Mid-Year Center for Ethics Report to the Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences

To: Phyllis Smith

From: Elizabeth Whiting Pierce

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**Narrative Account**

Outcomes, Fall 2017

This semester’s concrete outcomes fall under two broad headings: existing CFE programs and miscellaneous small projects. Existing programs are FYS 112 and Ethics Bowl. I am happy to report that both programs are quite healthy. Sixteen sections of FYS 112 were scheduled for next semester, books were ordered, and an instructor training workshop was held on December 6. The teaching team will continue to use the assessment method developed last year by Guy Sayles, Brett Johnson and Robert Lawrence. In addition, all FYS 112 sections will participate in a pre- and post-course information literacy assessment. This assessment will allow the teaching team to measure the efficacy of a scaffolded class assignment on “Ethical Use of Information.” Renfroe Library Staff will partner with a handful of instructors to implement this assignment with six FYS 112 sections. Ethics Bowl is also thriving. Last year, MHU sent a team of four students. This year, we have a team of six (the maximum allowed) and have three alternates. The team has practiced four times this semester, and each team member will write two position papers on cases over winter break.

I also undertook miscellaneous small projects with various campus partners. These included an Ethical Use of Information Workshop (Renfroe Library), an Academic Integrity Faculty Forum and FYS 111 Common Session (Academic Affairs), Diversity, Civility, and the Liberal Arts Institute application (Academic Affairs and Student Affairs), and Civil Discourse Trainings (a couple of other faculty members). While these small projects aimed at worthy student-oriented goals—information literacy, leadership development, etc.—they also served another important function: they acquainted me with MHU’s institutional structure and culture. These projects—in tandem with rather a lot of meetings and attendance at various campus events—prepared me to spend spring 2018 developing the CFE’s organizational mission and structure.

Perspective and Plans, Spring 2018

*Administration*

In my view, democratic values and skill-development require more emphasis at MHU. Conversations with faculty and students in fall 2017 indicate that MHU students feel socially disempowered, unable to participate in collective decision-making either on campus or in public life. While discussing an Ethics Bowl case about the creation of a public park, one student told me “nobody ever agrees on anything so you can’t really expect to get anything done. There’s always somebody who doesn’t want public projects, and you can’t force it on them.” The implication was that working through conflict over matters of public concern is impossible; keeping your head down and being nice to people is the best any of us can do. These anecdotal observations seem consistent—at least at an attitudinal and cultural level—with recent findings that young people feel lower confidence in democratic institutions than previous generations. According to Foa and Mounck,

In the United States…41 percent of those born during the interwar and initial postwar decades state that it is “absolutely essential” in a democracy that “civil rights protect people’s liberty.” Among millennials, this share falls to 32 percent….[O]nly 10 percent of citizens born in the interwar years and 14 percent of baby-boomers say that it is “unimportant” in a democracy for people to “choose their leaders in free elections” (with “unimportant” defined as 1 to 5 on a 10-point scale of importance). Among millennials, this figure rises to 26 percent.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Addressing this value shift will be central to the mission of MHU’s Center for Ethics. The working draft of our mission statement is: *The MHU Center for Ethics equips students for redemptive and creative participation in the institutions of a democratic society.* The working draft of our vision statement is: *The MHU Center for Ethics equips students to act as redemptive and creative moral agents within the institutions of a democratic society: governments, religious, ethnic, and cultural communities, not-for-profit organizations, businesses, markets, and the free press. Our focus on democracy is intentional; the ideals of freedom, equality and social self-governance frame our moral vision. So is our focus on institutions—sets of rules, roles, and relationships that allow individuals to act together.. Institutional savvy sustains the enactment of any moral vision, but particularly a democratic one since democracy requires tremendous collaboration.* This mission and vision align with MHU’s larger mission to cultivate citizens.

Furthermore, this focus creates possibilities for synergy without redundancy with existing MHU departments and programs. The Center for Community Engagement, the Office of the Chaplain, and the Hester Center for Peace and Justice do not focus explicitly on democracy, though their programming is often compatible with the vision expressed above. Also, CFE housed programs—FYS 112, Ethics Bowl, the Certificate in Ethical Leadership (more on that below)—need slight or no adjustment to support democratic values education and democratic skill-development.

*Certificate in Ethical Leadership*

The Certificate in Ethical Leadership will pursue two learning goals implied by the name: ethical vision and leadership competence. Many existing courses across MHU’s disciplines contribute to one or both of those goals. In spring of 2018, I will create a list of those courses, and identify how many of each type—ethical vision or leadership competence—students must complete to qualify for the certificate. The Curriculum Committee has already designated several “EAC” courses, though they are not presently attached to any certificate program.

