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The Formation of an Ethical Professional Identity in the Peer-Review Professions

Neil W. Hamilton

University of St. Thomas School of Law, nwhamilton@stthomas.edu

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FOREWORD

THE FORMATION OF AN ETHICAL PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY IN THE PEER-REVIEW PROFESSIONS

NEIL HAMILTON

The mission of the Holloran Center for Ethical Leadership in the Professions is research and programs on the holistic formation of both students and practicing professionals into ethical leadership in their communities. A necessary foundation for ethical leadership in a peer-review profession is an ethical professional identity. A critical question for the peer-review professions is how most effectively to socialize graduate students and practicing professionals into an ethical professional identity that connects technical professional skills with the public purpose of each profession.

Yet, the field is in its infancy.¹ It is clear that although each of the peer-review professions educates for different technical skills, all of them face the same challenge in understanding and fostering adult moral formation into an ethical professional identity. We can learn from each other how most effectively to address the challenge. Accordingly, the University of St. Thomas Law Journal and the Holloran Center hosted the first interdisciplinary conference/journal symposium on ethical professional identity formation on February 2, 2008. This symposium marks an important step in moving this emerging field forward. Seven symposium authors who represent the clergy, engineering, the health professions, the law, the profes-

1. Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching senior scholar William Sullivan writes in *WORK AND INTEGRITY: THE CRISIS AND PROMISE OF PROFESSIONALISM IN AMERICA* (2005) that each “professional’s integrity, sense of direction, and ability to assume responsibility for the quality of his or her own work and the standards associated with the field of practice . . . ground professional education in a broader conception of the purpose of the profession and the ideals to which it aspires, connecting training directly with the field’s social contract. . . . It is this . . . dimension of professional education that typically receives the least attention in the formal curriculum. . . . Because it includes in principle all areas of professional preparation, this . . . cluster of values holds the greatest promise for integrating the whole educational experience, permeating its currently disparate parts with explicit concern for developing in students the capacity and disposition to perform in accordance with the best standards of a field in a way that serves the larger society.” *Id.* at 29–30.

porate, and the sciences presented their papers, followed by an afternoon discussion of research agendas for the next several years.²

The articles in the symposium addressed several fundamental challenges:

What are the elements of an ethical professional identity (these elements define the educational goals for each student and practicing professional)?;

What are the learning models that foster development toward the goals?;³

What specific educational programs and courses flow from the learning model?;

What assessment is needed both to help each student and practicing professional to understand his or her development toward the goals and to evaluate the effectiveness of the programs and courses and learning models to achieve the goals?; and

What is the role and importance of ethical culture or context in fostering or undermining the elements of an ethical professional identity?

In answering these questions, the articles by Bebeau, Colby and Sullivan, Hamilton, Leach, and Steneck address the first question. Both Bebeau and Downey's articles include discussion of the second question. The third question is analyzed by Bebeau, Colby and Sullivan, Downey, and Foster. Additionally, Bebeau and Hamilton focus on the fourth question. Finally, thoughtful insight into the fifth question is given by Colby and Sullivan, Foster, Leach, and Steneck.

2. Other invited scholars participating in the morning and afternoon discussions included Dr. Dan Aleshire, Executive Director of the Association of Theological Studies, Prof. Melissa Anderson from the University of Minnesota (sciences), Prof. Patricia Benner from the University of California, San Francisco (nursing), Prof. Fred Hafferty from the University of Minnesota, Duluth (medicine), Prof. Joe Heckert from the University of Arizona (engineering); Prof. Marcia Mentkowski from Alverno College (the professorate), Prof. Katerina Schuth from the University of St. Thomas (clergy), and Associate Dean Jerry Organ from the University of St. Thomas (law). Holloran Center Fellows Thomas Holloran and Hank Shea, the administrators of the law school's mentor externship, David Bateson and Lisa Brabbit, Ph.D. candidate Verna Monson, and law journal editors also participated in both sessions.

3. A learning model seeks to describe how people learn. A number of models exist including behaviorism (focusing on the process of forming connections between stimuli and responses), cognitive science (focusing on how human memory works to promote learning), and constructivism (focusing on how existing knowledge is used to build new knowledge). See NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL, HOW PEOPLE LEARN: BRAIN, MIND, EXPERIENCE, AND SCHOOL 5, 6-7 (John Bransford, Ann Brown & Rodney Cocking eds., 1999). Schunk concurs that behavioral theories focus on the formation of associations between stimuli and response, but explains that cognitive theories stress the acquisition of knowledge and skills, the formation of mental structures, and the processing of information and beliefs. DALE SCHUNK, LEARNING THEORIES: AN EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVE 16 (2008). Schunk argues that constructivism is not a learning model or theory that generates hypotheses to be tested, but rather an epistemology (a philosophical explanation about the nature of learning) that learners create their own learning. *Id.* at 236.

