

## Ethical and Moral Reasoning

### June 2008

#### Definition

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Lickona (1991) states, “Character so conceived has three interrelated parts: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral behavior . . . habits of the mind, habits of the heart, and habits of action” (51). Lickona claims that “all three are necessary for leading a moral life; all three make up moral maturity”(51). Moral knowing is described as involving moral awareness, values, perspective taking, moral reasoning, and decision making. Moral feeling includes the conscience, self-esteem, empathy, and humility. Finally, moral action is founded on moral competence (the ability to turn moral judgment and feeling into action), moral will (the unction to do what’s right), and moral habit (an unconscious proclivity to do what’s right). Lickona views moral action as an “outcome” (61) of both moral knowing and moral feeling, and the moral environment in which individuals are situated as a key factor in whether people behave morally.

Lickona, T. 1991. *Educating for character: How our schools can teach respect and responsibility*. New York: Bantam Books.

To actually live ethical lives, students need to integrate and reflect on the cognitive, affective, and behavioral elements of morality [Rest]. According to Rest, moral behavior is the outcome of the four characteristics below:

1. **Moral Sensitivity**: the ability to see an ethical dilemma, including how our actions will affect others
2. **Moral Judgment**: the ability to reason correctly about what “ought” to be done in a specific situation
3. **Moral Motivation**: a personal commitment to moral action, accepting responsibility for the outcome
4. **Moral Character**: courageous persistence in spite of fatigue or temptations to take the easy way out

So a moral life consists not just of how we think, but also what we do. And what we habitually do shapes the kind of people we become. This growth occurs in a “community of practice” with a shared mission or values [Wenger].

#### Rationale

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Simpson’s mission statement clearly articulates the shared values of the college. Our mission is to graduate ethical individuals, nurturing values like personal integrity, moral responsibility, service to community, and social justice. These values are an integral part of a liberal arts education at Simpson, are echoed in the recent strategic plan, and are reinforced by our connection to the religious traditions of the United Methodist Church.

[<http://www.simpson.edu/about/mission.html>]

A recent AAC&U survey of 23,000 students at 23 institutions found a “disconnect” between what colleges say they value and perceptions of the moral education they provide. Fifty-three percent of students and 78 percent of college professionals *strongly agree* that teaching ethical and moral reasoning should be a major focus of liberal education. But only 30 percent of students and staff strongly agree that this is currently a major focus of their colleges. Less than

half of students and about a third of staff strongly agree students leave their colleges with a stronger capacity for ethical and moral reasoning.

[[http://www.aacu.org/core\\_commitments/documents/PSRII\\_Findings\\_April2008.pdf](http://www.aacu.org/core_commitments/documents/PSRII_Findings_April2008.pdf)]

## **Criteria for Approving Proposals**

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The Center for the Study of College Student Values uses curricular benchmarks to assess “Principles and Practices for Promoting Character Development in College,” such as: (1) courses have in-depth opportunities for students to reflect on core values and ethical issues, (2) the liberal arts program integrates core values, (3) the institution’s core values infuse all academic majors, (4) the institution takes deliberate steps to help students act upon the core values, for example by giving students structured opportunities to develop and practice ethical leadership.

[[http://www.collegevalues.org/pdfs/articles/Principles\\_and\\_Practices\\_General.pdf](http://www.collegevalues.org/pdfs/articles/Principles_and_Practices_General.pdf)]

In order for a course to be designated an Ethics and Values course, it should:

1. Investigate ethical ideals (justice, human rights, equality, and “the good life”) in light of either historical Christian ethics **or** the major theories of moral philosophy (virtue ethics, natural law, utilitarianism, duty).
2. Identify and critically evaluate real-world ethical issues and discuss the individual and societal effects of various choices based on a vision of the good life.
3. Ask students to articulate and defend (in oral or written form) a conception of ethical action on an issue.
4. Give students an opportunity for engaged action in the larger community, consistent with the idea of the common good expressed in the college’s mission.

*Student learning in the area of ethics, values, and moral reasoning has intellectual, affective, and behavioral components. It is important to see this as a developmental process. When students take courses in ethics that challenge them to (a) critically reflect on and understand their values in the context of larger ethical systems, and (b) see issues from a “common good” or more universal perspective, they tend to progress through the levels of moral development.*

LAS would be a good platform to discuss ethical issues in the context of a “passion” course, going beyond the small community service component in the first week. *Senior Colloquium* is designed to have an ethics component: SRC courses are meant to raise “issues, themes, and questions that present students and faculty with value judgments that have to be made in order for the society to act...students and faculty should also consistently ask how the value judgments are to be formed, asked, and answered and then how these judgments are to be subjected to critique.”

[<http://www.simpson.edu/academics/seniorcolloquium/index.html>] Should we move to a “Senior Seminar” model, with some of the courses within the major, respective departments could explore ethical standards within various professions related to the major.

## **Programmatic possibilities**

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AAC&U has identified five key dimensions of personal and social responsibility that form the basis of the Core Commitments initiative:

1. Striving for excellence: developing a strong work ethic and consciously doing one’s very best in all aspects of college;

2. Cultivating personal and academic integrity: recognizing and acting on a sense of honor ranging from honesty in relationships to principled engagement with a formal academic honors code;
3. Contributing to a larger community: recognizing and acting on one's responsibility to the educational community (classroom, campus life), the local community, and the wider society, both national and global;
4. Taking seriously the perspectives of others: recognizing and acting on the obligation to inform one's own judgment; engaging diverse and competing perspectives as a resource for learning, for citizenship, and for work;
5. Developing competence in ethical and moral reasoning: developing ethical and moral reasoning in ways that incorporate the other four responsibilities; using such reasoning in learning and in life.

