Ethics & Behavior
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t782890670

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Online publication date: 08 January 2010

To cite this Article Birch, Mary , Elliott, Deni andTrankel, Mary A.(1999) 'Black and White and Shades of Gray: A Portrait of the Ethical Professor', Ethics & Behavior, 9: 3, 243 — 261
To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1207/s15327019eb0903_5
URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s15327019eb0903_5

ETHICS & BEHAVIOR, 9(3), 243–261

Black and White and Shades of Gray: A Portrait of the Ethical Professor

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A survey of University of Montana faculty ($N = 147$; 50 women, 97 men) was conducted in Spring 1997 to develop a snapshot of perceptions of ethical and unethical conduct on a university campus. A portrait of the ethical professor was developed by analysis of percentage ratings of 64 items. Chi-square tests were used to distinguish gender differences and differences between faculty members who identified ethics as a teaching area versus those who did not. Respondents agreed on basic characteristics of the ethical professor as one who exhibits equity and fairness, does not ignore evidence of cheating, and does not misuse power. Professors who identified themselves as teaching an ethics course differed significantly from the rest of the professor sample on 7 of the 64 survey items. Female professors differed significantly from male professors on 3 items.

Key words: ethics, professors, students, higher education, boundaries, dual relationships

Increased public interest in ethics and concerns about malpractice litigation have prompted professional organizations from a cross-spectrum of professions to in-

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vest considerable time and energy clarifying ethical expectations for practitioners. Attempts to define ethical obligations for members of the academy were at the core of a debate on the development of an ethical code for academics that appeared in a special issue of the *Journal of Higher Education* (Callahan, 1982; Robertson & Grant, 1982; Schurr, 1982; Souvin, 1982). However, to date there are neither ethical codes for academics nor universal standards for conduct. Although assumptions are made about the ethics of higher education professionals, or the lack thereof, little information exists regarding what professors in individual institutions or across the profession perceive as the ethical issues or expectations for their profession.

In this article, we present the results of a survey distributed to faculty at the University of Montana (UM) in the Spring semester of 1997. Through this survey we attempted to identify respondents' perceptions of the components of ethical and nonethical behaviors for faculty. The survey was based in part on a survey developed and distributed to psychologists teaching in academic institutions (Tabachnick, Keith-Spiegel, & Pope, 1991).

ETHICS IN THE CONTEXT OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Some scholars have viewed the ethical integrity of university professors with skepticism. Indeed, there is an assumption from within and outside of higher education that "both the university and its faculty members fail in their own lives, to serve as exemplars of decent moral behavior" (Callahan, 1982, p. 336). The criticism can be severe:

> Some of these intellectual priests are what we think they are—men and women of integrity, brilliant scholars with a passion for truth, conscientious teachers who love their craft. But today many of these academic intellectuals have betrayed their profession. They have scorn for their students and they disdain teaching. They represent their research and writing as important and relevant when much of it is not. Some have a passion for radical politics that transcends all else, and a few even have little regard for the truth. (Anderson, 1992, p. 10)

Institutions of higher education are particularly complicated settings for development of standardized expectations for conduct, and such attempts to standardize expectations may encounter strong resistance. These institutions are complex and diverse in their expectations for work. The expected output of a biology professor is different in important ways from that of a drama professor. In addition, "Academic departments and schools often have great autonomy. ... Faculty may have tenure, which limits normal administrative discretion. ... Universities are peer regulated, resembling legislatures more than bureaucracies. ... [and] Standards of ethical conduct may vary somewhat across disciplines" (Whicker & Kronenfeld, 1994, pp. 7, 8).

One description of general expectations of ethical behavior for academics can be found in the "Statement of Professional Ethics" that The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) offers for its membership. However, this document is not widely acknowledged, and it is not binding on members of the academy. Furthermore, this document shifts responsibility for the task of identifying and enforcing ethical standards to "the individual institutions of higher education," stating that these institutions must provide this assurance (the integrity of members) "and so should normally handle questions concerning propriety of conduct" (AAUP, 1987, p. 49). Written expectations of ethical propriety for individual institutions are most often found in negotiated contractual agreements, and these may vary considerably from institution to institution.

AREAS OF CONCERN

The following critical issues are generally perceived as central to ethics debates within the academic world: dual relationships with students and boundary issues between teachers and students (Blevins-Knabe, 1992; Callahan, 1982; Kagle & Giebelhausen, 1994); irresponsible and careless teaching (Callahan, 1982; Kerr, 1994; Markie, 1994); unfair tenure practices (Callahan, 1982); political and social pressures toward faculty with deviant views (Callahan, 1982); lack of civility (Callahan, 1982; Schrag, 1997); indoctrination (Callahan, 1982; Kerr, 1994); toleration of cheating and plagiarism (Callahan, 1982; Hoekema, 1994); exploitation of younger, untenured faculty (Callahan, 1982); self-interest (Callahan, 1982; Kerr, 1994); and failure of faculty to have a sense of obligation to the institution or to the larger society (Callahan, 1982; Kerr, 1994).

