Doing the Right Thing:

Ethical Issues in Higher Education

Recent ethical lapses in corporate America have motivated institutions of higher education to focus more attention on their ethical responsibilities. These responsibilities include creating ethical learning environments in which students can learn the principles and traditions of professional practice and develop knowledge and skills to help them become responsible citizens and ethical leaders. Some unique ethical challenges facing colleges and universities are described and examples from the literature are presented to illustrate how institutions are meeting their ethical obligations. Suggestions are given for ways faculty in family and consumer sciences and other academic disciplines can play a role in building ethical institutions.

In the aftermath of recent ethical lapses in corporate America, many colleges and universities have focused more attention on their ethical responsibilities. In the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, de Russy (2003) asserted that "professional ethics begin on the college campus" (p. B20). Colleges and universities must accept some of the responsibility for corporate scandals, de Russy noted, because it is in college that many future accountants, lawyers, and other professionals receive their first exposure to ethical standards and traditions.

Davis (2003–2004) challenged those who control the academies to correct the "faulty organizational structures that enable irresponsible actions" (p. 8). According to Davis, governing boards should establish clear standards for ethical behavior and ensure compliance with those standards, develop proce-

dures to encourage honest scholarship and academic integrity, implement safeguards to ensure that faculty do not exploit their power relationships with students, and provide funding for ethics education.

The call for universities to take ethics seriously is not new. More than 2 decades ago, Harvard President Derek Bok urged institutions of higher education to recommit to earlier academic traditions when students' moral development was considered an integral part of their mission (Bok, 1982). Bok suggested that, when a university refuses to take this responsibility seriously, it "violates its basic obligations to society . . . and gives an impression of moral indifference . . . " (p. 79).

Most universities have policies that address standards of conduct for university officers and employees. At Texas Tech, for example, an ethics policy that is

required by state law defines ethical behavior, essentially, as compliance with laws and regulations. It reinforces state and federal mandates and other institutional policies that either require or prohibit certain activities such as affirmative action, nepotism, sexual harassment, and use of institutional funds for political purposes (Texas Tech University, 2004).

Research institutions also have policies in place to promote ethical standards in the conduct of research and compliance with regulations regarding the use of federal research funds. Specifically, these policies are designed to minimize risk to human and animal research subjects, ensure respect for privacy rights, avoid conflicts of interest, and implement procedures for dealing with research misconduct.

Undeniably, such policies are both necessary and useful. They help to ensure that a university functions within the law, while at

Sue Couch, EdD
Professor
Family and Consumer Sciences
Education
College of Human Sciences
Texas Tech University
sue.couch@ttu.edu

the same time, articulating important ethical principles and creating a public image of an ethical institution. However, it probably is safe to assume that most institutions give greater attention to establishing ethics-related policies than to evaluating how the policies are being implemented and whether they are achieving the intended results.

With regard to policies on research ethics, for example, Frankel (2003) noted: "For all its scientific rigor, the research community has made little progress in assessing its efforts to promote research integrity" (p. 47). Frankel challenged institutions and individual researchers to address the question of how effective such policies are in nurturing an ethical research environment and reducing misconduct.

ADDRESSING ETHICAL ISSUES ON CAMPUS

Because they focus primarily on compliance, formal ethics policies frequently offer limited guidance for "doing the right thing" in the broader sense of ensuring ethical learning environments, fulfilling the institution's responsibilities to the larger society, and informing faculty and other members of the campus community on ethical issues with respect to their relationships with students and each other. A search of the literature reveals several examples of initiatives that illustrate how universities are addressing these broader ethical responsibilities.

Codes of Ethics

A number of universities have adopted institutional codes of ethics that differ from the ethics policies described previously, in that they emphasize core ethical principles rather than mere adherence to laws and regulations. The Code of Ethics recently adopted by the University of Southern California (USC) (University of Southern California, 2004) is a good example. The USC Code states: "We try to do what is right even when no one is watching us or compelling us to do the right thing" (p. 1). USC identifies ethical principles such as nurturing an environment of mutual respect and tolerance for diversity, attending to the well-being of students and others who are vulnerable, and distinguishing between behavior that is ethical and that which is merely legal. It holds all members of the "Trojan Family," students to trustees, responsible both for the ethics of their own behavior and for building an ethical institution.

