

The Ethics of Teaching

As a teaching assistant, you hold a position of power and responsibility. The students in your charge have the right to expect ethical behavior on your part.

Following this page is a series of essays on ethics. You are encouraged to read and think about them. There are, however, some very simple and straightforward rules that anyone with teaching responsibilities must follow.

1. Because you are in a position of power with respect to the students you teach, dating students in your charge is not appropriate. Attempting to form a personal relationship with one of your students can be considered sexual harassment, and will be dealt with as such. Disciplinary action, including termination of employment, may result.
2. Student records are private, and protected by law. Distribution of graded material or posting of grades in such a way that the grades of students become known without their permission is not allowed.
3. Test materials, problem sets, and solutions must be kept secure. Under no circumstances should test or homework problems or solutions be made available to students without the knowledge of the instructor. If made available, these materials should be available to all students under identical circumstances.
4. U.S. universities are among the most culturally diverse environments that exist. It is essential that respect for other cultures (including religious traditions) be maintained at all times. Discrimination based on cultural heritage, race, gender, sexual orientation, religion or national origin is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

WHY A CONDUCT CODE?

In Engineering Professional Ethics, (p. 422-425)

By Daniel W. Meade

“It is true of established rules of conduct, and also of rules of law, that few ethical or legal principles are universally applicable, and that in certain cases each individual must depend upon his common sense and conscience as to what his conduct should be under the limitations of the conditions under which his conduct must be exercised.”

“Common sense and conscience are the results of early training, of the personal influence of those with whom one comes in contact, of education, of experience, and of such reflections as the individual may give to these factors. Common sense and conscience are limited to their application to the breadth of the experience on which they are based and can be applied successfully only within such limits. When that experience is extended, apt to be mistaken because of the limitations of experience.”

“Although certainly purely technical requirements of a code of conduct may change with changing conditions, the fundamental principles of good conduct and good ethics are unchangeable and eternal.”

“What are principles that men live by? A man learns that there are some games he cannot play, there are ways of doing his work better, there are ways of conducting his relationship with other people. Out of the accumulation of individual experiences he creates rules for himself. The rules become principles of living because observing and respecting them saves himself untold trouble and discomfort.”

“A man of advanced age and long experiences would, in his ordinary relations in life, find it necessary to study a code of conduct in order to determine what his own conduct should be. He would not need to ponder very deeply to estimate what the possible outcome of his action might be. His answer would be given at once, based on his established principles, and would probably be correct. However, if the conduct concerns new conditions entirely beyond and different from his previous experiences, then he seeks the opinions of those who have had similar experiences.”

(e.g. a person does not seek legal advice concerning his ordinary conduct in everyday life, but does so when he enters into legal relations.)

“The Golden Rule is, and should be in general, the basis of almost all ethical conduct.”

(One should do to others as he would have others do to him.)

IEEE Code of Ethics for Engineers

PREAMBLE

Engineers affect the quality of life for all people in our complex technological society. In the pursuit of their profession, therefore, it is vital that engineers conduct their work in an ethical manner so that they merit the confidence of colleagues, employers, clients and the public. This IEEE Code of Ethics is a standard of professional conduct for engineers.

ARTICLE I

Engineers shall maintain high standards of diligence, creativity and productivity, and shall:

1. Accept responsibility for their actions;
2. Be honest and realistic in stating claims or estimates from available data;
3. Undertake engineering tasks and accept responsibility only if qualified by training or experience, or after full disclosure to their employers or clients or pertinent qualifications;
4. Maintain their professional skills at the level of the state of the art, and recognize the importance of current events in their work;
5. Advance the integrity and prestige of the engineering profession by practicing in a dignified manner and for adequate compensation.

