

Proposal to NAUFRP to cooperate on a Survey of Forestry programs on Professional Ethics

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Quick Look: Proposed survey of programs at p. 4

Proposed student survey at p. 8

Background

Years ago I conducted an informal survey of SAF accredited programs to see what they were doing on professional ethics. Only half responded... which is a clue. This was while I was preparing my readings volume on the subject. Responses received were discouragingly fragmentary and brief. Many took the form of “Oh, our faculty talk about it in various courses”.... Which left wishing for some specifics.

I think it's time to try this again. A summary would be a valuable piece of our projected Ethics Special Section for the Journal. We need a new strategy. I think if school Deans/Directors receive a request from a peer, and see support from NAUFRP, they might take an information request seriously.

I'm thinking such a survey with backing from NAUFRP might well help raise consciousness of the issues in instruction on professional ethics. I think more than a few deans and directors are from scientific backgrounds and may never have even read the SAF Code. Further, many students seeking careers in various environmental fields have no obvious professional societies to look to.

I know when I was at Yale, the only students who took my Ethics Workshops were the MF students - who were required to. We would not want to confine our attention only to programs in traditional forestry.

Do you think I could get 5 minutes of the Yale SFES Curriculum Committee's time to discuss possible curriculum requirements for all our students? This is a key question that nobody wants to face. They'll say "there's no time". My son earned a degree in electrical engineering; in his curriculum was a 3 credit course on professional ethics. Considering how much engineers need to learn, nobody can tell me that in forestry training "there's no time". The purpose of this survey, though, is not to make recommendations on what programs should do, but to uncover good ideas.

A possible side benefit of a survey is that we might get in touch this way with younger faculty and others who are doing something with ethics, who'd like to learn more, and who have good teaching materials they'd be happy to share. There is some interest in SAF in the idea of collecting cases and teaching materials onto an SAF website.

Since this is entirely a volunteer effort, limits must be set. I am reluctant to take on a wide scope of content unless there is very strong support. The initially proposed limits are arbitrary and remain open to discussion. But the student survey should be set up so that individual institutions can add questions for their own use.

Further, since the scope of this effort is for students and not experienced practitioners, the level of awareness on their part should not be overestimated.

Definitions

For purposes of this effort, "Professional ethics" means the body of knowledge, practice, and guidance distinctive to professional activity. This means it focuses on basic guides for behavior in working situations. Topics such as loyalty to employer, cotreatment of confidential information, and conflict of interest are among the basics. The content of Ethics Codes of SAF, TWS, or AFS illustrates the scope well.

Boundaries are not clear. Attention to a Land Ethic or its equivalent is essential, yet much of what we know as environmental ethics does not include

specifically professional situations. Further, there is growing concern over interpersonal conduct issues such as respect for diversity, various forms of discrimination, and sexual harassment. While these issues are not specifically mentioned in Ethics Codes, they are part of what most would consider “professional” behavior and are thus relevant.

For present purposes I suggest setting research ethics to one side as having its own existing training modalities and requirements.

Relationships

The only point here is that a student could be a deep student of any of research, environmental ethics or professional conduct codes and still have no background at all in the core concerns of professional ethics (and of the 3 noted Society ethics codes).



A Survey of Programs for NAUFRP Institutions

We do not need an elaborate, detailed survey. A short one is more likely to get a response.

I would keep the scope to undergrad instruction; I suspect graduate programs instruct grad students in research ethics which is important but not our concern right now.

A few sample questions:

1. What activities are taking place in your School related to instruction in professional ethics? In what courses are ethics topics raised with students?
 - a. Are there sample course syllabi we could see that include mention of ethics?
2. Does your institution have a curriculum requirement for all students, in whatever major field, to take a course in ethics?
3. Is there a faculty member who is seen as a lead on professional ethics? Could we communicate with them?
4. How many of your students are members of student chapters of SAF, TWS, AFS, SRM, or other resource societies?
5. Are there issues of professional ethics that you believe need to be emphasized with students?
6. Can you think of things SAF could do that would assist your faculty in integrating ethics discussion into the curriculum? Examples: prepare case study materials, other instructional aids; include more ethics discussion in local meetings, etc.
7. Other suggestions?

