

Interdisciplinarity@WMU- Phase One planning Template

- 1. Brief Overview:** Provide a brief overview of the proposed interdisciplinary initiative. What types of questions would the initiative ask? What types of complex problems would it seek to solve?

This proposal suggests unifying the Department of Philosophy and the Center for the Study of Ethics in Society as the School of Philosophy and Ethics. The School will have two novel strategic pillars: interdisciplinary academic ethics-related programming and community outreach and engagement. The Department of Philosophy has an internationally recognized M.A. with a strong reputation including in ethics. The Department produces high-quality research and has a high ratio of credit hour production per faculty, in part because of applied ethics accreditation requirements across the University. However, the Department has lost faculty members to retirement; it may struggle to retain its reputation and capacity without partnership. The Department's existing major and minor in ethics need to be re-conceived because there are limited pathways for students to learn from ethics experts outside the Department, and ethics is interdisciplinary.

Founded in 1985, the Ethics Center has also achieved national acclaim and has promoted interdisciplinary ethics work across the University. The advisory board comprises representatives from most of the University's colleges, who teach, research, and advocate for ethics. But despite healthy endowments for ethics programming the Center has no academic offerings or dedicated administrative support.

The School will promote other units' initiatives and integrate them through the cross listing of courses and courtesy cross appointments of faculty. It will offer a redesigned major and minor in ethics, drawing from existing ethics classes across campus, as well as an interdisciplinary graduate certificate in ethics.

These offerings will produce increased credit hours and revenue. The School will achieve efficiencies by reconceptualizing programs, repairing low-enrolled classes and reducing redundancies through consolidation of ethics offerings. The School will also internalize Ethics Center expenses, thus creating cost savings for the College.

- 2. Impacted units:** What existing units, programs, and colleges would be involved in the proposed initiative? What other possibilities for collaboration across campus or in the broader community might exist now or in the future?

The primary units affected will be the Philosophy Department and the Ethics Center. The Ethics Center gets access to academic offerings and more robust, stable administrative support. The Center retains its identity and still has a director and an advisory board with members from across the University. The Philosophy Department retains its philosophy major and graduate program, while expanding the size of its faculty and accessing the Ethics Center's networks, outreach programs, and endowment funds for talks and conferences.

The Ethics Center's advisory board (and its director if applicable) would be invited to join the School on courtesy cross-appointments. The board includes faculty from the College of Business, College of Education and Human Development, the College of Engineering and Applied Science, the College of Health and Human Services, as well as other College of Arts & Sciences departments. The primary goals are to: facilitate interdisciplinary collaborations; cross-list ethics courses to increase visibility and low enrolments; and strategize ways to teach ethics efficiently.

Almost 30 other programs offer undergraduate and/or graduate course with "ethics" or related terms in the course title or description. Therefore, dozens of other programs choosing to participate in the School's interdisciplinary offerings could be impacted. We anticipate that units entering into agreements would access new students and mutually benefit from increased credit hour production.

We also hope this proposal impacts other units in less obvious ways. It will be clearer where ethics content originates and where expertise lies. It will be easier for media to initiate ethics-related inquiries. Finally, it will streamline collaboration on grants for researchers who need to build out ethics components; for example, many federal grants require ethics training. The Office of Research and Innovation included ethics on its 2020 list of research strengths across the University.

- 3. Impact on teaching, learning, and curricula:** Describe the anticipated impact of the proposed initiative on teaching, learning, and curricula. How might this initiative help to grow enrollment, including by reaching new audiences of learners through continuing education, dual enrollment, or professional certification? How will the proposed initiative positively impact the training of undergraduate and graduate students? How does it enhance our institutional commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion?

