

CCAS 2008 Annual Meeting  
poster/multimedia session on  
Traditional Liberal Arts Education &  
Professional Preparation-11/13/08-  
PowerPoint version of presentation  
on one approach to integrating  
liberal arts education &  
professional preparation.-  
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# Liberal arts & professional preparation integrated in professional ethics

One way in which liberal arts education can be integrated with professional preparation is through courses and curricula in professional ethics.

# Assumption: Ethics as a Liberal Arts Subject

- This approach assumes that ethics can be a liberal arts subject, whatever topic ethical judgment is about.
- Thus, teaching professional ethics can combine liberal arts and professional preparation.

# Philosophy departments and professional ethics: one curricular context

Professional ethics can be and sometimes is taught to undergraduates in philosophy department courses and curricula.

# Issues about professional ethics within philosophy

In contemporary US philosophy departments, this often, but not universally, includes courses in medical ethics, business ethics, and similar areas less often taught, such as engineering ethics and computer ethics.

Within philosophy, there is ambivalence about professional ethics, as a source of enrollments, but also a threat to more traditional areas.

Some other College of Arts and Sciences departments (other than philosophy) which may teach professional ethics in their liberal arts functions-

# Political Science in some liberal arts-cum-professional preparation functions for mixed constituencies

Such as teaching-

ethics of law,

constitutional law,

jurisprudence

to a mixed general student constituency,  
to academic majors in political science,  
and to pre-law students.

# History

History: e.g., a History of Science course list or curriculum, if any, may under some circumstances have a course in Medical Ethics or Ethical Issues in Engineering or History and Ethics of Technology.

More directly vocational  
departments/curricula and  
professional ethics-

Professional ethics can also be taught in other academic contexts (other than philosophy), including (but not solely) the more specialized departments (or other institutional units) in which more directly vocationally relevant instruction goes on.-

# Political science and the ethics of public administration

A political science department with public administration programs may teach ethics of public administration.

E.g., Natural science  
departments: some examples-

Science departments: ethics of science  
curricula, still unusual or scattered,  
possibly occasional courses on biomedical  
ethics or ecological ethics taught in biology  
departments.

# Colleges of Business

- General business ethics,
- Ethics of accounting,
- Ethics of corporate governance,
- Ethics of international business
- Legal Issues in business, etc.

# Colleges of Engineering

General engineering ethics,  
Ethics of technology, etc.

# Turf disputes about professional ethics

This presentation does not try to take sides in turf disputes, if any, about who will teach professional ethics.

# Multiple curricular contexts desirable for professional ethics

Rather if anything this presentation aims to say that multiple disciplinary contexts for teaching professional ethics at the same institution tend to be educationally preferable, other things being equal.

What is the basis for claiming that multiple disciplinary (or other curricular) contexts are preferable for teaching professional ethics?-

# Conflict avoidance?

Conflict avoidance may sometimes be taken as a reason for multiple disciplinary contexts, but it may also backfire, with conflicts between departments over course enrollments, the direction of teaching and research in the area of professional ethics, etc.

# Professional ethics sometimes viewed as a burden?

Professional ethics is sometimes viewed as a burden which professional schools are all too happy to hand over to “liberal arts” units, and about which “liberal arts” units may be ambivalent.

One result may be to foster multiple contexts for teaching professional ethics.

Part of the basis for favoring multiple contexts is that professional ethics is optimally taught with the student experiencing both immersion in and detachment from professional viewpoints.

# Immersion, detachment, and professional ethics

That means IMMERSION in the professional activity (or preparation for engaging in the professional activity) which gives reality to the ethics issues, and some DETACHMENT from professional experience or details of preparation (which may permit more critical ethical objectivity by the prospective professional).

# Strategic planning and professional ethics curricula

These points have connections with university or college or departmental administrative and individual faculty decision-making, including strategic planning.

# Amartya Sen and the ethics of identity

A promising approach to support advocacy of multiple contexts for professional ethics with arguments and an overall ethical perspective is a focus on the ethics of identity, as suggested recently (though not about professional ethics as such) in writing by Amartya Sen.

- See Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence-The Illusion of Destiny*, Norton, New York-London, 2006.

# One ethical aim of undergraduate education

Part of the ethical task of undergraduate education is to contribute to student discovery (or better, formation or change, by choice based on reasons) of multiple identities (rather than discovery of a singular identity), but especially to contribute to undergraduate formation and choice of multiple identities (for the same person), thoughtfully self-examined according to ethics and other values.

# Two problems about Sen on the ethics of identity

One problem about Sen's approach is that he emphasizes identity very much as a function of an individual's group memberships. Also, he tends to stress number rather than quality of an individual's identities, and primarily he criticizes over-emphasis of singular identities.

# Identity and individuality

However, those who use the concept of identity in many contemporary societies typically attempt to include a concept of identity as what distinguishes an individual from others within various groups to which an individual belongs.

# A more individualized concept of identity

It is likely that educational implementation of the ethics of identity needs to accommodate not only Sen's ideas, but also a more individualized concept of identity as part of an acceptable account.

# Coherent professional ethics curricula, choice about identities

- Despite the desirability of multiple curricular contexts for professional ethics, a university needs overall coherent planning about how to educate for professional ethics in various domains.
- Despite the desirability of individuality in choice about identities, there is a need for coherent professional ethics curricula.
- Such planning is inherently conflict-laden.

# Ethical Qualities of Identity

Also, it is likely that beyond multiple identities, preferred by Sen over single, sometimes exaggerated identities, we need as educators to evaluate, and to encourage thoughtful student evaluation of identity, beyond the number of identities, to include judgments about the ethical quality of identities.

# Educating for ethical judgment about one's identity (identities)

Besides that, we need as educators to provide experiences that foster nuanced judgments about the ethics of identity connected with prospective or current professional and other roles that shape educational planning by institutions and individual students.

# Conclusion

Individual faculty, departmental, college, and institution-wide planning of courses and curricula in professional ethics (with the partial aim of integrating liberal arts and professional preparation) need to include consideration of issues about multiple curricular contexts, coherence in professional ethics education, and the ethics of identity.