Report to the Doerr Institute for New Leaders

Ethics and Society at Rice Summer Program 2016

Brandon Williams and Peter Zuk
We are incredibly grateful for the Doerr Institute’s generous support of our Ethics & Society program and of our personal development as leaders. Below, we review the evaluation criteria from our proposal and how we met these criteria over the course of the program.

Section I: How successfully did the graduate student instructors identify their own strengths as leaders and use this information to set and achieve tangible pedagogical goals?

1. Instructors will gain awareness of their own leadership strengths through critical self-reflection and third-party evaluation in the form of an EQi assessment and leadership coaching.

Both Peter Zuk and Brandon Williams took an EQi assessment and thereafter met with coach Heidi Sherick five times each.

Peter Reports:

“I had a wonderful and highly productive experience working with Heidi. The EQi gave me a heightened awareness of my leadership potential that provided a firm foundation for positive development in our coaching sessions. Working through the various topics that we decided upon together yielded near-immediate improvement in both the classroom and other professional interactions. To take just one example, Heidi and I spent time during one session discussing strategies for active listening. I was able to successfully apply these lessons during the course of the E&S program, with noticeable results—especially in responding to student questions. With Heidi’s assistance, I was also able to see the core principles of active listening at work in the context of philosophical dialectic, which has led to fruitful, collaboration-centered conversations with peers on philosophical topics about which we strongly disagree. Keeping track of my experiences through journaling allowed me to be intentional about this and the various other topics on which we worked. This experience has provided me with the necessary tools to continue my leadership development through practice informed by effective reflection.”

Brandon Reports:

“Leadership coaching was a new and enriching experience for me. Going through my EQi assessment with Heidi helped me to identify ways in which I can be a more effective communicator and leader. I also found that keeping these points in mind during the summer program helped me to better convey my thoughts and ideas to the students and other facilitators alike. These effects have naturally carried over to other areas of my daily life as well. Finally, the process of reflecting upon and journaling about my
experiences each day helped me to understand any frustrations and joys that I was feeling. This understanding then allowed me to appropriately adjust my own action, expectation, and response moving forward.”

2. **Instructors will develop programming skills and gain experience in setting a clear vision and actionable goals for group development.**

Throughout the course of planning and implementing the program, Peter and Brandon gained experience in creating a vision and actionable goals for group development. They developed the curriculum with an eye toward the ethical issues that are likely to be of importance to the student demographic and toward the theories that are likely to be able to equip the students to be able to think clearly about these issues. They were able to effectively deal with obstacles and unexpected challenges (though there were not many) in ways that allowed the program to proceed in beneficial ways without interruption.

When asked to rate the overall quality of the program on a scale from 0 (poor) to 7 (excellent), eleven students (73.33%) ranked it as 7, and four students (26.67%) ranked it as 6.

3. **Instructors will practice effective time-management in the settings of professional meetings, group discussion, and classroom facilitation.**

Peter and Brandon were able to run all classroom instruction, field trips, and group discussion in a timely manner that allowed the group to follow the program schedule without having to remove any activity or discussion time.

When asked to rate the program’s organization on a scale from 0 (poor) to 7 (excellent), ten students (66.67%) ranked it as 7, three students (20%) ranked it as 6, and two students (13.33%) ranked it as 5.

**Section II: How successfully did the high school student participants learn program content, become more aware of their leadership abilities, and apply these concepts to their daily lives as potential student-leaders?**

4. **We seek to recruit 15 talented rising juniors/seniors who qualify for free or reduced-price meals in Houston public schools by working closely with school administrators and counselors during the selection process.**

We successfully met our recruitment goals by working with high school counselors to identify high-performing students who met the above criteria. Our student application process included a statement of interest, writing sample, transcript, and recommendation from a school official. Recommenders were asked to describe the student’s attendance and disciplinary records, as
well as to evaluate the students on each of the following dimensions: academic potential, academic achievement, intellectual curiosity, effort/determination, organization, willingness to take intellectual risks, ability to collaborate with others, maturity (relative to age), emotional stability, comfort speaking to large audiences, and ability to comprehend difficult tasks.

Seven of our students were female; eight were male. Ten were Hispanic/Latina/o; two were Asian (Nepalese and Vietnamese); two were African-American, and one was Native American. Our students attended the following Houston-area high schools: Bellaire, Carnegie Vanguard (2), DeBakey, Harmony, KIPP (3), Northbrook (4), and YES Prep (3). Five were rising seniors, and ten were rising juniors.

5. Students will improve their presentation skills: demonstrating content-area expertise; using body language appropriately and effectively; and speaking with clarity, volume, and purpose.

During Week 3 of the program, students worked together in research groups under the guidance of one of the instructors. Each group of five students chose a real-world case to analyze using the concepts and theories learned in the earlier stages of the course. This research culminated in a semi-public Academic Symposium on the final day of the program.

At the Symposium, each group summarized their case, reconstructed in detail their ethical analysis of that case, presented their practical recommendations of what ought to be done in a case like theirs, and fielded questions from the audience. (See Appendix I of this report for the guidelines given to students for the concluding Academic Symposium assignment.)

