

**PRESENTATION:**

**A Survey of Ethics Courses in State**

**College and University Curricula**

**Presenter:**

**Angela Hernquist, Doctoral Candidate**

**University of Nevada Las Vegas**

**February 2005**

**Florida State University**

***“Leadership with Spirit: How Colleges Prepare Students to Lead  
with Moral Purpose and Commitment”***

## Introduction

We anticipate that the higher education experience will give students exposure to breadth, depth, skills, contexts, and perspectives across disciplines. This learning will be integrated with experiences from within and outside of the classroom and will be challenged and modified by the reigning political, social, and ethical issues of the period. This on-going interconnectedness between the students' intellectual growth in the classroom, the development of their logic and reasoning capabilities, and their practical application of knowledge outside of the classroom is a central focus for higher education institutions, educators, and their stakeholders.

Recently, calls for increased social, environmental, and financial responsibility have come from all sectors of our society and these calls have translated into an increased awareness and attention to ethics in the higher education curriculum. Historically, the influence of religion in higher education provided the impetus for the discussion of ethics and morals. This discussion continued in public colleges and universities as part of the liberal education curriculum that required undergraduates to incorporate a moral/ethical philosophy course into their studies. However, as institutions moved away from the liberal education curriculum towards specialization, academic departments, and a focus on research, this changed.

As we stand on the doorstep of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, society and higher education face many challenges. For example, advances in and uses of technology have created a broad spectrum of complex ethical issues and legal problems that have surfaced in almost every academic discipline and profession, including science, business, engineering, journalism, and education. In addition, globalization has changed how we react to and interact with

people of different racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds within our institutions, our country, and around the world. As higher education provides the forum for individuals to develop intellectually and socially, it should also provide the opportunity for students to develop civically through the critical analysis, study, and discussion of ethics.

## **Purpose**

Nevada State College opened its doors in September 2002 as the newest public comprehensive baccalaureate institution within the Nevada State System of Higher Education. The institution “specializes in four-year baccalaureate education” and is “dedicated to providing quality educational, social, cultural, economic, and civic advancement for the citizens of Nevada.” In addition, Nevada State College promotes its “fresh approach to higher education” which focuses on student-centered learning and the integration of student digital portfolios for both assessment and career/personal advancement purposes. (<http://www.nsc.nevada.edu>).

As part of their dedication to the educational experience of their students and the citizens of the state, Nevada State College was interested in integrating an ethics component into their curriculum. The purpose of this report is to provide a survey of how ethics is integrated in state higher education institutions and to provide examples of assessment methods and learning outcomes/goals/course objectives associated with a range of ethics courses to assist in the discussion, development, and implementation of ethics in the Nevada State College curriculum.

## Conceptual Framework

Ernest Boyer (1996) writes about the influence of early higher education institutions on society through their training of civic and religious leaders. Yet as he traces higher education's influence over the years into the present, he states,

Increasingly, the campus is being viewed as a place where students get credentialed and faculty get tenured, while the overall work of the academy does not seem particularly relevant to the nation's most pressing civic, social, economic, and moral problems" (p.14).

Recognizing that there are many factors that influence moral and ethical issues in society, few would argue that higher education institutions alone are responsible for ethical understanding and analysis. However, an appreciation for and discussion of the relevant ethics should be an integral component of every academic discipline. Braskamp and Wergin (1998) discuss this from the standpoint of the social partnerships and settings that higher education institutions should provide stating,

While the academy rarely can solve important social problems, it can promote learning about how problems might be solved. While the academy cannot presume to have sole access to higher truths, it can play a major role in the search for them. While faculty members do not hold the secrets to the common good, they can be active participants in defining and shaping it. Seeking and holding truths need not be divorced from personal experiences and knowledge (p. 82).

