Teaching Values through Moral Example

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I am delighted to be a part of the Institute on College Student Values. Given the global, national, local, and personal issues that our students are confronting, it is appropriate that we stop and reflect on the values that undergird our work. Ethics and values are not abstract concepts; instead, they provide guidance regarding how we go about our day-to-day work. Our ethical and moral framework shapes our relationships with our students, our colleagues, our staff, our faculty, our alumni, members of the community, our governing boards, and the parents of our students. It molds our policies, our exceptions to our policies, our procedures, and every aspect of our institutional lives.

I strongly believe that in the future we will encounter issues and problems on our campuses that will be markedly different from those we have encountered in the past. The forces of change influencing higher education have increased both in number and in power. Institutions of higher education are becoming much more influenced by events in the world outside of the academy. Second, there is not now, nor does there appear to be in the near future, consensus on issues and agreement on goals, philosophy, and the mission of education. Third, in the near future our ability to deal with issues will be greatly influenced by financial constrictions that are facing both government and higher education. Finally, we are faced with choices that must be made between and among legitimate goals. The alternatives and choices we must make are neither inherently good nor are they inherently bad. They just are!

Paradox is not new to higher education. In fact, paradoxical questions are part of the daily lives of students, staff, faculty, and administrative colleagues. In the classroom, such questions are central to the processes of intellectual challenge, creative thinking, and pedagogy. To illustrate, a vigorous classroom debate on the question of euthanasia will bring forth a number of paradoxical questions with which students and faculty members must struggle. There are many points of view, and both the rights of an individual person and the rules and laws of society must be weighed in deciding whether euthanasia is an acceptable solution to the problems of terminal and debilitating illness. Such debates are not abstract, and students must explore issues such as these if they are going to be able to meet the challenges ahead.

How we go about our tasks -- whether those tasks are teaching, learning, supporting, administering, or whatever -- is just as important to me as the outcome of those tasks. Our individual commitment to be responsible, ethical humans and involved members of our campus community shines through in our work. Karen Kitchener's work on ethics has had a profound influence on my own professional practice, my ability to deal effectively with paradoxical questions, and my ability to relate to other people. She derived four principles from the work of Beauchamp and Childress on biomedical ethics and has added a fifth of her own. These principles have been adopted as part of the Role and Mission Statement of the Division of Student Affairs at Texas Christian University and have been helpful to us as we develop our policies, programs, and services. Our role and mission statement also recognizes that each of our professional specialty areas have detailed ethical codes. If you have not done so for awhile, review the ethical codes of AAUP, ACPA, NASPA, APA, or other professional organizations. As a chief student affairs officer, I expect my staff to know the ethical codes of their professional specialty areas and to implement them in their work.

Kitchener's principles provide overall guidance to our efforts, and I would like to take just a few minutes to review them with you. The five principles are these:

Respecting autonomy. This principal involves the right of self-determination, and the rights of privacy, confidentiality, and informed consent. These are all matters of grave concern to students and staff. But when we are dealing with a particularly vexing student problem or an institutional one, do we always adhere to this principle? Do we adhere to it when we gossip about colleagues, friends, or students?

Doing no harm. We would all agree that we do not intend to harm others. But Kitchener points out that there is psychological as well as physiological harm that can be done to others. My question to each of you is, do you always analyze the potential harm that could come to others through changes in policies and procedures? When you change degree requirements, sick leave policy -- pick an issue, those policies are not abstract -- they affect people.

Benefiting others. This principle affirms that it is not only important to cause no harm to others but also actively to seek to benefit others in our professional practice. Although this is an easy principle to assert, it may be difficult to put into practice as we are faced with student, institutional, and parental pressures.

Being just. To be just means to be fair. That should be the principle behind all of our professional practice, whether it is staff supervision, student conduct, teaching, housing assignments, availability of on-campus interviews, or resolution of student problems. Our ability to balance the rights of all concerned is the greatest skill we have and can be the most effective influence in our professional practice. All will certainly not get everything they want, but everyone should feel that they have been listened to and considered in decisions.

Being faithful. Kitchener's final principle involves questions of loyalty, truthfulness, promise keeping, and respect. It is a powerful principle which should undergird all our work in higher education and govern our relationships with our administrative superiors, our colleagues, our students, and our institutions.

