



Ethics as a Way of Life

A Case Study at Yezreel Valley College

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Abstract

The dynamic landscape of ethics in higher education is pivotal as organizations and individuals navigate diverse stakeholder needs. Ethical responsibility becomes an integral facet of all professionals, highlighting the crucial role of ethical education in preparing students for post-graduation success. The acquisition of ethical competence, rooted in knowledge of ethical principles, equips students with the tools to make ethical decisions, shaping their ethical behavior and responses. Yezreel Valley College exemplifies this commitment, with a well-defined Code of Academic Ethics reflecting universal values and principles, overseen by the College Ethics Committee. In summary, this case study offers insights into Yezreel Valley College's ethical education practices, emphasizing the significance of ethics in higher education and the dynamic interplay between ethics and professionalism. The college's proactive approach positions it as a leader in addressing ethical challenges and adapting to changing environments while fostering ethical competence in its students.

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1. Background

“The higher education collapses if the moral, and character fail, to prove and show that” — Ehsan Sehgal

Ethics is the compass for orientation, decisions and actions based on values and virtues (Global Ethics Forum 2018, Globethics)¹. Organizations as well as individuals identify and address the needs and interests of a variety of stakeholders as part of their professional roles, which necessitates the addition of ethical responsibility to business considerations (Manuel and Herron, 2021). Most professions have codes of professional ethics—sometimes developed as a response to public criticism of the behavior of a minority of practitioners—which practitioners must interpret and use to guide their actions (Epstein, 2018). As educators, we have a responsibility to prepare our students to deal with these situations proactively and effectively. Not only because it is the right thing to do, but because it is a necessity for their success post-graduation. Thankfully, ethical competence is possible when students gain knowledge of ethical principles, which in turn, leads them to ethical responses and behaviours. Ethics education is effective in achieving ethical competence (Jurkiewicz, 2014), thereby increasing their understanding and awareness of how ethics informs and influences the work of professionals (Talash et al., 2022). This knowledge will carry over into the student’s careers, impacting the organizations of which they will be a part in the future (Birch & Chiang, 2014).

2. Maintaining an Ethical organizational culture

Ernest Greenwood (1957) delineated five quintessential attributes characterizing a profession: systematic theory, authority, community sanction, ethical code, and culture. In the realm of higher education, the role transcends merely shaping well-educated professionals; it extends to

¹ Global Ethics Forum (GEF). Conference presentation slides, Globethics Website. Conference ‘Managing and Teaching Ethics in Higher Education: Policies, Skills and Resources’, 2018. URL=<<http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/170388> >

cultivating individuals who are not only proficient but also value-driven citizens, destined to emerge as future leaders (Mbae, 2019). As higher education takes the baton in refining future professionals, it grapples with the preconceived notions students bring, shaped by a complex interplay of familial influences, societal norms, media, religious beliefs, and cultural practices. Yet, higher education acts as the crucible where these notions are further refined, and their behavioral foundations solidified. In this dynamic process, the synergistic relationship between ethical and professional skills evolves (Lurie & Mark, 2016). The emphasis on ethics in higher education is not novel, with numerous academic institutions championing this cause. For instance, California State University–Long Beach spearheaded the “Ethics Across the Curriculum” initiative, urging educators to infuse ethics into their teaching practices². Likewise, Utah Valley University has exemplified best practices in ethics education, featuring a student symposium, a faculty summer seminar, and fellowships, all underpinned by a robust digital ethics focus (“Ethics Awareness Week”)³. Despite these commendable efforts, there remains ample ground to traverse in advancing ethics in higher education. This article presents a case study of Yezreel Valley College, shedding light on our goals and insights in this crucial domain.

