

Kaiser Ethics Project
Summary Final Evaluation

July 9, 2009

The year 2009 marks the third and final year of the Kaiser Ethics Project. This summary final evaluation will reflect on the goals presented to the Kaiser Foundation in the original grant proposal and assess the progress made toward achieving those goals over the past three years.

The Ellbogen Center for Teaching and Learning (ECTL), an important and valued contributor to the teaching of undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Wyoming, served as the home base for the project. This was a major contributor to the success of the project. Because the Center serves to make the University a true intellectual community through its sponsorship and support of forums of every shape and size devoted to the furtherance of college teaching, it was the obvious place for the development of a model for a campus-wide ethics curriculum.

The ECTL, with its wide array of programs, its experience in publicity and planning, and its strong connections with a broad spectrum of faculty guaranteed that the project would have solid administrative and programmatic support.

Cooperation between the ECTL and the Department of Philosophy, which provided the intellectual and pedagogical support for the project, was seamless and substantial. Such cooperation, essential to the success of the project, didn't just happen; it was due in large part to the clear vision and generous dedication of the two project directors, Jane Nelson, Director of the ECTL, and Ed Sherline, Head of the Department of Philosophy. Both worked well together, and both were highly instrumental in the project's success.

From the start, the project directors had a clear sense of how the project should develop. They chose an existing model of a highly successful applied ethics program from Princeton University. Their decision to bring the Director of the Princeton University Center for Human Values to the University of Wyoming as a consultant and speaker was a good one. The director, Stephen J. Macedo, helped the project directors and the project's advisory committee establish a clear consensus as to what the broad guidelines for a campus-wide ethics across the curriculum program should be.

The decision to focus on applied ethics rather than on the more esoteric field of pure ethics, for example, was obviously a sound one. But more than that, it meant that the project would take a broad view of ethics as a means of helping students develop critical thinking skills that could be applied over a broad spectrum of academic disciplines. A major goal of the project, then, was agreed upon right from the beginning: to encourage faculty to include in their course curricula content that would help students to generalize accurately and carefully, to learn to look past vivid but possibly misleading examples and analogies, to use words carefully, and to be fair-minded and careful, especially when their own favorite beliefs were placed under the microscope.

Thus, at the outset, the project emphasized a student-centered approach to teaching applied ethics, one that was built on the conviction that applied ethics was a form of critical thinking and as such instructors in all disciplines could integrate ethics into their courses without special training in philosophy or professional ethics. This was an important step, for it meant that the project would not be regarded by faculty and students as something that was moralistic and preachy, but that its goal would be to guide students in analyzing real world ethical situations.

The project's advisory council, seven faculty members representing a wide variety of disciplines across campus, worked well together and provided valuable guidance to the project directors. The members served as reviewers of grant proposals and provided excellent advice regarding the annual call for proposals and contributed to the design of the criteria for the awarding of funds.

Overall, the project funded twenty projects and provided supplementary funding for three ongoing projects. The diversity and quality of the funded projects were, in short, remarkable. Previous project reports and evaluations have summarized the projects funded to date along with those that will continue to be implemented in the coming years. As has been pointed out, the courses that have been, or are, being developed as a result of the Kaiser Foundation funds will undoubtedly serve as models for teaching ethics across the curriculum for many years to come.

In this final summary evaluation, however, it is important to note that seldom does such a large portion of a project's funds go directly to the persons and programs for which the funds were originally requested. One of the major strengths of the project, in this evaluator's opinion, was that the Kaiser Foundation funds were used almost exclusively to support projects and programs directly related to the goals and intentions of the original grant application. This was in large part due to the willingness of the ECTL to take up the administrative details and the programmatic coordination of the project as a cost share.

In cooperation with the Philosophy Department, the ECTL offered an impressive array of discussions, colloquia, seminars and conferences on the topic of teaching ethics across the curriculum. Such an effort gave the project an intellectual credibility and a programmatic richness that greatly enhanced the scope and reach of the project.

An additional strength of the project was the well-organized workshops and follow-up meetings which Jane Nelson and Ed Sherline put together for each cohort of Kaiser Faculty over the three-year period of the grant. Sponsored by the ECTL, the workshops proved to be a highly effective introduction to the challenges of developing ethics curricula for courses in a wide variety of academic and professional disciplines.

The ECTL organized discussions and lunch-time seminars that provided both practical hints for developing ethics-centered instruction as well as creating a forum for faculty colleague to exchange ideas not only with each other but with colleagues across the University. Such opportunities are rare in the course of a busy academic year, and their integration into the Kaiser

Program provided a unique opportunity for cross-disciplinary intellectual engagement.

Beginning with the fall workshop on ethics course development, held in each of the three years of the project and continuing through meetings held throughout the year, successive cohorts of Kaiser Faculty were provided with opportunities to refine ethical content in their courses and to discuss what worked and what didn't. Discussions were consistently lively, engaging and constructive. Moreover, the group became quite cohesive over the course of three years and established both personal and intellectual connections that will undoubtedly carry over into the future.

The Kaiser Faculty Program was especially fortunate to be able to draw upon funds from the independent Kaiser Ethics Endowment to assist in bringing visiting scholars from other universities to discuss their own research and to raise awareness across the university campus of the importance of ethical issues in the undergraduate curriculum. These speakers, in addition to the workshops and forums sponsored by the ECTL and the Philosophy Department, gave the project a thematic cohesiveness and greatly enlivened the intellectual environment of the University.

In sum, the Kaiser Ethics Project not only achieved the goals set forth in its original application to the Kaiser Foundation, but in many instances it exceeded those goals.

It successfully developed a model program for teaching ethics across the curriculum that, while based on other exemplary programs, has developed into a prototype that is nicely tailored to the students and faculty at the University of Wyoming.

Through its grant awards, along with an annual series of curriculum development workshops and meetings, the project succeeded in generating a wide range of new or revised courses focused on ethical issues. In addition, the project created a core of more than twenty faculty members with experience in developing ethical content in an impressive variety of professional and academic disciplines. Furthermore, the project encouraged a series of highly effective exchanges among faculty members throughout the University about teaching strategies and practices.

The dedication of the Kaiser Faculty to the goal of teaching ethics across the curriculum as well as their willingness to experiment with new approaches to the topic, promises to ensure a solid foundation upon which to create an institutional commitment to the teaching of ethics across the curriculum. In this regard, it is highly encouraging that the University of Wyoming deans and directors voted to pursue funding for an expanded ethics project in the coming years.

In large part due to the role of the ECTL in promoting the project, it is fair to say that the visibility of ethics as part of the general curriculum was greatly heightened during the three years of this project. Due to the efforts of the project directors and members of the project's advisory council, the goal of incorporating ethics into the curriculum at the University is now a part of the draft University Plan for the next five years.

In conclusion, and on a personal note, I have evaluated a great many projects over the years, but I have rarely evaluated a project that so successfully achieved the goals it set out to achieve – and it did so efficiently and with a high degree of grace and integrity.

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