

## What makes professionals so difficult: An investigation into professional ethics teaching

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### ABSTRACT

Teaching ethics to professionals pursuing a university degree programme requires a method that engages them with the realities and problematic nature of their workplace environment. In this paper we examine some of the history of professional ethics from a philosophical and political standpoint. Unfortunately this analysis appears to produce more questions than answers, with the terms 'professional' and 'expert' seemingly poorly defined.

In order to demonstrate some of the generic problems likely to be encountered by anyone teaching professional ethics we make use of our case study. Whilst this is concerned largely with what can be termed business and computing ethics, the case study does highlight problems that occur across the curricula. We look at the concerns and problems surrounding the teaching of issues such as integration into the curricula, codes of ethics, ethical decision making and ethical standards. We stress the value in universities moving away from traditional methods, based purely in direct value of decision making to an alternative ethical evaluative framework based on social, economic, environmental and rights information. This model should be introduced early in the student calendar and used as a vehicle for discussion of later issues such as whistleblowing.

### Introduction

Applied ethicists, especially in the United States, have been extremely active in the field of professional ethics. Undoubtedly this is in part due to the changing technological and social environment in which the professions now find themselves. From the older established professions it is medicine that has to meet the greatest challenge; although, as is evidenced from the increased use of information technology (IT) within the criminal justice system and the demands that are placed upon it by the media, the legal profession is having to adapt to change. IT itself, as one of the *new* professions, is having to consider its narrow professional interests in the context of the wider ethical responsibilities (Kizza, 1996) it has acquired from being the major architect of the 'information society'. How much of this soul searching is a genuine attempt at rethinking the role of the professional in face of changing technology, and how much of it is an attempt to maintain and/or redistribute power and wealth among an international 'professional' elite, is by no means clear.

This changing and challenged world has led to increased calls for more ethics. For example in Malaysia (Alam, 1995) there is 'support for a greater emphasis on ethical values in business curricula'

and 'a need to develop in students a caring and sharing attitude'. Other international writers have proposed a management curricula that is oriented to values rather than profit (Pascale and Athos, 1981; Peters and Waterman, 1982; Hosmer, 1985). Some view these developments as part of a wider picture, with Etzioni (1989) claiming 'ethics has all the earmarks of a new theme for the 1990s'. Yet this increased demand for ethics teaching has raised many pedagogical questions where answers are either poorly considered or non-existent. Put more directly (Schoenfeldt, 1991) 'most institutions do not know where to put ethics instruction or how to deliver it'.

We will examine some of the pedagogical, philosophical and political issues raised by the vociferous call for an increase in the number and breadth of ethics courses currently offered. Before we can begin to do this and attempt to answer some of the questions raised we must ask ourselves 'What is a professional?'

### Professional ethics: Historical and societal links

Many of the *craft* industries and *skilled* occupations of the past are now describing themselves as 'professions'. Some members of the established professions, or 'learned professions' may object to their plumber describing their occupation as a 'profession' on a par with medicine or the law. As we shall see, there is in fact very little difference between them, and what differences do exist could and should be removed for the 'public good'.

The word 'professional' does not, of course, necessarily denote membership of a professional organisation; it can mean anybody engaged in an occupation, including a sport, who receives payment for their services. Increasingly the term is being used to describe someone or a group who perform their job with 'high standards of efficiency', as in 'he handled the situation very professionally' when describing how a receptionist dealt with a particular difficulty, or 'the emergency services acted professionally'. The established professions may claim that this is where the distinction lies. A doctor not only has to be efficient but is called upon on many occasions to make ethical decisions. We may be tempted to view this as falling within the 'is/ought' distinction, i.e. the plumber *is* a professional when he does an efficient job, but a doctor has to be both efficient and *ought* to act ethically. Of course plumbers ought to be ethical; they should be honest, give good advice that is in the interest of their customer, respect the privacy of the people whose home they enter, etc. We may expect such conduct from a plumber but we may *demand* it of a doctor because we believe she is subject to a code of ethics that is part of the definition of what it *is* to be a doctor. But if it is as clear cut as this could it not be that Hume (Hume, 1988) was incorrect in his condemnation that every system of morality he had encountered contained a shift from an 'is' and 'is not' premise to an 'ought' and 'ought not' conclusion? Should we not look upon the doctor's respect for our privacy as just being an 'efficient' practice which, like many forms of efficiency, turns out to be for our 'good' as well as their own? From within philosophy, the work of Michel Foucault, for example, has further undermined certain preconceptions we may have held about the medical profession.

When we ask questions like 'What is the role of the professions, what function do they serve, do they act for the public good, etc.?' there has been tendency to look towards the established professions for a 'model'. It is often difficult to make distinctions about the larger ethical issues that have shaped these professions and the function they now have in advanced capitalist societies.