In his book, *The Curricular Integration of Ethics*, Lisman states that universities "have an important ethical contribution to make" to society. He adds,

Indeed, virtually every business executive and lawyer, every public servant and physician, every politician, and engineer will now pass through our colleges and probably through our professional schools as well. Our colleges and universities can use this strategic position to encourage students to think more deeply about ethical issues and strengthen their powers of moral reasoning (1996, p. 2).

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) echoes this same idea in the report, *Greater Expectations: a New Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to College*. The report “suggests that a 21<sup>st</sup> century liberal education should create learners who are ‘empowered through intellectual and practical skills, informed by knowledge and ways of knowing, and responsible for personal actions and civic values.’”

The AACU has further expounded on this concept and,

Called upon colleges and universities to foster intentionally in students the following skills and capacities, among others:

- Intellectual honesty and engagement in ongoing learning
- Responsibility for society’s moral health and for social justice
- Active participation as a citizen of a diverse democracy
- Discernment of consequences, including ethical consequences, of decisions and actions
- Deep understanding of one’s self and one’s multiple identities that connect habits of mind, heart, and body

(<http://www.aacu.org/template/index.cfm> Education for Personal and Social Responsibility Programs & Initiatives).

The “best” education should help students develop knowledge, understanding, and skills that are transferable from discipline to discipline and from the classroom to practical application with a focus on the important connections between college study and life-long learning, the academy and the world of work, the theoretical and the applied, and the individual and society. As the actions and activities of most college graduates have considerable ethical significance, higher education should be at the forefront of ethics education. Stated another way, “the curricular integration of ethics provides our educational institutions with a framework for reasoned debate and discussion of moral issues integral to the understanding of academic disciplines and professional and social practices” (Lisman, 1996, p. 3). It is within this context that ethics in the curriculum will be examined.

## **Methodology**

As a new institution that currently does not offer ethics in the curriculum, Nevada State College was very interested in the various approaches used by other state higher education institutions to integrate ethics in the curriculum. A limited review of literature on the subject indicated that there are several ways that institutions have integrated ethics in their curriculum (Chowan College Center for Ethics, Earl, Lisman, Penn). They are as follows:

- Ethics as a general core course requirement
- Ethics as an elective general core course requirement
- Ethics as a separate department/discipline

- Ethics integrated into specific discipline- or department-based courses (i.e. included in Business, Nursing, Journalism, or Engineering degree requirement)
- Ethics as a capstone course
- Ethics integrated institution-wide

There are pros and cons associated with each approach, with the pros most often having to do with the fact that institutions can indeed indicate that they do value and offer ethics in their curriculum and do focus on the civic development of their students, the cons being the additional costs in degree hours/tuition and professional/labor expenses associated with offering specialized courses. The most significant disadvantage of the single course “ethics vaccination” approach is that it tends to have little long term impact on students because it is not tied to their other coursework or terminal degree program (Chowan College Center for Ethics, Earl, Lisman, Penn).

There are alternatives to the single course approach. For example, in May, 2004, the University of Dubuque announced a \$32-million donation that will fund the Michael Lester Wendt Character Initiative, which will “create curriculum and student-life programs that integrate ‘the virtues of truthfulness, fairness, honesty, and the Golden Rule’ and will establish “a center for character education, providing salary support for professors as they integrate elements of ethics and character into course work, creating student scholarships, and underwriting a lecture series” (Strout, 2004). Another approach for integrating ethics in the curriculum institution-wide is addressed through the “Ethics Across the Curriculum” program.

As this study was the culminating report of a semester internship at Nevada State College, time and resources were limited. Therefore, in an effort to assess how higher education institutions integrate ethics courses in their curriculums, a short five-question convenience survey was designed.

This survey was emailed to 101 public state higher education institutions in the United States identified through a member list provided by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities and through the Peterson and Company website. Only those institutions that specifically identified themselves as “state” through their titles and had accessible email addresses for individual contacts were considered for the survey. In addition, 16 public higher education institutions identified as peers of Nevada State College by the National Center for Higher Education and Management Systems (NCHEMS) were emailed surveys, for a total of 117 institutions surveyed.