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO QUANTIFY PERCEPTIONS

In the late 1980s, Tabachnick et al. (1991) compared the behaviors and ethical beliefs of teaching psychologists with those of clinical psychologists. These researchers collected survey data from 482 psychologists teaching in institutions of higher education. Participants were asked to indicate the degree to which they engaged in each of 63 behaviors and also to judge the ethical aspect of each of those behaviors. Behaviors included "course content, evaluation of students, educational environment, disrespectful behavior, research and publication issues, financial and material transactions, social relationships with students, and sexual relationships with students and other faculty" (Tabachnick et al., 1991, p. 506).

As a follow-up, Tabachnick et al. (1991) then conducted a survey of college-level students' perceptions. They surveyed 482 students from large universities, asking them to rate the ethical acceptability of 107 acts in which professors might engage. Virtually no difference was found between Midwest and West Coast students, between freshmen and upper classmen, or between male and fe-

male students. Findings also suggested students and professors are generally similar in their views of what constitutes ethical and unethical conduct for professors (Keith-Spiegel, Tabachnick, & Allen, 1993). Authors in both articles noted a lack of baseline data and empirical studies available to help define and clarify a code of conduct for teaching professors.

UM SURVEY OF ETHICS

The survey described in this article represents an attempt to identify expectations of ethical behavior shared by members of a single institution from a variety of teaching disciplines. From these expectations we developed a portrait of an ethical professor. In reviewing items to include in the survey instrument, we considered specific behaviors delineated in the AAUP "Statement on Professional Ethics," as well as the collective bargaining agreement (contract) ratified by faculty at UM. The section of that contract entitled "Academic Responsibility" provided the backdrop for development of some of the items included in the survey form developed for this study.

UM is somewhat unique in that it has required, for the past 15 years, that all undergraduates take at least one course in ethics. This university offers 42 different ethics courses, and more than 50 professors from varied disciplines identify themselves as teachers of an ethics course. For purposes of this study, we asked respondents to indicate whether they were teaching an ethics course that specifically met the criteria for inclusion in the university's general education ethics requirement. We explored whether the attitudes presented by ethics professors would differ significantly from that presented by other professors.

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

UM is located in Missoula, which is the third largest community in Montana, and has an estimated population of 51,204. The state has a relatively small population base (878,810) in comparison to other states, but it covers a relatively large geographic area of 145,556 square miles (Census and Economic Information Center, Montana Department of Commerce, 1990). The university's primary focus is undergraduate liberal arts and science programs, with seven schools training students for professions in journalism, law, business, forestry, education, pharmacy, and the fine arts. In addition, UM's College of Technology offers courses in 25 programs.

Since its founding in 1893, UM has prided itself on providing a high-quality, well-rounded education. Graduates have included seven Pulitzer Prize winners, 28 Rhodes Scholars, and 31 International Fulbright Scholars (University of Montana, 1998). These academic achievements rank the university 17th in the nation and 5th among public universities.

As of Fall 1998, the student population was 12,124 (University of Montana, 1998). UM has an increasingly diverse population, which in the previous year included nearly 286 foreign students representing 52 countries around the globe (information obtained from UM web site). The main minority groups in the student population include African American, Asian and Pacific Islanders, Hispanics, and Native Americans. The proportion of these minority groups are approximately the same in both the professor and student populations (6% and 5.7%, respectively) at the university (University of Montana Payroll/Personnel Database for Permanent Nonstudent Employees, 1997; University of Montana Registrar's Report, 1998). These percentages are slightly smaller than those of minorities within the general population of Montana (8.8%; Census and Economic Information Center, Montana Department of Commerce, 1990). The proportion of female students is higher than the proportion of female professors: 52% female student population versus 34.5% tenure and nontenure women faculty (University of Montana Registrar's Report; University of Montana Payroll/Personnel Database for Permanent Employees).

METHOD

A survey questionnaire was sent to all UM faculty who were identified as full-time tenured teaching faculty as of the Spring semester of 1997 (N = 336). Respondents in this survey were asked to rate 64 behaviors in terms of perceived ethical appropriateness. The 5-point rating scale ranged from 1 (*unquestionably not ethical*) to 5 (*unquestionably ethical*). The last item on the survey asked, "Do you have any other comments to offer with regard to ethical behaviors of professors?" Respondents were also requested to indicate their sex and whether they taught an ethics course.

Several items on this survey were adapted from the survey of teaching psychologists identified earlier. Twenty-seven of the items in the UM survey were essentially the same as those in the original survey, with some minor wording changes. Five additional items were modified more extensively but focused on the same ethical concerns. The remaining 32 items were developed from a review of other ethics surveys, from discussions with faculty and students, and from participant discussions at a seminar on "Ethics in the Academy" offered at the 1996 Association for Practical and Professional Ethics (APPE) Summer Ethics Workshop.

LIMITATIONS

Survey results must be viewed with care. The concern most frequently expressed by respondents, and the most serious limitation of this research, is the lack of context for the behaviors listed in the survey. That is, several comments from respon-

dents indicated that some behaviors could be considered ethical under certain circumstances but unethical under others. To reiterate the concern expressed in the Tabachnick et al. (1991) survey, these are "simple ratings of enormously complex issues." In the words of respondents:

> A lot of these questions regarding ethics of student–professor relationships are clear cut for undergraduate students, but considerably less so when they involve graduate students, who are colleagues in training.

> I, and I assume most others, make ethical judgments about particular issues in context. That is, they are complex judgments, influenced by a series of other related ethical readings and judgments. While there are some issues that are clear cut to me and not so influenced by context (and are captured best when I answer 1 or 5), most are not. In your scale, I have no way of indicating this, except to answer number 3. And this is very unsatisfactory, because it does not mean to indicate on my part "not sure" but rather, depends.