Representative student comments:

“In regards to the symposium, the presentations were executed really well and I’m proud of myself and all of my peers for being able to achieve this in less than a week.”

“Preparing for the final presentation really allowed me to practice my research skills along with my presentation skills.”

Assisting the student groups in their preparations was a valuable experience for the instructors. Oversight of group research and presentation on philosophical issues brought with it the array of pedagogical opportunities typical of such oversight on all group work: promoting collaboration, encouraging beneficial division of responsibilities, and ensuring that all group members have a voice. It also presented philosophy-specific pedagogical opportunities: assisting students with comprehension of particular philosophical theses, commenting on the formulation of key arguments, and helping students to come to see philosophical group work as an opportunity for dialectical engagement with one another.
6. Students will cultivate a greater sense of personal initiative and responsibility in the pursuit of their own goals, the baseline for which will be each student’s statement of interest in the program (received as part of their application) and a personal reflection writing assignment done in class on the first day.

More than half of the students met with an undergraduate leadership coach from Rice University. The Tier 2 assessment (to be completed later in the fall of 2016), will gauge the level of personal initiative and responsibility that the students will have carried into the future. Relevant Tier 2 assessment questions include:

If you attended a leadership coaching session with Dylan, can you comment upon the carryover into the school year? Are you executing the plan of action that you discussed? If so, give an example.

Has the summer program (content, site visits, symposium) inspired you to continue your studies in ethics or philosophy? If so, please share an example.

7. Students will become equipped to exemplify effective, ethical leadership within their peer groups, educational settings, and in contexts of civic engagement.

Students learned the major ethical theories and were exposed to how those theories can be brought to bear in real-world situations. The Tier 2 assessment will gauge the level to which the students will have utilized these theories as leaders in their own social circles. Relevant Tier 2 assessment questions include:

Consider the content of the summer program, the ethical theories (viz. consequentialism, deontology, virtue ethics, and care ethics) and the philosophical conceptions of justice (social contract theory, distributive justice, libertarianism, and the capabilities approach). Thus far, have you used any of the knowledge from the summer program in your current coursework (i.e. in class discussions, participation, written work, or simply to aid your thinking? If so, please give an example.

Consider the skills we practiced during the summer program (viz. ethical deliberation, seeing a problem/issue from two opposing sides, public speaking, etc.). Thus far, have you used any of these skills in your current coursework with greater confidence? If so, please give an example.

8. We plan to deliver the content areas – normative ethical theory and philosophical conceptions of justice – through engaging lessons and activities.

Classroom instruction consisted of a combination of traditional lecture, group discussion, and activities:
- Traditional lecture: Co-taught by Peter Zuk and Brandon Williams. Classroom lecture and discussion allowed the instructors to hone their traditional presentation and dialectical skills while also employing pedagogical innovations to help illuminate the course content for high school students.

- Group discussion: Professor Gwen Bradford conducted a Socratic discussion with the students in which the students identified morally relevant features of a difficult moral dilemma and structured their responses using moral theories studied during the first week of the program.

- Activities: Students analyzed several case studies and engaged in other educational activities (games and discussions) in order to amplify the real-world significance of ethical theory. These praxis-centered pedagogical methods were highly successful, so much so that the instructors plan to test their broader applicability in undergraduate classrooms.

9. We will engage the wider Houston community by taking three field trips: Anadarko Petroleum, Baylor Center for Medical Ethics and Health Policy, and InterFaith Ministries for Greater Houston Refugee Services.

Each of these field trips was a great success, deepening student understanding of the course material as it pertains to a wide variety of professional activities.

Planning and executing the site visits provided the instructors with the opportunity to improve our organizational skills. In addition to gaining valuable experience in various logistical matters, instructors worked with site visit hosts on the issue of how best to integrate course content with real-world practice.

10. Students will gain proficiency in the content areas.

We determined the degree of student improvement in program content areas through a combination of methods. Student responses to pre- and post-program survey questions about knowledge/familiarity with concepts pertaining to ethics and theories of justice showed marked improvement. Students were also assigned an in-class writing activity (“Sartre’s Dilemma”) on the first day of program and then again on the final day. (See Appendix II of this report for the full prompt and instructions for the Sartre’s Dilemma assignment.) The sophistication of student responses to the prompt improved dramatically between the first and second attempt at the assignment. Finally, students demonstrated the full breadth and depth of their acquired knowledge at the concluding Academic Symposium. Further, the Symposium afforded the students an opportunity to display their proficiency to a broader audience.
11. **Students will improve their critical reasoning skills (viz. evaluating arguments for assumptions, premises, and conclusions; generating challenges to arguments; and reconciling opposing views).**

Students showed real improvement both in the ability to identify morally relevant factors in case studies and in the ability to construct arguments their own positions on ethical action. At a Socratic discussion held by Prof. Gwen Bradford (Rice University) at the beginning of the program’s second week, students demonstrated in real time their heightened level of awareness, after one week of instruction, of morally-relevant factors and the applicability of various theoretical concepts to moral dilemmas. In addition to a greater grasp of program content, responses to the Sartre’s Dilemma assignment showed improvement in argumentative strength. Finally, practice for and performance at the Academic Symposium showed an improvement in presentation and public speaking skills.