The 16 Nevada State College peers were identified by NCHEMS when the Nevada State Legislature authorized the formation of the Committee to Evaluate Higher Education Programs in the 2003 Session through Assembly Bill 203. This committee then hired NCHEMS to evaluate the current higher education programs in Nevada in relation to similar peer institutions in the United States and to make recommendations to the legislature. Through a detailed and lengthy process, NCHEMS identified 16 state higher education institutions that qualified as Nevada State College peer institutions.

The availability of email addresses determined who received the survey at each institution. In general, the survey was directed to the Academic Affairs administrator, if the email address was available. If not, the survey was sent to an individual with an email address in the Advising Department, the Provost, or the President, depending on

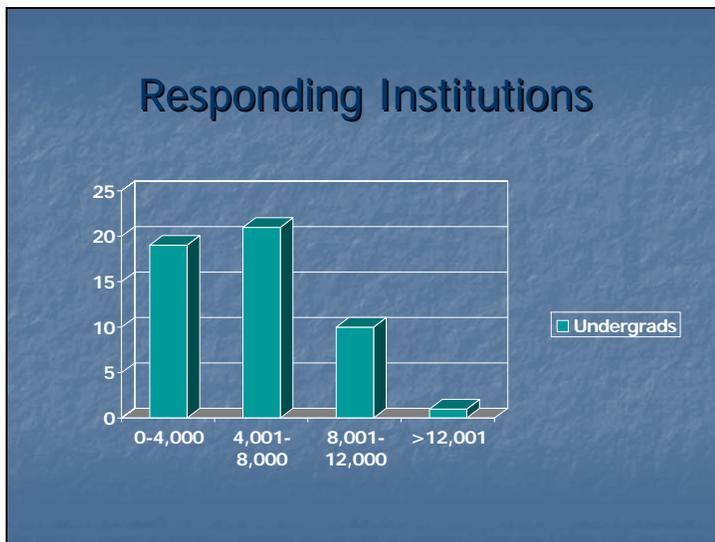
whose email address was available. The subject section of the email referenced “Ethics in the Curriculum” and the body of the email introduced the researcher and the purpose of the survey (to assess how institutions incorporate ethics courses in their curriculum). Included was an internet link to the short five-question survey.

When the respondent clicked on the link, the survey appeared with a similar introduction and five questions seeking responses to the name of the institution, the approximate undergraduate enrollment, the type of institution (Carnegie classification), an indication of whether the institution’s curriculum includes an ethics course(s), and six choices as to how the ethics course(s) is/are integrated into the curriculum. A section was included for additional comments and attachments. All of the information was presented on a single page on the website and, once the respondent clicked submit, the results were forwarded to the researcher’s personal email address. The survey was sent a maximum of three times over a four-week period to institutions that did not respond to the first or second email. It is recognized that the recipient’s position and/or knowledge of the institution’s curriculum is a limitation of this study.

## **Survey Results**

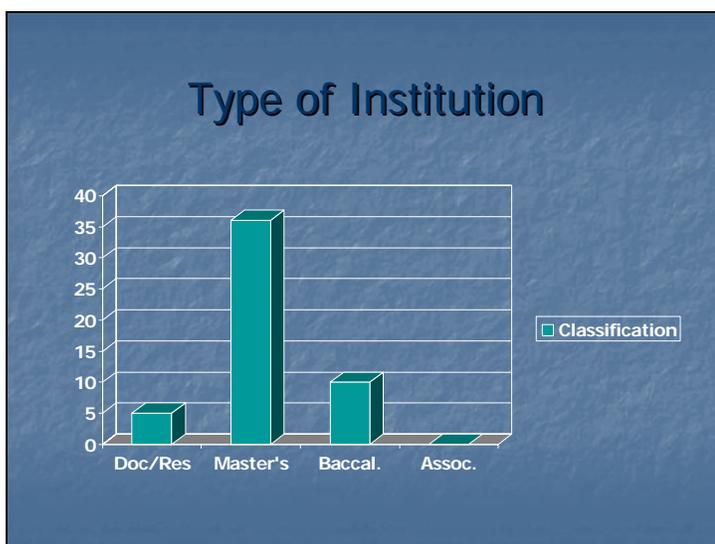
Of the 117 surveys emailed around the country, 51 responded for a response rate of 43.6% (38.6% of the 101 “state” institutions and 62.5% of the Nevada State College peer institutions). The results indicate a fairly even number of institutions with less than 4,000 undergraduate students (37%) and institutions with 4,001-8,000 undergraduate students (41%). Only 22% of the respondents reported undergraduate enrollments of over 8,001 and only 1 institution reported an undergraduate enrollment over 12,001. The one institution that reported over 12,001 students actually reported 222,000 students;