Another concern raised by respondents was the assumption that all items listed are ethical issues. Although some respondents felt several of these behaviors were "undesirable," they did not consider all of the situations to be "ethical" dilemmas:

> I answered the questions in light of my ethical beliefs, not my view of professionalism. Some things are not professional but not necessarily ethical.

> For many if not most of these, I would not consider them ethical/moral violations, but for several reasons they are not a good idea or not socially acceptable. A clearer definition would help, e.g. whereas it is not good for a number of reasons to be out of date on research, I would not consider it unethical.

These comments suggest that the category *not sure* may rightly be interpreted as "depends on the particular circumstances of the situation" or "this behavior is not an ethical issue."

RESULTS

Surveys were returned by 154 of the 336 faculty on the mailing list (a response rate of 46%). One hundred and forty-seven provided useable data. Of these, 50 were returned by women (55% of the 91 female faculty on the mailing list) and 97 by men (39% of the 251 male faculty). Of the 33 academic units represented in the sample, at least one member of each unit responded to this survey; in 13 of the units half or more of the faculty in that unit responded.

Fifty-one (35%) of the respondents wrote comments to the narrative questions or wrote comments in the margins next to individual questions. Nineteen (13%) of all professors responding indicated that they taught an ethics course. Eight of these ethics teachers were women.

In developing this portrait of the ethical professor we combined the two ratings on either end of the scale—that is, ratings of *unquestionably not ethical* and *most likely not ethical* were combined to discuss perceptions of what the faculty perceived as *not ethical*. Similarly, *unquestionably ethical* and *most likely ethical* were combined in discussing what was perceived as *ethical* behavior. Behaviors rated "3" and behaviors not rated were combined in the "unsure" category. A high-percentage response in the extremes of the continuum constitute the "black and white" area of our portrait. Those behaviors that did not have high rating agreement at either extreme and/or higher percentage of ratings in the "unsure" category constitute the gray area of the portrait. These are the behaviors that may or may not be ethical, depending on the specifics of any given situation, or they may be considered "undesirable" but not necessarily "unethical." Table 1 shows the percentage response for each of the 5-point ratings for the 64 behaviors on the survey. Items are presented in descending order according to the percentage who rated them as unethical (i.e., the combined responses for ratings of 1 and 2). The combined percentages falling into this "unsure" category appear in the final column of Table 1.

The first column of Table 1 also contains designations for assignment of each item into overall categories of behaviors. Sixteen items on the survey ("G" designation) appear to tap faculty perceptions of behaviors related to grading and testing. Eighteen items related specifically to teaching activities are designated with a "T." The items marked "TS" for "teaching settings" were separated from the overall "T" category because responses to those behaviors were not consistent with the others in the teaching category. Relationships between students and faculty formed a third category of 18 questions designated with an "S." Activities extending beyond the immediate classroom included interactions with colleagues and responsibilities related to overall functioning of the university (eight items with a "U" designation). These latter items were derived primarily from discussions about ethics and the academy held at the 1996 APPE Summer Ethics Workshop. A final miscellaneous dimension ("M") was used to categorize a scattering of items that did not fit easily into any of the major category themes.

PORTRAIT OF THE ETHICAL PROFESSOR

In composing this portrait of the ethical professor, we identified nine behaviors that 90% or more of all faculty rated as unethical (i.e., *unquestionably not ethical* or *most likely not ethical*). Eight additional behaviors reached at least 80% agreement as being unethical. Highest on the list of these characteristics are the qualities of equity and fairness in assigning grades and applying course requirements. Equally

