Center for Ethics

Annual Report to Advisory Council

Spring 2019

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Letter from the Director

April 22, 2019

Dear Advisory Council,

As MHU welcomed a new president and provost, I settled into my second year of directing MHU’s Center for Ethics. CFE’s yearly rhythms—recruiting and training ethics instructors in the fall, coordinating ethics assessments in the spring—have begun to feel familiar. So have dear faces around campus. Many of these people have partnered with the CFE to write successful grant applications, organize lectures on criminal justice reform, and lead student trips Civil Rights Movement sites (among other accomplishments).

Also, as is wont to happen in one’s second year working at an organization, I have begun to recognize institutional challenges. We face some long term barriers to the CFE’s sustainability and efficacy, largely resulting from MHU’s financial planning processes. As you read, I invite your thoughts on how the CFE—and MHU as a whole—can overcome those challenges and what reasonable goals this council can set in the meantime.

Thank you for your time and wisdom. I value them both greatly.



Elizabeth Whiting Pierce, Ph.D.

CFE Mission and Vision

**Mission**

Equipping students for redemptive and creative participation in a democratic society

**Vision**

The MHU Center for Ethics aims to deepen students’ understanding of, critical engagement with, and commitment to democratic values: personal responsibility, collaboration, freedom, equality, and dignity. Furthermore, we seek to empower students to embody their convictions in and through the basic institutions of a democratic society: local, state, and national governments; religious, ethnic, and cultural communities; not-for-profit organizations; businesses; and a free press. Toward this end, the Center for Ethics pursues the following learning goals:

1. Students will be able to articulate, evaluate, revise, and enact their personal moral convictions.
2. Students will be able to respectfully engage others’ moral convictions.
3. Students will be able to develop shared expectations for conduct with people who differ from them religiously, racially, socioeconomically, ethnically, and/or ideologically.
4. Students will be able to collaboratively pursue shared values and goals within the institutions named above.

Activities and Accomplishments

**First Year Seminar in Ethical Reasoning: Community Engagement Pedagogies**

Each year, FYS 112 instructors focus on developing one method of ethical discernment. This year’s focus was community engagement. Community engagement helps students recognize ethical challenges in real time, in real communities, in real relationships. One class reflected upon the relationship between personal and corporate responsibility for their community’s environmental health after picking up trash along the side of HWY 213. Another class visited Wal-Mart and discussed the ethics of global supply chains. Still another class visited a crisis pregnancy center and spoke with its employees the values motivating their work. In total, 11 of 18 sections incorporated some element of community engagement into their courses.

Next year’s focus will likely be the use of narratives in ethical discernment. This theme aligns with MHU’s institutional assessment focus next year on writing. It also draws on deep local expertise from MHU’s nursing school faculty, Sharon Bigger and Bill Brochinski, who specialize in narrative ethics as a tool in medical decision-making.

**Certificate in Ethical Leadership Pilot Program: Fail Fast, Adapt Fast**

In the fall, six students participated in an ethical leadership pilot program. It was a helpful exercise in that it revealed a resource gap that would impede successfully implementation such a program. Project and internship based learning—which I had envisioned to be at the heart of the certificate—require serious time investments. In addition, I have no formal training in leadership theory and lack financial resources to compensate another faculty person—perhaps a business leadership professor—to take on this project.

Happily, this March I discovered another possible model for the certificate in the Student Leadership Institute of California State University, Long Beach. This institute is based not on projects but on visits and discussion with local governmental, business, and non-profit leaders. The institute is one course rather than a series of courses with a capstone project. At present, I still lack time and funds to develop this course (see “Challenges”), but it provides a more viable model going forward.

**Ethics Bowl Team: Solidifying a Tradition**

MHU fielded its third NCICU Ethics Bowl team this year. The team performed well at the tournament in Raleigh, NC, in February (2-2 record). I hope to improve not just our win/loss record but also the quality of the student experience next year by offering Ethics Bowl as a 1 hour course in the fall, with a dedicated weekly time and meeting space. The theme for next year is Ethics in Agriculture.

**Scholarship: Instructors and Student**

The CFE played a supporting role in the creation of two pieces of scholarship this year. First, Jennifer Brown and Dan Koster presented the results of their Ethical Use of Information Pilot Program, conducted among FYS 112 students last year, at the Appalachian Colleges Association Annual Conference. The pilot program had studied the efficacy of using cartoons and in-class exercises to teach information literacy to first year students. Second, Devin Thorpe, a junior Religion and Philosophy Major, submitted an essay for the Elie Wiesel Foundation Prize in Ethics Essay Contest. So far, his paper has made it to the second round of consideration.