however, their website fact page indicates that their enrollment is approximately 22,000 students.



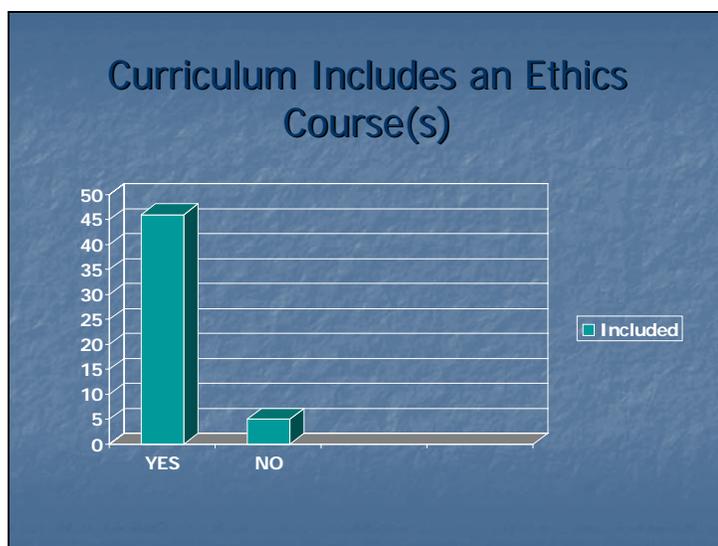
**Figure 1. Undergraduate Enrollment at Responding Institutions**

The majority of the reporting institutions were Master's colleges/universities (70%) with a few Baccalaureate colleges reporting (20%), even fewer Doctoral/Research universities reporting (10%), and no Associate colleges reporting.



**Figure 2. Carnegie Classification of Responding Institutions**

The overwhelming majority of institutions (90%) indicated that their curriculum includes an ethics course(s). Five institutions (10%) indicated that their curriculum does not include an ethics course however, the responses were ambiguous as the additional information they submitted contrasted with “no ethics course in the curriculum.” This ambiguity could have been the result of an inadequate classification format in the survey or a lack of knowledge on the part of the respondent. Unfortunately, due to time constraints follow up was not possible.



**Figure 3. Ethics in Curriculum at Responding Institutions**

The results concerning how ethics are integrated in the curriculum indicate that there is no consensus among institutions. Twenty-seven percent (27%) of the reporting institutions integrate ethics in discipline- or department-based courses and twenty-two percent (22%) integrate ethics as an elective general core course. Few of the reporting institutions (12%) require ethics in their general core courses, very few (10%) integrate ethics in some “Other” way, and none of the institutions offers ethics as a Capstone course. As well, the institutions that indicated “Other” for “how is/are ethics course(s) integrated into the curriculum” offered no explanation as to how this is accomplished.

The most significant finding from this survey is that the majority of the institutions (29%) reported having ethics as a separate department or discipline. Although this affirms that the individual institutions do indeed have ethics in the curriculum, it raises many more questions as to the extent that ethics is integrated and promoted in the curriculum institution-wide.