TABLE 1
Percentage of Professors Responding in Each Category

Category	*Question*	*Survey Items (# Indicates Original Order on Survey Form)*	*M*	*% Unethical*	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*% Unsure*
G	18	Giving lower grades to students who strongly oppose your views.	1.12	98.6	88.4	10.2	0	.7	0	.7
G*	1	Ignoring evidence of cheating.	1.21	98.0	79.6	18.4	1.4	0	0	2.1
S*	6	Telling a student, "I'm sexually attracted to you."	1.12	98.0	87.8	10.2	.7	0	0	2.1
S*	4	Becoming sexually involved with a student enrolled in one of your classes.	1.14	97.9	89.1	8.8	.7	1.4	0	.7
G*	2	Giving easy grades to avoid negative evaluations from students.	1.27	96.6	76.2	20.4	2.0	.7	0	2.7
T*	61	Teaching under the influence of alcohol or recreational drugs.	1.18	95.9	82.3	13.6	.7	0	.7	3.4
S	30	Failure to acknowledge significant student participation in research or publication.	1.24	95.3	76.2	19.1	.7	0	.7	4.1
T*	16	Teaching that certain races are intellectually inferior.	1.17	93.8	85.0	8.8	2.0	1.4	0	4.7
G	43	Lowering course demands for student athletes.	1.37	93.2	66.7	26.5	2.7	1.4	0	5.4
S*	59	Belittling students' comments in class.	1.48	89.1	60.5	28.6	5.4	1.4	.7	8.8
G*	19	Allowing a student's likeability to influence your grading.	1.61	88.4	51.0	37.4	4.8	2.0	1.4	8.2
G	36	Lowering course demands for minority students.	1.65	83.7	48.3	35.4	9.5	2.7	0	13.6
G	40	Relaxing rules (e.g., late papers, attendance) so students will like you.	1.66	83.0	49.0	34.0	10.2	2.0	.7	14.3
S*	23	Sharing with colleagues confidential disclosures told to you by a student.	1.54	82.3	60.5	21.8	10.2	2.0	.7	15.0
M	60	Using university supplies and equipment for personal use.	1.82	81.7	45.6	36.1	7.5	6.1	2.7	9.5
G	37	Lowering course demands for students who have too many work or family demands.	1.71	81.0	44.9	36.1	14.3	1.4	0	17.7
G	7	Failure to provide negative comments on a paper or exam when these comments reflect your honest assessment of the student's performance.	1.85	81.0	35.4	45.6	12.9	4.1	0	14.9
G	57	Grading on criteria not delineated in course syllabus.	1.93	78.2	33.3	44.9	11.6	5.4	1.4	15.0
T	64	Failure to keep up-to-date on recent research and scientific findings in one's field of academic/professional expertise.	1.89	78.2	34.0	44.2	11.6	4.8	.7	16.4
U*	28	Ignoring a colleague's unethical behavior.	1.88	76.8	33.3	43.5	13.6	2.0	1.4	19.7
G	63	Not providing alternative teaching and testing procedures for students who have learning disabilities.	1.90	74.1	36.7	37.4	17.7	4.8	0	21.1
S*	27	Ridiculing a student in a faculty-only discussion.	1.89	72.8	40.1	32.7	12.9	7.5	.7	19.0
U	46	Failure to challenge remarks by students or colleagues that are racist, sexist, or otherwise derogatory to particular groups of people.	2.16	67.3	23.1	44.2	19.7	6.1	2.0	24.5
T*	48	Failing to present views that differ from your own.	2.15	66.0	23.1	42.9	19.0	8.2	.7	25.1

T*	52	Criticizing all theoretical orientations except those you personally prefer.	2.18	63.9	34.0	29.9	14.3	10.2	5.4	20.4
T	54	Failure to maintain regularly scheduled office hours.	2.27	63.2	19.0	44.2	20.4	10.2	1.4	25.2
S	39	Using your role to influence students to support causes in which you have an interest.	2.14	63.2	29.9	33.3	23.1	6.1	2.7	27.9
S*	15	Reluctance to help a student file an ethics complaint against another instructor when you believe that the complaint might be justified.	2.22	61.9	26.5	35.4	27.2	3.4	4.8	29.9
T	8	Teaching a class in ethics while engaging in unethical behavior in one's personal life.	2.12	61.2	38.8	22.4	22.4	10.9	2.0	25.8
S*	22	Avoiding negatives in writing a letter of reference for a questionable student or colleague.	2.35	58.5	17.0	41.5	27.2	9.5	1.4	30.6
T	58	Differing significantly from materials or content listed in course syllabus or college catalog.	2.40	57.1	17.0	40.1	22.4	10.9	3.4	28.5
T*	14	Teaching a class without adequate preparation for the day.	2.46	56.5	17.0	39.5	24.5	11.6	4.8	27.2
G	42	Leaving graded papers and exams outside one's office in an area of public access.	2.46	56.4	26.5	29.9	20.4	8.2	11.6	23.8
TS*	62	Teaching in settings that do not accommodate students with disabilities.	2.30	55.8	23.1	32.7	23.1	9.5	2.7	31.9
G	44	Giving passing grades to students who could not pass tests, but who put forth considerable effort to meet course standards.	2.31	54.5	25.2	29.3	27.2	12.9	.7	32.0
S	34	Discussing your personal problems with a student.	2.36	53.0	19.0	34.0	33.3	4.8	3.4	38.7
U	13	Avoidance of departmental/university committees and associated responsibilities.	2.55	51.0	19.0	32.0	24.5	13.6	6.8	28.6
G	55	Returning graded papers without comments.	2.59	49.0	14.3	34.7	25.9	16.3	4.1	30.7
M	26	Giving priority to one's research interests over the students' educational experience.	2.66	47.0	14.3	32.7	22.4	19.7	4.8	28.5
M*	3	Selling unwanted complimentary texts to used book buyers.	2.70	46.9	19.7	27.2	25.2	14.3	11.6	27.2
S*	21	Allowing students to withdraw from or drop a class when they are technically not eligible to do so.	2.54	45.6	14.3	31.3	34.0	13.6	1.4	39.4
U	51	Failure to maintain a collegial atmosphere among faculty, students, and other members of the university community.	2.67	44.9	10.2	34.7	32.0	10.2	6.8	38.1
G*	49	Grading on a strict curve regardless of class performance level.	2.70	42.9	13.6	29.3	30.6	12.9	7.5	36.7
U	38	Unwillingness to engage in discussions with colleagues with whom you disagree over issues of departmental or university policy.	2.68	41.5	16.3	25.2	33.3	12.2	7.5	38.7
S*	29	Becoming sexually involved with a student only after the course is completed and the grades filed.	2.66	41.4	22.4	19.0	30.6	15.0	8.2	35.4
M*	45	Using school resources to create a "popular" trade book.	2.69	40.1	20.4	19.7	26.5	19.7	6.1	34.0
M*	47	Giving academic credit instead of salary for student assistants.	2.81	36.7	15.6	21.1	31.3	18.4	8.2	36.7