Where from Here?

1. Related Activities
 - a. We are working with SAF to see how we could conduct a survey of members on questions similar to those above
 - b. We will seek to prompt individual institutions to survey their own students on these points. A sample draft survey is attached.
 - c. Efforts are under way to get several ethics activities onto the program for Portland 2018.
 - d. Plans are afoot to propose a special issue on ethics for the J of F.
2. Conduct of Survey & Analysis
 - a. We would like for NAUFRP to officially support this undertaking, consisting of the survey of its own members, as well as the survey of students.
 - b. Then, designate someone to be its point person, and convey the questions and a request for cooperation to all NAUFRP members.
 - c. This person would also contribute to improving the question list and the process.
 - d. We will arrange for the mechanics of collecting the responses and analyzing them.
 - e. If NAUFRP would wish it, we'd be pleased to have them nominate an author or co-author to assist in writing a paper out of all the information gathered. (such authors to have full editorial control over content)
 - f. One project output would be a listing of the most useful teaching aids and other materials that we believe NAUFRP members would like to know about.

Student Survey: Awareness of Professional Ethics Issues

We plan to proceed with 2 or 3 pre-tests on this instrument as soon as possible....

I expect that the final version will need vetting by some institution's system. Hopefully that will be accepted by others.

I hope a pretest in a single class won't need such a process, so long as responses are destroyed and used only to improve the questions. Checking this.

In this draft I'm trying to keep it short and easy to complete by respondents, but not so short as to be useless.... It has been reviewed by 4 colleagues active in undergraduate teaching already, but is certainly open to suggestions. We do not seek approval of this as final wording, only of the general concept.

General

The purpose of this survey is to assess the awareness of students in NAUFRP institutions of specific topics addressed in professional ethics codes, as exemplified by those of the SAF, TWS, and AFS.

For a proposed Special issue of the *Journal of Forestry*, we are seeking volunteers from natural resources institutions to survey undergraduate students on their awareness of and perceived needs in the area of professional ethics. This is intended to be a simple, straightforward survey

to make an initial assessment only. We fear that a detailed survey instrument will get low response rates.

Mechanics of the process remain under discussion. Whether some automated system such as Survey Monkey or Qualtrics can be made to work, or if there is a better alternative will be addressed soon.

The information will be gathered on a volunteer basis. We hope to organize some means of processing the data once gathered. We seek faculty willing to invest some time in this. We would especially like to find someone willing to write up results once analysis has been completed. Resulting papers would be considered for publication in the Journal of Forestry and may well have prospects in the applied journals in wildlife, fisheries, and other allied fields.

Key points on this proposed approach:

This student survey is not intended to inventory the institution's instructional curriculum on this topic. A separate survey (discussed above) will be directed to deans/directors of NAUFRP members to handle this. An approach to them has been made.

We are not attempting to determine what students know about each topic mentioned, only whether they have encountered it or not.

Potentially all undergraduate students in the educational unit could be surveyed. For now, we suggest 3rd year and older. Sampling method could be determined by the institution (e.g. all students in 3 or 4 year, or a systematic subsample). So long as sample frame and method are documented.

Since this project is unfunded, and exploratory only, we see no need to limit every institution into a single question list. We plan to aggregate across the entire body of responses, but comparisons across individual institutions are not planned. Further, we are interested in responses from as many institutions as possible. Nationally and possibly regional summaries can be made if preliminary analysis turns up regional differences.

Timing: It would be best if the student surveys could be conducted toward the end of this spring semester. That would enable an assessment of a full academic year as well as allow the summer to analyze results.

