

Contemporary Ethical Issues Study Group Results

Spring 2009

General Education Area	Contemporary Ethical Issues
Assessment Project Name:	Rubric Pilot Test
Semester/Yr Data Collected:	Fall 2008-Spring 2009
Person submitting results:	Monica Stitt-Bergh and Marlene Lowe
Date submitted:	April 28, 2009; revised 11/30/2009

Executive Summary:

Background. In fall 2007, faculty groups drafted a rubric to evaluate how well student work achieves the Contemporary Ethical Issues (ETH) outcomes. In spring 2008, faculty who had taught ETH courses were surveyed regarding the rubric: [survey results](#) indicated that most faculty respondents believed the rubric was applicable to student work and would be useful.

Current project. This fall 2008-spring 2009 project tested how well the rubric could be applied to student work. Student work was collected in fall 2008. In spring 2009, two faculty study groups were formed. Faculty members who had ETH teaching experience and who were from various academic disciplines gathered together to test the rubric by applying it to several pieces of student work.

The “criteria for success” were met for two of the four assessment questions. Conclusions from this study include the following:

- The rubric is useful and can provide meaningful results
- With training, reliable application of the rubric is possible
- Faculty members’ confidence in their ability to accurately score student work decreases when they are unfamiliar with the area/content of the student work
- A study group is an effective technique to pilot test a rubric
- ETH Focus Board should consider establishing criteria for ETH assignments/tests
- ETH Focus Board should consider offering or requiring a workshop/course on ethics for ETH instructors

The Assessment Office presented the results and conclusions to the ETH Focus Board. The ETH Focus Board agreed to conduct a full-scale assessment project in spring 2010 that involves collecting student work from randomly-selected students and scoring the work using the ETH rubric.

The ETH Hallmarks, Explanatory Notes, Student Learning Outcomes, and the Rubric are in Appendix A.

1. Assessment Question(s) and/or Goal(s) of Assessment Activity

This project was designed to answer these questions:

- a) Can the ETH rubric be applied across different kinds of assignments (e.g., in-class exam questions, research papers, reflective essays, blogs)?
- b) Can faculty members reliably apply the rubric to student work completed in a course outside their academic field?
- c) Do faculty members feel confident in their ability to evaluate students’ ethical deliberation skills using the rubric?
- d) Will the results from the rubric be meaningful and help guide program improvement?

2. Questions Assessed	3. Method(s) to Gather Evidence	4. Method to Evaluate	5. Program Size & Sampling Technique
a) Can the rubric be applied across different kinds of assignments?	Two Faculty Study Groups and Follow-up Survey (online)	Qualitative analysis of discussion notes and of open-ended survey questions.	All 112 faculty members who had taught ETH in F07-S09 were invited. 27 accepted the invitation. 16 participated, from 15 different academic programs.
b) Can faculty members reliably apply the rubric to student work completed in a course outside their academic field?		Quantitative summary of survey question results.	
c) Do faculty members feel confident in their ability to evaluate students' ethical deliberation skills using the rubric?		Scoring rubric for student samples.	
d) Will results from the rubric be meaningful and help guide program improvement?			

Questions Assessed	6. Criteria for Success	7. Results	8. Met/Not met (criteria for success)
a) Can the rubric be applied across different kinds of assignments?	80% of study group members agree: rubric is applicable, reliable, and will produce meaningful & useful results; faculty members are confident.	a) The rubric can be applied to many different assignments, but not all. Majority believed that ETH assignments should meet certain criteria. (See #9)	NO
b) Can faculty members reliably apply the rubric to student work completed in a course outside their academic field?		b) Without training, they were in general agreement about the quality of the student samples and the scores each should receive.	YES
c) Do faculty members feel confident in their ability to evaluate students' ethical deliberation skills using the rubric?		c) They were not confident in their evaluation of how well students applied Codes of Ethics when the Codes were not from their field. Only 66% of group 2 survey respondents were confident they could apply the rubric to student work from outside the faculty members' field.	NO
d) Will results from the rubric be meaningful and help guide program improvement?		d) The rubric will provide meaningful, useful results. They believed that the assignment/task played a role in student success: assignments unrelated to the Hallmarks and/or the SLOs would result in low scores.	YES