(*Continued*)

TABLE 1 (*Continued*)

Category	*Question*	*Survey Items (# Indicates Original Order on Survey Form)*	*M*	*% Unethical*	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*% Unsure*
TS*	17	Teaching in classes so crowded your ability to teach effectively is impaired.	2.77	36.1	11.6	24.5	36.7	15.0	5.4	43.5
U	20	Failure to support (teach in accordance with) the stated educational mission of the university.	2.74	33.3	8.8	24.5	38.8	15.0	2.0	49.7
U	56	Failure to publicly voice concerns over university policies or procedures about which you disagree.	3.04	29.2	5.4	23.8	39.5	13.6	12.2	44.9
S	41	Going to a bar with students after class.	3.09	27.2	12.9	14.3	28.6	27.2	10.9	34.7
T*	11	Teaching material that you had not yet mastered.	3.15	27.2	8.2	19.0	27.9	27.2	10.9	34.7
S*	10	Selling goods—your car, insurance, books—to one of your students.	3.19	24.4	8.8	15.6	30.6	29.9	10.9	34.7
S*	5	Hugging students.	3.14	24.4	8.8	15.6	36.1	23.8	11.6	40.2
G	35	Giving the same test you used in previous semesters.	3.30	23.8	5.4	18.4	28.6	25.9	15.6	34.7
T*	25	Using same lecture notes from last term without updating them.	3.41	19.7	5.4	14.3	25.9	28.6	17.0	34.7
TS*	24	Teaching in a setting lacking in racial/ethnic/gender diversity among the faculty.	3.59	17.6	2.0	15.6	27.9	19.0	27.2	36.1
S	33	Beginning an ongoing friendship with a student who is enrolled in your class.	3.64	15.6	2.0	13.6	23.8	33.3	22.4	28.6
T*	12	Teaching that homosexuality per se is an acceptable alternative lifestyle.	3.84	12.9	7.5	5.4	19.0	26.5	37.4	23.1
S	31	Hiring a student to work for you—babysit, paint your house, type something.	3.74	10.9	6.1	4.8	24.5	31.3	27.9	29.9
S*	9	Accepting a student's invitation to a party.	3.70	10.2	4.1	6.1	26.5	36.7	22.4	30.6
M	32	Encouraging the elimination of programs that cannot be maintained at an appropriate level of excellence or that lack financial resources.	3.67	9.5	2.0	7.5	32.0	30.6	21.8	38.1
M	50	Accepting payment for speeches/consultant work while contracted full-time with the university.	3.98	8.2	3.4	4.8	17.0	35.4	34.7	21.8
T*	53	Encouraging competition among students.	3.84	8.2	1.4	6.8	25.2	33.3	27.9	30.6

Note. $N = 147$. Items appear in descending order by percentage who rated the behavior as Unethical. % Unethical = percentages answering 1 and 2; % Unsure = percentages answering 3 or leaving item blank (not rated); 1 = *Unquestionably not ethical*; 2 = *Most likely not ethical*; 3 = *Not sure*; 4 = *Most likely ethical*; 5 = *Unquestionably ethical*. * = Items on 1991 study; G = Grading and Testing; S = Student–Faculty Relationships; T = Teaching Activities; M = Miscellaneous; U = University Responsibility; TS = Teaching Settings.

important is the need to maintain clear boundaries in sexual relationships with students while they are in the professor's class.

The portrait that emerges is of a faculty member who does not do any of the following: punish students by assigning lower grades to those who hold views opposing their own, ignore evidence of cheating, give easy grades as a way of avoiding negative student evaluations, or relax rules to gain student approval. The ethical professor does not lower demands for student athletes, minority students, or students who have too many work or family demands. Objectivity is required in grading, and likability cannot influence the grading procedure. In addition, the ethical professor does not compromise objectivity by failing to provide negative comments on papers or exams when these comments reflect an honest assessment of the student's performance.

When students make important contributions to faculty research and publications, the ethical faculty member acknowledges such contributions. Professors show respect for students by not belittling their comments in class and by maintaining confidences that students disclose to faculty. The ethical professor does not compromise the quality of the students' educational experience by teaching under the influence of alcohol or recreational drugs or by presenting course material that portrays certain races as intellectually inferior. This professor also demonstrates ethical integrity by using university supplies and equipment for professional tasks only.

The ethical professor maintains clear sexual boundaries with students. He or she does not become sexually involved with students and does not tell students that he or she is sexually attracted to them. Although ethical sexual boundaries are well-defined for students in the professor's classes, these boundaries become less distinct once the student is no longer attending the professor's class.

The aforementioned features of our portrait were constructed from ratings of strong agreement among four fifths of faculty respondents. There were six additional behaviors on which at least two thirds of all faculty agreed were ethically inappropriate. In this extended picture, which begins to enter the "gray zone," the ethical professor is expected to: grade on the criteria delineated in the course syllabus, provide alternative teaching and testing procedures for students with learning disabilities, and keep up-to-date on recent research and scientific findings in his or her field of expertise. Respect for the student now extends to avoiding ridicule of students within faculty-only discussions. Two university-related items also fell into this slightly gray picture. The ethical professor does not ignore colleagues' unethical behavior and does challenge derogatory remarks made by students or colleagues.

