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Integrating Ethics Across the Curriculum

The University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez (UPRM) is one of 11 campuses in the University of Puerto Rico system. One thing that distinguishes the Mayagüez campus, however, is its development of an interdisciplinary strategy for the integration of ethical content in the curricula of its academic programs. The Colegio de Administración de Empresas (ADEM) is a key driver in the implementation of this strategy, which is known as Ethics Across the Curriculum (EAC).

One of the most intriguing aspects of the EAC approach at the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez is that ownership of the initiative is not exclusive to ADEM, but shared broadly across other academic units as well. According to Dr. William J. Frey, Professor of Business Ethics at ADEM, the university’s Center for Ethics in the Professions (CE-PRO) has “coordinated the development of this interdisciplinary program by designing and overseeing faculty development workshops, ethical content-generating efforts, and EAC modules for ethics intervention in the practical and professional classroom.”

Professor Frey recently discussed his school’s successful integration and promotion of ethical learning with AACSB researcher R. Colin Nelson, generously providing a great deal of information about how the university got its EAC strategy off the ground, how it continues to organize, support and deliver EAC, and details about the impact of the initiative:

R. Colin Nelson (RCN): What initially inspired the interdisciplinary approach of Ethics Across the Curriculum at the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez?

William J. Frey (WJF): In 1998, we held a faculty retreat funded by a grant from the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF). We explored the integrative approach by identifying ethical issues in business, science and engineering, providing participants with workshops on teaching ethics in their disciplines, and developing ethics cases and activities that they could integrate into mainstream business, science and engineering classes. The external advisors that participated in this retreat, Vivian Weil from the Illinois Institute of Technology, Michael Pritchard from Western Michigan University, and Michael Rabins from Texas A&M University, encouraged us to reformulate our strategy as Ethics Across the Curriculum (EAC). EAC in the form of teaching skills and pedagogical materials on ethics was the “emergent result.”

This approach to ethics has been further developed through a series of grants from NSF and the University of Puerto Rico Central Administration, beginning with the original grant awarded in 1996 and extending to the present day. These grants have helped in the institutionalization of an interdisciplinary EAC approach in business, the sciences, engineering and agriculture. This approach combines elective
standalone courses in ethics in the different disciplines (business, medicine, computers, engineering, etc.) with "micro ethics interventions" that are carried out at strategic points in the university curriculum.

It's also important to understand that much of the structure and the accomplishments of our ethics program have been shaped by the political and social context of Puerto Rico. This context has both advantages and disadvantages, but our overall program and the relationships between its parts cannot be fully understood apart from the political, cultural, and social background in which the university operates. For example, our university’s different administrations are closely tied to whatever political party is in power. This has led to a lack of continuity because university administrations are often short-lived. The effect on our ethics initiative is that we have started on one set of initiatives, only to lower their priority after three or four years as a new administration comes onto the scene with a new set of initiatives.

Business ethics is a case in point. While it has been a high priority item for some administrations, others have placed it at the very bottom of theirs. This has, over the years, led to several independent but converging initiatives, each developed under a different administration, and continued under a newer one that has given it less priority, but all coordinated from the bottom by those of us invested in ethics development over the long haul. This context is responsible for the broad range and scope of our initiatives, but it also has constrained the development of each initiative taken individually and in isolation.

**RCN:** Who has overall responsibility for overseeing EAC?

**WJF:** The Center for Ethics in the Professions (CE-PRO) oversees the EAC initiative at the university level. CE-PRO was originally the Center for the Philosophy and History of Science and Technology, which was founded by my colleague, Elena Lugo, and housed in the Humanities Department. In its early years, CE-PRO held two international congresses in the Philosophy of Technology (1989 and 1991). In the mid-nineties, CE-PRO began exploring the interdisciplinary relations between philosophy and other disciplines including business, science, engineering, agriculture, medicine and nursing. The link between CE-PRO and ADEM was designed into the description of the faculty position for which I was hired in 1990. Dr. Lugo directed the Center until she retired in 2003. I then became the director, and continued until I moved from Humanities to ADEM in 2007.

**RCN:** In addition to ADEM’s involvement, the university’s EAC strategy requires the cooperation of multiple other academic units at UPRM. How are they engaged to participate in the initiative?

**WJF:** In 2002, my colleague Dr. José Cruz designated our grassroots, bottom-up approach to faculty engagement in the EAC process as “15-85.” He hypothesized that a steady stream of faculty development workshops like the ones held during the NSF-sponsored retreats, along with a series of engineering ethics workshops we designed for our College of Engineering for their ABET accreditation.
efforts, could empower and commit 15 percent of our faculty to ethics integration across the curriculum. With this 15 percent strategically positioned at gateway or portal business, science and engineering courses, they could reach all of our students and produce a substantial, positive impact on the moral development of 85 percent of them.

