

ANNUAL REPORT
CONTEMPORARY ETHICAL ISSUES FOCUS BOARD
FALL 2003 – SPRING 2004

Introduction

During the 2003-2004 academic year, the UH-Manoa Contemporary Ethical Issues (CEI) focus board reviewed and approved courses for Manoa undergraduates to meet their CEI focus requirements. This report briefly specifies the board's actions and activities, documents the current status of the CEI course offerings, and identifies future activities.

This report was prepared by the current CEI board members: Andrew Arno (Co-Chair), Ernestine Enomoto (Co-Chair), Linda Engelberg, Lois Magnussen, and Ian Robertson.

Board Actions and Activities

To encourage faculty to apply for Ethics-designations, the board members made phone calls directly to all department chairs during the fall and again in the spring semester. We informed chairs of the availability of online application forms and provided support to those who were interested in applying. Responses from chairs were generally positive, expressing knowledge about the focus requirements and specifically for O, E, and H course requirements in their programs.

The board reviewed applications for Ethics-designation based upon five specific questions, related to content, percentage of class time devoted to ethical issues, specific methods or approaches employed, and assessment used. If a faculty member submitted an application that did not have sufficient information, the board chairperson contacted that individual by email for more clarification. Two particularly challenging questions were question #4 on how students acquired the tools for responsible deliberation and ethical judgment, and question #5 on assessing student competencies. Faculty members often responded by stating that students would engage in discussion or take examinations but faculty did not specify how students would learn or be assessed for ethical decision making. While the board did not want to be prescriptive about how a course was taught, we felt that it was necessary to inquiry further about the approaches to teaching and assessments of learning. Moreover, having ethical issues as content does not automatically make for an ethics-designated course. Thus, the board hoped to engage faculty colleagues in dialogue about how we develop our students into ethical thinkers in an increasing complex society. It has been suggested that a course syllabus might be requested of applicants. Having this information along with the responses to the five questions generally might be sufficient to make a decision about whether the course meets the criteria for an ethics-designated course.

The board also considered alternatives to 3-credit course offerings. For example, the department of Dental Hygiene proposed a series of courses that would collectively meet the ethic requirement by having ethical issues incorporated in each course in the series. The final course would be given the Ethics-designation. As enrollment into the series is restricted to only Dental Hygiene majors and students must complete the entire series in order to receive due credit, the board approved this alternative for meeting the CEI requirement. A question was also raised about authorizing one-credit courses. As the Hallmark requires that ethical issues and discussion

be at least 30% of a 3-credit course, the board concluded that a 1-credit course devoted exclusively to ethics would qualify. A third alternative format suggested was having a credit/no-credit option for E-designated courses. A similar suggestion was made for the O-designation as it would allow for free and open discussion with credit being given for attendance and participation rather than content knowledge and assessment.

Current Status

Table 1: E-course offerings

	Classes Offered	Seats Available	Seats Filled	Average Enrollment	Median Enrollment
Fall 2003	46	1420	1329 (94%)	29	21
Spring 2004	59	1716	1478 (86%)	25	22

Student Questionnaire

In November, the board devised a student questionnaire to solicit responses from those taking E-designated courses in the fall term. This questionnaire was sent out by the staff to all faculty currently teaching CEI-courses. The responses to a Likert scale questionnaire were compiled and reviewed by the board in the spring term. Of the 46 courses offered in Fall 2003, 25 (54%) were surveyed with a total of 469 student questionnaires returned (38% return rate). Generally students felt that the ethical issues covered in the class related to the course content (63% strongly agreed, 27% agreed with this statement). Asked about feeling comfortable expressing their opinions, most of the students were in agreement (40% strongly agreed, 29% agreed). As far as how the instructor fared in introducing techniques for deliberating on ethical issues, 40% strongly agreed and 37% agreed with this statement. Students generally felt more competent in evaluating ethical issues in their major (37% strongly agreed, 31% agreed).

Students were also asked an open-ended question soliciting their comments about taking this Ethics-designated requirement. Generally those who commented were positive in their appraisal. For example, one student stated

"I feel that this course has driven me to analyze societal issues with more depth. I like this E-focus course because I have never taken a course like it before. My ability to analyze is stronger, and I look at issues and events at other perspectives."

To improve teaching and learning, students suggested having content be made more meaningful and relevant to daily life. This could be done with more contemporary examples, specific cases, various source materials and everyday "real life" examples. Students also recommended more open discussions with time for deliberation and dialogue. It was suggested that students might engage in formal debates to address the issues or role-play dilemmas. Likewise it was suggested that more hands-on ethics projects and reflection or commentaries might enable students to apply what they learned to their own lives.

At the end of the Spring term, the board modified several questions on the student questionnaire and will obtain input on their E-designated courses taught this semester. This revised survey will be sent out at the end of the term and compiled for board review next fall.

Renewals and Changes to Upper Division

As of January 2004, a letter was sent to all those who had taught lower division CEI designated courses to notify them of a change in policy. After long discussions with the UH community colleges, the General Education Committee decided to restrict O and E courses to the 300 and 400 level. The factors leading to this decision were that it was pedagogically desirable to teach these areas of ethical deliberation and communication skills at the upper division so students would be better prepared as professionals in their respective fields; and that WASC accreditation requires that the general education requirements be spread across a student's course taking, not be restricted to the lower division exclusively.

The change in policy met with some resistance from those faculty members who had taught E-designated courses at the lower division. However, the policy stands as decided. Faculty members have been encouraged to revise their course offerings or apply for courses at the upper division to be E-designated.

Spring Workshop

One faculty development workshop was conducted on February 10, 2004 from 2:30-4:00 p.m. The aim of the workshop was to share experiences in teaching ethics and also to encourage those who might consider applying for E-designation. Two presenters Noel Kent from Ethnic Studies and Lurana O'Malley from Theatre and Dance shared approaches to teaching on ethical issues and drawing from multiple perspectives. Ian Robertson of our board presented the results of the student questionnaire. An open discussion followed with attendees raising questions about how to offer E-designated courses to meet the focus requirement.

Website Development

The board discussed ideas and suggestions to include in a Website for those interested in applying for or renewing their Ethics-designation. Information to be posted on a website might include the process of application and renewal, common misperceptions, suggested links to other ethics websites, faculty suggestions on teaching and learning, exemplars from faculty applications, some general comments from student feedback, and a list of video resources.

Future Activities

Next term, the board would pursue plans for developing the Website for Ethics and target those departments or colleges with few ethics courses. Reviewing and distributing feedback to faculty from the student questionnaire might also be appropriate.

Special thanks to those who have served on the Ethics Board and are ending their service! They are Ian Robertson who was board chair in 2002-2003, and ends his third term on the Board, and Lois Magnussen who served for one year.