

Summary of the Curriculum Development Workshop on “Professional Ethics and Social Responsibility”

April 21, 2013

A workshop to develop a framework for the non-graded component in the UG Curriculum on “Professional Ethics and Social Responsibility” was held on April 6, 2013. The summary of proceedings of various sessions is presented as follows:

Inaugural Session: The inaugural session was chaired by Prof R.K. Shevgaonkar, Director IIT Delhi. In this session, Prof Sangeeta Kohli provided the background to the workshop by explaining that in the new UG curriculum to be implemented in July 2013, the IITD senate has already approved a non-graded component of 2 credits on “Professional Ethics and Social Responsibility”. The broad recommendations of the committee which is looking into the details of this component were also presented, which need to be developed further into an implementation plan. In this backdrop, it was emphasized that the purpose of the workshop was to learn from the experience of some of those who have worked with the students in this direction and also to enable a wide consultation which can help in evolving an effective strategy for implementation.

Prof. Shevgaonkar, in the chairman’s address, highlighted the need for sensitizing students to ethics in general rather than only professional ethics and specifically making the students aware of the disparity in the Indian society created by technology. He expressed concern over the increasing loyalty to money in contrast to commitment to motherland and concern for human rights. He pointed out that with the changing family structure, many children are not able to get the required inputs related to human values from home. So, it is up to the education system to provide that input. He hoped that discussions in the workshop will help in evolving the course to enable it to bridge this gap in the IITD students.

Session II - Sensitization of Students to Human Values: This session was chaired by Prof M. Balakrishnan. The first lead presentation in this session was by Prof. Rajeev Sangal, Director, IIIT Hyderabad on “Human Values in Academic Institution: A Case Study”. He shared the experiences of IIIT Hyderabad of introducing a compulsory course on human values for UG students in the first and the fourth semesters. He pointed out that within 3 years of the inception of IIITH(which was started in 1998), the institute faced several issues related to students’ attitude, e.g., lack of sensitivity towards others, tendency to show off, lack of seriousness in academics. The institute tried solving the problem through lectures by eminent and “good” personalities but that did not create a long term impact since the exposure time was too short. Finally they introduced a course along the lines of “*Jeevan Vidya*”. The main highlights of the course are:

- The course is in the form of structured discussions between mentors and students along with some relevant activities. The focus is on encouraging students to look within to distinguish between the superficial and the valuable; to develop sensitivity and awareness leading to commitment as well as courage to stand by what they believe in.
- The mentors are primarily faculty members, along with some research scholars and also spouses of faculty members, all of them volunteering for this activity, after going through a training session.

- A group of about 15 students are associated with two mentors. They meet once a week generally on Saturdays for one and a half hours. In second and third semesters, the meetings are only monthly. In the fourth semester again, there is a regular weekly contact followed by a 4-day workshop in the end. There are also meetings of the mentors to share the experiences in the course.

Prof Sangal highlighted that initially the institute faced resistance from the students in making this kind of a course compulsory. However, gradually they started appreciating the discussions in the course and as a result several initiatives were taken by the students themselves to improve various facets of campus life, like starting a “Yuktahar” mess, caring for the staff, bringing about changes in youth festivals, undertaking social internships and the like. There have been distinct improvements in their interest in academics and ragging has been reduced to almost nil. Overall, the course has brought about very distinct positive changes in the environment on campus.

The next presentation in this session was by Prof R.R. Gaur, Retired Professor of Mechanical Engineering Department, IIT Delhi and former Head of NRCVEE, IITD. He welcomed the inclusion of “Professional Ethics and Social Responsibility” as a mandatory co-curricular component in the new UG curriculum. He emphasized the need for a foundational course for every student so as to orient them to be able to benefit from a variety of inputs to be provided under this component. It was pointed out that a lot of work has gone into development of the course being offered at IIITH, for which course material was also available in the form of a book. Several technical universities in the country are now introducing such courses in their curriculum. He also highlighted the need for developing adequate competence in the faculty participating in the conduct of the course.

Session III – Professional Ethics: This session was chaired by Prof Anshul Kumar. The lead presentation was made by Mr. Josantony Joseph, Advisor (Maharashtra) to Commissioner on Food Security and Trainer on Professional Ethics, Mumbai. He spoke on, “The Challenges and Possible Approaches to helping Students Internalise the Importance of Ethics in their Professional Lives”. The key points discussed by him are as follows:

- Ethics require one not to do harm to anyone as a matter of duty but do not require one to go out of the way to do good. In that sense, ethics are minimalistic, while Social Responsibility is about taking responsibility to bring about positive changes in the society, which is moving towards a maximalistic response.
- Ethics cannot be taught without an ideology. For example, in the present context, it may be provided by the Indian Constitution or at the global level by the United Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) .
- An effective implementation of such a course requires three elements:
 - An intellectual input for generating awareness for the need for ethical behaviour.
 - An experiential component, which essentially would require the student to explore the world around him/her primarily through people-to-people contact providing an immersive experience. For example, this element could be provided by the student spending a few days with someone working passionately for a cause.
 - Inputs at the Environmental level, meaning thereby, the institute must send a consistent message to the student regarding need for ethical behaviour through the institute’s

environment and the system as well. For example, rules must be strictly implemented and must be more stringent for those in power.

