Mid-Year Report on the MHU Center for Ethics

To: Phyllis Smith, Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences

From: Elizabeth Whiting Pierce, Dir. of the Center for Ethics

December 17, 2018

**Narrative Reflection and Plans**

*Administrative*

Administrative work for the Center for Ethics (working with advisory committee, fundraising, etc.) took a backseat this semester. However, two small projects were completed. First, Mike Thornhill created a Center for Ethics mymhu.edu page. Second, at a student’s request, I created the “Center for Ethics Projects Assistant” work study position and hired the student to fill it. Working out the kinks of the work study system took several weeks, so the student accomplished only a couple small tasks. However, next semester Kendyl Robertson plans to spend her hours planning a campus discussion series on addiction, to be held in fall 2019.

*Certificate in Ethical Leadership Pilot Program*

The pilot program was a major focus, particularly late summer/early fall. The pilot itself was useful as a learning experience though not particularly successful in terms of the student projects. The pilot showed me the infeasibility of managing a certificate program anchored by some kind of internship-like project work. Successful projects require a great deal of supervision, and those supervision hours would need to happen on top of my normal teaching load, due to the math of how internships count for teaching hours. Also, I realized the leadership training is not a particular area of expertise for me. I have some experience to share, but little formal training.

As a result, I find myself back at the drawing board. I plan to spend some time over Winter Break redesigning the certificate program around other goals (one sign that this shift is a good decision is that I feel utterly unclear about what the learning goals of a leadership certificate should have been). My initial instinct is to design a certificate that pairs the study of ethics as a humanistic inquiry (normative) with the study of the influence of ethical norms on social organizations and groups (descriptive). Possible student learning outcomes include the following: 1) explain how persons and groups develop ethical norms; 2) explain how ethical norms impact group behavior; 3) analyze/compare/contrast groups’ ethical norms; 4) state a 2-3 key ethical norms that the student takes to be central to a good society; 5) critically reflect on the validity of those ethical norms (Critical Thinking); 6) develop targeted interventions to change (nudge to revolutionize) ethical norms within a social group/organization (Problem Solving); and 7) explain the student’s ethical judgments in a clear and compelling fashion, in writing and in public speaking (Writing Skills, Public Speaking).

*FYS 112*

FYS 112 probably received the largest share of my attention this semester (see activities list). In addition to the activities listed there, two strategic choices deserve mention. Through a name change, SLO changes, and by dropping FYC points from the course’s grade, FYS 112 is moving away from its historical connection to the FYS 111 course. There is little overlap between what these courses aim to accomplish, and trying to build that connection was undermining instructors’ ability to achieve the goals of FYS 112. The second strategic decision has been to incorporate more community engagement pedagogy into FYS 112 pedagogy. Since one of our SLOs involves the identification of “ethical challenges in contemporary life” (i.e. in real communities and not just ethics case studies), this shift feels appropriate. At present, community engagement is optional. Long term, if MHU continues its commitment to the AAC&U Civic Engagement learning outcome, FYS 112 might be a good place in the curriculum to focus on that goal.

*NCICU Ethics Bowl*

Ethics Bowl continues to be a successful program in terms of student participation and—I think—student learning. Our team consists of five students from as many majors (Athletic Training, Criminal Justice, Political Science, History, and Zoology). After 2 recruiting events, the team practiced weekly or bi-weekly this semester. Their common comment after analyzing a case is “I’m less certain now than I was when we first read it.” Their research helps them develop clearer opinions, but even these are provisional. I am satisfied that they are learning to have a provisional opinion in the first place. In addition, they are learning to recognize the features of high quality public speaking.

Student learning would be further enhanced by turning Ethics Bowl preparation into a course. Several other NC private colleges do this, and students have asked for it. Treating Ethics Bowl as a class would enable students and me to dedicate more time to preparation. However, the class would be unfeasibly small, only 6 students.

Fiscally, the NCICU makes MHU’s participation in the annual bowl quite easy. The NCICU provides $500 for team travel and on-campus recruitment activities, pays for the team’s lodging and some food at the Ethics Bowl in February, and pays $1000 stipend to each coach.

