

Judith I. Bailey
"Ethics and the 21st Century University"
Center for the Study of Ethics in Society

I am proud to be at Western Michigan University, a university with a cadre of academics from every discipline who have chosen to devote their research and creative energies to the study of ethics. To you, I offer my admiration and appreciation. Your commitment to infusing the academic enterprise with ethical considerations makes this a better place for all of us, and your work has a special impact on our students and the broader communities we serve.

When our graduates are accustomed to examining their work and lives in the framework of ethical standards, we help build a better world and truly fulfill the University's long-accepted role as an instrument that can change society for the better. In short, we as a university community dedicate ourselves to higher education as a public good.

The view is changing

The view of higher education is changing – the notion that having an informed and thoughtful populace is a public good. While many of us fiercely adhere to that description of our institution's role in society, a change is under way today in the way the public we serve views higher education.

We need to explore that change more closely, because it is an important change – one that requires us to look vigilantly at how we conduct ourselves as members of the academy. It is a change that compels us to examine our own work in the framework of those same ethical standards we impart to our students.

First, let us define those ethical standards. That is not an easy task, I know, and those of us who truly care about creating an ethical world struggle daily with such definitions. We must have a common base that serves as a starting point for our more focused study of ethics – in business, engineering, biomedical advances, research and of course, leadership.

Some of my favorite language about basic ethical values comes from the Institute for Global Ethics in Camden, Maine. Rushworth Kidder, CEO of the Institute for Global Ethics, challenges us to consider our life's work in terms of five simple descriptors of ethical behavior. I ask you to reflect on the simplicity of the statements and the complexity of their application to our work as academicians.

Ethical behavior, according to the Institute of Global Ethics, requires that we be:

- honest and truthful in all our dealings;
- responsible and accountable in every transaction;
- fair and equitable in each relationship;
- respectful and mindful of the dignity of every individual; and
- compassionate and caring in each situation.

These are wonderful ground rules – simple, powerful and relevant to literally every facet of life and of the university. Students must know that these are the values we embrace. We, as members of the academy, must not let changing public perception or changes to the social and economic climate deter us from holding steadfast to these values, for they are basic to what we do. In a very real sense, the future of our society depends on these values being transmitted to the next generation.

Our students – and the public we serve – must see these values reflected in all of our decision-making. For instance, when we are asked to respond to public questions about student behavior, I want students and the media to know that we will do so, and do so fully, after we are sure we've fulfilled our ethical responsibility and commitment to protect student rights and privacy. Choosing between two rights is what ethical decision-making is all about. It doesn't mean either choice is invalid. It means we exercise care, compassion and responsibility in selecting the better choice.

Changes to the social and economic climate and shifts in public perception do, however, have an impact, and today we face a distinct set of challenges brought on by such external forces. To remain faithful to our ethical principles and responsibilities, I suggest there are three major areas that require our near-undivided attention. If we are to claim the moral high ground, this university, like every other university in the nation, must examine its commitment to:

- Integrity and academic honesty,
- Diversity, and
- Access.

Put simply, those of us working in higher education today have a moral obligation to educate students for a changing world. We must educate them in a way that both meets their expectations and challenges them to ponder avenues and behaviors they have never before considered. We must provide the education our students expect, and we must raise the expectations of our

students.

Furthermore, we have an obligation to prepare all students to use their knowledge, skills and talents for both their own benefit and for the advancement of the world in which we live. To not do so, is to build a 21st-century society that is dysfunctional, filled with individuals unable or unwilling to lead in an ever-changing global culture.

We must review how we arrived at this crossroad, for it is essential that we look at where we are today through the lens of our history. It has significance for our future.

Historical charges to America's universities

Over time, America's universities have experienced dramatic shifts in mission and the public's perception and expectations of them.

Many of our oldest institutions were founded as colleges in the 18th century, to educate the sons of the wealthy to follow their fathers into professions such as law, medicine, architecture and the clergy.

Higher education may not have been the norm for the average citizen at that time, but access to basic education emerged early as a central tenet of American life. From the time of its founding, our nation recognized that education must have primacy if the democratic experience is to survive and thrive. Our most enlightened founders, like Thomas Jefferson, understood "that knowledge is power, that knowledge is safety, that knowledge is happiness."