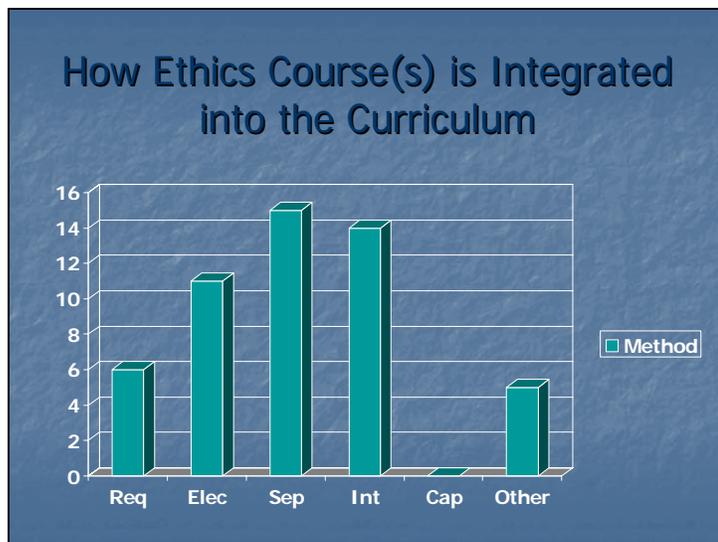


Figure 4. Method of Integrating Ethics in the Curriculum

### **Ethics Across the Curriculum (EAC)**

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) cites “ethical, social, and personal responsibility as key outcomes of a quality liberal education.” Although the results of this survey indicate that the majority of the institutions include ethics courses in their curriculum, the manner in which they integrate them is unclear and shows a lack of consensus among the higher education institutions. “Ethics Across the Curriculum” (EAC) describes an alternative trend that many higher education institutions have instigated and implemented to promote the kinds of responsibility that the AACU describes. In addition, the Society for Ethics Across the Curriculum exists and its

purpose is “to stimulate scholarship on ethics and the teaching of ethics in all academic disciplines and to afford an opportunity for the exchange of research.”

One of the key participants in the EAC program is Utah Valley State College (UVSC). Elaine Englehardt, Professor of Philosophy and Vice President for Scholarship and Research at UVSC was contacted and provided a wealth of information on the EAC program at that institution. Based on a required core humanities class in ethics that began in 1986, and interest generated by faculty and students, UVSC started an EAC project in 1991. In 1992, the Department of Education gave the institution a three-year grant to develop further the program that is now in its 13<sup>th</sup> year of operation.

The institution reports “The Ethics Program at UVSC has been nationally recognized as one of the top ethics programs in the country at community colleges by both National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Association for Community Colleges, and The Department of Education’s FIPSE.”

The required core course for all students and main component of the ethics program is the ethics and values course that started the trend at UVSC. In designing the required ethics and value course, UVSC integrated five “goals of national curricular reform.” They are:

- The discussion of ethics and knowledge of the seminal works in ethics is important for well-educated students.
- Interdisciplinarity is integral to student understanding.
- A strong writing component must be included.
- Self-confrontation and classroom discussion are encouraged.

- Critical thinking is necessary for students.

<http://www.uvsc.edu/ethics/eac.html>)

The goal of the EAC program is to teach faculty and students to “recognize and resolve ethical issues within their disciplines.” In addition, a key aspect of the program “is that it involves faculty, students, and the community in an important dissemination of ethics.” To achieve this, UVSC reports that the program involves:

- (a) at least one faculty seminar with a scholar of national reputation,
- (b) monthly meetings for faculty and invited students with scholars in ethics and the professions,
- (c) the creation of ethics case studies by faculty
- (d) the changing of curriculum to reflect a minimum of five class periods in professional or practical ethics in courses,
- (e) workshops with faculty and students in individual disciplines, and
- (f) the cultivation of an ethics resource center for faculty, students, and the community. (<http://www.uvsc.edu/ethics/eac.html>)

Further, UVSC states that,

The program is assessed through a variety of methods including results of faculty in a nationally normed test (Defining Issues Test), project evaluations with students across disciplines (Critical Incident Technique), the quality of ethics cases the faculty produce and analyze, and value of seminars and workshops to diverse groups of faculty through curricula changes.

