Report on UM Ethics Survey

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Executive Summary

While the first version of a proposed ethics creed was received quite negatively, the majority of the 37 respondents to the second version of the proposed creed responded favorably to the idea of having an ethics creed and/or the specific proposed creed when the revised document was released. This contrasted with the responses to the original, more detailed and behavioral, version. The generalizability and representativeness of this document's conclusions are limited by the small number of respondents (37 and 51) in relation to the size of the University community.

Introduction

On February 22, 2007 President Dennison proposed a University Ethics Policy. On August 21, 2007 a survey was posted in order to obtain views of the proposal from University of Montana faculty and staff. There was also discussion of this original proposal in the *Kaimin*. The initial policy was based on a document from the University of South California, and presented a fairly detailed set of rules of behavior. Subsequently, a consultant visited UM, and a second code was proposed, based on the University of South Carolina's "Carolinian Creed." When this changed policy was proposed, it was also posted on line, and responses to the revised document began on November 13, 2007. Both the original and revised documents are below:

Ethical Creed:
The University of Montana (Original)

Ethical behavior requires that we conduct our affairs in an open and honest manner and respect the rights and dignity of all. Faculty, staff, administrators, and students have responsibility for themselves and for the University as an ethical institution. In this regard, we consider the fundamental relationships in a university, those involving students with faculty, staff, and administrators, as deserving of special care.

- We respect the commitments of the Mission Statement.
- We identify and disclose all potential conflicts of interest and take appropriate action to prevent any compromise of individual or institutional integrity.
- We treat everyone with respect and dignity, even when the values, beliefs, behavior, or background of a person or group offend us.
- We speak out against hatred and bigotry whenever we observe their occurrence.
- We do not harass, mistreat, belittle, harm, or take unfair advantage of anyone.
- We do not tolerate plagiarism, lying, deliberate misrepresentation, theft, scientific fraud, cheating, invidious discrimination, or abuse of others.

- We do not misappropriate the University's resources or resources belonging to others, nor do we permit any misappropriation to go unchallenged.
- We understand that legal behavior differs from ethical behavior, and we respect legal requirements even as we attend to ethical considerations.

Because of the special ties that link us together, we have a social obligation to each other and to the public. By respecting the rights and dignity of others, and by striving for fairness and honesty in our dealings, we maintain an ethical University.

References: University Policy Number 101.4; University Policy Number 406.2 (MCA2-2-201, 2-2-202, 2-2-304, MUS).

Ethical Principals of the University of Montana (Revised)

The University of Montana commits to pursue personal and academic excellence.

All members of the University of Montana commit to:
- personal and academic integrity;
- respect for all persons;
- respect the rights and property of others;
- discouraging bigotry, while striving to learn from differences among people, ideas, and opinions;
- concern for others, and support the achievement of their full potential;
- value the natural environment, and strive to live in sustainable ways.

This report discusses survey responses to both documents. However, responses to

the specifics of the second, more current document are the more important ones.

Respondents' general comments regarding the role and scope of ethics codes are useful

regardless of which version is being discussed.

Survey Methods

As noted, each document was posted on-line, and responses were invited from the

University Community. Carol Buerman summarized this process as follows: "The

University Community was invited to participate in the Ethics discussion through

multiple opportunities that included an online web survey tool seeking individual input.

The survey was posted to each of the three senate web pages and was available for input over the course of several months. Participation was solicited through several Kaimin newspaper articles and by the ASUM, Faculty, and Staff senates via email. All senators were asked to communicate to their constituents the purpose of the survey and invite participation."

After accessing the survey on-line, participants could view the proposed document and responded to the following questions:

1. Please provide your general comments regarding the Ethics topic.
2. Please comment on the values that should be expressed in this proposed document.
3. Please comment on how these values should be articulated.
4. Please comment on how the statement document should be used.

Respondents had the option of remaining anonymous or providing name and other information.

Surveys were compiled and divided by dates, and information on each version of the ethics document is reported separately here. There were 51 completed surveys prior to November 13, 2007 (the date when survey responses began for the revised code), and 37 completed surveys on and/or after November 13, 2007. Each individual's response was read and categorized into one of three categories: Positive, Negative, Neutral/Unclear. In addition, general themes from responses were identified and are included in this report.

Results

Pre 11-13-2007 surveys

Of the 51 responses to the revised code, 25 had negative responses to the proposed code, 18 had positive responses, and 8 were either unsure, unclear, or did not provide enough information. Surveys came from one staff member , faculty, a few administrators, and two students (classified as "Other" here). Diverse units across campus were represented, but there were not sufficient numbers in any one discipline, for example, to allow analyses across units or fields.