**Student-Centered Events: Racial Justice Focus**

CFE (co-)sponsored a number of events this year: Election Night Party, Equal Justice Initiative Museum and Memorial Trip, *The Best of Enemies* film screening, *Just Mercy* reading Group, student leaders dinner and discussion on politics and friendship with President Floyd, and a lecture on "Social movements, media, and entertainments impact on Criminal Justice" given by Dr. DeAngelo Brown. The accidental theme of all these events was racial justice. Next year’s theme is under consideration.

**Fall Pedagogy Workshop: Ethics Pedagogy Across the Curriculum**

In September, **Steven Benko, Associate Professor of Religious and Ethical Studies at Meredith College, conducted three pedagogy workshops/lectures that were open to all faculty persons but especially targeted FYS 112 instructors. Topics included: “Ethics and Humor,” “Critical Thinking Pedagogy,” “Using Case Studies to Teach Ethics”. These topics “closed the loop” of our assessment process from the previous year. In spring 2018, we assessed our teaching of critical thinking. In fall 2018, we developed our teaching skills in that area.**

**On-Campus Partnerships**

In addition to partnering with various campus entities to organize student events, CFE also consulted with various departments on embodying ethics throughout the MHU student experience. I conducted an Academic Integrity appeals board how-to workshop in October, met several times with the newly formed Career Services Center to discuss the role of ethical discernment within vocational discernment, and gave comments on program adjustments for the Women’s and Gender Studies Department and the University Intercultural Council.

**Training Grant**

In January, the Council for Independent Colleges accepted MHU’s application to participate in the Diversity, Civility, and the Liberal Arts Institute, a four-day training event which aims to equip campus leaders—faculty, administrators, and staff—to use social conflicts as opportunities to teach constructive dialogue and citizen engagement, especially on racially diverse campuses. The Institute is funded by Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. MHU’s team consists of John Omachonu, Provost, Alaysia Black Hackett, Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Kimberly Reigle, Associate Professor of English, and myself.

Challenges

**Defining the CFE’s Scope**

The Center for Ethics’ scope was initially defined by two documents. The first was MHU’s *2012-2017 Strategic Plan,* which tasked the CFE with “encourag[ing] the formation of ethical decision-making skills” by “including ethics in curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular programs and [by] providing resources to the wider community.” The second document was the paperwork establishing the Michael Sr. and Melinda Kelly Ethics Across the Curriculum Endowment. This endowment aims to develop “ethics intensive courses in all disciplines…[and] a certificate program in ethics or ethical leadership.” The endowment also intends to fund faculty development, Ethics Bowl, and other extra-curricular ethics programming. In sum, these two documents imagine a CFE that supports 1) curriculum development, 2) faculty development, 3) extra-curricular programming, and 4) community outreach.

These aspirations are noble but profoundly under resourced. They are appropriate goals for a much larger CFEs.[[1]](#footnote-1) CFE’s of MHU’s size tend to limit their work to a several student/community events a year.[[2]](#footnote-2) These events are usually overseen by a faculty director with the help of an administrative assistant or post-doctoral fellow. MHU’s CFE has a faculty director with one course release.

Provost John Omachonu and I have temporarily remedied this gap between aspirations and resources. Next year, I will not undertake any student extra-curricular programming or community outreach. Rather, I will focus my attention on faculty and curriculum development.

**Funding Logistics**

The Kelly Endowment (fund 2) sustains CFE programs. CFE used about $2500 from the endowment this year (CFE’s fund 1 budget allocation was $400). Unfortunately, accessing Kelly Endowment funds in a timely fashion has proven difficult. This past year, the endowment funds became available for use sometime in late fall (precisely when is unclear). I have no idea when the drawdown will occur next fall or what amount the drawdown will be. Nor can I make plans based on funds remaining the Kelly Endowment account from this year. Funds remaining in the account in June 2019 will not roll over. So, practically speaking, Kelly Endowment funds are available November-May.

This timing is—to put it mildly—unhelpful. To plan CFE programming well, I need 6-12 months lead time. This time allows me to hire speakers, reserve retreat spaces, recruit co-sponsors, etc. But, at present, there is no way to determine the CFE’s budget for next year until the middle of it. I have no immediate solution for this problem. Perhaps budgeting will happen differently in the coming years under Tony Floyd’s leadership.