**RCN:** So is CE-PRO’s main function to coordinate the EAC efforts of the various colleges, or is it primarily responsible for maintaining the funding of the program through the various grants you mentioned?

**WJF:** Actually, CE-PRO has continued with both functions. Dr. Halley Sanchez, CE-PRO’s current director, is reorganizing the Center to better reflect its interdisciplinary mission. CE-PRO has four associate directors, each responsible for coordinating ethics efforts within one of the university’s academic colleges: business, engineering, agriculture, and arts and sciences. For example, as associate director for ADEM, I develop ethics activities for my academic unit and coordinate with the associate directors in the other colleges.

Officially, CE-PRO is not allowed to direct curricular development, as new courses must be developed through each academic department. However, working through other official means, CE-PRO members have designed standalone ethics courses in business, engineering, the environment, biomedicine, research and computers. These are housed in the Humanities department and have a philosophy codification. While standalone ethics courses are not required at UPRM, over the last thirty years they have been a popular option for fulfilling general studies requirements.

These courses have also served as a “space” in which teachers have developed EAC modules and cases, which are then “spun off” into mainstream business, science and engineering courses as micro ethics interventions. The primary means for developing and implementing these EAC modules and cases has been through the formation of interdisciplinary pairings of CE-PRO members and committed faculty who have been recruited through past workshops and retreats, such as the ones I mentioned for the College of Engineering’s ABET reaccreditation effort in 2001-2. These workshops began with engineers modeling their ethics micro-interventions to their peers. Then, engineering faculty formed groups to develop new cases and modules for further integration efforts. This effort led to the formation of the Social, Ethical, and Global Issues in Engineering group, which directs the college’s EAC efforts toward ABET standards.

**RCN:** Can you elaborate on these “micro ethics interventions” you mention? At what “strategic points” are they placed within the curriculum?
**WJF:** “Micro ethics interventions” consist of short modules or activities that introduce ethics to students in the context of mainstream, core curriculum courses in business, science and engineering. The overall thrust and scope of this strategy is quite ambitious, but we have made substantial progress, especially in ADEM and the College of Engineering:

(a) In the College of Engineering, for example, a module in engineering ethics is taught to all incoming freshman through the required course, *Graphics Design*. Three of us are teaching this module through the first phase of its development; eventually *Graphics Design* professors will take over through a “train the trainer” strategy, freeing the engineering ethics team to develop and implement other interventions for students as they advance through their undergraduate studies.

(b) In ADEM, I have taken over a required course, *The Environments of the Organization*, and added ethics cases and modules to it. Two micro interventions I use in the course include *Values-Based Decision-Making in Gilbane Gold* and *The Ethics of Teamwork*. Both of these modules were developed through our NSF “EAC Toolkit” grant and have been published in Connexions, an online platform for developing and disseminating Open Education Resources.

(c) Through another NSF grant, GERESE (Graduate Experience in Research Ethics for Science and Engineering, 2006-2009), we developed and tested a more detailed prototype for a hybrid EAC approach that integrates EAC modules with standalone ethics courses. Students took four two-hour workshops where they were introduced to research ethics issues, learned a decision-making procedure (moral deliberation), practiced this procedure on research ethics cases, and prepared case analysis posters for a “Research Ethics Banquet.” These workshops could be institutionalized either as micro ethics insertions or as extra-curricular activities. Those who wanted to explore research ethics issues in more depth took either the one- or three-hour version of a standalone course we developed in research ethics.

(d) Also with the GERESE grant, we began designing a procedure where faculty (using a bottom-up approach) identified issues and developed classroom materials for research ethics. For example, in a workshop held in 2007, university graduate research faculty members identified and prioritized issues in research ethics. Then, in a retreat held in 2009, faculty members worked in small groups to generate cases and modules to address these issues. All of these have been published in another Connexions module, *Faculty Retreat in Research Ethics—Modules and Issues*.

(e) In an “EAC incubator,” these modules and cases have been projected onto the issues list to identify “hits” as well as “gaps,” i.e., outstanding issues that need to be addressed in future module generation activities. For example, one of GERESE’s Co-Principal Investigators, Carlos Rios, has developed a module, *The Grey World*, which introduced 352 pre-university students to research ethics. I have been working with him for the last two years to reconfigure this module for university students. We added several features to address issues gaps such
as plagiarism, mentoring, documentation, and authoring. We have also developed a case presentation strategy for it called the “layered case” to help students understand and proactively confront moral ambiguity and conflict. The layered case begins with a simple black and white scenario. Then it is re-presented several times, each with complicating circumstances added in to help students transition gradually from the black and white world to the moral complexity of the grey world.