MEN VERSUS WOMEN AND ETHICS VERSUS NON-ETHICS FACULTY

In composing this portrait of the ethical professor, we looked for differences in responses given by two groups of faculty members: men versus women and professors

who teach an ethics course versus professors who do not. For the most part, male and female faculty and ethics and non-ethics faculty were in strong agreement about what constituted the portrait of an ethical professor. Only three items revealed a statistically significant difference in the responses given by male and female participants (Items 13, 20, and 37 in Table 1). Male professors were more likely than female professors to view avoidance of departmental or university committees as ethical, and females were more likely than males to be uncertain about this behavior ($p < .05$, $df = 4$). Female professors expressed stronger views that lowering course demands for students who have too many work or family demands was unethical ($p < .05$, $df = 3$). Whereas both females and males expressed high uncertainty (56% and 46.4%, respectively) about the failure to support the educational mission of the university, males were more widely dispersed in their responses and more likely to see this behavior as ethical ($p < .05$, $df = 4$). The questions for which there was a statistically significant difference between male and female UM professors appear on Table 2.

We also examined potential differences between professors who teach ethics courses and those who do not. Several items revealed a statistically significant difference between these two groups of professors, but these findings must be considered tentative in light of the low number of ethics professors in our study ($N = 19$).[1] There was a statistically significant difference between professors teaching ethics

TABLE 2
Chi-Squares and Percentages of Professors at the University of Montana
(Female Professors vs. Male Professors)

Question	*Chi-Square*	*p*	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*% Unsure*
13 Avoidance of departmental/university committees and associated responsibilities.	9.88	.043*	18.0	30.0	34.0	8.0	0	44.0
			19.6	*33.0*	*19.6*	*16.5*	*10.3*	*20.6*
20 Failure to support (teach in accordance with) the stated educational mission of the university.	10.75	.03*	0	32.0	42.0	12.0	0	56.0
			13.4	*20.6*	*37.1*	*16.5*	*3.1*	*46.4*
37 Lowering course demands for students who have too many work or family demands.	8.98	.03*	58.0	28.0	6.0	0	0	14.0
			38.1	*40.2*	*18.6*	*2.1*	*0*	*19.6*

Note. N (female professors) = 50; N (male professors) = 97. 1 = *Unquestionably not ethical*; 2 = *Most likely not ethical*; 3 = Not sure; 4 = *Most likely ethical*; 5 = *Unquestionably ethical*. Female percentages provided in top row for each category; male percentages provided (in italic) in bottom row.

*$p < .05$.

[1]Prior to performing the chi-square analysis between ethics and non-ethics professors, responses were recoded into three categories to avoid having too many cells with expected values less than 5. In keeping with the manner in which the portrait of the ethical professor was created, responses were recoded as follows: *unquestionably not ethical* and *most likely not ethical* were coded as 1; *not sure* and blank responses were coded as 2; *unquestionably ethical* and *most likely ethical* were coded as 3.

and those not teaching ethics for the items that appear in Table 3. Professors who teach ethics were more likely to view the following as unethical: accepting a student's invitation to a party ($p < .05$, $df = 4$), avoiding department/university committees and associated responsibilities ($p < .01$, $df = 4$), and teaching in a setting lacking in diversity among the faculty ($p < .01$, $df = 4$). Ethics professors also were more likely to view three additional behaviors as unethical, and the professors not teaching ethics were more likely to be unsure about the same behaviors. These were: unwillingness to engage in discussions with colleagues with whom they disagree ($p < .05$, $df = 4$), failing to maintain a collegial atmosphere ($p < .05$, $df = 4$), and failing to publically voice concerns over university policies and procedures ($p < .05$, $df = 4$). There were two items that professors *not* teaching ethics were more likely to view as unethical and ethics professors were more likely to be unsure. These were lowering course demands for minority students ($p < .01$, $df = 3$) and lowering course demands for students who have too many work and family responsibilities. This last item approached statistical significance at $p < .06$, $df = 3$. Both of these latter findings must be viewed as preliminary, however, because each analysis contained three cells with expected values less than 5. The questions for which there was a statistically significant difference between professors teaching ethics and those not teaching ethics appear on Table 3.

DISCUSSION

The portrait of the ethical professor that emerges from the ratings of UM faculty raises questions around several areas of academic responsibility: fairness in grading, relationships between faculty and students, and university responsibilities. Ethical obligations in maintaining objectivity and fairness in grading are strongly reinforced in these survey results. The UM contract states, "the faculty member will carefully ensure equal application of class standards and requirements" (p. 14). However, these findings indicate that there may be circumstances under which this obligation may vary, such as showing leniency toward students who "work hard for their grades." This leniency is apparent in the fact that only about half of the respondents (54.5%) rated as unethical "giving passing grades to students who could not pass tests, but who put forth considerable effort to meet course demands." One respondent described circumstances under which such action might be considered ethical: "if the nature of the exam is part of the problem, if extra work is submitted, and if the student otherwise demonstrates competence." Lowering course standards for other reasons was considerably less acceptable, as indicated by higher "unethical" ratings for making concessions to athletes (93%), minorities (84%), or students having too many work or family demands (81%).