Capitalism requires (Weber, 1992) 'ethical qualities of quite a different sort from those adapted to the traditionalism of the past'. These ethical qualities were often tolerated by some traditionalists as being unavoidable 'facts' of the new free economic climate. Obviously these qualities did not come into existence overnight, but they were, according to Weber, greatly hastened and encouraged by the 'charismatic' Protestant reformers and their followers who sought to radically change the means/end relationship in every area of economic activity. The Protestant 'work ethic' was universally applied, as Weber observed: 'Labour must... be performed as if it were an absolute

ends in itself, a calling'. The capitalist was also restrained from eudemonistic self-interest by the 'religious foundations of worldly asceticism'. For Weber, any populist notion that capitalism was purely founded upon greed and the taking of profits for personal consumption and gratification was wholly misplaced.

To Weber the scientist, doctor, teacher, lawyer, banker, politician, entrepreneur and the charismatic leader are all united within the ascetic notion of a calling and their rejection of the tradition of the *Bildung*. But is a doctor's calling, vocation and duty the same as a banker or entrepreneur's? Talcott Parsons (Parsons, 1957) believed that there was an ethic of the service professions, most notably in medicine, that was not subject to unbridled economic competition and self-interest because it set normative standards of professional competence and performance towards clients. We can say that the professions embody many of the qualities Weber identified in his concepts of a calling and rationalisation. Indeed, given that many of the professions (medicine again stands out as a good example) work within and develop scientific expertise, it may appear, as it does indeed to Habermas, that in some sense they are the guardians of 'reason' and the custodians of the ideals of the Enlightenment.

If we look at some of the observers and writers at the time of the Enlightenment, we discover that it is not the professions that they single out to exemplify the spirit of the age, but in many instances it was the new merchants and industrialists who, at least for a time, had broken with tradition and were not, perhaps, too far removed from Weber's worldly asceticism. Indeed, from the Elizabethans onwards - right up to the present day - Shakespeare's proposal, "First, let's kill all the lawyers", has been much applauded; but it is only comparatively recently that the substitution of 'doctor' for 'lawyer' would not have evoked the same response from an audience. Certainly Adam Smith would have applauded the line, for he saw nothing but traditional monopolistic practice in medical profession and the universities that licensed its 'quackery'.

For Smith it was the universities and the medical profession, with their monopoly, status, privileges, patronage and hierarchy that were at fault. Smith believed that many universities were more interested in protecting their commercial monopoly than they were in training 'good' doctors. He was not, of course, suggesting that universities should have to embark upon providing courses in medical ethics: he would have found the idea that you should formally instruct pupils in how they could justify such a 'negligent and corrupt' system as being yet further humbug. For Smith it was the 'role' of a doctor that the universities had created that was at fault; the status and privilege the degree of Doctor from some universities automatically conferred upon individuals had to be removed in order to allow them to develop, as far as possible, their ethical, scientific and professional interests as *ordinary* members of society.

Veblen (1918) presents a picture of the professional academics' self-interest that is dominated by the business ethic of American capitalism. He rejected the notion that universities were centres of 'objective' study and believed them to be fully involved in the process of capitalist production and control.

It is true today that ethical issues arise out of scientific and technological discovery, but we are still reluctant to say that if such-and-such a discovery was possible it should be stopped on ethical grounds. It is perhaps not that we are 'reluctant' to make ethical judgements: we may attempt to do so, only to discover that they fail to influence or alter the minds of those that have become the new guardians of 'progress'. It is the professional that seeks to give a 'meaning' to progress by way of ideology. The professional ideology of the American sociologist Veblen, unlike Smith's world of productive labour, raised the professions to new heights as they legitimated their own 'science' in American universities and established themselves within US government circles and the management hierarchy. Veblen's image of the professional was first and foremost as an 'expert', and the closer they were to 'science' *qua* technical control, the greater their expertise. Those professions that could not touch the hem of science had their place if they contributed to the process of stabilising the system; thus the legal profession was viewed as a mechanism for rationalising and

stabilising the system by settling disputes and closing social divisions by means of controlled disputation and consensus.

## Problems in teaching professional ethics

Before discussing the teaching of professional ethics we need to examine some of the current problems facing potential practitioners in order that we may then formulate some solutions to them. The range of problems reflect (Cowton & Dunfee, 1995) the 'broad uncertainties about the pedagogical approaches'. It includes: the necessity for such teaching; the form of delivery; the placement within the curriculum; the standards to be adopted; the content of the curricula; the students themselves; the appropriateness of values and the values used.

The most fundamental question facing any individual involved in the teaching of professional ethics is the rationale for doing so. Ignoring this question can lead to institutional neglect, for, as Solberg (1995), in discussing business ethics, remarked 'Why colleges of business should teach ethics escapes serious examination'. For some the answers lie in the future of the organisations who will receive the students. Hosmer (1988) remarked 'businesses can only thrive in an atmosphere of trust created through adherence to accepted standards of ethical behaviour', whilst for Bok (1988) 'the critical importance of ethical conduct is the long-term health of businesses in a free market society'. Measuring against such high ideals many claim positive results have not been forthcoming. Weber (1990) suggests that such classes do 'improve the ethical reasoning of future managers but the effect is short-term', which Glenn (1992) later confirmed with a larger study. Parmental (1989) goes further in suggesting that, because the average university student is young and inexperienced, ethical classes 'will be ineffective over the long term'.