The EAC program at UVSC is very impressive and many other institutions have used their example to start their own programs. UVSC also participates with the University of Utah, Loyola University of Chicago, Rochester Institute of Technology, and Chaffey College of California in their programs and seminars to “provide an extensive cross section of the kinds of institutions of higher education in the country.” UVSC also has a Center for the Study of Ethics that promotes “the advancement and dissemination of the study and practice of ethics.” The Center maintains a database of over 100 additional ethic centers in the country, including those at Harvard University, Gonzaga University, and Stanford University to name a few.

In addition to the EAC program at UVSC and many other institutions, the Association for Practical and Professional Ethics is located at Indiana University and has “more than 100 ethics centers and other institutional groups as members.” This organization has a wealth of information and resources available to institutions interested in incorporating ethics and ethic centers into their curriculum. Many of the members of this organization are also listed through UVSC’s Center for the Study of Ethics.

## **Samples of Ethics Course Assessment Methods**

Recipients of the survey were encouraged to submit syllabi or other information that they thought would be helpful. Unfortunately, nothing was received. To aid Nevada State College in the discussion, development, and implementation of ethics in their curriculum, an internet search was done to find and compare a broad range of syllabi from various ethics courses around the country in order to gain insight into how student learning is assessed and what learning outcomes are identified in a variety of ethics courses. The result of the search yielded 17 ethics course syllabi, with three of the syllabi

from Nevada State College peer institutions. The syllabi collected were for the following courses:

- Introduction to Ethics
- Mass Media Ethics
- Ethics and the Internet
- Business, Ethics, and Society
- Professional Ethics for Scientists
- Film and the Construction of Virtue
- Ethics, Fire, and Wilderness
- Media Law and Ethics
- Political Ethics
- Technology and Ethics
- Ethics and Public Policy

After reviewing the syllabi, I determined that the majority of courses use some combination of class discussion/participation, written paper(s), and final exams to assess student learning. Out of the 17 samples collected, the following assessment criteria were found:

Class discussion/participation	(14)
Final exam	(13)
Paper(s)	(12)
Quizzes/multiple exams	(7)
Mid term exam	(5)
Case studies/chapter assignments	(4)

Journal	(3)
Group project	(2)

It was interesting to note that group projects and journals were the least used and class discussion/participation was the most widely used forms of assessment. The method of student assessment used in the UVSC Ethics Across the Curriculum program indicates:

Student assessment for the program includes the use of the “Critical Incident Technique” (CIT). Using the CIT, a participant is to locate and recognize specific actual behaviors and evaluate them as ethical dilemmas. The incidents are selected by the participants from a movie, television show, or video. The participant analyzes the incident and its solution or lack thereof in the performance. The participant is also encouraged to propose different or additional solutions to the dilemma(s) portrayed. To complete the assignment, participants are to submit:

- A. A video copy of the incident.
- B. A two-page description of the circumstances in which the incident occurred; the outcome or result of the incident; and an analysis of the ethical relevance of the incident.
- C. The assignment can be completed individually or with an assigned study group.

<http://www.uvsc.edu/ethics/eac.html>

## Samples of Learning Outcomes

The 17 sample syllabi collected were also reviewed to determine what learning outcomes/goals/course objectives were identified. It is interesting to note that only 11 of the 17 syllabi (65%) included this information. The learning outcomes/goals/course objectives were very similar in all of the 11 syllabi with only slight variations tailored to the specific course title and they can be summarized in three broad categories:

- Understanding of the theories and philosophical foundations of ethics
- Recognition of ethical problems and the development of reasoning skills
- Discussion of issues and arguments in applied ethics

UVSC identifies both faculty and student outcomes in their Ethics Across the Curriculum program. They are:

### **Faculty Outcomes:**

- Integrate the subject of ethics into vocational, technical, nursing, business and liberal education courses.
- Challenge students to understand basic principles of ethics, to think and write critically, and to confront inconsistencies in their own ethics and values systems.
- Establish a faculty renewal program through shared study of ethics, so we may re-energize as scholars as well as teachers.

