

Teaching Communication Ethics as Central to the Discipline

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Communication ethics as a field of study within the communication discipline has made significant contributions in a variety of areas, including teaching. This paper offers an historical overview of communication ethics, with special attention to four major approaches to pedagogy – ethics in human communication, moral psychology and intuition, a communication ethics framework, and a critical communication ethics pedagogy. For the department seeking to incorporate communication ethics through stand-alone courses or throughout curricula, the authors suggest ways for communication administrators to address questions of desired competencies for communication graduates, and to articulate related learning outcomes. Future recommendations for the field and administrators are offered. The authors conclude that while communication ethics pedagogy has made significant contributions to the discipline, its potential will only be fully realized when faculty and administrators together construct the right balance of offerings for their departments.

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Introduction and Overview of Communication Ethics

In 2013, the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) published the results of its latest national employers' survey. The report provides a detailed analysis of employers' priorities for what today's college students need in order to succeed in today's economy and offers recommendations for changes in educational and assessment practices ("It takes more than a major," 2013). According to this survey, today's employers place ethics, or the ability to "demonstrate ethical judgment and integrity", at the highest level of importance with 96 percent of participants identifying this skill set as "important", including 76 percent identifying it as "very important"). As today's college administrators and faculty labor to prepare students to meet employer's priorities and needs, adequate training in ethical reasoning and communication ethics takes on important significance.

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Ethics, as a branch of philosophy, has been studied for thousands of years from many different perspectives. An ethical issue is described as something “one can raise a question about . . . [whether it] is *right* or *wrong*” (Neher & Sandin, 2007, p. 3). Communication ethics specifically focuses on communicative behavior in speaking, writing, and actions. With communication ethics issues, questions of justifications or rationales emerge because we give reasons, either for or against particular communication behaviors, utterances, and actions (Neher & Sandin, 2007). Therefore ethics generally and communication ethics specifically often addresses how to make and explain a decision based upon good or just reasons. To a lesser degree, communication ethics also considers guidelines for passing judgment on what has transpired in written and spoken acts.

Exercising sound communication ethics requires competent communication skills which involve studying, understanding, and applying communication theories, knowing when to follow guidelines and when to question them, using discernment and judgment related to given particular situations, environments, and audiences, and articulating sound and just reasons for a decision (Tompkins, 2011). This does not mean communication ethics devolves into relativism, but rather it means that communication ethics engages a system or process of reasoning, reading situations, knowing and understanding people, considering and evaluating various possibilities of engagement before taking action, making judgments about actions, and articulating reasons for specific communication choices and behaviors (Neher & Sandin, 2007).

Making decisions about communication with attention to ethical behavior is not easy, and it is sometimes awkward, uncomfortable, and inconvenient. However, understanding the role of communication ethics in how we make decisions and engage in the world around us is essential in order to unpack, discover, and understand what it means to engage as ethical human communicative agents in a diverse world (Arnett, Fritz, & Bell, 2009). Developing these ethical facilities means developing one’s communication ethics literacy, or a reflective engagement and awareness of our communicative behavior (Arnett, Fritz, & Bell, 2009). As communicative agents in a world in which every action we take has the possibility of impacting others, it is important to understand the implications of our individual and collective communicative acts because the possibilities and outcomes are vast and not always obvious. Importantly, as the AAC&U report points out, the ability to think, discern, and make judgments from an ethical basis is a necessary skill for employment and career success.

We suggest that communication ethics literacy should be present in every communication and media curricula in some form. As a discipline, there is a need for administrators and faculty to discuss how we teach communication ethics, both as stand-alone courses that can be devoted to understanding the role of ethics in our communicative life, interactions, and transactions with others, as well as integrated throughout courses that warrant discussions of ethics (public speaking, interpersonal communication, rhetoric, media, etc.) across curricula.

The purpose of this paper is to stimulate conversation within communication departments about the importance of teaching and integrating communication ethics in our courses and curricula. Administrators are in a unique position to act as catalysts for those conversations, and to secure resources to ensure that communication ethics is adequately covered as part of a sound communication education that will prepare students to meet the needs of today’s employers. This paper unfolds in three parts. First, we begin with a review of how communication ethics came to be organized as a field within the communication discipline under the tutelage of experienced administrators, with attention to literature on

teaching communication ethics. Second, we outline recent work in communication ethics pedagogy. Finally, we draw on best practices from other disciplines to offer ideas that present a way forward for the field, especially for departments developing curricula and for faculty teaching communication ethics.

Communication Ethics as a Field: Toward Pedagogy

The first and most important drive for communication ethics as a field came in 1982 when First Vice President and planner Kenneth Andersen declared the theme of the Speech Communication Association (now the National Communication Association) “Communication Ethics and Values.” His 1983 presidential address was titled “A Code of Ethics for Speech Communication,” proclaiming the recognition of communication ethics as essential to the discipline. This bold statement by the one of the discipline’s leading scholars and administrators, led to the creation of the Communication Ethics Division in 1984 with James Jaksa as chair, Ken Andersen as vice chair, Richard Johannesen as vice chair-elect, Vernon Jenson as secretary and Ronald Arnett as newsletter editor (Andersen, 2000).