According to Cowton (1995), who conducted a fairly large international survey, the form of delivery of ethical classes varies enormously, reflecting the wide range of teaching objectives, from 'relativistic, diversity oriented' to 'the universality of values'. Goodpaster (1985) recommends taking a multi-view approach that 'examines ethical issues from the perspective of the individual, the organisation and the nation state'. Cowton (1995) further suggests that recently there has been a discernible change to a more global approach to professional ethics which is 'less provincial and culture specific', adding that this path faces 'daunting challenges'.

Many international writers are concerned with where professional ethics should be placed within the broad curricula. Certainly some countries, having perhaps thought the issues through sooner, have a more mature policy, and consequently professional ethics is (Mahoney, 1990) 'firmly established' in the curricula. The main question currently being faced within the international discourse of professional ethics appears to be whether to integrate or 'bolt-on'. In the former, the concerns are the success and level of the integration. In the latter, the compulsory or elective nature of these modules is discussed. Dunfee and Robertson (1988) claim that in the USA, at least, 'integration ... has been advocated and implemented'. Integrating ethics into business courses is seen as particularly problematic by some, with Jones (1989) claiming that, due to the emphasis on profit maximisation, the integration led to 'a decline in moral reasoning abilities'.

Another important question concerns what standards, if any, should be applied in making ethical judgements, such as (Khazanchi, 1995) 'women are better able to recognise unethical actions'. It appears that the majority of writers use community standards as the yardstick, but many, including some who support such measures, see many drawbacks to them. Bunke (1988), for example, viewed Americans as "currently less responsive to 'being good' than they are to 'feeling good'", which would tend to challenge propositions based on the premise that social acceptance equates with ethical behaviour.

On the content side of professional ethics, recurring themes are codes of ethics, ethical decision making, ethical standards, ethical theory and whistleblowing. Many of the papers on codes of ethics have two recommendations. Firstly, more (Furman, 1990) 'alternative modes of education' are called

for that (Davis, 1991) 'extend beyond the walls of the classroom', rather than the traditional teacher-student classroom based learning. Secondly the code of ethics should be personalised by the student, for this has been shown to be (Ferris, 1992) 'effective in creating ethical awareness'. Most papers suggest some formal work in ethical theory is essential if one is to avoid (Cowton, 1995) 'unintentional relativism' caused by pedagogy that simply 'sensitises students to ethical issues through a focus on specific examples'. Perhaps the most significant and fundamental issue within the discourse on content is the suggestion that students need assistance in developing alternative methods of measuring professional ethics issues. As Tozer (1993) remarked 'whilst traditional methods of direct value measures abound and indirect 'softer' forms of measurement are in their infancy, individuals are unlikely to move from the current norm of readily achievable but inaccurate results'. Measurement is fraught with problems, not least of which is the misrepresentation of the results. Jane Kelsey (Kelsey, 1995), writing on the economic 'New Zealand experiment' from 1985 to 1995, describes how it had proven to be a success in the eyes of 'those economists, politicians, financial analysts and journalists who formed the vanguard of the new world order'. Questioning this measurement of success she states that using 'positive economic indicators the experiment would not have been receiving glowing accolades...'. Jane Kelsey suggests this manipulation was for a hybrid of personal and political reasons, that the measurement of success amounted to no more than 'applauding ... the unimpeded imposition of a particular ideological model to which they adhered ... notwithstanding its economic and social consequences'.

As di Norcia (1994) remarked 'Given the complexity of technology development and the broad range of social issues involved, an ethical framework is needed'. It would seem that, if students are to consider more ethically based decisions, they will need access to such frameworks. Indeed, without such a structure from which to analyse ethical action and decision-making, it is difficult to imagine how issues such as whistleblowing can be investigated other than as a series of unrelated random acts.

Many writers are concerned with the factors, in particular environmental (e.g. employer) and individual (e.g. gender), affecting ethical decision-making. Victor (1988) identified three distinct organisational cultures: caring, for the good of the people; instrumental, where people exist to further the interests of the organisation; and rule-oriented, which comply with laws. The extent to which the organisational culture clashes, or harmonises, with individual characteristics seems (Loch, 1996) to determine how predictable behaviour will be. Arlow (1991) and Burton (1991) discovered that the effectiveness of ethics education was moderated by personality, attitudes and individual characteristics, such as gender. Bommer (1987) claims that 'individual factors could be the most powerful determinant of ethical standards'. Poorscoltan (1991) found female and married subjects consistently proved to be more conservative than their counterparts. Solomon (1990) found gender differences in two ethical issues. More recently, Loch (1996) showed that 'men and women use different decision cues in forming their intentions in ethical computing actions'. Interestingly, Loch (1996) used two previously unused measures to statistically test hypotheses on their effects on ethical action. These two measures, self-image and deindividuation, or estrangement from others, might lead to other factors being researched.