3. Ethics at the Yezreel Valley College

Yezreel Valley College, established in 1965, is situated in northern Israel, encompassing a microcosm of the nation's diverse population⁴. This institution serves as a dynamic mosaic of individuals hailing from varied socioeconomic, national, and religious backgrounds, including Jews, Christians, Muslims, Druze, Bedouins, and Circassians. With an enrolment

² Ethics Across the Curriculum, Ukleja Center for Ethical Leadership, Website: URL= <<https://www.csulb.edu/college-of-business/ukleja-center-for-ethical-leadership/education/ethics-across-the-curriculum>>

³ Center for the Study of Ethics, Utah Valley University (UVU), Orem, Utah. Website: URL=<https://www.uvu.edu/ethics/events/2019/2019_eaw_ethics_technology_society.html>

⁴Max Stern Yezreel Valley College, Website: URL= <<https://www.yvc.ac.il/en/homepage-english/>>

of approximately 5,000 students pursuing either undergraduate or graduate studies in a wide spectrum of fields, including Economics, Behavioural Sciences, Social Sciences, Human Services, and Health Administration, Yezreel Valley College has been a hub of academic excellence. During the 2021-2022 academic year, 1,130 students successfully completed their bachelor's degrees, while 173 attained their master's degrees, and 558 completed a preparatory program aimed at facilitating their academic studies. Since achieving its status as a public college in 1994, Yezreel Valley College proudly counts 22,001 graduates with first-degree qualifications and 1,077 with second-degree achievements. Ethical education is an integral part of the college's curriculum and ethos, ingrained through four foundational channels: Ethics as an integral component of the college's mission statement, Ethics as a core element of the college's operational framework, Ethics as an inherent aspect of the faculty's NA and conduct, and Ethics as an integral facet of education and training.

Code of Ethics

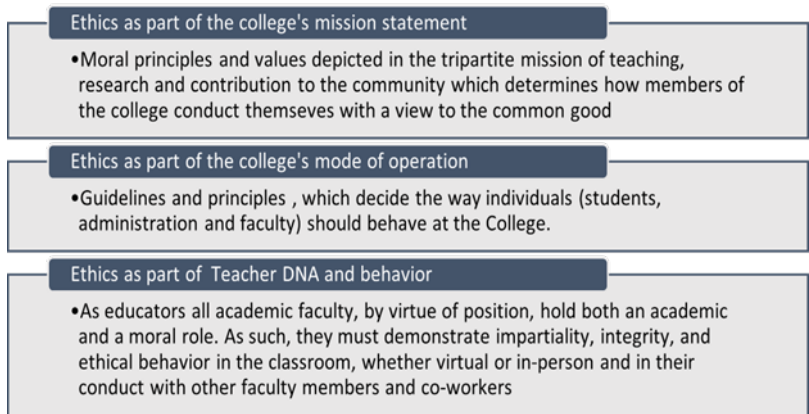
In any organization, the establishment of a well-defined code of ethics is imperative, exemplified by "Ethical Principles in University Teaching" as outlined by Murray et al. (1996). Yezreel Valley College adheres to this essential principle, offering an accessible Code of Academic Ethics to the public⁵. This code is grounded in Ben-Gurion University's "Code of Academic Ethics" from 2007, defining the college as a vibrant research community built upon universal values. These values encompass truth and liberty, leading to the derivative principles of impartiality, honesty, justice, equality, and respect for all human beings. The interdependence of these values underscores the college's commitment to fostering truth through the freedom of research, underpinned by the core values of impartiality. Conversely, any deviation from these values, manifesting as arbitrariness, inequality, or a lack of respect for human autonomy, poses a threat to the pursuit of truth and its validation through critical assessments.

⁵ The Code of Academic Ethics is accessible at: URL=<<https://www.yvc.ac.il/codeethics>>

Yezreel Valley College's Code of Academic Ethics offers a practical interpretation of these values in the daily life of a modern academic institution. It establishes an exemplary set of guidelines governing the college's activities in research, teaching, management, and its daily operations. The code's implementation is reflected at the institutional level through the promotion of academic freedom, the vigilant safeguarding of civil rights and human dignity, the prohibition of any form of unwarranted discrimination, and a culture of tolerance towards diversity and differences. It emphasizes unwavering integrity in research, teaching, and the publication of professional work, maintaining the strictest commitment to truth in all academic endeavors. Moreover, the code ensures the prevention of academic fraud or dishonesty and upholds the theoretical and administrative independence of the academic community as a free research community.