Soon following in 1990, James Jaksa and Michael Prichard organized the first National Conference on Communication Ethics that was devoted to research and teaching on communication ethics. This conference continues to meet biannually and has led to the publication of several books (e.g., Arneson, 2007; Bracci & Christians, 2002; Groom & Fritz, 2012; Jaksa & Prichard, 1994; Makau & Arnett, 1997; Stewart, 1996/1997). Further legitimizing communication ethics as a field, in 1999 the Legislative Council of the National Communication Association approved a “Credo for Ethical Communication” that discusses the importance of ethics to communication processes. The Credo is featured on many department web sites, as well as NCA’s and states: “Ethical communication is fundamental to responsible thinking, decision-making, and the development of relationships and communities within and across contexts, cultures, and media” (NCA, 1999).¹⁰ In 2003, Kenneth Andersen delivered the National Communication Association (NCA) Carroll C. Arnold Distinguished Lecture on “Recovering the Civic Culture: The Imperative of Ethical Communication” to remind us of the importance of ethics (Andersen, 2005).

In 2013, at the request of the National Communication Association to celebrate the organization’s centennial in 2014 and 100 years of communication research, the communication ethics division reflected on its impact in both the academy and public arenas highlighting areas of significance, including artificial intelligence, ethical sensitivity, narrative, communication ethics in journalism, public relations, media, dialogic ethics, and communication ethics pedagogy. This breadth and depth demonstrates the maturation of communication ethics as a field of research and teaching in the past 40 years.

Notably, there has been sustained production of communication ethics pedagogy and textbooks throughout the 20th and early 21st centuries. Scholars focused on the integration of communication ethics into the communication curriculum (e.g., Christians & Lambeth, 1996; Jensen, 1959; 1985; Johnson, 1970; Canary, 2007). In 1959, Jensen analyzed the literature of the previous five years on teaching ethics in public address. The basic question at the time asked, “Should a teacher of speech teach the ethical considerations in speaking in addition to the techniques of speaking?” (p. 219). Almost all writers who

¹⁰ The language of the Credo is intentionally non-academic and non-technical in order to pass “the airplane test”—that the Credo could be shared with and understood by someone you meet on an airplane. (Andersen 2000, p. 140).

discussed the subject asserted that yes, instructors of speech should teach ethical considerations in public speaking. Jensen (1959) further argued that a teacher of speech had ethical obligations toward truth, the political society (the nation), the field of the liberal arts, the speech profession, and the student of speech. As a result, the communication discipline had an obligation to integrate communication ethics into the public address curriculum, a responsibility that was to fall to department administrators. Johnson's (1970) *Teaching Ethics in Speech Communication* found that over 90% of participants indicated a need for a speech teacher to discuss the ethical issues of speech but only 28% had a separate discussion on the subject of ethics.

In 1985, Jensen shifted his focus to *how* to teach ethics within speech communication classes. He proposed a number of areas to emphasize. These included familiar ideas regarding the content of communication and a framework of communication that incorporated the message, medium, and receiver to help organize ethical issues. Other emphases focused on such topics as clarifying sources of ethical standards, the need to move from either/or thinking to considering degrees of ethical quality, the inherent "oughtness" of ethics, and the continuing conflict between absolutism and relativism in ethics.

Eleven years later in 1996, the increased interest in communication ethics pedagogy was evident in a survey by Christians and Lambeth. They found that 39% of schools were teaching or planning stand-alone courses on communication ethics with 58% of the courses being required. However, over 50% of instructors teaching a course on communication ethics did not regard ethics as an intellectual strength or primary research interest (Christians & Lambeth, 1996).

A more recent survey by Swenson Lepper et al. (in press) found that 50% of respondents teach communication ethics in their programs, either through a stand-alone course or integrated throughout the curriculum. It also found that most courses for undergraduates were offered in junior and senior years. Survey respondents, nearly 40% of who were department chairs with an average of over 6 years as chair, indicated that they regarded communication ethics as important, even critical to the field. However, many also noted that lack of expertise or training as a barrier to providing a stand-alone communication ethics course. Qualitative responses, in particular, indicated that communication ethics was not an intellectual strength or primary research area for many faculty, a finding similar to the Christians and Lambeth's (1996) study.

In summary, communication ethics has made significant contributions to the communication discipline, though its potential has not yet been fully realized. Notably, there has developed a sustained and evolving focus on the teaching of communication ethics but still needed are the conversations among faculty and administrators together to construct the right balance of offerings for their departments, based on one of four highly regarded and used pedagogies.

Communication Ethics Pedagogy

Pedagogical approaches to teaching communication ethics vary in focus as related to ethical frameworks and theories (democratic, universal humanitarian, codes, procedures and standards, narrative, dialogic, etc.),¹¹ communication context (digital, organizational,

¹¹ Examples of texts using a specific ethical framework include Makau and Marty, (2013), *Dialogue & Deliberation* and Christians and Traber, eds. (1997), *Communication Ethics and Universal Values*.

interpersonal, etc.),¹² and how communication ethics is examined and assessed.¹³ In this section, we briefly describe the four general approaches to teaching ethics in communication.

