relationships, in the daily activities undertaken in the course of your employment, and in your wider engagement with society.
4.1.1 HUMAN DIGNITY IN THE ACU MISSION

ACTIVITY 4.1.1

In UNCC100, students were asked to consider the ACU Mission statement in light of the common good. Here, we ask you to read the statement and analyse the way in which human dignity is presented, understood and embodied in the mission of ACU.

Consider the following questions and make a note of your responses:

1. What understanding of human dignity might be seen to underpin the mission of ACU?
2. What social influences, traditions, and mores have led to ACU arriving at such an articulation of human dignity?
3. How does this understanding of human dignity affect the engagement of the institution with broader society, and the programs it sponsors?

To help you answer this third question, follow the links provided here:

- The Core – The Strengths of Clemente
- The Core – Building Capacities in Baucau
- The Core – Emancipation and Empowerment
- The Core – Soccer Game that's Streets Ahead

In what ways do these programs embody a respect for human dignity and promote the dignity of all human beings?
4.1.2 HUMAN DIGNITY IN PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

As you have seen throughout this unit, the idea of human dignity has relevance in a number of contexts and disciplines. The following videos explore the importance of respecting human dignity in various fields.

All videos have captioning as an accessibility option. Please see home page in the Accessibility section for turning on captions.

Mr. Duncan MacLaren, Lecturer in and Coordinator of the ACU Refugee program on the Thai-Burma border, discusses the importance of respecting human dignity in the context of working in international aid and development.

Ms Cynthia Dowell, Executive Director of Surgical and Specialist services and Chief Nursing Officer, St Vincent’s Hospital, Melbourne, discusses the importance of human dignity in the nursing profession.

Mr. Martin Nally, Managing Director, hranywhere, discusses the values which are prized by employers in the business community and among large corporations.

Professor Michelle Campbell, Executive Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences here at ACU, stresses the importance of human dignity in all occupations in the health sector.

ACTIVITY 4.2.2

After watching the videos linked above, think about your chosen profession (or a profession in which you would like to be engaged) and note your responses to the following questions:

1. What understanding of human dignity underpins professional practice in that chosen field? Are there contested understandings of human dignity by professionals in that field?
2. What social influences, traditions, and mores have led to such an articulation of human dignity in that field? What difference might being a graduate of Australian Catholic University make when considering those social influences, traditions, and mores?
3. How does the understanding of human dignity by professionals in that field affect the moral behaviour of those working in the field?
### 4.1.3 YOUR PERSONAL UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN DIGNITY

Throughout this unit, you have been asked to analyse in depth the use of the term, “human dignity.” We have seen that there are a number of bases for understanding human dignity, and that there can be conflict between them. This may lead to an impasse when considering ethical issues. It has been argued in this unit that only a robust understanding of human dignity - one that is multidimensional, in the same way that humans are multi-dimensional - is adequate to enable us to face ethical issues in a way that is not reductive.

#### ACTIVITY 4.1.3

**Print the two PDF sheets:** My Personal Approach to Human Dignity (Before) (available in [PDF](#) and [Word](#)) and My Personal Approach to Human Dignity (After) (available in [PDF](#) and [Word](#)).

1. **Before you began this unit, what was your own understanding of human dignity?**
   a. Which quadrant/s do you think best represents this understanding? Using the "My Personal Approach to Human Dignity (Before)“ sheet, jot some thoughts, words or phrases in those quadrants which best express how you thought of human dignity before and explain why your understanding fitted there. Note: you may find that your understanding fits mostly within one quadrant, but touches on areas of the others. Try to represent this in the diagram.
   b. What social influences, traditions and/or mores, do you think led you to arrive at this understanding of human dignity?
   c. What problems, if any, can you now recognise in terms of your understanding of human dignity at the beginning of this unit? How does this understanding fit with that which is espoused in your chosen (or desired) profession?

2. Has your understanding of human dignity changed as a result of this unit? In what way? Using the "My Personal Approach to Human Dignity (After)“ sheet, repeat this activity for your new understanding of human dignity and explain why your understanding fits there. Note: you may find that your understanding fits mostly within one quadrant, but touches on areas of the others. Try to represent this in a diagram.

3. Consider, again, the social influences, traditions, and mores that led to your understanding of human dignity at the beginning of the unit. Do you think these influences need to be called into question, in light of an understanding of human dignity as multidimensional? Do these social influences, traditions, mores, promote human life and flourishing, or do they debase human life and human dignity, thus defined?