Category	Frequency	Percent
Faculty	40	78.4
Other or unspecified	10	19.6
Staff	1	2.0
Total	51	100.0

Particiapant Distribution

Early Surveys

STATUS1
Faculty
Other
Staff
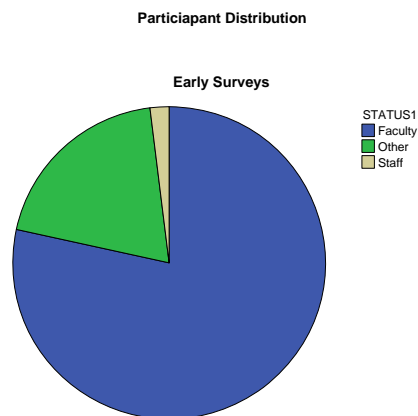
Overall Impressions regarding the code

As noted, twenty-five of the 51 collected surveys were classified as

"negative." It is worthwhile to examine the qualitative comments the participants made; however, because of the relatively small number of respondents, these are useful for understanding the <u>range</u> of people's opinions, not the numerical frequency or strength of a particular comment or opinion. Several of these participants suggested that the proposed code was a "worthless enterprise," "pointless," "unnecessary," "divisive," and even "dangerous." Some of the respondents were opposed to the very idea of having a codified or explicit (not implicit) written ethics creed, as well as commenting on the specific the contents of the creed itself. One questioned the constitutionality of such a document and compared it to a "loyalty oath." Another quoted the *Tao Te Ching:* "The more prohibitions you have, the less virtuous people will be." It was noted that various professions and disciplines already have their own codes of ethics.

Several respondents questioned the "function and influence" of the creed, claiming it was "merely a set of rules" or an "imposition of restriction under the guise of ethics," and they expressed concern over the issue of "conformity." A participant felt that such documents should be arrived at via public participation, and there were also specific concerns about restrictions on free speech and inquiry, and that the code promoted a specific (left-wing) political agenda. Others felt that advancing ethical principles in this way is dangerously close to "religion." Some respondents felt that ethical principles are better communicated via discussion, for example of sample situations, as well as via negotiation. One respondent commented favorably on the use of "Honor" codes, and the importance of formal

"pledging" to the principles of a code.

As is note below, a variety of methods were outlined for possibly publicizing the creed's principles, including placing plaques on the All-people's tree and across campus, discussing the code during the Day of Dialogue, in orientations, and in FIGs. Another respondent mentioned the importance of integrating such principles into the University culture, in both on- and off-campus behavior.

Some respondents questioned the enforceability as well as the legal status of the creed, asserting that having a written code of ethics was quite different from putting its elements into action. One wondered about the relationship between "ethical behavior" and "legal behavior." Suggestions for addressing this concern included making the creed more aspirational in nature, rather than consequential. It was noted that enforceable provisions are included in the faculty CBA, while aspirational goals are already in the Mission Statement. A number of people felt that the ethics code should be included in the University Mission Statement.

The wording and format of the document were also concerns for a few respondents. One stated that the creed should not include words such as "shall" or "must," and another questioned whether mere "respect" for the University's Mission Statement was enough.

A few of the participants apparently used this survey as an opportunity to express dissatisfaction with the current University administration, as well as with a number of specific events that have occurred on campus.

Additional general impressions

Some participants emphasized that the code should apply to faculty, students, and others, and indicated that it should be included in syllabi and Departmental Unit Standards, as well as in the recruitment of students and employees. Other participants advocated reflecting on the University's principles annually. There was discussion of how to articulate a "common ground" for the behavior of diverse University constituencies, and the fact that a fairly general as well as clear set of principles was required to do this. Others were concerned that general principles can become meaningless. Questions were raised about how to detect or enforce violations related to specific items on the code, such as misappropriation or conflict of interest.

Additional principles in need of articulation were noted as (listed here in alphabetical order): Accountability as a public institution, accuracy, assisting students regarding their goals, celebration of difference, civility, collaboration (vs. emphasizing individual achievement), commitment to the truth, credibility, dignity, doing one's job well, equity, equality (across sectors of the University), excellence, fighting oppression, freedom of expression, honesty, inclusiveness, integrity, justice, promoting a learning environment, public service, regard, respect, responsibility to call values to others' attention, social justice, standards in research and citing others' work, transparency, and willingness to learn from others. One respondent felt that the values in the UN Universal Declaration of

Human Rights were the ones that should be articulated here. Some respondents also mentioned items of particular concern to them.

Post 11-13-2007 Responses

Overall, the reactions to the revised document were considerably more positive. Of the 37 responses to the revised code, 23 had positive responses to the proposed code, 9 had negative responses, and 5 were either unsure, unclear, or did not provide enough information to categorize. Surveys came from staff, faculty, and administrators, as well as Deans and one student. Again, faculty members responding represented a range of disciplines.