The first approach situates ethics outside of the discipline, focusing on *ethics in human communication*. This is the position argued by Plato in the *Gorgias* (1961a) and *Phaedrus* (1961b) and is the more conventional view. Standards for evaluating the ethical quality of communication reside in the domain of philosophical ethics. Through studying philosophers such as Plato (1961a; 1961b), Immanuel Kant (1781/1965; 1785/1993), John Stuart Mill (1859/1947; 1863/1991), or Jürgen Habermas (1984), for example, students of communication discover what is needed to live a good life or what is necessary for good government, and then communicate accordingly. This perspective views communication as a vessel or medium for carrying or transporting ethical content, serving as a context for applying ethical theories. The communication process is bereft of ethical content and, thus, makes no substantive contribution directly to ethics. Using this pedagogical approach, students are taught ancient and/or contemporary theories of ethics to identify what is good, right, or virtuous in communication. While students would be able to recite ethical concepts and theories and perhaps apply them in this approach, they generally do not consider how the nature of communication processes in general or specific communication acts and episodes contribute to their understanding of ethics. In short, ethics is viewed as separate from and superior to communication processes in this pedagogical approach.

The second pedagogical approach is characterized by a reliance on the student for ethical content, with some supplementation.¹⁴ Supported in part by recent research in moral psychology indicating that babies can distinguish between what adults consider right and wrong behavior (Bloom, 2013), this pedagogical approach assumes communicators bring a pre-existing, personal understanding of ethics to the communication process. Theoretically, this approach often relies on moral intuition (Haidt & Joseph, 2004; Haidt, 2008) where individual ethical judgments are based upon the moral emotions of empathy, a basic sense of fairness aligned with egalitarianism, and disgust (Bloom, 2013). This assumes that there is an understanding of ethics inherent in individual human consciousness that a student brings to the classroom and to a communicative action. This theoretical basis translates into a pedagogy predicated on students bringing relevant ethical concepts, values or principles through moral intuition. This allows the instructor to focus on communication theory and context in exploring an ethical issue rather than philosophical approaches or ethical theories.

Many moral psychologists, however, consider the moral emotions alone insufficient to identify what is ethical, recognizing that the individual is situated. Empathy, for example, “should promote prosocial behavior and discourage aggression in cultures guided by caring and justice principles. But it does not operate in a vacuum, and in multicultural societies with intergroup rivalry, it might, calling to empathy’s familiarity bias, contribute to violence between groups” (Hoffman, 2001, p. 22). Moreover, recent research work by Smith et al. (2011) on a new stage of human development named either “extended adolescence” or

¹² Examples of texts focusing on a specific communication context include Fortner and Fackler, (2010), *Ethics and Evil in the Public Sphere*; Hamelink (2000), *The Ethics of Cyberspace*, and Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles, (2009), *Public Address and Moral Judgment*.

¹³ Examples of texts examining communication and ethics more generally include Arnett, Fritz, and Bell, (2009), *Communication Ethics Literacy*; Gehrke, (2009), *The Ethics and Politics of Speech*; Johannesen, Valde, & Whedbee, (2008), *Ethics in Human Communication*; Neher and Sandin, (2007), *Communicating Ethically*; and Tompkins (2011) *Practicing Communication Ethics*.

¹⁴ For a communication studies textbook example of this pedagogical approach, see Lane, Abigail and Gooch, 2014.

“emerging adulthood,” calls into question the capacity of college-aged students to think coherently and critically about what is “good” in life, even characterizing this developmental stage as “morally adrift” (p. 19). If this is the case, then this pedagogical approach strategy is likely unable to fulfill its task of teaching communication ethics because a student may lack the moral and cognitive capacity, development, or experience that provides the relevant ethical concepts, values, norms, and moral emotions. It further lacks the cultural and situated awareness necessary to exercise competence in communication ethics.

The third pedagogical approach sees communication and ethics as theoretically intertwined. This is a framework of *communication ethics*, in contrast to *ethics in* human communication or individual moral intuition. This approach posits ethics as emerging from ontological acts and episodes of communication that construct our social worlds. In other words, *both* communication and ethics are critical to human survival and thriving, without privileging one over another and valuing both equally and symbiotically. Michael Hyde’s (2006) study of communication as an act of acknowledgment calls attention to communication as creating spaces where people make room for others in their lives, illustrating the inseparable connection between communication and ethics.

This communication ethics approach provides a theoretically rich and sophisticated understanding of communication that focuses on the dynamics of relational connection interlaced with communication acts and episodes. This approach productively informs our understanding and practice of ethics, especially regarding ethical sensitivity and deliberation, both critical processes for enacting ethically responsive communication. This approach promotes rigor in both discernment and decision making about ethical issues that helps students imagine and evaluate alternative communication responses and to distinguish between rationalization and justification as they deliberate about their communicative choices. Further, this approach encourages developing a personal practice of ethics that draws upon both philosophical influences and moral impulses, but without sole reliance on either, placing communication at the heart of ethics rather than communication as a mere vessel or context (Jovanovic & Wood, 2004).

In this way, the third approach recognizes how both our understanding of ethics and our personal ethical practices emerge within interactions and episodes where people co-construct what is good, right, or virtuous in their relationships and communities and, over time and with critical reflection, a richer understanding of ethics is developed. However, this approach relies on a robust understanding of concepts and theories of both communication and some combination of philosophical ethics, practical philosophy, or moral psychology. A thin understanding of the latter concepts and theories weakens the rigor of communication ethics pedagogy or practice (Nussbaum, 1999; Tompkins, 2011, pp, 115-6). The literature reviewed above and the survey by these authors (forthcoming) indicate that a significant portion of communication studies faculty may lack sufficiently substantial understanding of relevant concepts and theories of philosophical ethics, practical philosophy, or moral psychology which, in turn, would affect the teaching of communication ethics. Further, even within the communication discipline, some are still hesitant to accepting the relative equivalency of philosophical ethics and communication upon which the communication ethics framework is based, continuing to view communication as secondary to philosophy or ethics and relegating the teaching of ethics to other programs.