4. How does your new understanding of human dignity relate to that of your chosen profession? How do you think this new understanding will assist you, or challenge you further in your future professional practice?
4.1.4 APPLYING YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN DIGNITY

Note: This activity will be useful practice for your assessment.

Now that you have articulated your understandings of human dignity, consider how you would apply this to a range of scenarios. This activity is designed to help you to do just that. As you work through each of the scenarios, consider the following questions:

1. How might a person respond if they approached the issue from an understanding of human dignity based in only one quadrant each time?
2. Now try to articulate a response for each case, which recognises the multidimensionality of human dignity.
3. Now think about your own understanding of human dignity, as discussed above, in Activity 4.2.3:
   - How might the scenario have posed a challenge to your understanding of human dignity prior to undertaking this unit?
   - Do you believe your own understanding of human dignity has shifted as a result of this unit? If so, how might your new understanding of human dignity better equip you to face this challenge?

ACTIVITY 4.1.4

A personal challenge (all students to complete):
Channel 7’s Today Tonight ran a story on Nov 16, 2011 that reported the indifference of Australian people towards those in need. As you watch the video (or read the transcript), consider whether an understanding of human dignity is evident in the actions of the people that the celebrities encounter.

1. How might a person respond if they approached the issue from an understanding of human dignity based singularly in each of the quadrants?
2. Try to articulate a response for each case, which recognises the multidimensionality of human dignity. (To help you with this, you may wish to refer to Activity 3.2.3).
3. Then, think about your own understanding of human dignity, as discussed above, in Activity 4.2.3:
   - How might the scenario have posed a challenge to your understanding of human dignity prior to undertaking this unit?
   - Do you believe your own understanding of human dignity has shifted as a result of this unit? If so, how might your new understanding of human dignity better equip you to face the personal and professional challenges that may arise?

A professional challenge (select one of interest from the links below):

1. International Development
2. Nursing
3. Law
4. Midwifery
5. Education
6. Paramedicine
7. Exercise Science
4.2 CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES: CASE STUDIES

There are two case studies provided in this module to help you apply the knowledge you have learned in the unit. While you will focus on one for your assessment, you will need to work through both at this stage for your class or testing preparation.

As you read each case study, consider the following questions:

1. Why do you think human dignity is a critical factor in this case?
2. What are the various perspectives in play and who holds these perspectives?
   a. What understanding of human dignity appears to be at work in each perspective?
   b. Which quadrant or quadrants best reflect the understanding of human dignity in each perspective?
   c. What are some of the social attitudes, mores, or circumstances that might have led to the different perspectives in this case?
   d. What role do you think the social attitudes, mores and circumstances play in the justification of each perspective?
3. When considering human dignity as multidimensional, what aspects of human dignity could be jeopardised by actions arising out of the perspectives described above?

Be sure to check you unit outline for all assessment requirements.
4.2.1 CASE STUDY 1 - **HUMAN DIGNITY AND GENDER SELECTION**

This case study explores whether or not parents should be allowed to choose the sex of their child by technological means, particularly for non-medical reasons, such as family balancing. Some proponents argue that parents should be afforded this right, and that such decision would be an expression of the parents' autonomy as dignified human beings. Others argue that gender selection treats babies as commodities, thus failing to recognise their inherent dignity as human beings. They say that deciding the sex of a child only reinforces sexism, gender stereotypes and gender imbalances in society.

![The popular symbols used to identify female and male gender.](Public Domain) via [Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Gender_symbols)
4.2.2 CASE STUDY 2 - HUMAN DIGNITY AND CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

In 2015, the executions of Andrew Chan and Myuran Sukumaran sparked renewed debate about the use of the death penalty for serious crimes. The concept of human dignity is at the core of this debate, and many arguments, both for and against the death penalty, are grounded in particular understandings of human dignity. Where does human dignity lie? Does it lie in human life itself, or in the capacity for people to make their own decisions and accept the consequences that follow? Does it lie in the condemned person’s potential to change their sense of who they are and make amends, or does it lie in society’s judgement of the past actions? These and other questions are explored in this case study.

View this case study online or Download the PDF version
4.3 ASSESSMENT TASK 2

The graduate attributes and assessment task 2: how do they work together?