These principles are useful as we attempt to deal with the major areas of paradox that we face. In his writing, Jon Dalton has stated that it is impossible to be value free when we are in the business of education, saying in part that "one may start off with a neutral position on the values implicit in the situation but eventually one gets to the unavoidable point of helping students to struggle with issues of responsibility, consideration and fairness." While each institutional context is unique, as is each student body and each student, I believe we are teaching values through who we are and how we approach questions of conflict and tension in our respective academic communities. As the issues we face become more complex, Kitchener's principles can and do conflict, and resolving those conflicts between and among issues of truth, rightness, and values is a shared reality for all of us.

The relationship between the individual and the institution has been a constant source of paradoxical questions in higher education. These questions include the value of autonomy of the individual student versus the value of protection of the student, the value of protection of individual freedom of expression and the sometimes competing value of social propriety, and the need to resolve the competing values of the personal agenda of members of the campus community and the sometimes conflicting values of institutional objectives.

Let me illustrate each of these paradoxical issues. First, if we believe in Kitchener's ethical principle of respecting autonomy, should we intervene when we know a student has a life threatening eating disorder? The recent controversy over flag burning represents an example of the second category of paradox. Suppose a student decides to burn a flag on the day when your very conservative governing board is meeting or when a major donor whose son has died serving his country is dedicating a new building? How do we resolve competing values of animal rights and the sanctity of the research environment? As you can see, the paradoxes we manage are not abstract nor are they value free.

In our recent past the paradoxes we faced have centered on the relationship between the individual and the institution. At times, paradoxical situations develop based on the sensitivity of certain individuals and groups and the pride of other community members in embedded institutional traditions such as mascots or all-male bands. In the '60s and early '70s the overwhelming paradoxical issue for higher education involved balancing the interests of some members of the community in social protest against compelling institutional and educational interests in maintaining an orderly environment. These questions are still present on our campuses today. A review of any issue of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* bears stark witness to that reality. Student rights, on most of our campuses, have been ensured through institutional policies, court cases, and statements. Student responsibility, on the other hand, is still subject to institutional expectations and disciplinary procedures. The joint goals of freedom and responsibility remain primary, but often elusive, ideals within most academic communities. Putting the assumption to work that students are responsible for their own lives is a difficult task at best.

An additional historical paradox for higher education emerges from our traditional mission of trying to meet student needs. This will continue to be a challenge. Achieving appropriate balance between providing

services to all and concurrently providing attention to individual needs is also an unresolved issue for many of us. This issue will become even more difficult to deal with as fiscal resources become restricted, and choices have to be made between programs, activities, and services.

Many of our contemporary paradoxes are focused more on social issues than on individual matters. The relationship between the greater society and the institution, for example, spawns a number of paradoxes in the area of behavior of students, faculty, and staff. To illustrate, should an individual's behavior be judged in light of campus standards or those of the broader community? Consider the issues of statutory violations of illicit drugs and alcohol laws, theft, and acquaintance rape. Which standards should prevail? Such questions are very real.

Broader issues also influence our current paradoxes. The increased expectations for institutional performance, coupled with more limited resources, have caused a number of questions to surface. Who should be served? What program should be abandoned? The provost at Lehigh was in a conversation with some of his humanities faculty colleagues, who were bitterly complaining that the budget difficulty they were in was really the fault of the engineering faculty. They claimed that if the engineers hadn't gotten all those government contracts, the institution would not have been in this difficulty. The provost looked at his colleagues and said, "That's like saying the hole is not in my end of the canoe." If we think of ourselves as a community, we are all in the canoe in these times of fiscal resources and constraint, and we can't sit there pointing fingers. Anyone who has faced a budget cut or steady-state funding can testify to the difficulty of resolving such issues.

The overriding paradox of this decade, which reflects all other issues, is the question of access versus excellence. Our professional literature mirrors the intensity of the debate on this issue with reports, books, and research projects in abundance. Conferences and workshops on the twin concepts of access and excellence have proliferated. Legislatures in many states have passed statutes regarding the issue. Yet the paradox of access and excellence is still reflected in a number of questions that must be resolved if higher education is to move forward. Does affirmative action mean commitment or compliance? Are goals and quotas appropriate? Should higher education provide special admissions programs or equal opportunity? Should achievement be judged only through standardized tests or should other options be considered? The debate is alive and well and will continue as a primary issue in the future.

