

Developing a Shared Code of Ethics for Instructors

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Abstract

Review Article

Instructors are constantly challenged because they are bound by two major ethical principles. The ethics of leadership and the ethics as followers are the concern. They must adhere to the National Education Association ethical principles when dealing with students and from a professional perspective. The article reviewed the relevant literature, emphasized the five ethical processes to decision making, suggest how the five processes can be used in ethical decision making for educators. The ethical processes in decision making should be used in all universities and colleges. The aims of education as outlined by the university's mission should be adhered to by the instructors. The shared code of ethics should be explained, developed through a lecture, with a question-and-answer session. A handout with the National Education Association code of ethics for instructors and the moral beliefs of different culture should be respected. This article was first submitted to Fischler College of Education at Nova Southeastern University in partial completion of my degree in higher education.

Keywords: ethics, leaders, followers, students, education, morals, cultures, tolerance, code, instructors.

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INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW WITH COMMENTS

All instructors are bound by two different kinds of ethics. Johnson (2004) informed that instructors act as followers and leaders within the same institution. As followers' instructors are bound by the same code of ethics as all the other employees of the institution, and must show loyalty to the institution. As leaders who guide the development of students, instructors are also bound by the code of ethics as outlined by the National Education Association.

Some universities have instituted a new strategic plan that involves, (a) learning without labels, (b) learning across borders, and (c) success one student at a time. The concepts of learning across borders and success one student at a time mean that the instructor's ethical approach towards decision-making must be altered. The opportunity or problem in the work setting would be to outline the ethical approaches that should be used when dealing with students, and the code of ethics as outlined by the National Education Association that would meet the requirements of the universities' new strategic plan.

Velasquez *et.al.*, (2005), described the five approaches to ethical decision-making. These are (a) the

Utilitarian approach, (b) the rights approach, (c) the fairness or justice approach, (d) the common good approach, and (d) the virtue approach. The approach used in some universities by instructors is the utilitarian approach, which involves end-based thinking. By this approach the instructors are doing what is best for the majority of students. The new university strategy of success one student at a time means that such an approach is inadequate.

The author believes that Velasquez *et.al.*, (2005) ethical decision-making plan should be use by all instructors at the universities/ colleges. By this plan, one does not

based on an ethical decision by one approach but rather a combination of the five approaches. Velasquez *et.al.*, (2005), implied that the utilitarian approach to ethical decision making is done by doing what is best for the majority of students. Decision making by the rights approach means, according to Velasquez *et.al.*, (2005, that the decision does not violate the rights of any student. Velasquez *et.al.*, (2005), by the fairness and justice approach implied that every student should be treated the same way without showing favoritism or discrimination. With regard to the common good approach instructors must view themselves and the

students as members of the same community, and thrive to do what is best for the community we serve. Velasquez *et.al.*, (2005) informed that by our virtues such as, honesty, courage, compassion, generosity, fidelity, integrity, fairness, self-control, and prudence, we are able to act in ways that develop our highest potential. Ethical decision-making by the virtuous approach is based on character within oneself and the university community and the broader community at large. Instructors should try to develop virtues within their students.

Velasquez *et.al.*, (2005) reported that the five approaches suggest that once the instructors have ascertained the facts, they should ask themselves five questions when trying resolve an ethical or moral issue with respect to students. These questions are

- (a) What benefits and what harms would each course of action produces, and which would give the best overall consequences for the students?
- (b) What are the moral rights of the affected students, and which course of, action respect those rights the best?
- (c) Which course of action gives every student similar treatment, and does not show favoritism or discrimination?
- (d) Which course of action is a move towards the common good?
- (e) Which course of action develops moral virtues in both students and instructors?

Although this method, according to Valasquez *et.al.*,(2005), does not provide an automatic solution to moral problems, the author agrees with Velasquez *et.al.*, (2005) that it helps to identify important ethical considerations when dealing with students.

Jarvis s (2002) ethical themes of education are the second aspect of the ethical plan that the author would implement. Jarvis (2002) reported that the ethical themes such as. (a) instructor student relationships, (b) the student's moral status, (c) the aims of education, (d) teaching methods, and (e) the epistemological questions related to the distinction between education and indoctrination are all-important to education. Instructor student relationships should be on a group basis as well as individualized. This individualized approach would enhance the strategic plan of the University of "Success One Student at a time". The moral status of the students is important for the strategic goal of learning across borders. Students at the university come from different cultures and different backgrounds.