9. **Conclusions and Discoveries**

- Useful rubric. The rubric can be used to gather useful and meaningful information about how well students achieve the SLOs for ETH.
- Reliability possible. With training, reliable application of the rubric appears possible.
- Readers' lack of knowledge. Unfamiliar content, genres, and Codes of Ethics decrease faculty members' confidence in their ability to accurately score student work.
- The study group is an effective technique to pilot test a rubric (see also #13).
- Criteria for assignments/tests. Certain stipulations are likely needed for assignments given in ETH courses, especially those assignments collected for program assessment. **The study group recommended that at least one assignment or test question(s) ask students to address a complex, current ethical dilemma.** The assignment/test should do more than ask students to recite "pat" answers or apply a Code of Ethics (or law) without interpretation. Assignments/tests that do not allow for ethical deliberation were deemed inappropriate because they do not align with the *Explanatory Notes* or *Outcomes*. For example, a test question that asks students to list the ethical issues related to the Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis cannot be evaluated using the rubric because it does not meet the Hallmarks, Explanatory Notes, and Outcomes. The rubric cannot evaluate multiple-choice tests, but the study groups did not conclude that multiple-choice tests are unsuitable. It may be possible to design closed-ended test questions that evaluate students' ethical deliberation skills and then to use the instructor's answer key to determine levels of achievement.
- Faculty development workshop/course. One study group recommended that those teaching ETH should attend a workshop or course on ethics.

10. **Distribution and Discussion of Results**

The Assessment Office will give the ETH Focus Board and the General Education Office a written and oral report of this project. Discussion will take place during the regular board meeting.

11. **Use of Results/Program Modifications**

No program modifications will be made at this time, in part because of the small sample size. Because the rubric was deemed useful and appropriate, the ETH Focus Board will collaborate with the Assessment Office to apply the rubric to a larger, randomly-selected sample of student work.

12. **Assessment Modifications**

- Clarify distinction between "3" and "4" scores. The study group reported that the distinction between the score of "3" and "4" on the rubric was not evident. Only 36% of the survey respondents perceived the descriptions' differences as adequate. This might be solved through reader training and/or modifications to the rubric.
- Provide assignment information to readers. The study groups wanted to have at least a summary of the assignment along with the student work. 55% wanted a copy of the assignment; 45% wanted a 1-3 sentence summary of the assignment or task.

13. **Other Important Information**

Assessment involves more than collecting and evaluating data/evidence. Assessment activities involved in this project include the following:

- faculty members collaborated to create a rubric;
- instructors provided feedback on the rubric via a survey;
- instructors supplied examples of student work;
- faculty members joined a study group to discuss the rubric in light of student work; and

- faculty and staff on the ETH Faculty Focus Board and in the General Education Office discussed these ETH assessment activities with the Assessment Office and provided valuable insight and guidance.

These aspects of assessment provide faculty members the opportunity to intellectually engage in a discussion of teaching and learning. In turn, these assessment activities contribute to faculty ownership, increase confidence in the results, and therefore makes use of results more likely.

The survey respondents reacted positively to the study group sessions. 82% would recommend the experience to colleagues. They reported that they joined the study group because they believe assessment is the faculty's responsibility and/or to learn more about teaching and ETH course:

- “I think we all have some responsibility for assessment and this form involved more intellectual engagement.”
- “I wanted to help and also to meet others teaching E designated courses. I'm curious about how other faculty incorporate the E focus in their classes and how that aligns, or not, with what I've been doing. Of course, I'm always looking for ways to enhance my teaching and participating in this group seemed like a good idea. It was!”

As a result of the study group, survey respondents reported changes in the following areas:

- how they will teach ETH courses (55%);
- their view of the ETH program/requirement (45%); and
- their view of assessment (36%).

Their comments described the change:

- “Our actual discussions of the scoring and how to define and teach ethics were especially helpful and gave me some good ideas on how to refine the presentation of ethical dilemmas for class activities in the future. I was also impressed with the rubric itself and see more clearly now all the steps that go in to creating this kind of assessment instrument.”
- “The experience convinced me that it really would be advisable to offer (perhaps only to those instructors who wish for it, however) a specially designed general survey course in ethics—so that they are at least introduced to the various ethical perspectives that are implicitly referred to in the rubric.”
- “I always have felt Ethical issues need to be part of the curriculum. But assessment has always been difficult to define. I think I have a clearer picture of assessment goals.”
- “I was unhappy w/ the SLO that was along the lines of ‘can identify an ethical issue’ which seemed like an unusually low bar. I don't feel that way so much now.”

Given the positive response to the study group session, the Assessment Office plans to continue using this technique to involve faculty members in the assessment process.