### **Student Outcomes:**

- Recognize ethical issues.
- Develop critical thinking and self-confrontation skills.

- Cultivate tolerance toward disagreement and the inevitable ambiguities in dealing with ethical problems.
- Elicit a sense of moral obligation and develop a personal code of ethics. (<http://www.uvsc.edu/ethics/eac.html>)

It is important to note that samples of student assessment methods and learning outcomes/goals/course objectives were intended for discussion purposes only and not for evaluation purposes.

## **Conclusion and Implications**

There is no simple or uniform agreement as to how ethics should be incorporated in higher education curriculums. Consensus exists only through the actions of higher education institutions that continue to offer ethics in some format in their curriculums. The majority of responses (29%) indicated that ethics is a separate department or discipline at many institutions. This finding raises more questions than it answers as to the degree of integration in the curriculum institution-wide, as well as the accessibility and impact of the ethics course(s) if it is not tied to the students' other coursework or degree programs.

The results of this survey indicate that there are various approaches that Nevada State College can take to integrating ethics in their curriculum. As the institution is new and still in the development and implementation phase with many of the courses in their curriculum, they could potentially use this opportunity to establish an Ethics Across the Curriculum program. There is a wealth of information on this program through both the institutions that currently incorporate the program and through the Association for Practical and Professional Ethics.

Should the prospect of developing an Ethics Across the Curriculum program prove to be too much of a strain on Nevada State College's current resources or a greater endeavor than they envision, a single required ethics and values course modeled after the course at UVSC could provide a viable alternative for the institution. It was this single course that started the trend and signaled the beginning of the Ethics Across the Curriculum program at UVSC. Grants and other measures could potentially be secured to aid Nevada State College in this effort.

Although the majority of responses to the survey indicated that ethics is a separate department or discipline at many institutions, this is probably the least viable option for Nevada State College in recognition of the competing priorities for resources at this new institution. As well, due to the lack of responses, it appears as though a capstone course is not the most efficient or effective method to integrating ethics in the curriculum and is one that Nevada State College should probably not consider.

Two other potential approaches to integrating ethics in the curriculum at Nevada State College are to offer ethics as an elective or to integrate an ethics component in other department/discipline courses within the college. Offering ethics as an elective course is a common approach (22%) and a viable alternative for Nevada State College. However, integrating ethics in discipline- or department-based courses was a more common approach (27%) employed by institutions in this survey and one that offers the additional benefit of tying ethics to the students' coursework.

The implication of this study is that the manner in which ethics is incorporated in the undergraduate curriculum is a direct reflection of the goals and priorities of the individual higher education institution. Further research should address this relationship,

the manner in which institutions foster the development of personal and professional ethics, and the effectiveness of ethic course assessment methods and learning outcomes.

On a regular basis, we have seen the headlines in the news implicating governments, companies, and individuals for unethical conduct and it is apparent that ethics are an integral component of the challenges and opportunities that present themselves in everyday life. Certainly, higher education is not the only answer to the teaching of ethics. However, it seems only logical that a well-educated individual who successfully graduates from an institution of higher education should have developed and exercised some critical thinking and reasoning capabilities to deal with the complexities and issues involved with ethical dilemmas as part of their education and preparation for professional practice.

This brings us to a larger question. If the manner in which ethics is incorporated into the undergraduate curriculum is a direct reflection of the goals and priorities of the institution, what constitutes a “well-educated” student at your institution?

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