As a result, their moral status is subject to ethical relativism. Velasquez *et.al.*,(2005) informed that ethical relativism is the theory that holds that morality is relative to the norms of one's culture. They emphasized that whether an action is right or wrong depends on the moral norms of the society in which it is practiced. Harris

(1996) outlined three theses for moral relativism and these are

- (1) Cultures do in fact disagree in their moral beliefs.
- (2) Whether a moral belief is right or wrong can be determined only relative to the culture or moral tradition of the individuals who hold them.
- (3) A tolerant attitude towards the differing moral beliefs should be adopted among individuals or social groups.

Far too often, in the American society we expect individuals from other societies to share our moral beliefs. Clearly, this is not the case through moral relativism, and as instructors we must be tolerant and cognizant to the situation.

The aims of education should be those as outlined in the university's mission statement. As instructors our main focus should be, (a) commitment to success, (b) academic quality, (c) personal attention, (d) integrated learning, and (e) global community. The instructors commented to success be initiated with all ethical decision-making taking into consideration the approaches of Velasquez *et.al.*,(2005). The teaching methods should incorporate all learning styles, to cater to the different strengths of the students. Since every instructor has some specialty in the course he/she is teaching, care should be exercised in not to indoctrinate the students to his or her way of thinking but the general perspectives of the course.

The third component of the ethical plan is the code of ethics by which we must be bound as instructors. Strike and Soltis (2004) made reference to the National Education Association code of ethics for educators and informed of the ethics of inquiry, the ethics for punishment and due process and the ethics in relation to equality of treatment for students. Strike and Soltis (2004) informed that in relation to ethical inquiry that the educator/instructor, (a) should not deliberately suppress or distort subject matter relevant to the student's progress, (b) should not unreasonably restrain the student from independent action in pursuit of learning and (c) should not unreasonably deny the student access to varying points of view. Strike and Soltis (2004) with regard to punishment and due process reported that an educator/instructor, (a) should make a reasonable effort to protect the students from conditions harmful to learning, and (b) should not intentionally expose the students to embarrassment or disparagement. Strike and Soltis (2004) informed that in relation to the equality of treatment to students the National Education Association code of ethics stated that, the educator/instructor should not on the basis of race, color, creed, sex, national origin, marital status, political or religious beliefs, family, social or cultural background, or sexual orientation, unfairly, (a) exclude any student from participating in any program, (b) deny benefits to any student, and (c) give advantage to any particular student.

It is the opinion of the author that the National Education Association code of ethics as cited from Strike and Soltis (2004) should never be compromised even for loyalty to the university. Additionally, the codes of ethics mentioned above covers some of the concepts of ethical decision-making as outlined by Velasquez *et.al.*,(2005). Jarvis (2002) informed that in ethical decision-making students should be treated as an end in themselves and not the means to an end. This line of thought should be the basis of all decision-making at the university.

Ethical Plan

To implement the ethical plan for instructors at a university/college, the author suggested the delivery of a lecture, with a question and discussion session at the end. The focus of the lecture would be the ethical themes, and solutions outlined in the paper along with the National Education Association code of ethics that would enable instructors to meet the university's new strategic plan of learning across borders and success one student at a time. Instructors should be urged to implement the plan and a handout would be given illustrating the ethical approach to be used, and the National Education Association code of ethics of importance.

CONCLUSION

It is important that the teaching staff and the administrative staff know their roles in the University (College). The administrative staff are bound mainly by the code of ethics and mission statement of the university. The instructors are bound by both the code of ethics associated with educators and the code of ethics and mission statement of the university. It is therefore

necessary for each instructor to be informed of his/her expectations as both a follower and a leader.. There must be an action plan to ensure that new and continuing instructors are aware of their roles at the institution. The proposed action plan is useful in all settings and countries. Some countries might not have a national Education Association but there must be other forums for the implementation of such a plan. For example the combined efforts of the instructors' workers union and university personnel can be used. Cultural differences could mean different moral standings and they must be respected.

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