[http://www.aacu.org/press\\_room/press\\_releases/2007/cc\\_advisory\\_board.cfm](http://www.aacu.org/press_room/press_releases/2007/cc_advisory_board.cfm)

### *Intentional culture*

George Kuh, whose work in developing and promoting the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) makes him one of the most prominent researchers in the field, sums up the findings across the literature (p. 38):

- **College can at least accentuate a student's values development trajectory** ("crystallize and integrate the attitudinal and values dimensions of a student's identity");
- **In a small fraction of cases, perhaps no more than 10 percent, college may have a transforming effect** ("resulting in substantial reorganization of one's personality");
- **A high level of peer interaction is a significant positive mediating factor**; and
- **Active involvement in both academic and out-of-class activities is a significant positive mediating factor.**

Kuh (2005) provides six principles:

1. Emphasize character and moral development in the institution's mission.
2. Adopt a holistic approach to talent development--learning takes place in and outside of the classroom.
3. Recruit and socialize new faculty, staff, and students with character and moral development in mind
4. Make sure certain institutional policies and practices are consistent with the institution's commitment to this agenda.
5. Assess the impact of students' experiences and the institutional environment on character and moral development.

Numerous studies in moral education suggest practical tactics teachers can use that will help their students move toward more complex, principled ethical reasoning. Listed here are some methods consistent with the findings of research on fostering students' moral judgment.

- Have students discuss controversial moral dilemmas. Identify disciplinary issues with moral content—that relate to moral values. Develop cases, problems, or scenarios that involve these values for students to discuss.
- Have students play the roles of and explain the reasoning used by others to resolve moral dilemmas.
- Allow students to discover how various cultural groups reason about moral issues.
- All courses, even in disciplines such as mathematics or statistics that on their surface may appear to lack obviously moral content, offer rich opportunities for helping students develop their skill

in moral reasoning. Every course can become a learning community where values of mutual respect, sensitivity to others' needs, and cooperation are emphasized and discussed.

- Ensure all students have ample out-of-class contact with faculty members.
- In addition to high involvement tactics, directly teach Kohlberg's model of six stages of reasoning as one would teach other, disciplinary concepts.
- Use the DIT to help both teacher and students understand their moral reasoning and track and improve program effectiveness.

#### Whiteley's Sierra Project

#### Chickering's Seven Vectors

#### “Embedded” Ethical Training

Susan Illingworth in *Approaches to Ethics in Higher Education*, published by The Higher Education Academy of the United Kingdom in 2004, usefully outlines 3 ways that ethics is commonly taught: “pragmatic,” “embedded,” and “theoretical.”

#### Interdisciplinary and Integrative Learning

#### Service-Learning as Reflective and Developmental

#### Developing “Servant Leaders”

The evidence is that leadership training, interdisciplinary courses, engaged and integrative pedagogies, volunteerism and reflective service-learning, a supportive institutional climate of social activism, and a high level of student involvement in and out of class do have an effect on the development of moral judgment, moral motivation and moral character, to use Rest’s distinctions.

### **Source Information on Similar Requirements at other Good Schools**

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- [http://www.calvin.edu/admin/provost/core/chap\\_5.html](http://www.calvin.edu/admin/provost/core/chap_5.html)
- [http://roanoke.edu/Student\\_Life.htm](http://roanoke.edu/Student_Life.htm)
- <http://www.ccl.sbc.edu/index.html?general>
- <http://www.mercer.edu/oie/qep/summary.htm>
- NASPA: Best College Character Programs  
[<http://www.collegevalues.org/bestprograms.cfm>]
- College & Character: Exemplary Programs  
[<http://www.collegeandcharacter.org/guide/exemplary.html>]
- College & Character: Curriculum  
[[http://www.collegeandcharacter.org/guide/exemplary\\_faculty.html](http://www.collegeandcharacter.org/guide/exemplary_faculty.html)]

### **Teaching Resources**

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Code of ethics for various professions and disciplines

[www.collegevalues.org](http://www.collegevalues.org) has a great variety of articles for faculty and student development professionals

## **Assessment Resources**

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Online “Engaged Leader Scholar” (co/curricular) transcript managed by student, which lists various courses and activities designated as developing character. Approved by? Advisor; CVIL: ?

*Personal and Social Responsibility Institutional Inventory (PSRII)*

Part of AAC&U study “Core Commitments: Educating Students for Personal and Social Responsibility.

*Survey of Character Development Practices (www.collegevalues.org)*

*Defining Issues Test (DIT)*

*Sociomoral Reflection Measure-Short Form (SRM-SF)*

*Measure of Moral Orientation (MMO)*

*CSEQ*

*Measure of Intellectual Development (MID)*

*Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Assessment (SDTLA)*

*Ethic of Care Interview (ECI)*

## **Examples of Classes**

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Humanities/Religion/Philosophy: Study of ethics, particularly virtue theory

Behavior: Service-Learning courses

Assimilation: integrating information into existing structures

Accommodation: modifying existing structures to incorporate new experiences

Dissonance: novel experiences create potential for new learning, but can overwhelm/shut down.

Cross developmental regions: Cognitive-structural, Domain, Affective, Social learning, and Integrative (Swaner, 2004)

## **Staffing and Costs**

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No additional faculty or staff would be needed to improve personal and social responsibility.

## **Implementation Challenges**

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Coming to consensus on expected moral behaviors, virtues, or outcomes. Such consensus is described in Alasdair MacIntyre’s *Whose Justice, Which Rationality*.

## **Resources and further reading**

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The subcommittee has an extensive list for further reading. Much of it is captured in:

Educating for Personal and Social Responsibility:

A Planning Project of the Association of American Colleges and Universities

### **Review of the Literature**

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