

## UCI Ethics Center 2026 | Module Design

**Mentor:** Gabriella Colello, Ph.D. Candidate in Political Science (IR/Political Theory)

**Proposed Module Title:** The Ethics of Nuclear Risk and Responsibility

### Module Description

At the center of this module is a core ethical question that also guides my dissertation research: What do states owe to those who bear the greatest risks from nuclear weapons, and who gets to decide what counts as “acceptable” harm? The debate surrounding the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) makes this dilemma vivid. Many Global South states supported the treaty because they viewed nuclear policies as producing both severe material harm and significant ethical failures, especially environmental destruction and gendered and intergenerational health effects. These harms were never consented to and received little recognition from nuclear-armed states. In contrast, states relying on nuclear deterrence reject the TPNW by appealing to a different ethical claim that maintaining nuclear arsenals *protects* their own populations and upholds international stability.

Students will explore how each side justifies its position ethically: *What counts as legitimate security? Whose lives are prioritized? How do concepts like consent, responsibility, reparative justice, global equality, and moral injury shape the arguments for and against the treaty?* The aim is to help students understand not only *what* states argue, but the deeper ethical commitments and tradeoffs embedded in those positions and how those commitments shape real decisions with long-term human consequences.

### Research Focus

Students will examine short public materials (e.g., testimony, statements, reports) to see how different groups explain nuclear harm and who they think should bear responsibility. We will work together to uncover the ethical ideas behind these arguments and relate them to concepts like justice, care, and fairness. The goal is to help students practice forming strong questions, evaluating evidence, and applying ethical reasoning to real-world problems.

### Student Involvement

Students will participate in:

- identifying and collecting relevant documents
- synthesizing material into short research memos
- discussing ethical frameworks and their application to real cases
- preparing a brief collaborative presentation for the program’s final session (optional but encouraged)

The pace will be guided by the group’s interests and comfort level. The goal is to model how ethical inquiry and empirical research can be done together through shared investigation and guided, hands-on practice.