APPENDIX A

Contemporary Ethical Issues Course Hallmarks & Explanatory Notes

1. Contemporary ethical issues will be presented and studied in a manner that is fully integrated into the main course content.
2. The disciplinary approach(es) used in the class will give students tools for the development of responsible deliberation and ethical judgment.
3. Students will achieve basic competency in analyzing and deliberating upon contemporary ethical issues to help them make ethically determined judgments.
4. The equivalent of one semester credit-hour or 30% of a 3-credit course will be devoted to contemporary ethical issues.
5. minimum of 8 hours of class time will be spent in discussing contemporary ethical issues.
6. The course will be numbered at the 300- or 400-level.

Explanatory Notes

- The goal of E courses, at least in part, must be to equip students with some degree of proficiency in ethical deliberation. These courses should not be purely descriptive, merely characterizing, for example, the moral beliefs of person or peoples. Nor is it intended that the pedagogy be value-free, using approaches that maintain an “arms-length” relationship with current ethical issues.
- Course materials must be pertinent to the ethical issues under review. While well-selected philosophical and literary texts would serve, so would case studies, judicial opinions, statutes, codes of ethics (and commentaries), film, works of art, performances, as well as a broad range of other readings.
- Different academic approaches and methodologies can be used to give students tools for the development of responsible ethical judgments. Approaches might include small group discussions, formal debate, round-table discussions, Socratic questioning, etc.
- E course may be associated with particular disciplines, professions, and larger enterprises: the ethics of human and animal research, medical ethics, bioethics, biotechnology, business ethics, engineering ethics, ethics in government, and journalistic ethics, for example. Still others might look at ethical issues that emerge at cultural interfaces, such as war, evangelism, colonialism and multi-cultural societies, etc. Contemporary ethical issues must be fully integrated into the main course content and must be tied to activities that develop students’ proficiency in forming sound ethical judgments.

Student Learning Outcomes

Undergraduates can:

1. identify ethical issues in a contemporary situation/professional setting;
2. deliberate responsibly on ethical issues using tools/processes/frameworks;
3. form sound ethical judgments.

CONTEMPORARY ETHICAL ISSUES RUBRIC

10/24/2007

CATEGORY	Not Meeting-1	Approaching-2	Meeting-3	Exceeding-4
Identifies ethical issue(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does not identify the ethical issue(s) or realizes something is not “right” but does not clearly identify the professional and/or contemporary ethical issues at play - Sees issues mostly in “black and white” terms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identifies some of the professional and/or contemporary ethical issues or identifies what is legal/illegal or acceptable/unacceptable - Recognizes relevant ethical ambiguities/ dilemmas but does not clearly describe them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identifies/names the inherent ethical choices and implications involved in the professional and/or contemporary situation - Clearly describes relevant ethical ambiguities/ dilemmas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clearly identifies the inherent ethical choices and implications involved in a professional and/or contemporary situation - Understands the effects of perspective, context, personal views, codes and laws (if applicable) - Specifies the decision-makers and stakeholders - Integrates clear descriptions of relevant ethical ambiguities/ dilemmas into the overall analysis
Deliberates responsibly using ethical tools, processes, and/or frameworks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unclear about the frameworks, principles, and/or code of ethics to be applied - Fails to acknowledge multiple viewpoints or embraces contradictory viewpoints - May discuss ethical issues but unclear on own position and/or the effects of different perspectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Describes the frameworks, principles, and/or code of ethics that can be applied - Comfortable discussing ethical issues from own point of view, but may have difficulty seeing different points of view 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Draws upon frameworks, principles, and/or code of ethics to develop pertinent arguments and/or positions - Debates and/or discusses ethical issues with sensitivity to others’ points of view and different perspectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Draws upon frameworks, principles, and/or code of ethics to develop pertinent arguments and/or positions - Develops and presents alternate arguments/positions - Discusses and/or debates ethical issues with sensitivity to others’ perspectives and the context while also defending own position with logic and fact
Forms sound ethical judgments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does not specify a resolution or judgment or decision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Makes a judgment/decision but may not take into account multiple perspectives - Partial or flawed use of a systematic decision-making process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Makes a judgment that considers and is sensitive to multiple perspectives - Evidence of a logical, systematic decision-making process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Makes a reasoned judgment that takes into account an array of arguments and perspectives - Evidence of a logical, systematic decision-making process.
Uses professional code of ethics (IF APPLICABLE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does not correctly reference sections of the professional code of ethics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cites applicable sections, but may not correctly use in decision-making process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Correctly cites applicable sections of the professional code and explains how they guide forming a judgment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Correctly cites applicable sections of the professional code and explains their meaning and/or implications on forming a judgment

For more information contact the Assessment Office, 956-6669 or 956-4283