Codes of ethics also are used specifically to promote ethical teaching practices. These codes reflect the basic principle that teaching is an ethical undertaking. A number of universities in Canada and some in the United States have adopted "Ethical Principles in University Teaching," developed by a Canadian organization (Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 1996). The nine principles of ethical teaching outlined in

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the Society's document include content competence, pedagogical competence, confidentiality, intellectual development of students, valid student assessment, dealing with sensitive topics, dual-role relationships with students, respect for colleagues, and respect for the institution.

In addition, some universities have adopted codes of ethics to deal with certain business transactions. For example, Duke University was the first American university to develop a code of conduct for the companies it licenses to manufacture Duke apparel. More than 100 universities have followed Duke's lead (Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, & Stephens, 2003).

It is important that institutions of higher education pay attention not only to what they say, but also to what they do. UCLA professor Alexander Astin (1989) suggested that universities often have two sets of moral values—those expressed explicitly in the institution's formal policies and pronouncements, and the implicit values that drive institutional practices with regard to matters such as allocation of resources, personnel decisions, curricular offerings, how the institution defines excellence, and the kind of assessment data it collects. According to Astin, some of the most serious ethical problems in higher education arise from inconsistencies between an institution's explicit and implicit values.

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Academic Integrity Initiatives
Technology-enhanced plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are growing concerns on most campuses. Studies have shown that cheating is common among college students and that some forms, such as cheating on exams, have increased dramatically over the last 3 decades (McCabe, Trevino, & Butterfield, 2001).

Similar results have been reported for college-bound high school students. A recent study published by Who's Who Among High School Students indicated that 80% of students who plan to attend college had cheated in high school. Most said they had never been caught and more than half did not consider cheating a serious transgression (cited in Fundamental Values, 1999).

Some universities have implemented student honor codes as one way to stem the rising tide of academic dishonesty. Maryland's Code of Academic Integrity is an example of a "modified honor code" that provides for strict penalties for dishonesty, but also has a strong educational component. Maryland's Code is governed by an all-student honor council, and faculty are considered key to effective implementation ("Faculty Commitment," 2003).

Studies suggest that honor codes can reduce academic dishonesty by conveying a consistent message to students that ethical behavior is expected. They also promote student involvement in broader ethical issues and help to create ethical campus communities (Colby et al., 2003; McCabe et al., 2001). In addition, there is some evidence that collegiate honor codes may have an enduring positive effect that extends beyond the educational environment (McCabe, Trevino, & Butterfield, 1996).

Ethics in the Classroom and Beyond
Higher education's central mission is to foster the intellectual and personal development of students. Part of that responsibility is helping students develop a set of ethical standards to guide professional and personal decision-making. Professional guidelines, such as the American Association of Family & Consumer Sciences' Code of Ethics (AAFCS, 2003) can assist faculty in teaching students the principles required for ethical professional practice.

A recent report (Behr, Finch, Dobson, Abrams, & Brown, 1998) offers guidance for the more challenging task of producing graduates who are capable of ethical leadership and responsible citizenship. The report, prepared by a group of young professionals and published by Duke University's Kenan Ethics Program, is based on the premise that " . . . ultimate responsibility for the character of a democratic society rests with its

citizens" (preface). It calls for principled leadership in all spheres of American society, and identifies several essential ethical principles, including mutual responsibility, working for the common good, transparency in business transactions, corporate social responsibility, integrating economic efficiency with environmental sustainability, serving society's marginalized, commitment to community service, and the advancement of equality (Behr et al., 1998).