Faculty are clear about the appropriate sexual boundaries with students enrolled in classes. However, these strong ethical boundaries apparently do not carry over

TABLE 3
Chi-Squares and Percentages of Professors at the University of Montana (Teaching Ethics vs. Not Teaching Ethics)

Question	*Chi-Square*	*p*	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*% Unsure*
9 Accepting a student's invitation to a party.	11.31	.023*	10.5	5.3	15.8	57.9	0	26.3
			3.1	*6.3*	*28.1*	*33.6*	*25.8*	*31.2*
13 Avoidance of departmental/university committees and associated responsibilities.	13.20	.01**	5.3	63.2	15.8	0	5.3	26.3
			21.1	*27.3*	*25.8*	*15.6*	*7.0*	*28.9*
24 Teaching in a setting lacking in racial/ethnic/gender diversity among the faculty.	14.11	.007**	10.5	26.3	10.5	10.5	21.1	31.6
			.8	*14.1*	*30.5*	*20.3*	*28.1*	*36.8*
36 Lowering course demands for minority students.	13.31	.004**	42.1	21.1	31.6	0	0	36.9
			49.2	*37.5*	*6.3*	*3.1*	*0*	*10.2*
37 Lowering course demands for students who have too many work or family demands.	7.50	.058	47.4	15.8	31.6	0	0	36.9
			44.5	*39.1*	*11.7*	*1.6*	*0*	*14.8*
38 Unwillingness to engage in discussions with colleagues with whom you disagree over issues of departmental or university policy.	10.05	.04*	31.6	36.8	5.3	10.5	5.3	15.8
			14.1	*23.4*	*37.5*	*12.5*	*7.8*	*42.2*
51 Failure to maintain a collegial atmosphere among faculty, students, and other members of the university community.	10.41	.034*	21.1	52.6	15.8	0	0	26.3
			8.6	*32.0*	*34.4*	*11.7*	*7.8*	*39.9*
56 Failure to publicly voice concerns over university policies or procedures about which you disagree.	12.63	.013**	15.8	42.1	26.3	5.3	0	36.8
			3.9	*21.1*	*41.4*	*14.8*	*14.1*	*46.1*

Note. *N* (professors teaching ethics) = 19; *N* (professors not teaching ethics) = 128. 1 = *Unquestionably not ethical*; 2 = *Most likely not ethical*; 3 = *Not sure*; 4 = *Most likely ethical*; 5 = *Unquestionably ethical*. Teachers of ethics percentages provided in top row for each category; professors not teaching ethics percentages provided (in italic) in bottom row.

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

once students have completed the course. Fewer than half of the faculty (41%) rated as unethical the act of becoming sexually involved with a student after the course is completed, and nearly one fourth (23%) of all professors rated it as ethical.

The UM contract provides sanctions for sexual harassment and states that faculty must maintain "a responsible, professional relationship with students" (p. 14). There are, however, few guidelines in the contract as to what constitutes a responsible, professional relationship. Reaching consensus with regard to specific behaviors will likely be a difficult task, because disagreement was evident with regard to the desirability and ethical appropriateness of such out-of-classroom relationships. The results of this survey demonstrate that although there are aspects of student–faculty relationships that are clearly defined ethically (black and white), there are several others that remain ambiguous (gray; see "S" category items in Table 1). Of the 18 items in this category, five were rated as "unethical" by 80% or more of the faculty. Ratings for the remaining items reflected considerable uncertainty. For example, fewer than 41% could agree that the following behaviors are either ethical or unethical: *going to a bar with students* (27% unethical, 35% unsure, 38% ethical), *selling goods to students* (24% unethical, 35% unsure, 41% ethical), and *hugging students* (24% unethical, 40% unsure, 35% ethical).

The appropriateness of informal interactions between students and faculty raises troubling concerns about managing dual relationships and maintaining objectivity in grading. After reviewing 20 years of research summarized in the book, *How College Affects Students*, Pascarella and Terenizini (1991) pointed out that "there is considerable evidence that the impact on students of faculty norms, values, and attitudes, as well as faculty members' impact as role models, is enhanced when student–faculty interactions extend beyond the formal classroom setting" (p. 393). This research reinforces the perception that such relationships outside the classroom should be ethically permitted, and even encouraged, because they may contribute positively to the students' educational experience.

In contrast, Markie (1994), in his discussion of *A Professor's Duties*, stated that we must not be friends with our students because such friendships conflict with our ethical obligations as professors:

> We are fundamentally obligated to give all students equal consideration in instruction, advising, and evaluation. We may treat students differently only when a relevant difference justifies doing so, and the only relevant differences are those directly related to guiding each student to knowledge. Any friendships we establish with students are likely to prevent us from honoring this obligation. ... In cases of uncertainty and high risk, the best strategy is often the most conservative: forgo the social relationship and ensure the professional obligations are honored. (pp. 70, 71, 74)

Whereas 88% of the faculty in our study agreed that it is ethically prohibited to allow a student's likability to influence grading, personal relationships with students in different nonsexual capacities were frequently rated as ethically permissi-

ble. For example, 56% of the faculty rated *beginning an ongoing friendship with a student enrolled in your class* as ethical. Markie suggests, when a professor develops an ongoing friendship with a student while in class, he or she may be hard pressed not to allow this relationship to affect grading.