Plans for Next Year

**Faculty Development**

Next AY, Kim Reigle and I will host a series of faculty workshops on inclusive pedagogies, per our training at the Diversity, Civility, and Liberal Arts Institute this summer. The content and structure of these programs depends in part on funding.

**Curriculum Development**

Harvard University’s Center for Ethics is currently developing user-friendly model for building an Ethics Across the Curriculum Program. It begins by assessing what kind of ethics education is *already* embedded within a university’s curriculum. This model uses a human-development framework (personal ethics, professional ethics, community/civic ethics) to categorize and build upon existing ethics education. I am in conversation with Jess Minor, Director of Research for HUCFE, regarding the possibility of implementing that model at MHU.

**Extra-Curricular and Community Programming**

Next year, once budgets have been set, I will create and advertise a process by which students, faculty, and staff can utilize CFE funds to pay for educational events that advance the CFE’s mission.

Fund 1 Budget Proposal 2019-20

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|   | 2016-2017 | 2017-2018 | 2018-2019 | 2019-2020 |   |
| Description | Budget | Budget | Budget | Request | Amount increased |
| Consultant | $1,500 | $1,000 | $0 | $1,355 | $1,355 |
| Travel | $3,500 | $0 | $200 | $3,400 | $3,200 |
| Meals | $500 | $500 | $0 | $320 | $320 |
| Program Supplies | $3,500 | $2,500 | $100 | $490 | $390 |
| Office Supplies | $500 | $300 | $100 | $100 | $0 |
|   |   |   |   |   |   |
|  | $9,500 | $4,300 | $400 | $5,665 | $5,265 |

**\*\*\*Important Notes\*\*\***

It seems highly unlikely MHU will fulfill this budget request, or come anywhere near doing so. Most of CFE’s funding this year came from its endowment ($1946.80 to date plus about $500 imminent expenses). Most of the CFE’s funding will likely come from the Kelly Endowment next year. However, VP of Finance Neil Tilley instructed me to treat those funds as supplementary. Hence, endowment funding does not appear in this budget proposal.

**Consultant: $1,355**

This amount covers a consultant’s honorarium (usually around $1000) plus travel expenses, meals, and lodging. The consultant’s role is usually pedagogical; he or she introduces new teaching methods or theories related to the institutional SLO that university is focusing on at that time and ethics education.

**Travel: $3,400**

Travel funds support 1) citizen engagement trips and 2) my professional development. Citizen engagement trips usually take one of two forms. Either they involve sending students to national historical sites to learn about the ethical challenges our country has faced and still faces, or students take trips to centers of legislative power (Washington, D.C., Raleigh, NC), so they can learn how to participate civilly and effectively in the democratic process.

I use travel funds to participate in one of two yearly professional development conferences pertinent to the Center for Ethics’ work: The Society for Ethics Across the Curriculum (SEAC) and The Association for Practical and Professional Ethics (APPE).

**Meals: $320**

This sum covers a meal for fourteen FYS 112 instructors during a 4-hour long end of year workshop and taking students to coffee to discuss CFE programming.

**Program Supplies: $490**

Program supplies include books for new FYS 112 instructors, books for reading groups or other student led activities, and snacks for meetings.

**Office Supplies: $100**

$100 pays for a couple of flipcharts (surprisingly expensive) and markers for workshops.

Questions

What does the phrase “Ethics Across the Curriculum Program” make you think of? What does the phrase “Ethics Across the Campus Program” make you think of?

What should be the goals/content/themes of an ethics across the curriculum program?

Which programs/departments need to play a role in building the ethics across the curriculum program?

What else might we call the program? What name might be more interesting to students, faculty, staff?

What ideas do you have for involving non-faculty campus employees or community members in an ethics across the curriculum program?

In coming years, how public/community facing ought the CFE aspire to be? At present, the CFE focuses its efforts almost entirely in-house. Is that problematic or appropriate? Why?

1. See, for instance, the Ukleja Center for Ethical Leadership at CSU Long Beach (<http://www.csulb.edu/college-of-business/ukleja-center-for-ethical-leadership>) or the Kenan Institute for Ethics at Duke University (<https://kenan.ethics.duke.edu/>). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See, for instance, Augustana College’s Center for the Study of Ethics (<https://www.augustana.edu/academics/center-for-ethics>), King’s College’s McGowan Center for Ethics and Social Responsibility (<https://www.kings.edu/academics/special_programs/mcgowan-ethics-center/history>), and Luther College’s Center for Ethics and Public Engagement (<https://www.luther.edu/ethics-public-engagement/>) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)