A fourth approach builds upon the third and goes beyond the classroom to promote direct engagement and often activism through a communication ethics framework. This is a critical pedagogy of communication ethics, which recognizes the importance of disparate views and confronts those who seek to silence, disparage, or otherwise dismiss those voices.

Teaching to develop a critical consciousness requires students to examine, act, and reflect upon their communication choices as ethical decisions that maintain or disrupt social norms and practices (Simpson, 2014). A critical lens is turned toward how power is brokered to instantiate or challenge class differences, economic struggle, sexism, racism, and other forms of discrimination that keep certain communities at a disadvantage as rooted in ideological commitments. Communication teachers who embrace critical pedagogy frequently draw on contemporary, political issues to inspire “students to care about the world enough to intervene with, for, and on behalf of others to make things better” (Jovanovic, 2014, p. 121), such as the communication ethics of local government action, gay marriage legislation, corporate rights vs. community interests, and education policy. Critical communication pedagogy also recognizes that common, everyday interactions are important sites for ethical consideration, for it is these day-to-day practices that express and negotiate the power dynamics at work in our social world (Fassett & Warren, 2007).

By examining their interactions with others, students see how language is disciplined, values and beliefs influenced, and identities shaped. This critical approach is attentive to how larger social forces influence the most micro of our practices. It “stresses the importance of public goods and shared responsibilities along with a language that connects private troubles with social considerations” (Giroux, 2012, p. 28). Against the grain of radical individualism, a critical perspective offers a hopeful vision for ethics to create a world through community, dialogue, and deliberation in favor of justice, equality, and respect (Freire, 1970/2000). In this approach, students are transformed from recipients of knowledge to co-creators of social change (Swartz, Campbell & Pestana, 2009).

In communication studies curricula, ethics is often a central concern in service-learning courses, community engaged activity, and communication activism where students come face-to-face with the harsh realities experienced by people in their own communities. For some students, it may be the first time they witness and interact with people suffering from a lack of basic resources, leaving them homeless, without sufficient educational opportunities, or subject to environmental hazards, to name just a few persistent inequities. These experiences lend themselves to a rich consideration of communication ethics situated at the individual, organizational, and systemic levels to understand how one voice intersects with others to affirm (or not) the dignity of all people as well as promoting learning and competence in everyday communicative acts, as well as social change through broad, systemic transformation.

Criticisms levied against critical scholarship, service-learning, multicultural education and community engaged pedagogies are also applied to the critical approach to communication ethics. According to that criticism, research and scholarship should aim for disinterested objectivity, not activism (Kimball, 2008). Further, teaching theory without engagement is the superior form of education, while service-learning is too “applied” (Kahl, 2010). Rejection of the paradigms of engagement may lead one to reject the critical communication ethics approach.

An overview of these four pedagogical approaches has departmental and administrative implications. It is important for communication departments to recognize that all of these four communication ethics pedagogical approaches can be implemented in undergraduate or graduate curriculums. Most likely, a little of all of these are present in one course or curriculum, with different approaches used based on many factors including the institutional and department climate, the instructor, and the students. However, here we point out that the third approach is the most accepted approach in communication ethics.

Given that instructors will likely teach from a variety of philosophical perspectives, these differences should not be the bases for disagreement in departments, but instead viewed as opportunities for both collegial enrichment and enhanced learning opportunities for students. Rather than allow pedagogical differences to fracture departments, departments and their chairs need to recognize that regardless of commitment to one or multiple pedagogical approaches, developing ethical competence and achieving learning outcomes is key to effective teaching of communication ethics. To that end, understanding and valuing different pedagogical approaches coupled with the development of developing strong, clear, and measurable learning outcomes should be the overarching goal of departments and conversations about how to teach and integrate communication ethics. Assessment reports should describe different pedagogical approaches and demonstrate how diverse pedagogical approaches bolster the accomplishment of learning outcomes.

Developing a Communication Ethics Curriculum—Competence and Outcomes

For the department that is considering program and course design related to communication ethics, there are a variety of questions to be considered. Departments need to establish for themselves the relative importance that graduates should know 1) the theoretical underpinnings of communication ethics, 2) the knowledge and skills for exercising the “moral imagination,” or perspective-taking about different ethical viewpoints and rhetorical listening (Tompkins, 2009, p. 60), 3) the knowledge and skills of ethical deliberation (e.g., distinguishing between a rationalization and justification), 4) the responsibility to strive for a high ethical standard of communication, and 5) the utility of ethical thinking, discernment, judgment, and integrity to employment and the professional working environment.

Once these questions are addressed, developing related learning outcomes is possible. To help in that process, we recommend looking to the definition of communication ethics pedagogy developed by members of the National Communication Association’s Communication Ethics Division as part of the centennial celebration of NCA:

Communication ethics pedagogy takes seriously the claim that communication constitutes the worlds in which communicators live—to live in a more ethical world we must promote ethically mindful communication. Competent and skilled communicators are ethical communicators who take responsibility for a message’s creation, impact, and effects in a diverse range of contexts, including mediated, mass, interpersonal, intercultural, professional, and public. Stimulating the moral imagination is key to helping students recognize issues of communication ethics in their lives. Introduced to philosophical theories of what is good, right or virtuous (e.g., virtue theory, utilitarianism, the categorical imperative, theories of justice, dialogical ethics, ethics of care, etc.), students use case studies and practical philosophy to develop skills in problem-solving and reasoning about communication. They learn to weigh their self-interest relative to the self-interest of Others so their communication may co-construct the ethical dimension of the worlds in which they live.