The code of ethics is not a legal document, yet its implementation is vigilantly overseen by the College Ethics Committee, comprising members elected by the college Senate, reinforcing the college's commitment to the highest ethical standards.

Fig. 1: Four components of ethics at YVC



Ethics as part of Education and training

- Teaching ethics: College curriculum focus on embedding theoretical and applied ethics into the core programs so as to prepare future professionals for ethical performance within their fields of practice.
- Applied ethics are emphasized with the purpose of promoting the capability of students to understand various situations by giving them simulations and situations to analyze. In this category the goal is to help the students acquire skills and competencies in what is required from ethical behavior.

4. Ethics and Technology

As technology advances at an unprecedented rate, Yezreel Valley College, along with the rest of the higher education landscape, grapples with profound changes. The adverse social impacts of technology have been the focus of extensive discussions, as previously highlighted by García-Peñalvo (2021), shedding light on the emerging ethical risks, including diminishing transparency in technological processes and compromised data privacy and security. In response to the demands of the modern workforce, Yezreel Valley College needed to adopt remote learning practices and pedagogical adaptations as other educational establishments. The unexpected ramifications of the Covid-19 quarantines in 2020 led our college, like many others worldwide, to swiftly transition from traditional face-to-face teaching to a fully remote learning environment. This rapid transformation significantly impacted both students and educators.

Adjusting to this new educational paradigm was challenging, but it required an unwavering commitment to uphold ethical standards of professionalism. Faculty and staff at Yezreel Valley College were promptly updated on the operation of technological tools for distance teaching and encouraged to enhance their proficiency, working diligently to elevate the quality of online education.

Considering these transformative changes, the academic staff at Yezreel Valley College is now exploring alternative assessment methods that encompass diverse components, enabling students to navigate the learning process successfully. This rapid shift also raised ethical concerns, such as safeguarding the intellectual property of educators when students could freely record sessions and share materials not intended for distribution. Moreover,

questions arose about how to support students lacking a suitable study environment or essential resources, like a computer, at home, as well as how to assist those affected by illness within their families.

These pressing ethical inquiries encompass principles of dignity, privacy, security, and equal opportunity. In response to these challenges, the Yezreel Valley College Center for Teaching Development, in collaboration with representatives from other Israeli universities and colleges, formulated a comprehensive set of guidelines.

Guiding rules for the lecturers

- The academic staff will coordinate behavioural and pedagogical expectations with the students at the beginning of each course while having a respectful discourse that includes consideration of students' cultural sensitivities.
- The academic staff will be alert and sensitive to the personal difficulties of students (such as visual or hearing impairments) and will find tailored solutions that allow them to participate in the learning process.
- The academic staff will make sure to start and finish an online class on time and will maintain a respectful learning atmosphere.
- The academic staff will inform students at the beginning of the course of the intention to upload the lesson recordings to the course website. If students object, the lecturer will upload a voice recording of the lesson only or choose alternative options (such as uploading the summary of the session or uploading the presentation only).
- The academic staff will be sensitive to students in need of learning infrastructure, including a computer or Internet connection.
- Academic staff will maintain contact with students to reduce dropouts due to reasons of inaccessibility to distance learning for assorted reasons.
- If the lecturer is aware of a student with such difficulty as listed above, the lecturer will refer him/her to the appropriate bodies at the institution for guidance and assistance. The academic staff is responsible for transferring the relevant knowledge while maintaining an adequate academic level.

- The academic staff will ensure that the material studied is understandable to the learners. This obligation is of paramount importance in online teaching.
- The academic staff will show special sensitivity to first-year students, who are at the beginning of their academic path and will assist them with additional assistance if necessary.

