MEMO

TO: Deans Council

FROM: Elizabeth Whiting Pierce, Assist. Prof. of the Philosophy of Ethics, Dir. of the Center for Ethics

DATE: August 16, 2018

SUBJECT: Drop “Ethics Across the Curriculum Program,” replace with “Center for Ethics” in MHU nomenclature

**Explanation of Request**

I oversee several programs related to ethics education at MHU, including Ethics Bowl, the Certificate in Ethical Leadership, First Year Seminar in Ethical Reasoning, and occasional student trips and events. *The institutional home of these programs* has three names at MHU: 1) Ethics Across the Curriculum Program/Initiative; 2) Ethics Across the Campus Program/Initiative; and 3) the Center for Ethics. These various names appear mostly on internal documents (budget fund names, organizational charts, etc.) but occasionally on the MHU website (my faculty profile page, MHU’s newsfeed, etc.)

I am requesting that MHU stop using the first two names and adopt the third name, the MHU Center for Ethics, as the official name of the institutional home of the programs I oversee.

**Justification**

There are several reasons to adopt “Center for Ethics” as the official name of MHU’s ethics education programs.

* The creation of the “Center for Ethics” fulfilled a goal of the 2012-2017 Strategic Plan. The “Ethics Across the Curriculum Program” led by Barry Sharpe was a step in that direction rather than the final goal (see below, “MHU Center for Ethics History”).
* The title given on my job offer letter and on my contract is “Director of the Center for Ethics.”
* The “Center for Ethics” makes more sense in marketing/development. It is recognizable since many other schools use similar terminology (UNC, Virginia Military Institute, Emory University). Also, the “Center for Ethics” could—with a lot of luck—attract a named gift. An “Ethics Across the Curriculum Program” seems unlikely to do so.
* It is easier to say than the “Center for Ethics” than to say “Ethics Across the Curriculum Initiative” or “Ethics Across the Campus Program”.

**For further reading, see “MHU Center for Ethics History” below.**

MHU Center for Ethics History

(Drawn from 2017-2018 CFE Advisory Council Annual Report)

The 2012-2017 Strategic Plan provides the earliest—to my knowledge—public record of MHU’s intention to establish a Center for Ethics (CFE). The Center was tasked 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.” That task is not explicitly religious, but it falls under Strategic Priority 5: “Mars Hill will encourage the formation of ethical decision-making skills and maintain an environment conducive to Christian faith development.”

In a conversation in March 2016, then-president Dan Lunsford indicated that MHU’s growing religious and cultural diversity was a key concern motivating the CFE’s creation. Dr. Lunsford wanted MHU to be a place that supported students’ growth into moral maturity. But the question remained, how does a university support students’ character development without imposing a particular religious worldview on them? How does a university promote ethical decision-making among young persons with diverse moral convictions? The CFE was an attempt to answer that question in practice if not in theory.

Dr. Barry Sharpe, then a faculty person in the Business Department, oversaw the CFE’s beginning stages in 2012. Activities that would later constitute the CFE’s work fell under the heading of the “Ethics Across the Curriculum Program.” These activities included: recruiting and equipping 12-14 instructors to teach the First Year Seminar in Ethical Reasoning (FYS 112), a required course for all first year students; researching the possibility of MHU’s participation in the NCICU Ethics Bowl Program; generating the curricular designation of “Ethics Intensive” courses in preparation for the creation of a Certificate in Ethical Reasoning.

Dr. Sharpe completed his work at MHU around 2015. Dr. Guy Sayles, Assistant Professor of Religion, served as interim director of the Ethics Across the Curriculum Program. During that time MHU began a search for the first Director of the Center for Ethics. The position description allocated three fourths of the director’s time to teaching courses in the Religion, History, and Philosophy Department and one fourth of his/her time to CFE administrative duties. MHU offered the position to Elizabeth Whiting Pierce in April 2016.

As I hope will be evident in the remainder of this report, CFE programming does and will address the concern raised by Dr. Lunsford; the CFE exists to support students’ character development. In particular, it promotes students’ development as ethically-engaged citizens in a religiously and culturally diverse society. This mission is not identical to character formation within the Baptist tradition, but it is certainly compatible with the deepest roots of that tradition. The CFE pursues this goal by guiding and empowering students to take responsibility for the institutions they belong to, starting with MHU.