Finally, the category of behaviors producing the greatest ethical uncertainty concerned professors' responsibilities to the university community. This gray area of the portrait contained the highest percentage of unsure responses and is particularly evident in the ratings for Item 20: *failure to support (teach in accordance with) the educational mission of the university.* Half of all respondents were not sure about this behavior, and only one third rated it as unethical. Several faculty commented on this item, with such statements as "What is the mission, anyway?" suggesting that "not sure" may reflect uncertainty about the mission itself as well as about one's ethical responsibility to implement it. Similarly, 45% of the faculty indicated uncertainty about the ethical nature of *publicly voicing concerns over university policies or procedures about which they disagree.*

We noted deviation from the university contract on another issue. The UM contract states that "each faculty member has obligations and responsibilities to assist in the proper administration of university affairs" and "will serve on committees" (p. 14). Whereas half of our respondents rated *avoidance of committee responsibilities* as unethical (51%), the remaining respondents were split between being unsure and perceiving this as ethical behavior. Similarly, nearly half of all professors rated *failure to maintain collegiality* as unethical (45%), but over one third remained unsure (38%). The "Statement on Professional Ethics" (AAUP, 1987) addresses this area of concern by stating:

> As colleagues, professors have obligations that derive from common membership in the community of scholars. Professors do not discriminate against or harass colleagues. They respect and defend the free inquiry of associates. In the exchange of criticism and ideas professors show due respect for the opinion of others. (p. 49)

As noted earlier, it was on this item that ethics professors and non-ethics professors expressed a statistically significant difference, with ethics professors being more likely to rate failure to maintain collegiality as unethical. A treatise on "Civility in the Academy" written by Brian Schrag (1997), president of the Association for Practical and Professional Ethics, provided insight into the importance placed on this behavior by ethics professors. Schrag described civility (which shares qualities with collegiality) as "an attitude of mutual goodwill toward all others in the community, a disposition to act on that goodwill, and a presumption of mutual trust extended to all members of the community" (p. 3). He maintained that

> civility, properly understood, is and ought to be a core value of the academy ... in the pursuit of truth, for teaching and creating a proper learning environment and for the proper discharge of faculty governance responsibilities. Consequently, it is misguided to think that the notion of freedom of thought and expression, so appropriately

> guarded on campuses, justifies the assumption that we are free to say or do anything in any manner we choose. Freedom of thought and expression does not justify freedom from civility on campus. Faculty who engage in acts of incivility or maintain a practice of incivility are parasitic on the academic community. (p. 2)

We agree with Schrag in believing that the exercise of collegiality and civility are among the more important features in the portrait we seek to construct of the ethical professor.

CONCLUSIONS

Equity and fairness in applying course requirements and in assigning grades is essential for maintaining ethical integrity in academia, according to the respondents in this survey. Similarly, clear and irrefutable boundaries prohibiting sexual conduct with students enrolled in classes are required of the ethical professor.

However, faculty are far less certain about other areas of ethical behavior in academia. Considerable disagreement and uncertainty is evident in expectations concerning nonsexual relationships with students. This lack of clarity about the ethical appropriateness of dual relationships with students, such as developing friendships, may threaten the clearly agreed on ethical mandate of equity and fairness in treatment of all students.

Ethical responsibilities concerning involvement in the university community is a second area of considerable uncertainty. Professors who teach ethics courses are, however, significantly more likely than those who do not teach ethics to view these activities as part of their ethical responsibility. Willingness to engage in discussions with colleagues with whom the professor disagrees, publicly voicing concerns over problematic university policies, maintaining collegiality among members of the university community, and participating in committee responsibility were viewed by the ethics faculty as part of their ethical responsibilities.

As with other studies that have attempted to identify professional understanding about ethical behavior, this survey highlights areas of professional agreement and disagreement and raises more questions than it answers. Two areas worthy of additional study identified by this survey are: clarification of the ethical expectations concerning faculty–student relationships outside the classroom, and clarification of ethical expectations that define and guide interaction among faculty colleagues and the university community as a whole. Furthermore, this study did not address some of the newer areas that may become concerns of the future—for example, reliance on electronic distance learning, use of part-time faculty, and efforts to diversify the student and faculty population along different lines.

The question remains of how easily these findings can be generalized. Although it is the largest educational institution in the state, UM is a comparatively

small school in a predominantly rural state. Faculty in larger urban schools with greater racial and ethnic diversity may perceive their ethical responsibilities differently. At present, ethical literacy is on the rise for faculty and students in colleges and universities of all sizes and styles. As the national public discussion focuses more directly on questions of ethics in public and private life, faculty and students everywhere cannot help but be drawn into consideration of ethical responsibilities and expectations. Clarification of faculty ethical responsibilities appears inevitable, even ethically required, regardless of the size, location, or diversity of the educational institution.

Such attempts to clarify areas of ethical uncertainty may ultimately lead to debates about the desirability and the potential content of a Code of Ethics for academia. Indeed, a few potential respondents refused to fill out our survey because they feared such an inevitability. Their written comments suggested that professors should be left alone to determine their own personal code of ethical behaviors, just as they are free to determine class content and mode of presentation. However, we maintain that discussions of ethical responsibility in academia will clarify and energize what faculty believe is essential in maintaining educational institutions of high integrity worthy of public support, and these discussions and further research ought to be pursued.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Chuck Harris, Network Administrator for the University of Montana Social Science Research Laboratory, for his assistance with part of the analysis of data gathered from this survey, and Anna Rolando for her assistance in editing the article.

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