

COURSE AIMS AND OUTCOMES

The aim of the course is to train bioethics and medical law experts who will display skill and proficiency in the fields of bioethics & health law. The course aims to develop capacity and excellence in the ethical & legal analysis of issues arising in health care and research. Graduates will be able to apply their knowledge to the evaluation and management of bioethical and medico-legal problems and to propose solutions that are ethically acceptable and within the constraints of the law.

COURSE STRUCTURE

The curriculum comprises two parts. Part 1, the coursework component, entails the successful completion of 5 taught units. Part 2 consists of a written research report of at least 15 000, but no longer than 20 000 words in length. Part 1 constitutes 50% of the degree and Part 2 the remaining 50%.

The curriculum extends over two years of part-time study. Students complete the following four units in their first year: Foundations of Bioethics, Foundations of Health Law, Advanced Health Ethics and Advanced Research Ethics. In their second year, they complete the Research Methods unit and Research Report.

Successful completion of the units and the written Research Report will lead to the degree of Master of Science in Medicine in the field of Bioethics and Health Law.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE UNITS (Part 1)

The units are taught in block release form. The block release for each unit is 5 days, with the exception of Foundations of Bioethics. Assessment will take the form of a combination of formal, on-site examination and some take-home assignments which must be submitted by the specified submission due dates. On-site exams will be scheduled during the teaching blocks.

Foundations of Bioethics

This unit is designed to enable you to analyse and evaluate issues in bioethics within the context of a solid ethical framework. Major theoretical, non-theoretical and other ways of viewing the world will be taught. The course intends to provide a foundational understanding of the relationship between concepts, logic & argumentation and fallacies of reasoning.

Foundations of Health Law

This unit will cover sources of South African law, the Constitution, statutory and common law in the context of health. Criminal, civil and family law and their interaction with health will be explored. The National Health Act will be discussed as well as the amendments to the Medicines & Related Substances Act. International law in relation to health is included in this unit.

Advanced Health Ethics

This unit addresses a number of important issues in bioethics and health law critically and in depth. Three to four important issues will be focussed on each year relating to ethical and medico-legal issues in clinical contexts, reproductive health, policy and public health, resource allocation, genetics, health and human rights, environmental bioethics and others. Students will learn how to apply the ethical theories, ethical and legal principles, and their critical

and analytical skills learnt in the foundations units to specific ethical and medico-legal questions.

Advanced Research Ethics

This unit introduces and explains a number of topical ethical issues in research ethics, including what constitutes unethical research, standards of care in a study, authorship guidelines and plagiarism. The role and modus operandi of Research Ethics Committees are outlined. Finally, clearly articulated standards of good clinical practice in research relevant to local realities and contexts are provided. These include obtaining valid informed consent, considering specific subgroups, standards of care for trial participants, access to study medications following completion of a clinical trial, issues pertaining to incentives affecting researchers and participants, releasing and publishing research results and the implementation of research findings.

Research Methods (2nd year)

This course will provide students with rigorous training in independently designing, implementing and evaluating research. It will describe the nature of research in bioethics and health law, the kinds of possible projects, appropriate research questions and the methods used. The course aims to instil in students a commitment to ethical research. The course will prepare them to produce a research proposal suitable to their project, and ultimately a research report.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH REPORT (Part 2) (2nd year)

Students apply what has been taught in the research methods course, as well as the other units in the programme, and carry out a supervised research study on an approved topic. This research project may be either essentially normative and legal in nature (defending a thesis), or consist of an in-depth critical, descriptive analysis of ethical issues related to a topic.

Admission Requirements:

Any of the following may be admitted as a candidate:

- a) A graduate of the University of Witwatersrand who has been awarded any of the following degrees:
 - Bachelor of Dental Science
 - Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery
 - Bachelor of Nursing
 - Bachelor of Science in Occupational therapy
 - Bachelor of Pharmacy
 - Bachelor of Science in Physiotherapy
 - Bachelor of Science with Honours, or
- b) A graduate who has been awarded any other qualification, the normal curriculum of which extends over not less than four years' full-time study (NQF 8), of the University, who in the opinion of Senate, is sufficiently qualified to undertake the field of study proposed or research (or both) required for the qualification, or
- c) Any person who has satisfied Senate, by means of written or oral test (or both), or by any other mode of assessment to be determined from time to time by Senate, that s/he is sufficiently qualified to undertake the line of study proposed or research (or both), required for the qualification.

2026 PROVISIONAL TEACHING BLOCK DATES for first year of registration

(Dates are subject to change; contact the Centre for final dates)

1. Foundations of Bioethics (Mon 2 – Sat 7 February)
2. Foundations of Health Law (Mon 13 – Fri 17 April)
3. Advanced Health Ethics (Mon 1 – Fri 5 June)
4. Advanced Research Ethics (Mon 20 – Fri 24 July)

Full attendance of units is compulsory.

INTERESTED CANDIDATES ARE STRONGLY ADVISED TO APPLY TO THE FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES POSTGRADUATE OFFICE BEFORE THE CLOSING DATE on 30 September 2025.

Application and related information is available at:

Postgraduate Office

2nd floor, Phillip V Tobias Building, 29 Princess of Wales Street Parktown, 2193 Johannesburg.

Tel: + 27 (0)11 717 2076/2510

Website: <https://www.wits.ac.za/health/faculty-services/postgraduate-studies/>

For more information about the Centre and the academic programmes offered, please visit our website:

<http://www.wits.ac.za/bioethics>, or contact the Centre on Tel: +27 (0) 11 717 2635

Steve Biko
Centre for Bioethics

**MSc Med BIOETHICS & HEALTH LAW
2026**

**Steve Biko Centre for Bioethics
Faculty of Health Sciences
University of the Witwatersrand
Johannesburg**

UNIVERSITY OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG 

 FACULTY OF
HEALTH SCIENCES