Responsible Conduct of Research is another area where we are making progress on the graduate front. My responsibility in our current NSF grant, GREAT IDEA,\(^7\) is to design a course exploring such issues in the context of appropriate technology and community development projects.

CE-PRO has also helped organize EAC efforts within ADEM through individual partnerships, such as the decade-long collaboration I have had with Dr. José Cruz. José and I have coauthored several papers that explore pedagogical issues in EAC.\(^8\) We also organize faculty development workshops for ADEM. José was the Principal Investigator for the EAC Toolkit project, an online repository to develop and disseminate EAC best practices (funded by a grant from the NSF from 2006-2010).\(^9\) Dr. Aury Curbelo, an expert in educational technology (and also from ADEM), and Dr. Halley Sanchez, the current director of CE-PRO, also worked on this project as a Co-Principal Investigators.

**RCN:** How would you describe the support you get from the university for the EAC initiative? Is it funded entirely through grants, or are there other revenue streams in place to help maintain it as well?

**WJF:** CE-PRO receives no funding from the university, so it has had to generate external funds through grant agencies such as the Puerto Rico Humanities Foundation, University of Puerto Rico Central Administration, and the NSF. However, through present and past deans from the College of Arts & Sciences and ADEM, the university has been most generous in providing release time for writing proposals and travel funds for trips to conferences to build inter-university research networks. In short, our deans have helped us accomplish a great deal with very limited funding over the years by supporting our efforts to bring in external funds.

**RCN:** How does ADEM assess the impact of the curricular content of the EAC initiative?

**WJF:** Currently, we employ a multi-faceted assessment program to assess moral development in the classroom, at the course level and at the program level. Guiding this program is a Statement of Values,\(^10\) whose development and implementation was reported at the November 2011 AACSB Associate Dean’s conference. The Statement of Values supports a scenario-based assessment process to show the extent to which students have incorporated its five values (justice, responsibility, respect, trust, and integrity) into
their decision-making and moral problem-solving. Other forms of assessment consist of student-generated “challenges” to the Statement, such as student-driven translation of the value profiles into Spanish, and the implementation of these values into different pedagogical modules.

RCN: How do these student-generated challenges to the Statement of Values work? Are they done on a regular basis? How do they feature in the assessment of ethical learning at ADEM?

WJF: Several ADEM student groups translated the Statement of Values into Spanish and challenged the rest of the community to adopt one of their versions. In response, we organized a workshop with the remaining stakeholders (faculty, administration, and support staff) who revised and polished the student versions. Students are also beginning to formulate situational and conceptual challenges to the Statement’s value profiles. If this gains sufficient momentum, they will write new profiles in groups, debate these in class, and present their refined profiles to the remaining stakeholders for further review. A third way to challenge the Statement of Values is to examine its robustness by bringing to it different cases and scenarios that have arisen in ADEM. For example, can the Statement support dialogue on research misconduct, paper mills, or ethical issues associated with job candidacy? Everyday situations provide an inexhaustible source for testing and challenging the Statement of Values.

RCN: Was the Statement of Values developed strictly by ADEM, or in collaboration with CE-PRO and/or other academic units as well? Does it apply only to ADEM?

WJF: The Statement of Values was developed specifically for ADEM. In fact, ADEM is the only faculty unit at our university that has been able to produce and adopt such a document. The initiative was stimulated by the pursuit of AACSB accreditation. I was brought into the process as an outside advisor. José Cruz and I organized a series of workshops during which faculty members experimented with writing provisions for a rule-based code of ethics, studied existing codes of ethics (professional, academic, corporate), identified and prioritized values, and, in a committee composed of representatives of ADEM stakeholder groups, crafted a one-page document which was formally adopted by community vote.

RCN: What benefits do you think ADEM and the university as a whole have reaped from the EAC and related initiatives?

WJF: The main benefit of EAC is its ability to generate buy-in to ethics integration projects from the bottom-up. Our approach is emphatically voluntary—nobody has been forced to teach ethics—but our faculty development workshops, interdisciplinary faculty pairings, and the willingness of committed business, science and engineering faculty to model their ethics successes to their peers have proven effective in motivating a critical mass of faculty to integrate ethics into the professional, practical, and occupational content they teach. Business, science and engineering professors who integrate ethics into...
their classes serve as ethics mentors to their students. They also provide a fresh viewpoint that has challenged ethicists at the university to rethink their own positions. Thus, the integration of ethics and the business, science and engineering experience has led to a positive transformation of both.

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End Notes

2 Two published anthologies, El Nuevo Mundo de la Filosofía y la Tecnología and Actas do Congreso Interamericano de Filosofía de la Tecnología, record the papers read during these conferences.