Scholars have argued that service learning and other pedagogies that promote maximum student engagement in the learning process are more effective for teaching ethics than traditional modes of teaching (Colby et al., 2003; Fleckenstein, 1997; Saltmarsh, 1997). This argument seems particularly relevant to the task of preparing students to become responsible citizens and ethical leaders. For example, Fleckenstein emphasized that experiential learning can personalize and legitimize traditional classroom instruction by giving students opportunities to consider the broader social, economic, and political dimensions of ethical issues.

As Saltmarsh (1997) noted, students often are taught to think about ethical decisions, but it is only through the process of reflective inquiry and dialogue that they learn to recognize real-life ethical issues and develop the commitment to make responsible choices. Saltmarsh recommended a process that he calls "connected knowing," both as a tool to teach ethics *and* as an ethical way to teach.

Institutions can provide a variety of opportunities for students and faculty to become engaged in ethics initiatives in the classroom and the larger community. Following are examples of such initiatives:

- The Association for Practical and Professional Ethics (APPE) offers activities for students and faculty in conjunction with its Annual Meeting. These include a paper competition for undergraduates, a seminar for graduate students, and a National Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl, inspired by television's College Bowl. Ethics Bowl teams prepare for debate on case studies representing ethical dilemmas on a wide range of issues, from academic integrity to professional ethics to social/political issues (Association for Practical and Professional Ethics, 2004).

- "A Matter of Ethics" is a national project spearheaded by the Association of College Honor Societies (ACHS). Launched in 2004, the project encourages members of campus honor societies to work together to provide leadership for ethics programs and activities. Project objectives include increasing campus awareness of ethical standards, promoting dialogue among student groups regarding ethical issues, strengthening commitment

to ethical behavior among peers, providing opportunities for ethical leadership, and increasing understanding of professional codes of ethics within the various academic disciplines ("A Matter of Ethics," 2004).

• The Center for Academic Integrity (CAI), affiliated with Duke University's Kenan Institute for Ethics, provides a forum to affirm and promote the values of academic integrity, defined by CAI as "a commitment, even in the face of adversity, to five fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility . . . " (Fundamental Values, 1999, p. 4). With more than 300 institutional members, CAI supports research and disseminates information about academic integrity, assists institutions in assessing the campus climate of academic integrity, provides professional development for faculty on academic integrity issues, and sponsors an annual conference for faculty and students (Center for Academic Integrity, 2002).

• Both public and private universities have established ethics centers to provide leadership for programs and activities that support the study and teaching of ethics and contribute to an ethical campus community. An examination of Web sites for several leading university-based ethics centers indicate that, although mission statements and goals vary, most seem to be broadly conceived to function as a resource for the entire campus community as well as the larger society. The Web site for the Rutland Center for Ethics at Clemson University, for example, states that it "provides the campus and the community with a forum for exploration and discussion of ethical issues . . . and serves as a resource for the people and institutions of the state and region . . . " (Robert J. Rutland Center, 2004). In addition, Cornell's Program on Ethics and Public Life (2005) and the Lincoln Center for Applied Ethics at Arizona State (2000) are examples.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FACULTY

In summary, colleges and universities must take seriously their obligation to contribute to the moral development of students. Clearly, students will learn to "do the right thing" only within the context of an ethical institution. Faculty and administrators in family and consumer sciences (FCS) and other academic disciplines have an important role to play in building institutions that promote integrity and practice it within the campus community and beyond. FCS professionals can and should:

• Become informed about formal ethics-related policies at institutions and initiate discussions about the effect of these policies on the creation of an ethical climate on campus.
• Support the development of an institutional code of ethics that articulates core ethical principles.
• Document inconsistencies that may exist between the explicit values communicated in written pronouncements and the implicit values that drive institutional decisions and actions.
• Collaborate with colleagues to foster a campus climate that values diversity and ensures a welcoming, supportive environment for all.
• Provide leadership to nurture an ethical learning environment that is inclusive, fair, and free from harassment and coercion.
• Become informed about the social, political, and economic issues that have ethical implications for the profession. Ensure that FCS graduate and undergraduate students learn the principles and traditions required for ethical professional practice, as well as the knowledge and skills that will prepare them to become responsible citizens and ethical leaders in their communities.
• Find ways to enhance opportunities for student engagement in experiential learning activities that provide exposure to real-life ethical issues.
• Engage in national ethics initiatives, such as the Association of College Honor Societies project and in activities sponsored by the Association for Practical and Professional Ethics and the Center for Academic Integrity.