Guiding rules for the students:

- Students will open the camera during all synchronous lessons unless opening the camera may cause discomfort to participants or may impair the dignity or integrity of the student's body.
- Students will join an online class at the scheduled time, in appropriate attire while maintaining a respectful learning atmosphere.
- Students will respect the other participants, take an active part in the lesson, and express themselves in an orderly manner.
- Students will not distribute recorded lessons online in order not to infringe on the privacy of their peers and the privacy of the lecturer (as well as the intellectual property right of the lecturer).
- Students will enrol in courses after reviewing the requirements and their ability to meet them. After choosing a course and at the end of a period of changes, students will take an active part in the course while meeting the various requirements.
- Students will be prepared for the online class ahead of time — in terms of technological equipment, timely arrival, and active participation.
- Students are responsible during the synchronous lesson for opening a camera, turning off the microphone when they are not talking, participating in appropriate attire, and proper behavior.
- The students are responsible for regular participation in the learning sessions and for completing the study material in the class from which they were absent.
- Students are responsible for referring questions to the lecturer regarding his or her lack of understanding of the topic studied.
- The Student Association will assist in the adaptation of new students to the academic system.

There is yet a great deal to do for higher education to adapt to the changing environment. Markkula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University presents an example of an interdisciplinary approach to digital ethics that can support the efforts of other higher education establishments with free resources. It offers for example the resource “Ethics in Technology Practice” which includes case studies briefings, videos, and hundreds of articles and other materials⁶. There are questions that higher education establishments should use to see where they stand on digital ethics (O’Brien, 2020):

- Is there a community of concern related to digital ethics on your campus? Should you launch one?
- Does your campus have written policies or guidelines related to privacy and digital ethics? Can you find them?
- Do you know whose full-time job it is to worry about ethical issues? Have you had lunch with her or him?
- When someone on campus develops an application that uses student data, is any ethical framework used before work begins? Required?
- When someone on campus buys an application is there any ethical review required?
- Do you know what your campus is doing to ensure that the next generation of developers and technology professionals (our students) have a strong digital ethics mindset?
- Are you more informed about digital ethics this year than last? Will you be even more informed next year? How will you make this happen with everything else going on?

4. Summary

The preceding descriptive case study provides an overview of the ethical education practices at Yezreel Valley College. This discussion illustrates the incorporation of learning objectives centered on ethical decision-making and social responsibility. Throughout the college's programs and curriculum,

⁶ Markkula Center for Applied Ethics, Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, website: [URL=<https://www.scu.edu/ethics-in-technology-practice/>](https://www.scu.edu/ethics-in-technology-practice/)

students are equipped with essential tools and mechanisms for their professional journey. This preparation includes nurturing empathetic and morally engaged interactions with others and fostering the ability to make ethical decisions that benefit all. By exposing students to flawed rationalizations, differing viewpoints, and ethical dilemmas, we empower them to develop their unique ethical decision-making processes. Guiding students to reflect on and address diverse ethical issues they will encounter in their careers is a fundamental aspect of their vocational training.

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic posed ethical implications for higher education institutions, as they navigated the balance between individual health and pedagogical constraints during both the initial response and the recovery stages. It also accelerated the integration of technology into the curricula. Yezreel Valley College remains committed to continually adapting its methods to equip graduates with the skills and knowledge necessary to make ethical decisions in their post-graduation careers in an ever-evolving environment. While these guidelines provide a strong foundation, limitations around feasibility and scope in some contexts should be considered when translating these practices to other institutions.

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6. Short Biographies

Dr. Clara Rispler, a senior lecturer in the dept. of Human Services and the MA program in organizational development and consulting at Yezreel Valley College, has been helping organizations navigate the rapidly changing world of work for over 30 years. She is a champion of gender equality in education, an advocate for teaching with technology, and a researcher of the shifting nature of work.

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Dr. Gila Yakov, an expert in medical ethics, serves as the head of the health systems management department at Yezreel Valley College. She holds a doctorate in medical ethics, is a senior lecturer and the Teaching Development Center head. Dr. Yakov advises ethics committees in various Israeli hospitals, with her research concentrating on palliative care ethics, clinical ethics, and medical education.

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