

I PRO Team Ethics Assignment

Interview with a Professional

Description of Exercise

Used successfully for many years as part of an IIT undergraduate course taught by Dr. Vivian Weil, Phil 370: Engineering Ethics, this exercise asks students to interview a professional in the workplace about a simple case study, and ask their interviewee about how he/she would go about solving the ethical dilemma in the case. The aim of the interview is to elicit the **interviewee's analysis of the situation** and especially the **resources in his or her company** (for example, a process or committee in the company) for resolving such a problem. Students are often surprised both that the professionals they interview are concerned about ethical issues, and that many resources exist to help individuals in the workplace solve these problems. If your I PRO has a sponsor, you may wish to have your students interview individuals from that company or organization for this exercise.

The faculty advisor (or a group of students) should work with Kelly Laas, the librarian of the Center for the Study of Ethics in the Professions (CSEP), to select or write a short, 1 page case study for the students to use in their interview. The case should deal with ethical issues important to the I PRO project, and can either be written to closely resemble the work being done by the students, or can be set in a comparable setting, such as a workplace, construction site, etc.

The students, in groups of 2-3, will then receive a copy of the case and be asked to study the case in advance and work out their own analysis, options for solving the ethical dilemma(s) in the case, and assessment of these options. The first task for the students is to develop a set of at least eight questions about the case for the interview. These questions should be reviewed either by the faculty advisor or by a staff member of the Center before the actual interview.

During this same time, the student groups should be working on contacting a professional for the interview. The students can use connections they have through a previous job or an alumni they knew as a student, or can come to CSEP for help identifying someone to interview. The interviewee should not be a family member.

The student should schedule a time to have the interview (usually lasting about 30-40 minutes) with the professional in his or her workplace, if possible, and then hold the actual interview. The interview should focus on **how one might handle such a problem as the one in the case study in his or her workplace**. The questions the students have developed earlier can serve as conversation starters for the interview, and students should take notes of what is said. If the students decide to record the interview, they should first get permission from their interviewee.

After the interview is completed, the student groups should write up a short report of their interview, based on their notes. The report should be written up as a dialogue with the questions they asked and the answers they received.

Students will then participate in a short discussion during a class period (30-40 minutes) where each group will quickly share how their interviewees solved the problem in the case, comparing the similarities and differences in the response. The final reports of each interview will then be written up, and submitted as the ethics deliverable for the semester.

This exercise draws heavily on an activity developed by Dr. Vivian Weil for her course, Phil 370: Engineering Ethics. Assignment #2: The Interview Assignment. Fall 2009

Student Competency Level

Beginning – Good for helping students understanding the importance of professionalism when working in a workplace setting, and the role ethics play in professional life.

Time Commitment

- 1 Hour finding or (re)writing a case study for use in the interview
- 1 Hour analyzing case, developing questions, and locating a professional to interview, either using personal contacts or with the help of the Center for the Study of Ethics in the Professions. Students will set up appointment to interview the professional in the workplace, if possible
- 30-40 Minutes conducting interview
- 30-40 Minutes participating in class discussion about interviews.

- 1 Hour preparing group write-up of interview

Tasks Involved

1. Faculty advisor /student representatives work with Kelly Laas to select or (re)write a case to reflect ethical issues in IPRO.
2. Divide IPRO team into groups of 2-3, students work on analyzing case and writing series of questions for interview. Questions should be approved by faculty advisor or Kelly Laas before the interview is held.
3. Student groups work on lining up an interview with a professional in their discipline and make an appointment.
4. Student groups attend the interview, taking notes about the answers to their questions.
5. In class discussion
6. Final write-up of interview notes.

Required Deliverables

The student groups will write a short report of the interview based on the notes they took. The report should identify the name and company of the individual who was interviewed, and the interview should be written up as a dialogue with the questions they asked and the answers they received. The report should end with an analytical paragraph explaining the insights the students gained from the interviewed. One question that should be answered in this final paragraph is, "What did you learn about resources that are available for resolving an ethics problem in the workplace?"