This definition aligns with the four processes of ethical action offered by moral psychologist James Rest and his associates (1999)—moral sensitivity, judgment, motivation, and character.

These four processes can categorize competencies or learning outcomes. The first is moral or ethical sensitivity and effective pedagogy that heightens the moral imagination also heightens sensitivity to the existence of ethical issues. Teaching the practice of rhetorical listening to identify obscured or unseen stakeholders, for example, stimulates a communicator's moral imagination to envision potential consequences of an action or decision on previously unrecognized stakeholders as well as facilitates moral sensitivity by reducing ethical nearsightedness (Tompkins, 2009). Similarly, teaching how to distinguish between different types of ethical issues—problems, dilemmas, or tragedies—not only facilitates ethical sensitivity but also provides a framework for thinking about and communicating ethical concerns to others. An important component of communication ethics pedagogy is providing students with frameworks for bringing ethical concerns and issues into their daily conversations.

Communication scholars Rebecca Lind, David Rarick, and Tammy Swenson-Lepper (1997) have created a methodological tool based on Rest's work that measures ethical sensitivity. The approach involves in-depth interviews, cognitive mapping, and thematic analysis and coding. The approach has identified four characteristics of ethical sensitivity: situational characteristics, consequences, stakeholders, and linkages. Primarily developed to understand how audiences identify and deliberate on ethical issues in broadcast news (Lind, 1995, 1996, 1997; Lind & Rarick, 1992, 1995, 1999; Lind, Swenson-Lepper, & Rarick, 1998), recent efforts have applied this to assessing student competence (Lind, Swenson-Lepper, & Rarick, 2011), organizational communication (Swenson-Lepper, 1996, 2005), research misconduct (Lind & Rarick, 2006; Lind & Swenson-Lepper, 2007), and conflicts of interest (Lind & Swenson-Lepper, 2013). It is a promising model and line of research communication departments can consult in finding ways to measure learning outcomes related to ethical sensitivity. Important for administrators is having such a tool to assess and demonstrate the value of communication, and communication ethics more specifically, within a higher education climate where increasing scrutiny calls for such quantitative measures.

Ethical judgment is the second process identified by Rest et al. (1999). Judgment can be the result of moral intuition, intentional deliberation, or both. Deliberation may include consideration of concepts, values and theories of both communication and ethics, as well as the facts and circumstances of a specific ethical issue. While deliberating, a student weighs self-interest to survive and thrive against the interests of others, trying to discern a proper ethical weight to place on each. While all of the four processes of ethical action are vulnerable to breakdown, judgment is especially susceptible to rationalization of self-interest. Rigorous application of ethical concepts, principles and theories as well as communication theories, challenge a decision maker to identify rationalizations when making judgments (Nussbaum, 1999; Tompkins, 2011). For example, the ethical principle of “the greatest good for the greatest number” is a well-known and often used principle of utilitarian ethical theory. An equally important, but significantly less well known utilitarian principle is utilitarian impartiality, that my self-interest is no more important than anyone else's self-interest (Chappell & Crisp, 1998). Indeed the absence of sustained engagement with communication ethics skills can lead one to distort, manipulate or even abuse the communication process for personal benefit or for the benefit of a “good” cause (the ends justify the means), sometimes simply out of naiveté and ignorance. Another important safeguard against acting in self-interest is for students to recognize the importance of engaging in dialogue with trusted others surrounding ethical questions. In their study of how talk about ethics contributes to an ethical environment, Jovanovic and Wood (2006) found

that sustained talk about ethical issues reveals individual and, importantly, collective values are necessary to realize an ethical life. “Fairness, compassion, and equality are not just outcomes of talk but are constituted in the talk itself” (Jovanovic & Wood, 1996, p. 400).

It is admittedly more challenging to identify student-learning outcomes for the final two processes of ethical action, motivation and character. However, it is possible, albeit not always in a clearly quantifiable way. To illustrate, consider Philip Zimbardo’s analysis of the Stanford Prison Experiment over 35 years after he abruptly ended this study. He noted that in post-experiment interviews one student, who had been able to resist some of the unethical routines of the prison community, had taken time before starting the experiment to explicitly articulate to himself his value commitments and promised himself that he would follow them (Zimbardo, 2007). A student clarifying and articulating her personal ethical commitments by writing a personal statement of ethics, an ethical autobiography or critical reflection of a service-learning project, can bring a focus to thinking and motivation that could make a difference to that student being an ethically responsive communicator in the future. From an assessment standpoint, use of data from internships, co-curricular activities, and service-learning that emphasize ethical decision-making and justification is encouraged. Further, many universities involve students in their assessment and using both student testimonials that emphasize the learning and usefulness of ethical thinking as well as student evaluators who specifically assess for ethical judgments and justifications in their peers can help to offset the absence of clear, quantifiable data in assessment reports.

If a goal of a communication ethics curriculum is to provide students with knowledge and skills that help them become ethically responsive communicators, it will need to go beyond textbooks discussions of the NCA Credo for Ethical Communication, recitation of ethical theories, or brief, stand-alone case studies. Rather, effective communication pedagogy will also design curriculum that encourages rigorous study of the dynamics of ethics and communication, while also developing skills that promote a personal practice of ethically responsive communication with others. As Carpenter and McEwan (2013) note, it is incumbent upon communication administrators and faculty to communicate the positive aspects of the major in order to ensure sufficient students are thusly educated and that the discipline itself maintains a strong reputation. Teaching and reinforcing the practice of ethical communication is central to that mission.