The need for cultural sensitivity will intensify in the future and will be accompanied by a backlash that has already begun on college campuses today. Understanding and appreciating cultural and ethnic differences will be a necessary condition for the future success of our students, faculty, and staff. Our students are going to be working in multi-ethnic work places. When I hear our students saying we need to have more minority students, I say, "Yes, you do. You need to have them; it's in your best interest."

The emphasis on cultural and ethnic issues currently is accompanied by protests about special attention and treatment for minority students on campus. Clashes will continue to emerge as students struggle with the rightness and value of affirmative action programs that are more than just rhetoric.

Issues related to personal health and well-being are now and will continue to be prime agenda items for colleges and universities. Substance abuse, AIDS, and yet unknown diseases will affect the lives of all members of the campus community. The historical balancing of the welfare of the individual and the welfare of the group is re-emerging and intensifying. Health issues are not just related to students; they also influence the types and kinds of benefits that we can offer to faculty and staff. We will be struggling with trade-offs, balancing between what we would like to be able to do and what we can afford as institutions.

Technology will serve both as a predictor of the paradoxical issues we face and a paradox itself. Nearly every human function in higher education, including teaching, advising, testing, information access, counseling, and other student services, will face the technological challenge. The question of whether higher education can provide both technological support *and* human contact is very real. I visited a college which had entered into electronic mail. They had a professor who would only communicate with his students through electronic mail. He saw no need to have office hours; they could get him any time day or night on electronic mail so why did he have to be there? So technological advances create paradoxes for people. With computers, electronic mail, and interactive television becoming more accessible and less expensive, will the college campus, as we know it, even be necessary? With many learners off campus, how can student services and student-teacher relationships be carried out, and, more importantly, will such services even be needed?

As we approach the year 2000, each institution will have to resolve fundamental questions regarding its mission. The unbridled growth of higher education is at an end. All institutions cannot continue to try to be all things to all people. Making choices between and among positive alternatives will be difficult and will be the cause of new issues and new paradoxes. The question that faces us is not one of whether change will occur. Instead, it is one of learning to manage such changes in an ethical and responsible manner. The manner

in which we approach change may be as important as the final decisions that are reached. As we in NASPA said in *A Perspective On Student Affairs:* "In a pluralistic campus community, the manner in which policies are made, decisions are reached and controversial issues are handled may be as important as the results themselves. Indeed, an institution transmits values to students by the way it approaches policies, decisions, and issues."

There are three essential elements and three principles that I believe are essential in dealing with the paradoxical questions we must confront. The first element centers on *understanding the mission of the institution* and how that mission may translate into a position on a specific issue. Institutional mission statements are often viewed as abstractions and statements of intention rather than action. Time must be taken, by each of us, to ponder and discuss the institutional mission statement and how it influences the day-to-day processes of decision making and problem resolution on our campuses. It is essential that leaders within the academic community understand where the institution "stands" on certain issues. Too often it is after a crisis and a response that the institutional position is determined and communicated. Active discussion and debate as part of ongoing processes can help to avoid crisis responses to paradoxical questions, which may not be consistent with the basic institutional purpose.

Another essential element is *understanding the ethical dimensions of our work.* While we may not be ethics experts, we must be ethics officers on our campuses. We must actively work to ensure that the ethical dimensions of a decision are discussed. Discussion and resolution of ethical conflicts are essential where decisions are rarely "good," "bad," "right," or "wrong." Movement to understanding and a consistent approach to the ethical dimensions of our work can assist in achieving resolution when faced with paradoxical questions and issues.

The final essential element is *understanding the law.* Frequently, we use the law as a last resort or are forced by students and others to deal with issues on a legal basis. Higher education is not an enclave of immunity from the law, and thus legal concerns are fundamental to resolving many differences on the campuses. On many campuses, policies and procedures have been developed to meet an "explosion" of mandates, regulations, and compliance requirements. The newest is the campus security act. We have to tell how many people were killed, murdered, and raped on our campuses and make it palatable so that people will still come to the university. I don't understand how we're going to do all that. What is too often lost in the process of reaction to such mandates is the positive value of the partnership between higher education and the law. Protection of individual rights, ethical and humane treatment, and responsible actions are principles on which we all can agree. I have three friends who characterize the decade of the '60s as "peace and love," the decade of the '70s as "do your own thing," and the decade of the '80s as "see you in court." The emerging trend toward legalism is, in part, a response to a lack of adherence to those principles in the past.