By the middle of the 19th century, that right to basic education was firmly planted and had evolved to a demand for access to advanced education. The nation wanted higher education with a more practical bent, and in 1860, with industry growing and scientific thought blossoming, Congress passed the Morrill Act that led to the establishment of land grant colleges. These new institutions provided access to advanced education for those involved in the productive economy--agriculture and industry. Applied sciences and engineering joined the liberal arts as part of the university curriculum.

Throughout the 20th century, higher education continued to grow, with the evolution of normal schools, like Western State Normal School, into full teachers colleges. Again, the intent was for higher education to fulfill a specific need. Increasingly, the public saw higher education as the means for individuals to move ahead socially and enhance their career prospects.

The post-World War II era and the advent of the G.I. Bill of Rights solidified the public's perception of higher education as both necessary for individual success and a great boon to the prospects of the country as a whole. The bill that began as a "thank you" to returning servicemen and an attempt to

reintegrate them into civilian life became perhaps the most successful government initiative of a generation. It was a commitment to education and learning and an affirmation of the right of every citizen to a higher education. This grand, national effort sparked a sense of civic responsibility and engagement, and redefined the way ordinary citizens saw public policy intersect with the course of their lives. Higher education literally came of age as both a private and public good. By the early 1950s, more than 25 percent of America's youth was in or headed to college.

It was by no means a perfect era, of course, for large numbers of our most talented citizens – women and minorities of every background – still did not have full access to higher education or a wide range of career options, but it was an amazing platform on which to build.

America's colleges and universities today

It is now 50 years later, and higher education is still seen as both a right and a necessity. That's a good thing; yet along the way, we seem to have lost that vision of higher education as a public good. The argument that it is a public good is still a strong one because citizens who are educated, employed and productive benefit our society as a whole. Today more than 60 percent of high school graduates come straight to the doors of our public and private colleges because they believe that higher education is primarily a tool to achieve personal career success.

Increasingly, the public sees job preparation and a secure financial future more as private benefits and not examples of a public good. Perhaps it is that perception that has led us to this point in history, when the burden of paying for those private benefits now falls more heavily on our students and their families. It's not much of a leap from viewing education as a private benefit to seeing it as a consumer product – and an expensive one at that.

The dramatic reduction in public funding for higher education is tied closely to that perception of higher education as a private benefit and a consumer product. State-supported universities that came out of the land grant and teachers college traditions have now become state-assisted universities. Western Michigan University is one of those new entities. We are seeing a fundamental shift in funding that has taken the task of paying for higher education off the shoulders of the general population and placed it squarely in the laps of our students.

Our first set of ethical challenges--integrity and academic honesty

We are experienced teachers who know that education is so much more than job training. We know what education is about. We continually witness the power of education to transform both individual lives and the face of society, and that transformation reaffirms our commitment to integrity and academic honesty.

Our students, savvy consumers, pay tuition in the expectation of an unparalleled collegiate experience - and ideally a position in their chosen career immediately upon graduation.

Are these two ways of looking at higher education incompatible? We acknowledge the reality of why students come to us and recognize career preparation as a valid reason, but not the sole reason, for a college education. It is our responsibility to prepare them for the work they aspire to and to use the time we have with them to broaden the scope of their expectations, as well as instill in them a better sense of the importance of an educated citizenry.

Western Michigan University is an *educational* institution, a complex academic enterprise that engages faculty and students in an active intellectual and social experience marked by personal interaction and a commitment to learning, discovery and service. We know, and see the evidence in the success of our alumni, that a university experience both prepares our students for their chosen careers and challenges them to think beyond a single career path to embrace the life of an educated person. Our core liberal arts curriculum is designed to broaden our students' horizons and to prepare them in the analytical and critical thinking skills essential for life-long learning.

It is part of our job to challenge our students to grow intellectually and socially. No matter how career oriented a student may be, somewhere in his or her soul is the desire to be inspired, to embrace learning for learning's sake and take pride in mastering complexities for the sheer joy of doing so. It will happen. That is why we use such care in choosing faculty members.

We count on you who are on the frontlines – in our classrooms – to continue the tradition of educating the next generation to take their rightful place in the civic arena. While the desire for financial security may bring students to us, I remain convinced that what they will take away from their experience at the

university is what we most want to give them – the ability to think clearly, analyze carefully and live lives of intellectual vigor, compassion and ethical behavior.