Lessons from Other Disciplines

Teaching ethics is an international and interdisciplinary challenge (Austin & Toth, 2011; Bampton & Maclagan, 2005; Clarkeburn, 2002; Clarkeburn, Downie, & Matthew, 2002; Davison, Garton, & Joyce, 2003; Goldie, 2000; Goldie, Schwartz, McConnachie, & Morrison, 2002; Park, Kjervik, Crandell, & Oermann, 2012; Smith & Bath, 2006). In the last quarter of the 20th century, there was an “ethics boom” with more ethics courses being integrated in a variety of formats into disciplinary curriculums (Davis, 1999), largely attributed to the need to develop applied or professional ethics, where the concern is ethical practice and standards of conduct (Barry & Ohland, 2009; Davis, 1999).

In the past decade substantive and on-going discussions about why teaching ethics is important, how to teach ethics, and the effectiveness of teaching ethics has occurred in disciplines like medical education (Goldie, 2000; Goldie, Schwartz, McConnachie, & Morrison, 2002), engineering (Barry & Ohland, 2009; Colby & Sullivan, 2008), nursing (Grady et al., 2008; Park et al., 2012), social work (Grady et al., 2008), accounting (Bampton & Maclagan, 2005), psychology (Balogh, 2002; Davidson, Garton, & Joyce, 2003), and

business (Lau, 2010; McDonald, 2004; Sims & Felton, Jr., 2006). In addition, the “Ethics Across the Curriculum” approach aims to teach ethics as a general studies requirement at a specific institution, either through formal courses or with deliberate integration within a curriculum (Matchett, 2008; Ozar, 2001).

As a discipline, communication occupies a liminal space, with a professional orientation with fields like journalism, media, and public relations along with more theoretical orientations like rhetoric, intercultural, interpersonal, communication ethics, and philosophy of communication, to name a few. As outlined above, communication ethics has developed its own literature. The work of Christians shows how media ethics is an essential part of journalism and mass communication programs. (Christians, 1977; Lambeth, Christians, Fleming, & Lee, 2004). Furthermore, research shows there remains a continued need for media professionals to draw upon philosophical and general moral foundations and perspectives to develop a philosophical mind when addressing ethical issues (Christians, 2008).

In reviewing other disciplines, we find that communication ethics as a field is on par with its attention to teaching and pedagogy as well as its struggles for how to effectively teach and implement ethics throughout a curriculum. Further, we find much empirical evidence that points toward how teaching ethics improves and enhances both ethical awareness (also called the moral imagination) and moral reasoning (Clarkeburn, Downie, & Matthew, 2002; Lau, 2010; Park et al., 2012). Indeed, the focus for many disciplines, especially our own, is to increase how much students are aware of and can recognize an ethical dilemma, reason through, and justify choices (Balogh, 2002; Lambeth et al., 2004; Christians, 2008; Clarkeburn, 2002; Matchett, 2008; McDonald, 2004; Ozar, 2001; Sims & Felton, 2006). Why? Because, an increasingly complex society with diverse interests and needs means that students must be adequately prepared by faculty and administrators to engage, discern, and analyze discursive practices that define our social world. Indeed, the NCA Communication Ethics Division’s definition of communication ethics pedagogy parallels the critical trends in addressing ethical sensitivity, fair deliberation, and principled reasoning. In the next section, we offer directions for the communication ethics field in order to continue to advance its contributions to teaching and pedagogy for a just society.

Recommendations for Administrators Surrounding Communication Ethics Pedagogy

The findings of the 2013 AAC&U employers’ survey issues an unequivocal directive to administrators to strengthen instruction on ethics across the curriculum. According to the report, among the ten existing and emerging educational learning outcomes tested, employers believe a renewed focus on teaching ethics has the potential to “improve the education of today’s college students and prepare graduates to succeed in the workplace” (“It takes more than a major,” 2013). More specifically, employers express the greatest confidence in setting expectations for students to “work through ethical issues and debates to form their own judgments about the issues at stake with 66 percent of participants saying this “will help a lot/fair amount” (2013).

The potential benefits of developing competencies and outcomes in teaching communication ethics is evident in the research of both Lau (2009) and Park et al. (2012), which show how ethics education increases and enhances ethical awareness, moral sensitivity, and moral reasoning in nursing and business students, respectively. By focusing on awareness and reasoning, other disciplines justify teaching ethics and avoid the criticism

that teaching ethics is tantamount to indoctrinating students with a particular set of values (Matchett, 2008; see also Langenderfer & Rockness, 1989). *To advance communication ethics pedagogy, administrators need to encourage faculty to conduct more empirical studies that demonstrate how teaching communication ethics enhances ethical awareness, the moral imagination, and moral reasoning.*

It is clear that teaching ethics requires intentional design and practice (Moore, 2008). In fact, Matchett (2008) points out that if deliberate and intentional efforts are not made, students still learn ethics, but they do not learn awareness, reasoning, and the tools that allow them to be critical and analytical of the ethics lessons. In turn, this leads to an inability to make justified and strongly articulated ethical choices.

