

# HONORS THINK TANK BIOETHICS



In 2005, ten Honors students convened in a Think Tank to consider the ethical implications of new genetic technologies. With the guidance of Dr. Ray Gesteland and Dr. Peggy Battin, they explored moral objections to public policy based on limited scientific knowledge and discussed how the available science and technology might be ethically applied to benefit everyone.

Utah's leading geneticists visited the class to help educate the group. The Think Tank quickly recognized the need for better education in genetic science and its ethical implications. The Think Tank opined that as a world leader in genetic research, the University has a societal obligation to fulfill this educational need.

So the Think Tank students designed a *Genetics and Society* course and presented it to the University for approval. The new course instructs students in the basics of genetics and gives them an ethical framework with which to analyze the societal implications of genetic advancements.

The class is groundbreaking on many fronts; primarily that it was initiated and designed by students in the Honors Think Tank on Bioethics. First offered as an Honors course in Fall 2006, the class is now a first-time collaboration between the departments of Biology and Philoso-

phy, and co-taught by Dr. Bryan Benham in Philosophy and Dr. M. Wayne Davis in Biology. This Think Tank met their ultimate goal — the *Genetics and Society* course has been permanently added to the University catalog, cross listed as an offering in Philosophy, Biology and Honors.

The team of students had varying backgrounds, majoring in fields ranging from Finance to Philosophy to Anthropology. The diversity among the students helped them to carefully establish a course structure that allows all learners to explore interdisciplinary perspectives while developing a common ground for communication in both genetics and ethics.

The Think Tank concluded that it is not enough for only the scientific community to consider the ethical issues that genetic technologies raise; the general population must be better prepared to make decisions as individuals and as members of society regarding the use of these new technologies.

The resulting *Genetics and Society* course serves as a reliable source of scientific information, helps dispel misconceptions about new genetic technologies and facilitates societal decisions regarding personal medicine and public policy.



**"As information about genetics and health continues to proliferate, (bioethical) issues will affect people from every walk of life. The diversity of our group therefore becomes one of its greatest strengths. Each of us brings the considerations and views from our unique training to the project, making it possible for us to answer questions about bioethics that a less diverse group might not even think to ask."**

**-Ezra Christensen  
Think Tank Member**