The revamped ethics major and minor, and the new ethics certificate, will attract students in a wide variety of programs. Many pre-professional majors already require ethics courses as part of their accreditation. Those students could now access the ethics degrees more easily by consolidating their pre-existing ethics requirements into a second degree program. The addition of ethics and humanities content to other entrance tests for professional programs (e.g., MCAT, GMAT, LSAT) creates a further driver for some students. But we also anticipate that this program would appeal to others, including those working in business, entrepreneurship, and non-profit management. For example, computer science or aviation students might be interested in an ethics minor that divides credit delivery between their professors and the School. Because ethics is relevant to every occupation, as well as to a meaningful life, we think providing more opportunities to learn about ethics supports the University's emphasis on helping students find purpose.

The Philosophy Department offers several outreach initiatives, none of which is centrally coordinated. The Ethics Center already has this sort of experience and expertise, as evident from its 30+ years of doing exactly this sort of thing. It would pick up responsibility for coordinating the Philosophy's current outreach efforts, including: the state High School Ethics Bowl competition; a Lyceum chapter (i.e., of a national initiative) that brings philosophy and ethics instruction to local high school students; a Minorities and Philosophy chapter (of a national organization) that promotes participation in the field from historically underrepresented groups; a project that teaches philosophy and ethics at Coldwater Correctional Facility; and a project that takes WMU students to Indigenous Alaskan villages to assist with tax preparation. At the same time, the Ethics Center will continue to promote book clubs, lectures and other events.

- 4. Impact on research and creative activity:** Describe the anticipated impact of the proposed initiative on research and creative activity. How will this initiative promote discovery and creative scholarship? How might it result in increased external funding?

This initiative would seek to combine the Philosophy Department's academic offerings and the Ethics Center's community offerings. It would also create a platform for interdisciplinary work in ethics, both on ethics-related projects and on projects where ethics plays a support role (e.g., a STEM project).

As a starting point, interdisciplinary collaborations are difficult partly because there is limited infrastructure to enable them. By bringing the ethics faculty together into the School, we improve upon the current configuration because of both a broader mission and because of the teaching and learning aims mentioned above. For example, a member of the Philosophy Department and the Director of the Ethics Center co-published a book over the last two years, submitted an NSF grant proposal, co-edited a special journal issue, and co-organized a conference.

As another example, interdisciplinary academic offerings and outreach could help promote an ethical STEM culture among researchers and students, including graduate training. The Ethics Center has long provided leadership in this area, including through an NSF-funded grant and follow-up events. The Ethics Center is also evaluating further ways to partner with local non-profits and businesses, relationships that the School would incorporate.

Many of the outreach projects have also translated into research outcomes. Some of these research outcomes have accrued to Philosophy graduate students. The School would have regular "mentorship" sessions for affiliated graduate students and faculty. The School would also create a pipeline for these processes and collaborations and pool ethics resources and expertise to leverage extramural funding. The School would serve as a point of contact for researchers in other fields who might want to develop ethics components for their funding proposals or teaching, particularly in STEM disciplines where we have complementary experience.

- 5. Efficiencies and/or cost savings:** How might the proposed initiative contribute to increased efficiencies and/or cost savings, for example by reducing administrative positions (e.g. chairs/directors), sharing staff support services and/or by sharing facilities?

The School saves costs by internalizing the budget for the Ethics Center, which is currently paid for by the College of Arts & Sciences. The principal pieces of this investment were: a graduate assistant; course releases for the Center's Director; and funding for operating expenses. The Ethics Center has never had dedicated administrative support.

The School will have a single budget. It will provide a GA from those currently allocated to Philosophy, which has indicated an ability to cover this by restructuring its GA usage. The course releases will be handled internally through the School's economy. The School will continue offering ethics programming through the Ethics Center's endowments, available funding through the School, or through other co-sponsorships within and beyond the University. For example, one robust collaboration already exists between the Department, the Center, and the WMU Homer Stryker M.D. School of Medicine's Program in Medical Humanities, Ethics, and Law: these units co-sponsor the annual Medical Humanities conference, which draws delegates and revenue from around the country.