Moore (2008) argues that institutions of higher education “are viewed as the place where training in ethics should take place prior to graduates entering the workforce” (p. 6), and Woody (2008) reveals how many professional ethics codes such as history, education, physics, nursing, and psychology ask for ethics to be taught in undergraduate curriculums. Thus, it is ironic that institutions of higher education, committed to the value of ethics in teaching and learning, all too often keep ethics formally out of the education process. Given this situation, the discipline and departments offering communication studies courses *need to better articulate the connections between institutional missions, values, and the communication ethics literature to demonstrate how ethics is an inherent part of education broadly, institutional values specifically, and the field’s fundamental foundation and definition.*

The literature on teaching ethics across the curriculum strongly advocates articulating learning outcomes and objectives that incorporate ethics explicitly (Colby & Sullivan, 2008; Matchett, 2008; McDonald, 2004; Nicholson & DeMoss, 2009; Ozar, 2001; Sims & Felton, 2006). Ozar’s (2001) work draws from Rest et al.’s (1999) four processes of ethical action and outlines four areas of learning outcomes undergraduate students should reasonably achieve after exposure to an ethics across the curriculum program: awareness, reasoning, motivation, and implementation (we refer to this as character above). Ozar (2001) suggests that awareness and reasoning are the ideal learning outcomes for undergraduates because they can be taught through an ethics course and assessed. However, motivation and implementation, while the overarching *telos* for teaching ethics, require more mental ability, emotional capacity, and life experience than undergraduates typically possess. Interestingly, Grady et al. (2008) demonstrate how ethics education through courses or trainings leads to more confidence in moral judgments and the likelihood of taking moral action among social workers and nurses, providing empirical evidence to Ozar’s motivation and implementation outcomes. The NCA’s Communication Ethics Division’s definition of communication ethics pedagogy aligns with Ozar’s framework, providing a solid starting point for developing student learning outcomes and objectives for teaching communication ethics as we have previously noted. For communication ethics, administrators in the field *should formalize awareness and reasoning as student-learning outcomes at departmental and institutional levels to leverage institutional support for teaching communication ethics.* Included in this, we are encouraged by the AAC&U report indicating that employers want ethics to be taught and suggest that departmental chairs find ways to demonstrate the utility of communication ethics instruction to professional success. This kind of utility can be leveraged for institutional support and funding for expanded courses, faculty, and programmatic offerings.

In addition to having ethics formalized in student learning outcomes, it is also important to provide evidence that learning outcomes are being achieved. In general, all disciplines are struggling with assessment, with varying levels of success (Barry & Ohland, 2009; Colby & Sullivan, 2008; Goldie, 2000). Student reflections may be considered in assessment (Matchett, 2008; Smaldino, 2008). While some disciplines, including

health/medical, business, and law have developed their own instruments for assessment, communication studies and communication ethics have not yet done this. *For communication ethics pedagogy to demonstrate its merits, administrators need to develop and use appropriate, disciplinary specific assessment tools and resources.*

Having student learning outcomes and objectives, as well as sound research needs to be supplemented by trained faculty, familiar with communication ethics. According to Moore (2008),

One of the biggest barriers to the integration of ethics is that most faculty and staff do not feel comfortable with the content area. Many faculty believe that because they were not philosophy majors or are not content experts on ethics, that they are not equipped to teach ethics (or worry that they might even be dangerous because they know little about it) (pp. 6-7).

To address this concern, administrators should provide resources for repeated training and preparation for interested faculty members. McDonald's (2004) case example for how to integrate ethics into a business curriculum suggests this step of offering ethics resources and training to faculty.¹⁵ An example from the hard sciences demonstrates how ethics training and workshops for faculty has almost singlehandedly infused ethics into a science curriculum for undergraduates at Penn State University ("Integrating Ethics," 2013). Researchers in engineering also recommend engaging faculty more with resources and training (Colby & Sullivan, 2008). In communication, Lambeth et al. (2004) raises the question of whether or not professors have enough preparation and training to teach and research in ways that will make a difference in the field. In response, Lollar (2013) suggests that administrators can actually provide some of that by reflecting critically on their own practices and modeling everyday communication that puts communication ethics into action within workplace activities, as well as curriculum design. Further, both McDonald (2004) and "Integrating Ethics" (2013) point toward a need for a "champion," or someone with influence to advocate for the need to teach ethics. Thus, administrators should encourage their *communication ethics scholars to engage other faculty in their departments and across the discipline with training opportunities to teach communication ethics, through in-house workshops and presentations at regional and national conferences.* Further, we need to support and promote more champions to advocate for the necessity and impact of teaching communication ethics. The Communication Ethics Division for NCA has offered well-attended short courses at the annual convention for many years in pursuit of this goal of training and preparing faculty. Expanding those past offerings to address both in-class pedagogy as well as to provide advice on how to successfully integrate ethics across the curriculum are now the field's pressing needs.

Of course, implementing and integrating communication ethics into a curriculum can be done in a variety of ways, to achieve a balance of goals and outcomes. Teaching ethics can involve formal, stand-alone courses or integration throughout a curriculum, as well as outside the classroom opportunities like mentoring faculty during an orientation week.

¹⁵ Step 1 is to establish an ethics steering committee and college and departmental levels; Step 2 is to determine ethics pedagogy; Step 3 is review existing ethics outcomes; Step 4 is to revise ethics outcomes; Step 5 is to identify, development, and implement the course; and Step 6 is to provide ethics resources and training. Administrators and faculty looking for a model to develop and integrate ethics would do well to consult McDonald's (2004, pp. 375-379) case example.