12. **Students will gain familiarity with university library databases and conducting research efficiently.**

Students were able to effectively utilize Rice Library services after minimal instruction.

**Section III: How successfully did the undergraduate leadership coach utilize and improve coaching technique and approach?**

13. **Undergraduate leadership coaches will apply their skills and training in a high school educational setting and apply these lessons in classroom interactions in an effort to exemplify effective pedagogical leadership.**

Dylan Dickens generously volunteered several hours of his time to meet one-on-one with a total of eight of our students.

He also provided his contact information to the remaining students in order to offer a free session to them post-program.

Dylan Reports:

“Coaching 8 sessions for the Ethics and Society program was a fantastic experience as a developing coach. While each session was only 30 minutes long, every student was incredibly determined to improve themselves and working with them was a blast. The material that came up during sessions was very different than that which has arisen through my current experience, and learning to use the same skills in different ways on unique material was a great growing experience for me as a coach.”
When asked to rate the experience of working with a leadership coach on a scale of 7 (excellent) to 0 (poor), two students (25%) ranked the experience as a 7, four students (50%) ranked the experience as a 6, one student (12.5%) ranked the experience as a 5, and one student (12.5%) ranked the experience as a 4.
Appendix I: Academic Symposium Guidelines

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Academic Symposium

Objectives: There are two main objectives for this assignment: first, to apply the theories of ethics and justice to real-world circumstances relating to our program’s site visits (viz. business ethics, medical ethics, and the ethics of refugees); second, to develop skills in public speaking, such as using body language appropriately and effectively, and speaking with clarity, volume, and purpose.

Assignment: You will be divided into three groups of five. Each group will be assigned a broad field of inquiry relating to our site visits. The presentation will involve five components:

1. You must research and identify a real-world ethical dilemma within your group’s field of inquiry. You must present a case study that tells a story that includes specific names, dates, etc. which can be gleaned from reliable print or online sources (preferably newspaper articles). This should last approximately 2-3 minutes.

2. You must identify the morally relevant factors of the case. Try to be as thorough as possible. This should last approximately 1-2 minutes.

3. You must present opposing views on the case, utilizing at least two theories we covered in the course. Here, you may give succinct summaries of the theories you are invoking because our audience may not know specific terms and concepts. You should use the readings and notes for this part of presentation. This should last approximately 6-7 minutes.

4. You will act as ethical consultants and report the findings of your group. This may yield a specific, recommended course or action if your group achieves consensus, or it can report how your group’s opinions diverged (i.e. how the group disagreed). This should last approximately 2-3 minutes.

5. You will answer questions, the “Q&A,” from the audience for up to 10 minutes following your presentation.

Requirements: Here are some baseline criteria to follow:

- The presentations should be typed as a script, following the above structure (1-4).
- Every member of the group must speak for a significant portion of the total air-time.
- The presentations should last for 12-15 minutes.
Timeline: Monday (6/27) through Wednesday (6/29) - You will have the full day to put together your presentations. These are “workshop” days when we will have access to a Computer Lab on campus though you may bring your own devices to research and type.

Thursday (6/30) at 10:30am – Your group must have a completed script. From 10:30-11:30am we will be practicing and recording presentations. During Session 2, we will be critiquing our performances in small groups.

Friday (6/1) at 8:45am – Meet outside the Fondren Library. We will rehearse from 9:10-9:50am in the Kyle Morrow Room. The Academic Symposium begins at 10am. The day ends at noon following a reception held in your honor.
Appendix II: Sartre’s Dilemma

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Assignment 1: Sartre’s Apparent Dilemma

Directions: Carefully read the passage below. Then respond to the prompt at the bottom of the page.

The French Existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) tells a personal story in his essay “Existentialism.” During World War II, one of his students approached him for advice:

[The student’s] father was on bad terms with his mother... and was inclined to be a collaborationist [a French citizen working for the Nazi Regime]; his older brother had been killed in the German offensive of 1940, and the young man...wanted to avenge him. His mother lived alone with him, very much upset by the half-treason of her husband and the death of her older son; the boy was her only consolation. The boy was faced with the choice of leaving for England and joining the Free French Forces—that is, leaving his mother behind – or remaining with his mother and helping her carry on. He was fully aware that the woman lived only for him and that his going-off – and perhaps death – would plunge her into despair. He was also aware that every act he did for his mother’s sake was a sure thing, in the sense that it was helping her to carry on, whereas every effort he made toward going off and fighting was an uncertain move which might run aground and prove completely useless; for example, on his way to England he might, while passing through Spain, be detained indefinitely in a Spanish camp; he might reach England or Algiers and be stuck in an office at a desk job.¹

Prompt: What advice would you give the young man? Advice can be anything that helps him make his decision, even questions. If you do favor one choice over the other, explain your own reasoning in as much detail as possible. Use the space below to brainstorm ideas, and then write your response on the paper provided.