In addition to courses, the certificate will require students to exercise leadership on campus through a concrete project (rather than working primarily off campus, as Community Engagement Certificate participants usually do). Competence in institutional collaboration will be one of the primary learning goals of the project. So, students will be required to execute their projects through partnerships with one off-campus organization and one on-campus club, department, sorority/fraternity, etc. For instance, a student might partner with the NAACP and the Black Student Association to host a several letter writing sessions. Or, a student might partner with the National Wildlife Federation and Facilities to improve recycling infrastructure. Students will be required to give presentations of their projects either at SLAM or an off-campus undergraduate-oriented conference.

Note: partnering organizations need not and perhaps should not include the local entities with which the Center for Community Engagement partners. The best partner organizations for the Certificate in Ethical Leadership project will be those with internships and programs aimed at college students, almost always state- or national-level groups. These partnerships will not only enable students to strengthen their resumes and professional networks, they will bring more state and national organizations into contact with MHU.

*Student Events*

CFE events this semester focus on equipping students for civil participation in democratic politics. These events include an on-campus program hosted by the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL). This program will introduce students to FCNL’s work and invite applications to MHU’s trip to FCNL’s Spring Lobby Weekend (Washington, D.C., March 17-20). The Friends (Quakers) promote respectful, conscientious engagement with elected officials. Other events—Blue/Red workshop, Interfaith Perspectives on Contraception—encourage civil engagement with other citizens.

*FYS 112*

My general approach to FYS 112 is “don’t change anything until you know how it works.” So, this year is a learning year. I have made a couple of changes, however. Instead of meeting weekly to chat and check-in, the teaching team will meet monthly to discuss an article/essay/chapter on an ethical concept (moral relativism, moral pluralism, moral emotions, shame/honor, etc.). Also, six sections will participate in an “Ethical Use of Information” scaffolded assignment, and all sixteen sections will conduct a pre- and post-course assessment on information literacy, in addition to the existing FYS 112 assessment.

**Activities List**

Fall 2017

*Administrative*

* Lots of meetings across campus

*Student Facing Events*

* Assisted Virginia Bower in planning and hosting a Civil Discourse Training for students, November 4

*FYS 112*

* Assisted Jennifer Brown in planning “Ethical Use of Information” Workshops, October 26, November 1
* Recruited and scheduled teachers for 16 sections
* Hosted FYS 112 teacher workshop, December 6, 2016

*Ethics Bowl*

* Applied for and received $500 of program funds from NCICU
* Invited approx. 35 nominees for the team
* Hosted 2 informational meet-and-greets and 4 team practices
* Recruited a team of 6, with 3 alternates

*Certificate in Ethical Leadership*

* Preparation: reviewed existing EAC designated courses, met with Deb Myers regarding design of Certificate in Community Engagement, reviewed Curriculum Committee’s certificate application process

*Academic Integrity*

* Planned and facilitated a Faculty Forum on Academic Integrity, September 28
* Assisted in planning and presentation of Academic Integrity FYS 111 Common Session, September 11

*Professional Development*

* Training: Better Angels, November 9-10
* Attended annual meeting of the Society for Ethics Across the Curriculum, October 5-7
* Attended annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, November 18-21

*Other*

* Lead author on Diversity and Civility in the Liberal Arts Institute application

Spring 2018

*Administrative*

* Recruit and meet with advisory group, consisting of 1 trustee, 1 staff person from Student Affairs, 1 staff person from Development or Marketing or Admissions, 1 faculty person in liberal arts, 1 faculty person from the sciences or professional programs, 2 students
* Refine mission statement and vision with advisory group.
* Identify and apply for grant opportunities consistent with mission statement and vision
* Oversee work study student
* Draft proposal to new MHU President regarding Center for Ethics Programming (See Future Programmatic Possibilities belo)

*Student Events*

* January 28: Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL), On-Campus Event
* March 18-20: Student Trip to D.C. for FCNL Spring Lobby Weekend
* March 28: Wednesday Workshop on Center for Ethics activities
* Date TBD: Blue/Red workshop
* Date TBD: Interfaith Perspectives on Contraception, student-organized panel discussion

*FYS 112*

* Monthly instructor reading group
* Pilot Program in “Ethical Use of Information” scaffolded assignment
* Date TBD: FYS 111 and 112 end of year workshop

*Certificate in Ethical Leadership*

* Identify courses that enhance moral vision and leadership competence
* Write up and submit application for certificate to Curriculum Committee
* Recruit students to program
* Recruit faculty advisors to program?

*Ethics Bowl*

* January-February: bi-weekly Ethics Bowl practice
* February 16-17: NCICU Ethics Bowl in Raleigh, NC
* April 10: SLAM demonstration

*Future Programmatic Possibilities*

* DCLA
* MHU Nudge Unit
* Leadership Madison County
* Leadership Mars Hill

1. Roberto Stefan Foa and Yascha Mounck, “The Danger of Deconsolidation: The Democratic Disconnect,” *Journal of Democracy*, July 2016, Volume 27, Number 3 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)