Within the literature, students are often seen to pose additional problems for the professional ethics teacher, problems for which the chosen pedagogical model is ill-equipped. Cowton (1995) found that many teachers found the multi-cultural classroom difficult 'especially when some students have little experience of free markets'. Many find current professional ethics material inadequate, being either non-existent or too culturally specific, necessitating that the student develop a (Van Lwijk, 1990) 'derived identity'.

There are many questions surrounding the role of the teacher-student relationship, with some suggesting ethics should be largely one-way instruction, and others suggesting more negotiation. Indeed Brooks and McCarthy (1989) claim universities have been reluctant to teach ethics because of 'fear of indoctrination or dogma' and 'values have been purged from the curricula'. Typical of

those supporting instruction is Halfond (1990), who suggests that the University must instil high ethical standards in the students 'and should go so far as to influence the ethical reasoning of graduates'. Those supporting negotiation include Solberg (1995) for whom 'A system must be devised to allow students to discover and refine their own values rather than simply learning ethical theories from an intellectual point of view'. Gandze and Hayes (1988) feel the objective of ethics curricula is to 'sensitise students to the ethical consequences of their actions'.

## Teaching professional ethics

In discussing teaching, one invariably has to ask what framework one is working within in relation to education. Our assumptions about the education system are somewhat liberalised from those of Jonathon (Jonathon, 1983), who categorised them under five headings: society and the good life; the function of education; the role of educators; the social and moral status of the learner; the nature and function of knowledge. The assumptions for this paper are listed in table 1 (see next page). We also agree with the correlation found in Merritt (Merritt, 1991) between educational background and ethics. Merritt found evidence that students with business degrees have lower ethical standards than other graduates.

With definition problems surrounding 'professionalism', 'experts', and their ethics, it is hardly surprising that the teaching of professional ethics is fraught with difficulties. At the University of East London (UeL) we have recently undergone a certain degree of rationalisation of control centres of professional ethics. Previously, for example, nursing and business ethics had little or no contact, whilst now the new Ethics Centre encourages interaction between the partners. The Centre is now responsible for much of UeL's professional and applied ethics curricula and a fair proportion of its delivery. It is therefore in a unique position to examine the differences in problems faced by each area. Our function broadly is to provide individuals with some tools for the analysis and construction of ethical decision making. This will hopefully lead to individuals being better able to interact and understand the world around them.

One of the interesting results of the staff interaction across the differing domains is the apparent commonality of the problems faced by the respective staff. Indeed we would suggest that, having observed the generality of the problems faced, collectively we are only beginning to understand these difficulties and have few satisfactory answers. Our experience seems to partially concur with Solberg (1995), who suggested that simply getting the relevant staff 'in the same room' is sufficient to lead to all manner of benefits. However his proposal that we write a University Code of Ethics has proven unsuccessful, leading to many disputes and acrimony. For Vygotskii (Vygotskii, 1978) this would have come as little surprise, for his view was that any educational action is a huge cultural risk and that all we can hope for is a damage limitation exercise. We should not disadvantage others by denying them access, but without an understanding of where the participants are coming from this is impossible.

Category	Assumptions
<i>Society and the Good Life</i>	The future is broadly predictable in principle and education should prepare individuals for it. Technologists can/should help specify the requirements for the future in terms of knowledge, skills and capacities. Where choices are to be made the criteria for evaluation are Social, Economic, Environmental and Rights. Value should be assessed using the intangible components as well as the more usual tangible ones.
<i>The Function of Education</i>	The education system needs to reflect many of the changes that occur in the wider society. Educational change should be consumer-led. The consumers are students, parents, employers, the state. Links between education and training need to be explored. Efficaciousness is crucial.
<i>The Role of Educators</i>	Since education is a political and societal matter, it cannot be left in the hands of educators alone. Educators form part of an extremely broad education society and are thus accountable to the wider group.
<i>The Social and Moral Status of the Learner</i>	The economic role forms an important part of preparing individuals for life. Educational benefit should be assessed in social terms. Collective welfare implies the adaptation of the individual to social circumstance.
<i>The Nature and Function of Knowledge</i>	The process of learning matters more than the content learnt. Obsolescence of specific skills implies the devaluation of informational learning. Generic skills, independent of context, exist and are identifiable and transferable. Subject boundaries are unhelpful and arbitrary.