The School will promote efficiencies. It will review and consolidate ethics offerings across the University, improving overall enrolment and reducing bottlenecks for students. Ethics courses are currently taught in similar forms through multiple units by faculty in both Philosophy and

other departments. By coordinating and cross-listing appropriate courses, we can consolidate low enrolments, mitigate programmatic redundancies; reconceive faculty workload, and play to strengths. This is not an invasion of other units: the point is to facilitate the conversations that are now eluding us. Inclusivity would indeed be a principal virtue here, as we will pursue courtesy cross-appointments, cross-listing, and other collaborations.

- 6. Impact on course offerings and workload:** At present, proposed initiatives will only be feasible and sustainable if they can be supported by existing resources, including instructional capacity, faculty and staff time, and facilities. Will the proposed initiative streamline existing course or program offerings? Could the initiative help create more equitable and sustainable workload for faculty, for example, by reducing the need to offer under enrolled courses, reducing the frequency of course offerings or eliminating the need to teach some courses?

This proposal streamlines ethics offerings across the University. Through courtesy cross-appointments, the School will be a single academic unit that will concentrate most ethics instruction.

Consider a single ethics course currently taught in multiple units. Whether it makes most sense for the units to rotate their offerings, to adjust the caps and have fewer overall sections, or to team-teach some of the offerings will be determined by a centralized ethics clearinghouse that will explore these sorts of questions and make recommendations. (At the same time, we don't overestimate our clout here: our goal is to help facilitate a sustainable future by interacting with diverse stakeholders.)

We will rebuild the existing ethics major and minor that already exist in the Philosophy Department but are undersubscribed. There is potential here, as the existing programs are not interdisciplinary (they are traditional philosophy degrees), and we have many ethics experts and ethics courses at the University. Those programs will be rewritten to be truly interdisciplinary, taking advantage of existing resources and opportunities.

The promotion of efficiencies and the mitigation of redundancies will free faculty to do other things. Focusing on teaching, if we can offer the same ethics courses less often (i.e., by cross-listing and consolidation), then we've reclaimed faculty time.

In terms of workload, the Ethics faculty would take primary control over the two undergraduate ethics programs, as well as the development of the graduate certificate in ethics. This then lowers the average workload on the Philosophy faculty, by getting help with those programs. It is also not more work than the Ethics faculty were otherwise doing, as they were already seeking ways to establish ethics offerings. Overall it lowers the average faculty workload.

- 7. Additional Information:** What additional information would you like to provide in support of this proposal?

In addition to the strategic reasons for this collaboration, it should also be emphasized that these two units have worked closely together for more than 30 years. Two of the three founding members of the Ethics Center, Dr. Michael Pritchard and Dr. Shirley Bach, had faculty appointments in the Philosophy Department. The other founding member, James Jaksa, had a faculty appointment in the (then) Department of Communication. Three faculty members (Dr. Allhoff, Dr. Kurth, and Dr. Pritchard) sit on the Ethics Center advisory board; furthermore, their teaching and research have predominantly been in ethics. Many of the Philosophy Department's graduate students are on the ethics concentration, and have interacted extensively with the programming offered through the Ethics Center. The director of the Ethics Center, Dr. Borden, is an Affiliate Professor in the Philosophy Department.

This shared history matters because we know each other and have worked closely together for years. Both units are proud of their accomplishments and have been fortunate to have success working independently. However, given the synergies and mutual trust, coupled with a new reality on faculty and university resources, we are excited to pursue this proposal collectively. As growth dictates, increased resources may be necessary (criteria to be suggested in full proposal). Preliminarily, the administrative assistant, covering what had been two areas, should be a 1.0 FTE appointment, and the GA line dedicated to Ethics may need to be added rather than transferred from Philosophy. The name, School of Philosophy and Ethics, is tentative. Finally, this proposal should not be understood to license invocation of article 25.2.1.1 of the WMU-AAUP collective bargaining agreement (concerning faculty layoff). Such an invocation would be contrary to the spirit and intent of this proposal. A following full proposal will be contingent on approval by the Philosophy Department faculty and Ethics Center board.

8. Contact

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