UNIVERSITY of OTAGO
Te Whare Wānanga o Otāgo
NEW ZEALAND

Bioethics
Matatika Koiora

"Currently, I assist in carrying out clinical neurological research, relating to the brain and spinal column. My bioethics background has enabled me to identify ethical issues in this research, consider the implications, and address these in the ethical approval process, to ensure that this research is ethically sound."

Alexandria D'Emden
Bachelor of Science (Neuroscience), Postgraduate Diploma in Health Sciences (Bioethics), studying for a Master of Health Sciences (Bioethics)

Shape the future of healthcare and bioscience

Science, technology and healthcare are hugely powerful tools that bring ethical and legal challenges and opportunities. Bioethics explores the current and future impacts of the biosciences and healthcare on people and society, animals and the environment. It determines the right way for us to respond to these as individuals, professionals and a society. You will learn to identify and think through these complex bioethical issues from a range of perspectives, equipping you with the knowledge and skills to make a greater contribution to your community, workplace, and beyond.

With the great power of healthcare and science comes great responsibility. With bioethics, you will gain the expertise to respond to the most pressing issues of our time.

0800 80 80 98 | otago.ac.nz | university@otago.ac.nz

Why study Bioethics?

Is ending life part of medicine?

When should personal freedom be limited in order to benefit others?

How should gene editing be used and regulated?

What do biological scientists owe to their research subjects and society?

Should all reproductive decisions be the choice of the individual?

These are some of the ethical questions that arise within medicine and the life sciences. They need to be considered thoroughly and conclusions about them can change science and medicine. This is the domain of bioethics.

Bioethical reasoning is used to focus discussion; suggest new avenues for progress in healthcare, bioscience, law, and policy; and expose flawed thinking.

The ability to identify ethical issues and use reason to evaluate, discuss and argue about them is a valuable skill. If you are seeking a future in healthcare or the life sciences, these skills increase the value you can contribute to the profession.

The growing awareness that good practice in medicine and bioscience is informed by an understanding of its ethical implications means that studying bioethics strengthens any qualification. Bioethics graduates may use their knowledge to distinguish themselves among graduates in the sciences, medicine, and other disciplines.

Background required

Undergraduate Bioethics papers do not require specific prior learning. Students come from a range of backgrounds including law, philosophy, medicine, the life or health sciences, religious studies, social sciences, and psychology. The transferability of many skills gained in Bioethics suits this breadth of students. It means that students may apply the skills learnt to their original field of study and enrich it further or take it in new directions.

Career opportunities

Bioethics graduates work in areas such as health governance, healthcare, science and environmental policy development, health advocacy, regulation and review of research, health, and environmental law. There are many jobs and careers to which Bioethics graduates are particularly suited. These include academic research in bioethics, teaching at all levels, and bioethics-related work in science, healthcare, and law.

Bioethics at Otago

Bioethics is available as a minor for a BCom, BA, MusB, BPA, BTheol, BSc, BAppSc, BHealSc, BACom, BASc or BComSc degree. It is the only one of its kind in New Zealand. Completing five papers earns you a minor in Bioethics.

Students can look into all the main fields of Bioethics or focus on fields of particular interest. The wide choice of relevant humanities papers includes Anthropology; Bioethics; Christian Thought and History; Classical Studies; History; Indigenous Development / He Kura Matanui; Law; Media, Film and Communication; Philosophy; and Politics.

Several papers focus on mātauranga Māori in relation to research ethics, animal ethics and environmental philosophy. Other papers examine cross-cultural ethics in a global and local context.

Teaching style

The Bioethics Centre promotes a supportive and rigorous learning environment. Papers are taught via lectures and tutorials where engagement and debate is welcome, along with independent study.

The Bioethics Centre hosts a biennial bioethics conference, and weekly seminars during the semester featuring local, national, and international speakers.

Bioethics research at Otago

The research at the Bioethics Centre aims to examine the conventional and novel moral dilemmas arising from medical research, clinical settings, and advances brought about by life sciences and biotechnologies. Members of staff undertake research in a wide range of fields including:

- Animal ethics
- Clinical bioethics
- Cross-cultural bioethics
- Environmental ethics
- Genetics and ethics
- Neuroethics
- Paediatric ethics
- Public health ethics
- Psychiatric / mental health ethics
- Reproductive ethics
- Sports medicine ethics

Bioethics is multidisciplinary, so aligns well with other subject areas and interdisciplinary collaboration

Postgraduate opportunities

There are many postgraduate degrees and diplomas offered, including a Certificate of Proficiency, Graduate and Postgraduate Diplomas, the Master of Health Sciences (endorsed in Bioethics), the Master of Bioethics and Health Law (MBHL), and the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Bioethics.

Most masters' students complete a dissertation or thesis, and coursework. Postgraduate students may be yet to start their careers, or can come from a range of professional backgrounds and include healthcare professionals, law graduates, and those with policy roles.

For questions about
Bioethics
otago.ac.nz/bioethics

PROFILE

Alexandria D'Emden

Bachelor of Science (Neuroscience), Postgraduate Diploma in Health Sciences (Bioethics), studying for a Master of Health Sciences (Bioethics)

"I majored in Neuroscience for my BSci. In one of the first-year papers I took, we had four neuroethics lectures. In these lectures, our class was introduced to the ethics of stem cell research, frontal lobe injury and discussed turning off life support in cases where a patient was in a persistent vegetative state. Each of these one-hour lectures only felt as if it was five minutes long. I found them so interesting that I decided to take as many Bioethics papers as I could for my elective papers.

"I enjoyed that the entire class was encouraged to participate in discussion. We were able to give our opinion and listen to the opinion of others. I learned to structure and think through my own opinions, and listen to others to inform my own view. Topics that I found interesting included stem cell research, euthanasia, the patient-doctor relationship, and whistleblowing in science.

"Currently, I assist in carrying out clinical neurological research, relating to the brain and spinal column. My bioethics background has enabled me to identify ethical issues in this research, consider the implications, and address these in the ethical approval process, to ensure that this research is ethically sound. I also work directly with patients in the hospital, where my clinical bioethics knowledge is applicable every day, helping to empower patients and protect their rights."