*Table 1*

In addition we believe that only through basing it in real experience of ethical issues will professional ethics develop or be of value to the student. This contradicts much of the literature which recommends using scenarios (Harris, 1993), case studies (Stern, 1995) or other 'unknown' studies. Our experience has shown that students have little interest in 'classical' cases and are not enabled by this (Van Lwijk, 1990) 'derived identity' It is also our belief that students are, again contrary to much work (Cougar, 1989), engaged by giving their experiences theoretical analysis, but this must always be grounded in the student experience. It is perfectly possible, indeed recommended, to discuss macro terms such as Kierkegaardian 'choice' or Macintyrian 'virtue' with students who, though having little philosophical background, have work or life micro questions to discuss. Clearly such professional ethics instruction necessitates (Sims and Sims, 1991) 'experiential learning methods', and the Centre is moving toward a discussion group format with very few formal lectures. Our work with groups has tended to confirm Nelson's (1990) remark that groupwork 'creates an environment conducive to moral growth, especially if such groups contain individuals with a mix of moral reasoning abilities'. In addition class discussion is an effective tool for professional ethics instruction, especially if (Strong, 1990) 'appropriate topics are chosen'. A wide range of sources and media are required to support the curricula, including local and national newspapers, local leaflets, film, music and student generated material. Fiction can be a rich source of material and (Kennedy, 1992) 'can enrich and illuminate moral dilemmas'.

Whilst it is not possible to discuss specific curricula issues, we do believe that an integrated approach is essential if students are not to feel a sense of ethical reasoning being outside normal activity. Our earlier historical section reflected some misgiving over the value of professional codes of ethics. However, experience has shown that, as a starting point for educators, it does have its merits. Students do seem engaged by them in a way that generates enthusiasm and interest in the subject of professional ethics. This seems to confirm the work of Ferris (1992), who suggested such codes are 'effective in creating ethical awareness in undergraduate classrooms'. We believe our case is interesting insofar that it highlights the range of obstacles facing the teaching of Professional Ethics and contradicts many of the well publicised report (Project ImpactCS, 1995) recommendations.

In particular Project ImpactCS proposes an extremely broad coverage of professional ethics topics, the vast majority of which fail to engage our students because they have no naturally occurring experience to relate to them. The recommendations amount to a vast list of issues which the students can then examine for their particular relevance. Our suggestion would be the reversal of this emphasis to one where considerable time is spent discussing individual student experiences and then relating these to the broader picture of generic issues. More generally our students find difficulty with the underlying assumptions of such reports in that they assume technology is both value-free and passive. They seem interested and concerned about the relationship between technology and work. They are far more empowered through open critical discussions of technology (Bluestone and Harrison, 1990) as leading to a "growth of levelled low-wage jobs confronting fewer highly paid jobs" than many of those topics in Project ImpactCS, whose scope is always to accept this condition as permanent.

One of the most significant components in our Professional Ethics programme, driven largely by student demand is the theme of globalisation. Gary Teeple's (Teeple, 1995) book provides an excellent introduction to the fundamental issue of the changing nature of technology. Two of the recommendations in Project ImpactCS that we would concur with, however, concern the dearth of good resource material and the multi-disciplinary nature of professional ethics. The Teeple book is an example of a valuable and extremely relevant text that lies outside the professional ethics literature.

## Case study

One of the largest undergraduate degrees at UeL is that of B.Sc. Computer Science. Like so many such courses this degree offers a one year placement in the third year. The placement is often the first work experience for the student and can lead, after graduation a year later, to permanent employment either for the students concerned or one of their colleagues. Traditionally the placement takes place within Greater London area but increasingly students are being placed further afield within England and in some cases other European countries. The main two reasons for this change in the geographical location where students sought placement were both socio-political: an expanded student population and the effects of the global recession.

Britain has the second lowest skill rate (Labour Party, 1995) in the European Union, and the Conservative Government attempted to alter this by a variety of measures, including expanding student numbers, largely through increasing the number of universities by granting university status to the polytechnics. Graduation rates grew from 8 to almost 30 percent of the year group between 1978 and 1988 but is still (Keep, 1993) 'lower than in most other developed countries'. In addition the global recession which hit Britain particularly heavily reduced profit margins and led to a record number of bankruptcies within small and medium enterprises (SMEs). This recessionary pressure resulted in a smaller number of firms willing or able to offer placements, and an employer requirement for a greater degree of accountability and tangible value-added assessment of the



placement. As one employer informed us "In these market-led times we will consider for placement only those students who are most committed to demonstrating their worth to our organisation".

Whilst aware of the subjective nature of our evidence, it seems clear that the extra administrative burden engendered by the increased competitive nature of placements does not seem to be the only change in the three way relationship between the student, the university and organisation taking the placement student. During the placement a university tutor is required to visit and prepare a written report on the student and their placement at least three times. A walk through with the three partners revealed the reports served several theoretical functions: a record of what duties the placement consisted of and how the student performed from both the organisational and student perspective; pinpointing opportunities for future placements; highlighting areas for concern and improvement; and satisfying the University quality procedures. However, given that we were apparently the only readers of these documents, it would seem that in practice the reports had been used only as written confirmation that the student had actually undergone placement. They were brought out at the final (4th) year exam board but not examined. Analysing these reports over a period of five years we discerned several worrying trends.

