

IPRO Team Ethics Assignment

Ethical Codes Discussion

Description of Exercise

Professional codes of ethics articulate the standards that every member of a profession should uphold. They outline the expectations the profession has of its members and a member's duty to colleagues, those they serve, and society as a whole.

For this exercise, students are asked to find and bring a copy of their profession or discipline's code of ethics to class and participate in a group discussion about the similarities and differences between these codes. There is also a small selection of mini ethics cases that student groups can discuss in relation to their codes. Students will then be asked to write a short reflection paper focusing on what they learned about how codes of ethics both resemble and differ from one another, and how the ethical principles outlined in their professions' code might to shape their work on the IPRO project.

Student Competency Level

Beginning. Helpful for getting students to think about the similarities and differences between their respective disciplines, as well as main ethical issues that all professions are concerned with.

Time Commitment

- ½ Hour locating their professional code of ethics, reading it over, and making notes for discussion.
- ½ Hour reading background material on codes of ethics.
- ½-1 Hour discussion codes of ethics as a group
- ½ Hours writing short reflection paper.

Tasks Involved

Students will be asked to use the Center for the Study of Ethics in the Professions Code of Ethics Online Collection (<http://ethics.iit.edu/index1.php/Programs/Codes%20of%20Ethics/Index%20Of%20Codes>) to locate a copy of their profession's code of ethics. For help, please have them contact the CSEP Librarian, Kelly Laas, at 312.567.6913, laas@iit.edu, or by visiting the Ethics Center Library in Herman Hall, Room 205.

Students will then spend time reading over their code and any background material faculty advisors wish to assign, so that they will be ready to bring in and discuss the main points of their code for class. See the end of this exercise for a short bibliography on codes of ethics.

During the day of discussion, students will divide up into groups of 5-6 and hold a short discussion about their respective codes. After a 5-minute initial discussion, during which students should be invited to share their general thoughts on codes of ethics and what they found surprising and/or interesting about their code, students should be asked to focus their discussion on the following questions:

1. What elements do these ethical codes have in common? Why do you think these codes have these common features?
2. In what respects do these codes differ? Why do you think your code has these differences?

3. Are there serious ethical issues that people in this discipline/profession face with which these codes do not deal?
4. Of the ethical provisions in your groups' codes of ethics, which ones do you think apply to your IPRO project? How can your team go about addressing these concerns as you continue on with your work on the project?

Students can also be asked to see if their codes of ethics can be used to find solutions to the following mini case studies. (Faculty advisors or students leading the ethics discussion should feel free to write their own mini-scenarios that would fit more closely with their IPRO project, or contact the CSEP Librarian, Kelly Laas (laas@iit.edu) for help.)

1. As part of a multidisciplinary design team, you are responsible for the design of a new retirement home. You have done some research on a number of environmentally friendly design elements that you think would be excellent to include in the final plan, but so far the environment is not a factor that the committee is considering; rather price seems to be the major factor as decisions are being made.
2. When deciding which supplier to buy from, the sales representative offers to fly you and a friend out to California for a meeting to discuss the details of a contract, a negotiation that could easily be done over the phone. Conveniently, the company is located along the coast near some fantastic beaches.
3. During a site visit of a company sponsor, you notice a potentially dangerous situation where a worker in the plant could be severely injured.
4. During the course of your work at a company, you come up with an idea for a product that you think has great potential. You debate whether you should talk to the head of the company you work for, or if you could sell this idea for more money to one of your company's competitors.
5. You are part of a team working on raising funds, designing, and building a new school for a small impoverished village in Haiti. While visiting the village and presenting your design to leaders of the community, one of the local teachers approaches you with a list of suggestions from her colleagues and students that are not incorporated into your team's design that you know will raise the final cost of the project.
6. You know that someone on your team is "borrowing" material for a report he is supposed to write up from a paper written by another student.

Potential Deliverables

A copy of professional codes used in the discussion and a 1 page reflection paper, written as an individual or in a small group. This paper can discuss issues such as:

What stakeholders are mentioned in your code of ethics (clients, the public, etc.)?

What provisions in your code of ethics do you think relate to ethical issues that may come up in your IPRO project?

What provisions are missing that you think should be present?

Thinking back to the groups discussion, how will knowledge about these professional standards help shape how you move forward on your IPRO project?

What new issues or questions do these codes raise, and how do you think your team can begin to address these issues?

Bibliography on Codes of Ethics

Davis, Michael. 1991. "[Thinking Like an Engineer: The Place of a Code of Ethics in the Practice of a Profession](#)." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 20(2):150-167.

This article discusses the role professional codes of ethics play in defining what constitutes a profession, focusing on engineering as an example. Especially interesting to read in conjunction with discussions about how to use a code of ethics. While dealing specifically with engineering, main points in this article can be generalized to cover almost all other professions.

Olson, Andrew "[Authoring a Code of Ethics: Observations on Process and Organization](#)" Center for the Study of Ethics in the Professions, 1998.

Written by an intern of the Ethics Center in 1998, this short, insightful article gives a solid explanation of the role a code of ethics plays in a profession, why differences exist between codes of ethics, and some observations about the process of writing a code of ethics.

For further readings please see a bibliography on Codes of Ethics at <http://ethics.iit.edu/research/bibliography>