At a number of points in this unit, you have been referred to the Australian Catholic University Graduate Attributes, and have been encouraged to use the resources provided to enhance your skills in particular areas. Several of these skills will be utilised, and some explicitly tested, along with learning outcome 3.

**Graduate Attribute 1: demonstrate respect for the dignity of each individual and for human diversity**

It would be hard to imagine that you have come this far in UNCC300 without being required to consider what it means to demonstrate respect for the dignity of each individual, and without being forced to recognise that human diversity requires that you take a variety of perspectives into account when thinking about human dignity.

As to whether you can demonstrate this respect—you can show, in the way that you write and express yourself more generally, whether or not you are taking the dignity of each individual and the fact of human diversity into account. No amount of formal learning can guarantee that you will be a person who respects dignity and diversity, but rehearsing these attitudes can help you to become someone who does.

As the famous writer (and author of the Narnia stories for children), C.S. Lewis, observes: "very often the only way to get a quality in reality is to start behaving as if you had it already." 1

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1 C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity (Glasgow: Collins, 1942; Fount Paperbacks, 1977) 158.
GRADUATE ATTRIBUTE 4: THINK CRITICALLY AND REFLECTIVELY

In the thinking critically resource for Graduate Attribute 4, you were invited to develop skills in “reading various types of material critically, so that you can assess its likely accuracy, reliability and possible biases.” Throughout the unit, you have been analysing different texts to try to uncover how various writers understand and argue for different concepts of human dignity.

In your Assessment, you will be using arguments from key articles as the foundation of your response. How confident are you that you can read these articles critically (that is, with insight, not with antagonism!)? Return to the resources for Graduate Attribute 4 to check that you are able to assess “the reliability, accuracy and purpose of the articles.” If you are required to submit a major project, look closely at the rubric for Assessment Task 2: highlight those criteria that require you to show evidence of your capacity to think critically.

While Graduate Attribute 4 is also about thinking reflectively, we have rehearsed much of that type of thinking in the activities on personal and professional challenges.
GRADUATE ATTRIBUTE 7: WORK AUTONOMOUSLY AND COLLABORATIVELY

Graduate Attribute 7 develops the ability to work collaboratively. The classroom activities of the face-to-face delivery modes of UNCC300 quite deliberately require students to work collaboratively.

The other part of Graduate Attribute 7 is the capacity to work autonomously.

You were introduced to the skills related to working autonomously in the resources for Graduate Attribute 7:

Skills related to working autonomously

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Able to</th>
<th>Skill</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>complete</td>
<td>work without supervision or guidance but maintain communication with your supervisor regarding progress;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>set &amp; keep to</td>
<td>clear goals and timeline plans;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be</td>
<td>personally responsible for task completion;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>manage</td>
<td>personal work-time and multitask by moving between tasks to move forwards on all stages of tasks;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communicate</td>
<td>with all stakeholders;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>evaluate</td>
<td>plans and tasks to ensure quality completion: reflect on your personal effectiveness and the progress of tasks;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be</td>
<td>flexible to accommodate organisational changes, limitations or new stakeholder requirements;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>problem solve</td>
<td>as part of evaluating your work to either rectify and/or modify; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>determine &amp; lever age</td>
<td>organisational skills/specialised skill resources required for task/project completion, particularly when problem-solving requires skills you do not possess.</td>
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UNCC300 is usually undertaken by students towards the end of their courses, who are close to going out into the workforce. Your capacity to work autonomously in your assessment preparation and production will reflect:

- the sort of value you accord to your education;
- the values you will uphold when you enter more fully the world of work; and
- the sort of person you are and aspire to be.
Assessment in this unit is really testing your capacity to utilise the many sub-skills involved in Graduate Attribute 8.

- At the most basic levels, 1 and 2 from the above diagram, can you locate facts and arguments within the resources you have been given for your final assessment preparation? Can you track down further, appropriate materials that will help you to understand and interpret those resources?
- At level 3, can you analyse the arguments in the perspectives, and fully synthesise these in new contexts? Synthesis is a necessary prior process to being able to apply the evaluative questions of the next level.
- At the highest level, level 4, can you evaluate the arguments that various writers put forward—are they valid?—why or why not? Are you able to recognise your own cultural, social, intellectual and affective biases, step back, and see the big picture? Can you critique the “the social influences, traditions, and mores” that lead to various understandings of human dignity?