The first of these trends was that, where previously it was *de rigeur* for reports to discuss, even if negatively, the possibility of permanent work for the student after graduating, the later reports revealed an alarming number of organisations who had approached their placement student with offers of work as an alternative to returning to University. Whilst many of these organisations had mentioned this to the tutor, a considerable number had discussed in detail with the student the work possibilities (even recommending completing their degrees part-time). The reports suggested that these later cases were probably the result of uncertainty in the definition of their respective roles as organisation, tutor and student. In 1994 the University introduced both an inductive visit to organisations and extensive documentation outlining these roles. In the two subsequent years the reports reveal that this trend appears to have stabilised in percentage terms but shows no sign of returning to former negligible levels.

Perhaps a trend of even more import was that students became increasingly involved on the placement in acts that could be questioned ethically and, in some cases, legally without ever being aware of their own responsibility. The student seemed too willing to follow the organisational line even when issues such as integrity, confidentiality, privacy, quality and safety were being threatened. Without wishing to give a comprehensive list of the real situations, a feel for the recurring themes can be obtained by outlining two typical cases. The first of these cases shows how organisations can use students' lack of experience and information to put them in an unenviable ethical position. In the second, more direct emotional pressure is used, again facing the student with onerous moral questions.

Within a small business it is often the case that an individual may take on many functions and roles. In software development the same person may be involved in all phases of the life cycle, from specification through analysis, design, testing, implementation to review. Within this cycle perhaps the most difficult switch, in terms of maintaining ones integrity, is between specification and testing. The particular problem lies in being both problem setter and solver. Put bluntly there is a tendency to 'test to pass' when specifier and tester are the same individual. Exhaustive testing - where one tests all possibility of input - of a computer program is impossible due to the millions of years it would take to complete for even a simple program. Consequently any testing is conducted using a fairly small but 'sufficiently representative' sample. Provided the sample can be shown to satisfy this condition, the test team are acting, in Kierkegaardian (Kierkegaard, 1971) terms, 'in truth'. The problem lies in justifying any claim to representativeness. Even use of standardised techniques is insufficient as support, with litigation being commonplace even between larger companies.

A placement student within a small software company, responsible for building safety critical system units, was placed in a key role with regard to quality and safety involving both specification and testing. The company asked the student to be involved in the specification of a software module

for an underwater explorer vessel. Later the student was assigned as solely responsible for the testing and was subsequently introduced to clients and documented in organisational literature as having a wholly test based function. It was also implied that others were involved. On one occasion, after raising somewhat innocently that the company was flaunting their own testing standards, the student was criticised by the manager for allowing such practice to occur. Indeed it was this last act which led to the student raising the sequence of events with the tutor. The generic situation where a student is left in a position of ignorance, which can often benefit less morally constrained organisations, seems remarkably commonplace on the basis of our analysis.

The second common type of scenario where students are left with having to make unenviable ethical decisions occurs when direct pressure or threat is applied. The most frequent occurrence of this is when the actual student placement is stated as being at risk. One student, within a small management training and consultancy firm, was asked to carry out some fairly routine cost evaluation. The student later discovered that his originals were changed, with some of the figures from one being transferred to another. When he questioned this he was told that one of the cost centres, another company, was essentially more likely to pay the high costs calculated and that they would also be a potentially large future contractor in comparison with the other cost centre. The student was instructed not to mention this matter to anyone otherwise a large contract, on which his placement depended, could be cancelled. The student, thinking this silence did not include his tutor, raised the matter which resulted in the termination of the placement.

During the academic year 1994/5 the Business School introduced a second year module entitled 'Social Aspects of Computing', in reaction to this identified student passivity with regard to ethics. The school was aware that traditionally such modules were of 'variable quality and few in number' (Clarke, 1988). In designing this module we examined several similar, but decidedly more mature modules, from both Europe and America. In addition European advice was sought from those who had earlier experiences of introducing such a module. As a result the module included the following topics: computer crime and misuse; social responsibility of computer professionals, including a study of whistleblowing; new technology and employment; computers in education; IT and politics; privacy and data protection.

In 1995/6 the Business School decided to begin the process of integrating professional ethics into the whole curricula, as a result of some internal reports and the UK National Foresight document. As a result of this announcement, much heated debate was generated, with some areas, including accounting, refusing to participate. However some areas, including business information systems (BIS), were particularly open to the idea and offered most of their modules as vehicles of integration. As a result of this policy, whole sub-areas, such as software project management, became integrated with professional ethics. Perhaps the most significant factor in their ability to do this was the BIS traditional research base of 'soft determinism'. This approach views the primary responsibility of organisations is (di Norcia, 1994) 'to minimise the negative impacts of a technology on the social, economic, environment interests and human rights of stakeholders'. Traditionally such 'indirect' measures have been considered problematic, but our work with students shows that progress is attainable and tends to agree with di Norcia's remark that 'it may be more measurable than is generally believed'. Two newly introduced modules, on International Information Technology and Strategic Technology Management, became predicated on the alternative ethic of measuring the social consequences of technology. The external examiner described these two courses as "unique, challenging and significant developments in the UK portfolio". Clearly the students need an introduction to this alternative measurement before one can discuss more advanced issues as part of their early modules.