While we ask –no, demand – that our students expand their view of education, we need also to consider our own institutional mindset and whether there is a need for change. Just as we transform the lives of our students, should not we be willing to engage in our own transformation, one borne from assessment of our work and our students' accomplishments?

Our students and their families have choices about where to attend college and we must be *honest and truthful* in attracting them to our learning community. Truth in advertising may sound very commercial, but in an extremely competitive market for the best students, we aggressively promote WMU and all we have to offer. In doing so, how we portray the WMU experience and set the expectations of incoming students will influence student success at WMU. Students should not be surprised by the rigors of academic studies and the adjustment to collegiate life.

When we recruit students, we must be forthright and honest in our description of the academic, social and cultural life students can expect. Likewise, students must be aware of the academic and social skills they must possess to be successful at a University.

Once students are part of our learning community, we must be honest, truthful, *responsible and accountable* in our interactions with them. Our academic programs must be accurately portrayed. When we offer a program, students must know that the program is of the highest quality and that they will be able to compete well with graduates of similar programs at other institutions. Individual instructors must look carefully at what happens in the classroom. A class on 17th Century French Literature should be just that. If a student enrolls in a computer graphics class, that student has a right to expect that computer graphics is the central lesson of every scheduled class period, and every scheduled class period should take place.

These are not such radical suggestions, but we have all seen colleagues who abuse these basic principles, and such abuses amount to ethical lapses in our responsibility to our students. Likewise, we must continually help students realize that not everything that goes on in the classroom is about career preparation. There is immense value in the spontaneous free exchange of ideas and philosophies that cannot be narrowly channeled to fit a course description in a catalog.

We must be candid about our commitment to research and clear about the benefits that commitment brings to students. Too often, students fail to understand the responsibility a

university has in the discovery of new knowledge. Research and creative activity is at the very heart of the university experience. Our commitment to being a "student-centered research university" reinforces our commitment to students who are willing to invest in the challenges and joys of discovery and creative endeavors. These students have the opportunity to be engaged with faculty members on the cutting edge of their disciplines, who welcome students as active participants in research and the creative process. It is our responsibility to help students understand how they reap the benefits when we commit resources – funding, faculty time and facility use--to research. As the institution's reputation grows as a result of research and creative activity, the value of our students' degrees will increase as well.

Our next ethical challenge--diversity

When I gave that brief historical overview of higher education's role in American history, you may remember that I began by talking about our country's original colleges. They were designed to educate the sons of the professional classes to follow in their father's footsteps. College students in the 18th century were indeed sons from wealthy circles. Women and people of color were not part of the student body, and international students were a rarity.

What a different era that was – one we will never refer to as the good old days. We've come so far, but we have so much further still to go in our efforts to ensure that we all are *respectful and mindful of the dignity of every individual*. If we stop now and call our task complete, we will have jeopardized the future of our students and our nation.

Just saying we are committed to diversity is not enough. We must clearly articulate what we mean by diversity and our expectations of every individual.

Creating a diverse community is not about creating a comfort zone for individuals of a particular race, ethnic background, gender, religion, political belief or economic background. It is about creating a community where all are welcomed and respected for their contributions and where we celebrate our collective talents and differences – coming together as a community that acknowledges differences do matter and that our differences strengthen us as a whole.

In making a commitment to bring our community together, we also must ensure everyone is an active and engaged member. That engagement encompasses all that we do. Each individual is welcomed into the classroom and the research laboratory, and is encouraged to take full advantage of every opportunity in the university experience.

Achieving a diverse campus community cannot be a narrowly defined goal. It must be as broad as the human imagination is wide. Every effort we make to give our students the tools and experiences they need to be productive in a global workforce and to be a contributor in an increasingly diverse society will enhance our individual and collective future.

Finally there is what is perhaps our greatest ethical challenge – maintaining access

We cannot transform the lives of students if we are not able to establish a financial climate that allows them to have access to our programs. We perform a daily balancing act to fund our academic enterprise, but the result often leads to the cost of tuition rising at a rate that may well prevent students from enrolling at the precise time in history when higher education and the college experience is vital to maintain both personal and collective goals.

According to a national report – the American Diploma Project – which was released just last week, technical skills, college prep courses and college level knowledge are vital for success today even for those not interested in a highly skilled career. A high school diploma, the report concluded, is no longer a springboard to success because that diploma no longer ensures that the recipient is ready to do college-level work or take on the technical challenges of the workplace.