Websites can be valuable for teaching purposes, and/or workshop opportunities for students and faculty. Some institutions may opt for strategic integration across a curriculum rather than a stand-alone, compulsory course (McDonald, 2004) or even shortened 4-12 week sessions (Clarkeburn, 2002). Still, there is limited empirical evidence and mixed views regarding how exactly to implement the teaching of ethics in a curriculum. Thus, we suggest that *communication administrators consider how communication ethics can draw from a wide range of implementation strategies and pedagogical approaches to accomplish integration, recognizing that repetition and having multiple opportunities for both faculty and student learning is essential.* We strongly encourage administrators and faculty to describe and highlight how multiple pedagogical approaches accomplish learning outcomes in their assessment and other reporting.

Though the literature on classroom pedagogy for teaching ethics is wide ranging, Christians (2008) notes, the most dominant pedagogical technique in teaching media ethics is though case studies, a method also recognized in psychology (Balogh, 2002) and instructional technology (Smaldino, 2008). Some instructors rely, instead, on pedagogical practices that stress reciprocity and accepting responsibility for learning (Sims & Felton, 2006) while others draw from foundational communication ethics philosophers like Makau, Arnett, Buber, and Levinas to craft courses centered on dialogue and mindfulness (Brown & Amankwah, 2010). Active, experiential, and participation-based approaches are popular as well (Colby & Sullivan, 2008) often involving small group discussions (Goldie et al., 2002), personal application, or a focus on contemporary, intractable issues (Sims & Felton, 2006). We urge communication administrators to schedule *communication ethics courses that can be delivered with a student-centered, participatory-based pedagogical style that presents complex case studies, rooted in communication ethics philosophies where professors strive to model ethics in the classroom, and avoid “stand and tell” lectures.* Interestingly, little has been researched or assessed regarding online course instruction of ethics (Smaldino, 2008) and more needs to be considered regarding the effectiveness of service-learning/community-engaged learning/immersion and critical approaches to teaching ethics (Christensen, Peirce, Hartman, Hoffman, & Carrier, 2007).

Next Steps for the Field

Drawing from the best practices of other disciplines is useful, knowing that we will need to customize and adapt those ideas to the communication ethics field. To that end, we close briefly by emphasizing the necessity of sharing resources and research.

In its short history, the communication ethics field has made significant contributions and developed a rigorous and theoretically informed approach to scholarship and pedagogy. However, the field needs to create new ways to share resources, generate more research, and disseminate that research. Creating an online database for assessing and downloading course syllabi and other pedagogical resources has been in progress by the NCA Communication Ethics Division for many years, but needs to be brought to completion. This will allow sharing of best practices and resources like case studies, readings, films, and other classroom approaches to enhance communication ethics teaching and pedagogy.

Additionally, there have been sustained conversations and presentations at communication ethics-specific and communication conferences (Ballard et al., 2010; Ballard et al., 2014; Swenson-Lepper et al., 2013; Tompkins et al., 2011) focused on cultivating effective teaching and pedagogy, as well as pointing out the gaps in the research and field. Those presentations have generated helpful suggestions for the classroom and resources for navigating institutional structures and politics. These conversations need to grow into

developed departmental strategies and research programs, perhaps best directed by communication administrators in order to achieve the greatest impact within institutional settings.

To further disseminate research, a communication ethics-specific journal or online outlet could help; one that will publish peer-reviewed research dedicated to pedagogy and communication ethics issues in society. An academic journal will enhance the scholarly work of communication ethics faculty and provide administrators documented evidence of the centrality of communication ethics in society. Further, administrators and faculty will be better able to solicit resources to fund research, rely on an established platform to share knowledge, and create expanded opportunities for scholars to speak out on the utility and application of communication ethics issues in the public sphere.

Assessment

In today's climate in higher education, assessment has become a necessary task. In the field of communication, meta-assessment based on extended dialogue about student learning among faculty members has been heralded as a way to address the heterogeneous moorings of our field (Paroske & Rosaen, 2012). Communication ethics pedagogy can lean on that approach to provide evidence of classroom effectiveness, learning, and pedagogical approaches. In addition, the communication discipline has recently begun to cultivate more detailed standards and resources for assessing communication ethics education. We recognize that administrators will need assessment resources and tools that can provide them with the tools to champion the importance of the study and teaching of ethics in communication.

Conclusion

As we have illustrated, communication ethics has had a distinctive, but little known history, making important contributions in a wide range of areas. Its literature and development of pedagogical approaches and ongoing evaluation of its teaching effectiveness and integration in communication programs is laudable. Yet, communication ethics pedagogy stands at a key moment in its development. There is now the opportunity to take control and embrace a complex set of steps and approaches that will lead toward another push to expanding its influence, in terms of both scholarly contributions and teaching students how to be competent, ethical communicators. Communication administrators, as we see it, are vital players in tapping into this opportunity to showcase the value, rigor, and positive outcomes that communication ethics can have for students. More importantly, the concerted and sustained focus on communication pedagogy and attention to developing ethical communicators provides a key contribution in linking scholarly research and thinking with teaching, application, and inspiration. We humbly offer these claims and recommendations to advance the field, improve our teaching, aid departments and faculty in navigating a path to integrating and teaching communication ethics, and ultimately to help shape a more ethical and just world.

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