Another significant factor in the development of our courses is the external speaker on ethical issues. Being integrated, the courses generate a potentially large student body interested in a particular issue, and an external speaker is often invited to an 'Open Session'. These have proved enormously popular with students and indeed the local community. At a session on Copyright over

ten percent of the large audience, for this non-advertised event, were 'outsiders'. More recently a local company has agreed to sponsor the series. Most of the presented material is 'informal' but staff remark how frequently it is being referred to in class and examination rooms.

We feel it is important that these external speakers have a close affinity or commitment to the University, as more long-term relationships can develop with students who are voluntarily attendees. Our series has been remarkable for the atmosphere of informal discussion, and this has sometimes led the speaker to reveal something, often as a sideline, which students feel particularly challenged by. One speaker, in a discussion on whistleblowing, discussed how he had suspected one of his departmental juniors of frequent computer mediated theft. He instructed technicians to install a complex detection system consisting of hidden video, computer keystroke and cassette recorders. Other than the technician he informed no other person of the system. Fairly conclusive evidence was gathered which confirmed the suspect as a thief, and he was fired. The speaker ended by saying he felt "dirty" for doing this, asking "How would I have felt if it he had been proven innocent? Would I have hugged him and apologised for my suspicion?" This talk raised an exceptional level of interest with the students. Consequently the speaker was invited back.

As a follow up to this talk we invited a specialist speaker in computerised surveillance techniques. Whilst the session was well attended interest was generally low. However during her talk the speaker remarked on the need for localised information on how location affects attitude to technology, asking "If I went out the front door here what is the most likely attitude I would find?" One student became so interested in this that he took a video camera and cycled across London, stopping regularly to collect local qualitative opinion. After editing, the film was an excellent statement on very localised viewpoint and was later shown on national television with the student continuing to develop this research, initiated by a passing remark. Other local visitor experiences have been generally good, but the challenge we face is in making these events predictably rewarding for the students. One speaker failed to generate interest at any level when speaking on a multi-million pound sterling corruption case involving executives, prostitution, drugs and bribery. Another made the idea of UK National Identity Card in 2007 so relevant to students that the extensive questioning overran by three times its total allotted duration. The community spirit of the talks have certainly proved beneficial, but what type of 'revelation' will appeal to students is currently very difficult to predict.

One of the more significant issues in our curricula is that of whistleblowing, which we tend to introduce as action based on a whole series of factors. Two very significant such factors are the difference between, often 'hard', organisational and, often 'softer', individual measurement, and more generally the divide between societal and individual norms. Whistleblowing forms part, often indirectly, of most of the integrated courses. This is taught largely in tutorial mode with visitors, as above, offering an additional dimension.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to the integrated whistleblowing the 'Social Aspects of Computing' module is supposed to provide a more focused look at the subject. The module is based in everyday situations and attempts to enable the student to identify action that is worthy of reporting. In measuring the success of the module against these criteria, we would have to report that the results are mixed. Whilst the academic achievement from the course has been good, students do not display the enthusiasm and general interest so apparent in many of the voluntary seminars. It is conceivable that the module does not complement the other modules well. Discussion on the future of this module is currently centred on the need to identify (Loch, 1996) 'localised social norms', develop (Schon, 1983) 'reflective conversation' techniques and (di Norcia, 1994) 'explore Social, Economic, Environment and Rights issues'. We are currently experimenting with a 'game', devised jointly by two students and one staff member, that assists the vocalisation of personal self-image and the level of individual societal estrangement.

## Whistleblowing

Since the inception of the 'Social Aspects of Computing' module, there is evidence that students are demonstrating an increased awareness of their capacity to report situations to the placement tutor. Indeed the student files have grown considerably in the past three consecutive years. However the students do not appear to be overly selective in their situations, and the reports reveal a proliferation of the ordinary. Quite often tutors report their incomprehension at situations where placement students appear to be suggesting unethical or unlawful practice is taking place.

One case involved an oil company going to some considerable lengths to keep information on the whereabouts of some of their exploration engineers secret. The student contacted the tutor, who attempted to explain the rationale behind this fairly common practice. When a computer engineer was later fired for revealing this information the student wrote a long letter to a local newspaper, clearly believing an unlawful act had taken place. This came as a complete surprise to both tutor and organisation, though is an action which is supported by the quantitative study of Callahan (Callahan, 1994). Callahan tested various hypotheses, and found evidence that whistleblowers who use the media as an external outlet, rather than internal channels, are more likely to be low-level or non-professional employees who perceive a high risk of retaliation from their action. Several other students had also gone to extreme lengths, not contacting the tutor, to ensure their concern was aired. When most of these cases were shown to be fairly normal business practice, the placement students did seem to generally appreciate their overreaction, but only in one or two cases did they appear to show concern that their action would have repercussions for the placement relationship.