Sergiovanni (1992), Hamilton (2002), and others have noted that as "gatekeepers of knowledge," educational institutions have significant influence on the quality of social, economic, and political

life in local communities and throughout the world. Education is a public good, not merely a private benefit, and educators must be dedicated to the extension and transmission of knowledge for the welfare of society.

And, like other individuals who occupy positions of leadership, college and university faculty and administrators have greater ethical obligations than other members of society. Professionals must be concerned about personal behavior and also about holding others accountable to the ethical

standards established by each institution. Individual responsibilities are magnified because the academic profession depends primarily on effective peer review and self-regulation.

Jacques (1997) introduced a concept he described as "the ethics of privilege." Jacques would no doubt remind professionals that because privileged positions are held, individuals must recognize that there is greater responsibility to create a just and equitable society, and more power to make it a reality.

INCLUDE ETHICS IN ORIENTATION PROGRAMS

Ethical matters, large and small, touch human lives at some level every day and decisions often are rendered without a great deal of conscious deliberation, perhaps illustrative of the implicit moral values discussed in this article. The "implicitness," or perhaps ubiquity, of the moral frames that individuals apply to ethical judgment and behavior is worthy of a closer, more discriminating assessment. This assessment may challenge the assumptions held by professionals in higher education about the moral and ethical maturity of their students.

Most American colleges and universities today expend considerable resources on incoming students to address deficits in academic skills. It would be difficult to find an American institution of higher learning that does not provide some type of remedial education in reading, oral and written communication, and math. Perhaps the time has come to stop assuming that most students arrive on college campuses with adequate foundations for ethical reasoning and decision-making.

Most institutions provide or require some variation of orientation for new students in order to provide important information about what their lives as students will be like, and to ease the transition. Academic ethics are generally part of most college orientation programs, but the primary focus is on what students know and understand about academic dishonesty, or cheating. Many students grasp the concept that it is dishonest to "copy" another student's work or exam paper, but fewer comprehend the ethical deficiencies and finer points of plagiarism. This lack of comprehension is a source of bemusement to faculty; their bemusement, in turn, is sometimes a source of confusion for the students. In many cases, students involved in plagiarism or some other inappropriate use of another person's material genuinely are surprised to discover that their work has been deemed to be a product of cheating.

It is time to reconsider how academic honesty and broader ethical principles are understood by college students. Instead of assuming that students come to higher education hard-wired with ethical principles, colleges should expand and refine new student orientation programs after first taking inventory of incoming students' understanding and application of ethical issues and behavior. Businesses frequently rely on ethical assessment tools as part of their human resource functions. If employee honesty is of particular strategic value to a company, human resource managers frequently are directed to include valid and reliable selection tests to measure a job candidate's ethical understanding and maturity. Some of these tools, appropriately modified, may be useful in assessing the same traits in new undergraduate and graduate students. If these tools consistently reveal a lack of ethical or moral maturity, the institution should then modify orientation programs as well as other curricula to address the deficit. Likewise, it may be useful to assess the level of academic integrity and ethical understanding among faculty members. If such assessment reveals pervasive "inconsistencies between an institution's explicit and explicit [ethical] values" as discussed in this article, institutional leaders might consider requiring faculty and administrators to experience similar remedial ethical training and development. The institution then has role models for its students within the ranks of faculty and staff.

Family and consumer sciences (FCS) professionals are well placed to demonstrate to the wider academic community ways in which ethical training and education can be delivered effectively. The FCS profession, with its focus on student-constructed learning and experiential education is well-positioned to lead the academic community in designing and promoting ethics-based/ethics-oriented curricula. — *Sara Dodd, Doctoral student, Texas Tech University*

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