ARTICLE II

Engineers shall, in their work:

1. Treat fairly all colleagues and co-workers, regardless of race, religion, sex, age, or national origin;
2. Report, publish and disseminate freely information to others, subject to legal and proprietary restraints;
3. Encourage colleagues and co-workers to act in accord with this Code and support them when they do so;
4. Seek, accept and offer honest criticism of work and properly credit the contribution of others;
5. Support and participate in the activities of their professional societies;
6. Assist colleagues and co-workers in their professional development.

ARTICLE III

Engineers shall in their relations with employers and clients:

1. Act as faithful agents or trustees for their employers or clients in professional and business matters, provided such actions conform with other parts of this Code;
2. Keep information on the business affairs or technical processes of an employer or client in confidence while employed, and later, until such information is properly released, provided such actions conform with other parts of this Code;
3. Inform their employers, clients, professional societies or public agencies or private agencies of which they are members or to which they make presentations of any circumstance that could lead to a conflict of interest;
4. Neither give nor accept directly or indirectly, any gift payment or service of more than nominal value to or from those having business relationships with their employers or clients;
5. Assist and advise their employers or clients in anticipating the possible consequences, direct and indirect, immediate or remote, of the projects, work or plans of which they have knowledge.

ARTICLE IV

Engineers shall, in fulfilling their responsibilities to the community:

1. Protect the safety, health and welfare of the public and speak out against abuses in these areas affecting the public interest;
2. Contribute professional advice, as appropriate, to civic, charitable or other non-profit organizations;
3. Seek to extend public knowledge and appreciation of the engineering profession and its achievements.

Paraphrasing and Direct Quote
FROM ENGINEERING PROFESSIONALISM AND ETHICS

By James H. Schaub
Karl Pavlovic
With M.D. Morris

PROFESSIONAL CODE OF ETHICS

The professional code of ethics should be taken as guidelines for each person's formulation of his own personal code. The professional code appears to come from:

- A. The following two general statements:
- Love thy neighbor as thyself
 - Do unto others as you would have them do unto you
- B. What is engineering:

"Engineering is a scientific profession, but the test of the engineer's work lies in the marketplace. The purpose of engineering is to help satisfy the wants and needs of society through the development of technology and the prudent application of it in a cost effective and safe manner."

EXCERPTS FROM THE PROFESSIONS UNDER SIEGE
BY JAQUES BARZUN
WHY ARE WE SO CONCERNED ABOUT PROFESSIONAL ETHICS?
(P. 71-75)

"Something new has happened when the heads of two of the three branches of our government publicly attack two of the leading professions. The President has called down the lawyers and the doctors in turn; the Chief Justice has twice criticized the men of law. But the feelings behind these acts are not new; they have agitated the public and the press for a decade or more, and it is evident to all that the learned professions are not the splendid companies, held in awe and respect, that they once were."

"The doctors, formerly worshipped as omniscient Good Samaritans, are now seen as profiteers, often of doubtful competence. Lawyers have never been popular, but they did seem the defenders of private and civil rights in time of need. Now they are thought neglectful and extortionate when not actually dishonest...the idea of 'the professional man' is near to being swallowed up in contempt. For if the engineers seem to escape, it is because the public never sees them."

"The message for the professions today is that their one hope of survival with anything like their present freedoms is the recovery of mental and moral force. No profession can live and flourish on just one of the two. For its 'practical purpose' it requires the best knowledge from the processor to another person, the moral element necessarily comes into play. Moral here does not mean here honesty; it refers to the nature of any encounter between two human beings. Nobody sues a vending machine for malpractice; if it fails to work, no blame attached to it, even though one wants to get one's coin back. But as soon as a person serves another, ethical issues spring to life and get settled well or badly. Perhaps they are clearly felt by one of the parties; they are in any case never easy to reason out"...when the problem is a failure of competence and morality, nothing will solve it but the work of an individual mind and conscience, aided of course by the many scattered men of talent and good will who are only waiting for a lead. Without some hectic effort, we professionals shall go down...appropriately...as non-heroes together."

Note: emphasis is added