One major benefit of the 'Social Aspects of Computing' module is the readiness and interest shown in discussing whistleblowing cases once the students return in the fourth year. Several case studies were raised in classes by students, some rather surprisingly having little to do with technological issues. One discernible theme, however: the cases often had strong links with educational issues, supporting a locally held view that the students view themselves as student first and technologists second.

In one of the fourth year management modules the students found connections between their own experiences and that of the University of California Irvine (UCI) Medical Center (Kertesz, 1995), which fired top administrators for allegedly retaliating against employees who reported physician misconduct at the centre's fertility clinic. The issues raised at UCI, such as fairness and justice, seem to connect strongly with student placement experiences, with several students claiming the case had parallels with their own. Likewise the case of the director of a master's journalism programme in the USA (Fitzgerald, 1984), fired for uncovering misuse of funds at the University of Michigan, seemed to mirror smaller cases, including a part-time tutor within their own University being questioned by management. Several doctoral students, who also have preparatory classes in professional ethics, were particularly struck by the case of a Tufts University post-doctoral immunologist (Zurer, 1995) who was prosecuted by the USA Secret Service for whistleblowing. They were also particularly struck by the similarity of action with their own expectation of how their University would react in making a credibility choice between research staff with high standing and a whistleblowing post-doc.

This last case, allied to student experience, led to a discussion of Nondisclosure Agreements (Roditti, 1995).<sup>2</sup> As a coursework the students were asked to discuss the role of such agreements, with their conclusions to include which side the individual would vote for, won marginally by those in favour. All students thought NDA's and NCA's ethics committees might be practical within the technological sphere (as oft used in health care (Annas, 1994)). Other such debates included the viability of the Durango Declaration (ACM, 1995), the output of a workshop initiative in the U.S. Public Policy Committee of the ACM, held in Durango, Colorado. The Durango Declaration suggested that broad public discussion and coordinated action over information technology should be able to: create new industries and jobs whilst maintaining or improving the quality of work for

individuals; increase equality of access to technology and slow the increasing disparity between rich and poor; and develop new methods for expressing opinions and disseminating information while preventing the loss of privacy and freedom of speech.

## Conclusion

Many claim there is a need for more professional ethics within university curricula. Historically, however, confusion abounds as to the core issue of what professional ethics instruction should entail. We have identified some generic problems involved in the teaching of professional ethics, including: the necessity for such teaching; the form of delivery; the placement within the curriculum; the standards to be adopted; the content of the curricula; the students themselves; the appropriateness of values and the values used. On the content side, many of the recurring themes in the literature advocate issues such as: codes of ethics; alternative frames of ethical reference; ethical theory and standards; whistleblowing. It is suggested also that traditional forms of delivery will need to change.

Our own experience suggests case studies (and other material) however 'classical' they might be, are unlikely to generate student interest if they are not within the students' reference. Thus more individualised forms of teaching are required. However we believe students are capable of understanding, utilising and developing lasting interest in ethical theory, provided it is embedded in their own experience. Our case study at UeL tends to suggest that in order to give the subject relevance, integration of the professional ethics curricula is essential. In addition we propose that universities move away from traditional methods of decision making, based purely on direct value, to an alternative ethical evaluative framework based on social, economic, environmental and rights information. This can be introduced early and used as a vehicle for discussion of later issues. We also believe that, as an initial discussion point at least, professional codes of ethics do seem to have merit in their ability to generate student ethical awareness.

Students seem to need localised material if professional ethics is to be meaningful. From our experience, universities would be better advised to conduct ethical analysis of live student issues, such as those faced in their placement, rather than asking them to assume derived identities. Provided they have a close affinity or commitment to the university, external speakers are a potentially rich source of ethical material, particularly their tangential remarks. Faculty face the constant challenge of being able to predict which speaker will reveal issues of relevance and interest to students, though.

## Notes

1. As mentioned above visitor success is somewhat unpredictable. We have also had several incidences of a subsequent class, conducting video analysis, having been far more interested than those in attendance, expressing incomprehension at the low number and range of questions asked.
2. Nondisclosure agreements (NDA) are clauses of employment contracts that essentially prevent employers using trade secrets or company proprietary information. These clauses usually include a statement imposing a time, often around two years, beyond employment with the particular organisation. They are often linked to a Non-Compete Agreement (NGA) which prevents an employee competing, even in the form of a consultant, against the organisation for the same period. Many lawyers, particularly in Western Europe, consider the vast majority of existing NDA's and NCA's unenforceable, as they are often so broad as to render the erstwhile employee unemployable for the period stated in the clause.

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