With respect to the elements of an ethical professional identity, six of the articles observe that a foundation for this identity is created by self-knowledge and growth of the moral self from narcissism toward responsibility to other people.⁴ A fundamental question for all graduate and continuing education in the professions is whether it fosters self-knowledge and other directedness with intentional and carefully planned learning models, programs and courses. Both Bebeau and Downey caution that the learning models selected and the specific programs and courses designed to foster self-knowledge and growth of responsibility to others require an educational engagement that is appropriate to each student's level of personal development.⁵ Moreover, Bebeau provides evidence that the cohort of students entering graduate school today may be more narcissistic than earlier generations.⁶ A number of the articles (and a good share of the afternoon discussion on future research agendas) address the fifth question whether the ethical culture or context in which a student learns or a professional practices fosters or undermines the formation of an ethical professional identity. In particular, Colby and Sullivan and Steneck emphasize that the "trustee institutions" for each profession, including the graduate schools, accrediting agencies, licensing agencies, professional societies and associations, journals, national academies, and funders,⁷ must take responsibility to align their institutional cultures and contexts to foster and support an ethical professional identity. I would add the employers of professionals as another trustee institution.⁸

Further, Colby and Sullivan, Leach and Steneck point out the substantial misalignment between the educational goal of an ethical professional identity and the actual cultures and contexts that graduate students and practicing professionals experience.⁹ Colby and Sullivan note in their study of graduate education for five professions for the Carnegie Foundation series

4. Muriel J. Bebeau, *Promoting Ethical Development and Professionalism: Insights from Educational Research in the Professions*, 5 U. ST. THOMAS L.J. 366, 369 (2008); Anne Colby & William M. Sullivan, *Formation of Professionalism and Purpose: Perspectives from the Preparation for the Professions Program*, 5 U. ST. THOMAS L.J. 404, 421 (2008); Gary Lee Downey, *The Engineering Cultures Syllabus as Formation Narrative: Critical Participation in Engineering Education Through Problem Definition*, 5 U. ST. THOMAS L.J. 428, 438 (2008); Charles P. Foster, *Identity and Integrity in Clergy Formation*, 5 U. ST. THOMAS L.J. 457, 459 (2008); Neil Hamilton, *Assessing Professionalism: Measuring Progress in the Formation of an Ethical Professional Identity*, 5 U. ST. THOMAS L.J. 470, 485-86 (2008); David C. Leach, *Medical Profession and the Formation of Residents: A Journey Towards Authenticity*, 5 U. ST. THOMAS L.J. 512, 515 (2008); Nicholas H. Steneck, *Fostering Professionalism and Integrity in Research*, 5 U. ST. THOMAS L.J. 522, 526-29 (2008).

5. Bebeau, *supra* note 4, at 389; Downey, *supra* note 4, at 433.

6. Bebeau, *supra* note 4, at 369.

7. Colby & Sullivan, *supra* note 4, at 423; Steneck, *supra* note 4, at 524.

8. Hamilton, *supra* note 4, at 493-94.

9. Colby & Sullivan, *supra* note 4, at 406; Leach, *supra* note 4, at 515; Steneck, *supra* note 4, at 524. Colby and Sullivan argue that graduate education should prepare students to work in and eventually change misaligned cultures. Colby & Sullivan, *supra* note 4, at 406, 424.

of books on educating professionals, they rarely saw a faculty-wide active stance toward the formation of an ethical professional identity.¹⁰ Foster found in his study of seminaries that some faculties did take a faculty-wide active stance toward the formation of an ethical professional identity. In those seminaries, “the curriculum maps an integrative journey for students” and faculty members “model and coach students” toward a holistic ethical professional identity. At those seminaries, he observed a vital conversation among faculty about these formation issues.¹¹

The afternoon session asked each participant to discuss his or her highest priority research question. The two dominant themes were: (1) research on assessment necessary both to (a) help each individual student or practicing professional to understand his or her development with respect to the elements of an ethical professional identity and (b) evaluate the effectiveness of alternative learning models, programs, and courses to foster these elements; and (2) research to explore the ways institutional ethical cultures and contexts affect students and practicing professionals both in their (a) development of an ethical professional identity and (b) actual ethical conduct.

The Holloran Center will focus its research agenda for the next several years on the first of the dominant themes of the afternoon session. With respect to the second dominant theme in the afternoon session, the results of a growing array of assessment measures for ethical culture in the business ethics field should provide some help. For example, the University of St. Thomas Opus School of Business and the Center for Ethical Business Cultures are developing two such assessment measures.¹²

We hope that these symposium articles generate discussion, further research, and initiatives in the trustee institutions for each of the peer-review professions, particularly the graduate faculties. With respect to elements of an ethical professional identity, hopeful signs exist that the accrediting agencies in the various professions may be moving toward assessment of outcomes. For example, the Interim Report of the Outcome Measures Committee of the American Bar Association Section of Legal Education and

10. Colby & Sullivan, *supra* note 4, at 424.

11. Foster, *supra* note 4, at 468.

12. The Self-Assessment and Improvement Process (SAIP) is a comprehensive, systematic organizational appraisal which addresses issues of corporate ethics, corporate social responsibility, and corporate governance. Ongoing use of the SAIP helps companies build and sustain a culture that promotes responsible business conduct. See <http://stthomas.edu/business/centers/saip/default.html>. The Center for Ethical Business Cultures' Integrity Survey is a 28-item instrument that measures an organization's ethical culture along five dimensions: trust, integrity, and honesty; mission, vision and values; leadership effectiveness; stakeholder balance; and process integrity. See www.cebcglobal.org.

Admissions to the Bar (the accrediting agency for law schools) includes discussion of assessing professionalism.¹³

The Holloran Center appreciates both the contributions of the authors and the other invited scholars to this symposium and the funding support of the Medtronic Foundation for the conference. We also are grateful for the tireless efforts of the law journal editors for their work on the symposium. We recognize also Valerie Munson's help to coordinate the conference.

The Holloran Center is contemplating a blog on the formation of an ethical professional identity. If you would like to participate in the blog, please send a note to me at nwhamilton@stthomas.edu. The Holloran Center website will also be developing resources to assist the development of this emerging field. See our website at www.stthomas.edu/ethical leadership.

13. ABA Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, Interim Report of the Outcome Measures Committee (May 12, 2008) at 7-8.