	Frequency	Percent
Administrator	4	10.8
Deans	2	5.4
Faculty	12	32.4
Other (or unspecified)	6	16.2
Staff	13	35.1
Total	37	100.0

Particiapant Distribution

Later Surveys

STATUS1
Administrator
Dean
Faculty
Other
Staff
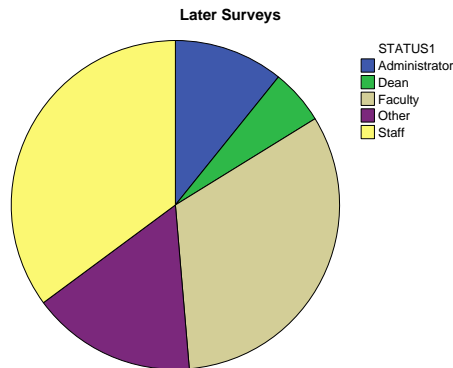
Again, while it is interesting to examine qualitative comments, the small number of respondents renders these useful for understanding the <u>range</u> of opinions, not the frequency or strength of a particular position. Several survey participants responded favorably to the revised ethics creed. They identified it as an important and necessary document. There was a comment that the new version was applicable to more segments of the University than the previous one, and that it resolved the earlier version's "inconsistencies." As respondents had done with the original version, participants mainly commented on the idea of having an ethics creed in general, as opposed to responding to the specific elements of the proposed creed.

Themes and overall impressions

Some respondents suggested that this document should not be viewed as a policy statement; rather, the creed should be used as a guide, frame of reference, and/or reminder that members of the university agree to a code of conduct. One respondent noted, "This kind of code is not necessarily an enforcement document that you will be brought up on charges of misconduct but as an affirmation more than anything else."

"Respect" and "integrity" were the two most common values respondents wanted expressed in this document. Other common value statements that were suggested as additions were "treat others as you would like to be treated" and "concern for your fellow man." Several respondents stated that the creed should be

a general overview of expectations; however, a few were concerned that the

document was too broad, claiming that it was "too easy to disregard."

Respondents also questioned the enforceability of this new version of the

creed. One individual stated, "The value of the document is the extent to which

words become actions." A few of the participants emphasized the importance of

this creed's applying to the Administration as well as faculty, staff, and students.

These participants raised concerns that certain "groups" (e.g., the Athletic

Department and Administration) are often given "special privileges," and that this

creed should apply to all members of the university equally.

Those participants who responded negatively to the creed also stated that

ethics are something to be determined by each individual, rather than being written

in a document. One commented that the creed was "infringing on the line of

telling what the students should think." Others claimed that the creed did not pass

the "Hitler test." In other words, these participants disagreed with some of the

requests set forth by the creed, specifically "respect <u>all</u> persons" (emphasis ours).

Several suggestions were made regarding the wording and grammar of the

document. A few participants commented that the title of "Creed" should be

replaced with "Code" or "Guidelines." With regard to the wording of the

document, one respondent stated that the creed should be written in more positive

terms. For example, rather than saying "discouraging bigotry," this individual

suggested referring to "openness to others." Survey participants also proposed that

the document be written in the present progressive tense, and that punctuation and

word agreement should be corrected. Several respondents suggested keeping the document "succinct" and "brief."

A few of the participants apparently again used the on-line survey as an opportunity to express dissatisfaction with the current Administration as well as situations occurring on campus. There were also general expressions of the fact that the document should apply evenly to all groups on campus, with concerns raised about privileged groups. There was also concern that at times dissent may not be considered as ethical, and that substantive parts of the code could impinge on academic freedom as well as freedom of speech. Some respondents commented on other specific issues of concern.

Several suggestions were made for how the document should be used and articulated. One person noted that it needed to be approved by the three Campus senates. Some suggested posting the creed on the University's website, adding it to the mission statement, distributing it in an annual memo, as well as including it in all University publications. Others suggested a more restrained approach, stating that the creed did not need to be "plastered" everywhere, but that it should be readily available for members of the university.

Additional general impressions

Some participants indicated that the code should be included in syllabi and Departmental Unit Standards (and thus faculty Individual Performance Records), as well as used in the recruitment of students and employees, and in the University's financial transactions. There was discussion of how to articulate a

"common ground" for the behavior of diverse University constituencies, and the fact that a fairly general as well as clear set of principles was required to do this. The question was raised as to how this document went beyond the Conduct Code. There was also a comment that ethical principles are individual and difficult to articulate in a way that applies to everyone.

Specific values that were endorsed (again in alphabetical order) included accountability, authenticity, bravery in seeking truth, cooperation, collaboration, concern for others, downplaying mere "comfort," empowerment, expressiveness, healthy living, honesty, integrity, respect, professionalism, questioning, tolerance, and valuing of human rights and dignity .

Conclusions

The majority of the 37 respondents to the second version of the proposed creed responded favorably to the idea of having an ethics creed and/or the proposed creed, after the revised document was released. This contrasted with the more negative responses to the original, more detailed and behavioral, version.

The generalizability and representativeness of these conclusions are, of course, limited by the small number of respondents in relation to the size of the University community.