Topics included would be the kinds of subjects specifically noted in the ethics codes of the SAF, TWS, and AFS.

Population to Survey We think surveying 3d year and 4th year students would be sensible and most practical. Institutions would be free to survey wider populations if they think it useful. The survey instrument will identify level of training, so that responses can be sorted on that basis.

(a case could be made for confining this to seniors -- thoughts?)

-- We propose this list of **core questions** that would be analyzed for our summary report on the survey. Only these questions would need to be included as written. Individual institutions could add questions on other topics or seeking further detail that they find useful. (but then they'd need clearance from their own IRB offices) The institutions could decide to keep the results on those additional questions to themselves.

Attachment One

Draft Core Questions:

Draft Feb 27, 2018

Core Questions for Undergraduate Survey on Professional Ethics

(note: we these are core questions for our analysis, we expect some institutions may wish to add others)

Explanation by person administering the Survey:

- a. This Survey survey is designed to quickly assess undergraduate student knowledge of professional ethics as an aid to further discussions on curriculum needs and the design of instructional materials. The Society of American Foresters accredits forestry programs, and requires that ethics instruction be provided.
- b. We are not attempting to determine what students know about each topic mentioned, or what their views would be on each topic, only whether they have encountered it or not, and in what way.

1. General

We will convert the questions to formats set up for quick data entry and tabulation: that part is omitted for now.

Institution code (to be designed... ideas? .. purpose: to keep institutional identity undisclosed when data tabulated while enabling a tally of responses)

Major field (include a list...Forest mgt, watershed mgt, wildlife, forest engineering, landscape architecture, etc)

Class in which this survey administered

Year of program (junior, senior, 5th yr BS, MS, PHD))

Region (Northeast, Midwest, South, West) (include a map)

Are you a member of a student club that focuses on your principal field of interest?

Name of Club

Are you a student member of any scientific or professional society or association?

Name of Society

Have you ever attended a local, regional, or national meeting of this group?

If so, did you see any presentations on professional ethics on the program?

Does your University have a Student Code or policy on ethics for students? If so, was a specific orientation on this policy given when you first arrived?

Are there annual refreshers or discussions of these issues?

Have you ever noticed violations of this code?

Does your institution have a curriculum requirement that all students take a course in ethical judgment, professional ethics, or any aspect of applied ethics?

If so, have you taken this course?

If you encountered a situation, say in a summer job, that seems to you to raise an ethical question, where would you turn for advice?

(indicate some choices?)

Have you read in newspapers or elsewhere about any specific instance where ethical conduct of a person in your field was questioned?

2. Professional Association ethics codes and Topics

Have you ever read or been referred to the ethics code of any professional association?

Can you recall in your coursework, lectures, or activities of student groups any mention of the following topics:

(set up for Y/N responses)

Specific information on what it means to be *a professional in one's worklife*

Agency and trusteeship

Loyalty to employer

Conflict of Interest

Attribution and plagiarism

Professional or ethical duty to report violations of regulations or an ethics code

Whether it is ethical for a public employee to “moonlight” – work on their own time for private clients

Ethics of advocacy on public policy

Requirements for competence and diligence

Ethics of safety practices, equipment, and work practices

Rules on confidentiality of government or private information

Communicating science and professional practice to the public

The Land Ethic

Have you ever read Sand County Almanac?

3. Personal and Professional Conduct

Issues of inclusion, diversity, and sexual harassment have been much in the press recently. In your coursework or otherwise on campus life have you received any instruction or guidance on how you should navigate these issues?

(Seeking suggestions on how better to word this question)

4. Best Way to Learn More

If it is desired to include more information on professional ethics in your University's program, what approaches would you suggest?

For now, Suggest this as an open-ended question....

5. How did it take you to complete this survey?

- a. Less than 10 minutes
- b. 10-15 minutes
- c. 15-20 minutes
- d. Longer than 20 minutes
- e.

Thanks for your participation.