Three principles are important in dealing with the paradoxical issues that face us: agreement, integrity, and utility. One of the first principles in resolving conflicts is the *determination of commonality,* common ground, agreements, and ways to cooperate. This applies to people, positions, or concepts. The agreements may be goals, limits, procedures, timeliness, or decisions. Essential to reaching agreement is the process of inclusion. It is critical that all who affect, or who are affected by, the paradox or issue at hand be included in discussions regarding resolution of the dilemma. In addition, agreement must include openness to further agreements, to new commonalities, and to balance of positions and outcomes.

Integrity involves principles that are too often assumed rather than affirmed. Integrity means demonstrating consistency between our beliefs and our actions. Implicit in this definition is adherence to behaviors demonstrating honesty, fairness, sensitivity, and a commitment to doing no harm. As you can see, Kitchener's ethical principles help to focus this principle. The simplicity of the words honesty and fairness, however, hides the complexity of principled action when faced with paradoxical issues. Total honesty can sometimes be harmful. Sensitivity is interpretive, and doing no harm involves evaluation. Integrity is in itself a paradox, a continuing struggle for both institutions and individuals.

Utility is a term rarely used with respect to a principle. What is the utility of dealing with a paradox? What can be gained? What can be learned? What can be contributed? Is it true that some issues do not need to be addressed but simply ignored until they go away? Indeed, not every paradox of life in our society requires attention from higher education. Nevertheless, many issues that have been ignored, either intentionally or unintentionally, are relevant to the goals of colleges and universities. We have too often confronted paradoxical issues as problems rather than as possibilities. Paradox is a tool for learning, for change, for progress regardless of the resolution of the specific issue or the solving of a problem. Indeed, dealing effectively with paradox is often the medium of higher education.

We must seek to turn difficult situations and paradoxical questions into opportunities for growth and development and be guided in that process by applying ethical principles that give meaning and shape to our

lives. Within higher education, academic freedom ensures a climate for coexistence of conflicting points of view, of equal but differing values and priorities, of multiple perspectives and infinite possibilities. The campus, however, is more than structured learning. Coexistence of paradoxical positions and goals is essential but not sufficient to the management of paradox. A sense of resolution must be achieved and that sense of resolution must be accomplished within an ethical and value-driven framework.

The following suggestions may be useful as you confront paradoxical issues on your individual campuses:

- Recognize that a paradox usually exists in any situation that you face and that the problem you are facing usually has ethical, legal, and policy dimensions. All must be examined and all must be dealt with in a framework that is consistent and fair.
- Explore the full range of possible reactions to the paradoxical issue you are facing. They are many and include doing nothing, doing more than is required (i.e., appointing a task force or committee), looking for opportunities to compromise, setting limits, and above all, keeping lines of communication open.
- Recognize that everyone will not see the issues from the same perspective that you do. Some people will be unhappy with outcomes, and not everyone will be pleased with the resolution of the issue or a non-response.
- Examine whether you can be objective in the situation and ethical in your responses to others. If you cannot, then remove yourself from the decision-making role.
- Do the best you can! Take comfort in the fact that it is difficult to make decisions between and among equally good goals.
- Keep the lines of communication open with as many people as you can when trying to resolve a paradoxical circumstance. While all might not agree with the outcome, they will feel that they have been heard.
- It is important to remember what Aristotle said: "We become just through just actions."

I would like to close with a poem by an anonymous author from Sonya Friedman's book *Smart Cookies Don't Crumble:*

After a while you learn the subtle difference between holding a hand and chaining a soul,
And you learn that love doesn't mean leaning and company doesn't mean security,
And you begin to learn that kisses aren't contracts and presents aren't promises,
And you begin to accept your defeats with your head up and your eyes open,
with the grace of an adult, not the grief of a child,
And you learn to build all your roads today because tomorrow's ground is too uncertain
for plans.
After a while you learn that even sunshine burns if you get too much,
So plant your own garden and decorate your own soul, instead of waiting for someone
to bring you flowers,
And you learn that you really can endure, that you really are strong, and you really do
have worth.

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