*Student Trip Planning*

The Center for Ethics partnered with the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and the Political Science department to plan a student trip to the Equal Justice Initiative Museum and Memorial in Montgomery, Alabama, in January 2019. Program funds kept costs down to $30 per student. Nine students have committed to attending and to discussing their experiences at SLAM. Their experiences may help promote another valuable learning opportunity: hearing Bryan Stevenson, founder of the EJI and author of *Just Mercy*, speak at UNCA in April. Chrystal Cook and Heather Hawn are already securing tickets and drivers to bring students to the event.

*Other*

In mid-October, the Independent Colleges and Universities invited MHU to reapply for its Diversity, Civility, and the Liberal Arts (DCLA) Institute in June 2019. MHU applied for the institute last AY but was not accepted, perhaps due to our presidential leadership transition (commitment from senior administration was a key criteria for admission to the institute). I authored the application last year and did so again this year, but it was far from a solo project. The application prompted the president, provost, University Intercultural Council, and MHU’s DCLA team to develop curricular and co-curricular plans to constructively address racial tensions on campus. The ICU will let us know in January 2019 if MHU’s team—John Omachonu, Alaysia Black Hackett, Kimberly Reigle, and myself—have been accepted to attend the institute in June.

MHU’s acceptance to the DCLA Institute could impact the Center for Ethics activities as early as next semester. Implementing our application plan would involve a series of pedagogy workshops, reporting activities and perhaps student activities in AY 2019-2020. However, Tony Floyd indicated during the application writing process that he wants to start addressing racial tensions on campus sooner, in spring 2019. Also, he asked the Center for Ethics to organize some of that work. I would prefer to dive into racial education work *after* the DCLA training, but if there is a great deal of campus momentum before then, I hope to be a part of it.

**Activities List**

**Fall 2018**

Fall 2018

*Administrative*

* Created a work study position for the “Center for Ethics Projects Assistant” and hired student
* Worked with Mike Thornhill, who created a Center for Ethics mymhu.edu page

*FYS 112*

* Organized Critical Thinking Pedagogy Workshop and Using Case Studies to Teach Ethics Pedagogy Workshop (Steven Benko, facilitator), September 26
* Hosted spring preparatory workshops for FYS 112 Instructors December 3 and 4
* Redesigned assessment tool with subgroup of instructors
* Wrote model syllabus with subgroup of instructors
* Adopted new SLOs
* Changed name to GE 112 (effective AY 2019-2020)
* Recruited 14 teachers and scheduled 16 sections

*Ethics Bowl*

* Applied for and received $500 of program funds from NCICU, October
* Hosted 2 informational meet-and-greets and multiple team practices, August-November
* Recruited a team of 5

*Certificate in Ethical Leadership Pilot Program*

* Recruited student participants, July-September
* Accepted 6 students
* Hosted project planning retreat for students, September 14-15
* Coached students in project implementation, September-December

*Academic Integrity*

* Assisted Phyllis Smith in facilitating hearing board training workshop, October 1

*Other*

* Lead author on MHU’s application to the NCICU Diversity, Civility, and the Liberal Arts Institute, November 14
* Assisted student Devin Thorpe in submitting paper for consideration to the Southern Appalachian Undergraduate Philosophy Conference at UNCA, December 14

**Activities Planned**

**Spring-Summer 2019**

Spring 2019

*Administrative*

* Meet with advisory council
* Write yearly report
* Submit budget request for AY 2019-2020
* Supervise work study student

*Student Events*

* Equal Justice Initiative Trip, Montgomery Alabama, January 25-26
* SLAM presentation, April 9

*FYS 112*

* Hold monthly instructor pedagogy workshops
* Manage FYS 112 Assessment, May

*Certificate in Ethics and Society*

* Write Certificate in Ethics and Society SLOs, curricular requirements
* Meet with deans, provost, and other campus partners to ascertain feasibility and support
* Submit proposal to Curriculum Committee and Assessment Committee
* Present to faculty for vote
* Plan fall recruiting events

*Ethics Bowl*

* bi-weekly Ethics Bowl practice, January-February
* NCICU Ethics Bowl in Raleigh, NC, February 8-8
* SLAM demonstration, April 9

*Professional Development*

* Attend Ethics Center Directors Summit, at the annual conference of the Association of Practical and Professional Ethics (APPE), February 28-March 2
* Present paper “NewsApp Democratizes ‘The View From Nowhere’” at APPE

*Other*

* Attend DCLA Institute in Atlanta, June 2-5
* Plan various pedagogy workshops for faculty based on DCLA materials, June-August