- He also emphasized that seed of idealism is still there in many children, but it is being killed by the competitive world. Parents have an important role to play in nurturing this aspect. Association with an inspiring person as a mentor can also make a lot of difference.

Session IV- Social Responsibility: Prof Ravinder Kaur chaired this session. The first presentation in this session was by Dr Neera Agnimitra from the School of Social Work, Delhi University on “Involving Students in Socially Relevant Projects”. She also welcomed the move by IITD to introduce this co-curricular component. She pointed out that even amongst students opting to be in the School of Social Work, it is a constant endeavour of the faculty to rekindle their motivation to be engaged in this kind of work. With regards to an effective implementation of this course, she provided the following inputs:

- There is a need for intensive engagement over a short duration. If the activity is spread out thinly over a long period without it being intense at any point, it can become frivolous.
- Any course of this kind must cover two aspects: one of personal enrichment leading to strengthening the sense of honesty, personal integrity and the like and secondly, sensitization to ethics emanating from a larger engagement with the society.
- The implementation of the social engagement component requires four essential components:
 - Knowledge transmission for a good theoretical grounding – knowing about social problems, the concept of community and the like.
 - Imparting the relevant skills for taking the activity to completion like communication, analysis, report writing, presentation on a social issue etc.
 - Identifying the values and principles underlying the activity. For example, taking a pledge.
 - Bringing about an attitudinal change.
- The course needs to be implemented in four phases: the orientation phase; induction phase (working closely with the field level agencies); planning and implementation phase; evaluation phase.
- The selection of agencies (NGOs) must not be left to the students. Use of students by NGOs for carrying out of surveys must be avoided. The students must be encouraged to work in different settings based on their aptitude.
- Supervision of the students’ activities is very essential.
- Evaluation must be carried out using well thought out evaluation criteria involving a combination of self-evaluation and evaluation by the supervisor. This process itself can create a great deal of learning.
- It will be useful to link up with schools of social work in different parts of the country to get mentoring support for project formulation and implementation.

The second presentation in this session was by Ms Neelima Khetan, Head of CSR and Sustainability Functions, Coca Cola on “Role of NGOs and CSR in sensitizing students”. The speaker has 22 years of experience with the NGO Seva Mandir. She highlighted the difference in the spirit with which people work in an NGO and those who work in the Corporate Sector. She pointed out that in general there is a lack of clarity on what should constitute Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) – whether in-house activities making the Company green or working with the outside world. Whatever may be the activity under CSR, the focus is on making a business model for achieving the desired goal. Philanthropy and charity are not part of CSR. She also emphasized that priority for students is still to find a good job,

something which may make it difficult for the course to be widely accepted by the students. The course can also create a conflict with the Corporate culture. She suggested that it may be important to sensitize some of the senior people in the Corporate world towards the issues to be addressed by this course.

The third presentation was by Dr Sameer Maithel, Director, Greentech Solutions, on “Student Participation in the Sustainable Technologies for the Grassroots Level”. He spoke of his own case of working on a brick kiln for his M.Tech project, doctoral thesis and later as a consultant-cum-technology developer. He highlighted that there is a huge scope for work by engineering students during their graduation as well later, in technical projects in various fields related to sustainability. There is also a strong possibility of integrating such a work with the main stream courses as well as co-curricular components as the course under discussion. Such activities may not always lead to final solutions in a single project but they provide a very vital exposure to the student for the possibility of long term technical inputs in the areas generally neglected. A sequence of projects can also lead to a tangible work in the field. However, he also raised the question of number of faculty being interested in such an activity for faculty involvement would be essential for such inputs to be effective at the student’s level as well as making a mark in the field.

Concluding Session: This session was chaired by Prof Santanu Chaudhury. The main points which emerged as a result of the discussions in earlier sessions and in this session are as follows:

- This course needs to have three components: The Orientational input; in-house activities; and engagement in the field.
- The course must allow students to raise questions and find answers through in-depth intellectual analysis as well as by drawing from one’s own experiences. This can include the ethical questions associated with practices like filing patents, rights over technology, funding pattern, technical disasters etc.
- The conduction of the course must involve campus community – including PG students and families of faculty members and staff. This can also help in bridging the gap between UG and PG students and also that between faculty and students.
- The institute must identify at the earliest, interested faculty members and others from campus community for participating in this course. They will need to undergo the initial orientation sessions in summer so as to enable the course to take off in July 2013.
- The course can use various modes like films, theatre, etc.
- The students can have a wide variety of activities to choose from but finally each student must get involved in only a few activities so as to enable high intensity of focused inputs.
- Self-evaluation would be a very important component in such a course.
- There is a need to change the environment of IIT so as to provide a bedrock for effectiveness of such a course. Special efforts for sensitization of student post holders towards ethical practices can be an important step in this direction.
- The administrative requirements for this course will be very high. Thus the required infrastructural support can be created in NRCVEE, which can serve as a nodal centre for coordinating this course, with pooling of efforts by various faculty members from various departments/centres of the institute as well as other members of the campus community.

(Sangeeta Kohli)