



# PROFESSIONAL CODES OF ETHICS USING CLASSROOM DISCUSSION TECHNIQUES

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Working Ethics into the Conversation  
National Academy of Engineering  
October 22, 2019

# WHAT ARE CODES OF ETHICS?

Standards of conduct that everyone in a group (a profession, a workplace, etc.) want everyone else to follow even if it means they have to follow it themselves.



# WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CODES OF ETHICS AND LAWS?

(STUDENTS WILL ASK..)

- Laws are standards of conduct applying to members of a group whether they want them to apply or not.
- Laws can be ethical OR unethical.
- In some cases, ethical standards may call on a person to go above and beyond what is required by law.
- Laws are nearly always designed to be enforceable but some ethical standards are not enforceable.

# WHY DO STUDENTS/TRAINEES NEED TO BE AWARE OF CODES OF ETHICS?

Codes of ethics help define professions

Ethical behavior is not only a matter of what the *individual* feels is right

Codes of ethics provide widely accepted standards with which we can analyze cases, real and hypothetical

# WHAT MAKES SOME ETHICAL JUDGMENTS DIFFICULT??

Ethical standards are broad—applying them to specific situations requires us to fill in details

Two or more standards in a Code of Ethics may suggest conflicting courses of action

One person may have duties associated with more than one Code of Ethics

# WHAT MAKES A PROFESSIONAL?

A Professional is someone who exercises judgment in the performance of occupational tasks and follows relevant professional standards –**both technical and ethical**. He/she also accepts the profession's agreement to work in a morally permissible way (as stated in a code of ethics).

Ethical standards exist to help professionals decide how to act in a given situation, to justify professional decisions in the face of pressure (from management, a supervisor, a patient).

These standards are not absolute, and are subject to interpretation.

# An Occupation becomes a profession when...

- A group of individuals sharing the same occupation organize to work in a morally permissible way or to support a moral idea (Doctors cure the sick).
- Members set and follow special standards for carrying out their occupational work.
- At least one of these standards must go beyond what the law, the marketplace, ordinary morality, and public opinion demand.

# SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OF A CODE OF ETHICS

- Have any of you ever read your code prior to now?
- What provisions are in the code that you expected to see?
- What provisions surprise you, make you wonder why they are included?
- Is anything missing from the code?
- Why do you think your professional organization developed this code? How do you think it is used?



# ETHICS AT THE CONVERGENCE OF DIFFERENT DISCIPLINES — QUESTIONS FOR GROUP

- What elements do these ethical codes have in common? Why do you think these codes have these common features?
- In what respects do these codes differ? Why do you think your code has these differences?
- Are there serious ethical issues that people in this discipline/profession face with which these codes do not deal?

# TIPS FOR CLASSROOM DISCUSSIONS

Group/class size of a dozen or so plus a moderator works well

Establish incentive (e.g., participation points) for each person to participate at least once during the discussion

Be on the look out for individuals who tend to dominate the discussion

Use the name card flip technique to establish whose turn it is to talk

# TIPS FOR CONTINUING DISCUSSION

Where possible let the participants choose what to talk about...

But come prepared with a list of topics you want to make sure are covered

Avoid dominating the conversation in your role as moderator

One useful role of a moderator is to come back to several points participants have made and weave them into a common theme

Another perspective can be found at  
<http://ethics.iit.edu/teaching/leading-case-discussions>

# M MSG DISCUSSION: MODERATED MEDIUM SIZE GROUP DISCUSSION

At your table, select one person to be the moderator.

Moderator: decide what discussion points you would like to see covered (be realistic!)

Remaining group members: review the Code of Ethics from your own profession

Run a 20 minute discussion based on the Codes of Ethics

Finally, use 5 minutes to discuss group dynamics in running a medium size group discussion

# MOVING FORWARD...

Remind students often about the code

In written assignments, score in part based on the student's use of the appropriate code(s) in their ethical analysis

When having students analyze historical incidents, remind them of the implications of using a modern code to analyze an earlier case

An example of how a code can be used in case analysis:

Michael Davis, "Thinking Like an Engineer: The Place of a Code of Ethics in the Practice of a Profession," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* **20** (2) 150-167 (1991).

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2265293>

# QUESTIONS?

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For case studies that can be analyzed with the help of Codes of Ethics, see <https://www.onlineethics.org/>

Find more codes at the Ethics Education Library

<http://ethics.iit.edu/eelibrary/>



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