Access to the advanced knowledge now required is not only a private good, but also a public necessity to maintain a strong economy. A strong national dialogue and an open political process also demand citizens with knowledge of complex issues in the sciences, history and philosophy. These are not just private benefits; these are public goods.

Few of us actually learned everything we need to know in kindergarten. Today the numbers of those coming to us because they need and want to learn more is growing. Last month, the Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education, the College Board and ACT Inc. released a report called "Knocking at the College Door," which detailed high school graduation rates over the next 15 years by state, income, race and ethnicity. In the next four years, the number of high school graduates whose families earn less than \$50,000 per year is expected to grow by nearly 7 percent, and the total number of Michigan high school graduates will grow by about 10 percent.

The number of students who need to be part of the higher education system is increasing nationwide, but in Michigan, we're also seeing a harbinger of what may come. Although the number of high school students is increasing, the number of students applying to Michigan's top universities is declining. Last week the University of Michigan announced an 18 percent decrease in applications for next year. Michigan State

University is down 15 percent, and applications to WMU are down by 9 percent. High jobless rates, a poor economy and uncertainty about future tuition costs are to blame. Access is threatened. The National Center for Public Policy in Higher Education recently estimated that at least 250,000 prospective students nationwide have been denied access to higher education by declining state appropriations and the resulting skyrocketing tuition rates.

While we struggle to keep tuition affordable and build a diverse campus, economic forces work against us. Reams have been written about what halting affirmative action programs could do to minority enrollment, but little is written about the very serious implications of the continuing reduction in state appropriations to higher education. A study by the Century Foundation estimates that if the nation's 146 most selective colleges abandoned affirmative action and looked only at grades and test scores, about 5,000 fewer African American and Hispanic students would make the cut each year. In just one state, California, officials estimate that at least 20,000 African American and Hispanic students will be shut out of California's higher education system because of cuts in state spending.

The access issues that loom in our future will affect students of every background and from every walk of life. It will be our constant struggle in the coming years to not only maintain the quality of the programs we offer, but to maintain our ability to deliver those programs to students who are qualified to enroll and who have the desire and commitment to work toward their goal of earning a degree

Universities have a long history of dealing with funding shortfalls, but today's challenges speak to the heart of what we are trying to do and our ethical responsibility to students. As president of this university, I've said that it will not be business as usual at Western Michigan University. It won't be here and it won't be at any public university with a commitment to students.

To better provide access, universities have a moral obligation to:

- Manage resources well;
- Be transparent about funding – where it comes from and how it is used; and
- Be forthright about the costs of higher education.

When we say it will not be business as usual, we must truly mean that we will examine every opportunity to make our institution cost efficient. We cannot be afraid to examine and challenge any part of what we consider the normal operations of the university – from class scheduling to facilities utilization.

And there will be times when we discover that being more

efficient means we have to move outside our comfort zone. We may need to schedule and teach more classes at 3 p.m. on a Friday afternoon. We may have to rethink long-honored traditions of class sequencing to accommodate the realities of our students' lives. We will consider such things because to not consider them would be a disservice to our students and an ethical break in our commitment to them.

Conclusion

The application of ethical principles to everyday life is all about balancing choices and needs. Decisions are rarely about choosing between good and bad. More often they're about choosing between competing goods. Low tuition is good and will secure access, but is that more important than academic quality? Flexibility and classroom autonomy is good, but so is delivering the education promised. Tradition is wonderful, but can it take precedence over working collaboratively to expand access? Building the reputation of an institution is important, but is every new research opportunity offered the right one for this institution, or do we need to be purposeful and focused in the way we accept or initiate new areas of emphasis?

I've posed some serious questions and laid out the challenges we face. Virginia Woolfe once said the first duty of a lecturer is "to hand you, after an hour's discourse a nugget of pure truth to wrap up between the pages of your notebooks and keep on the mantelpiece forever." I've taken not quite an hour of your time, but I do feel compelled to leave you with that nugget, and it is this.

In a pluralistic society, a core set of values and common rules of behavior are critically important if we are to continue moving forward. When we as a university are confident in our own adherence to the highest ethical standards, we cannot help but lead by example and through thoughtful instruction. The society we serve will be the beneficiary of what can truly be called a public good--an infusion of new citizens ready to meet the ethical challenges in whatever role they choose to play.

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