



***Psychology: Emphasizing the complexity of professional ethics through simulation***

A graduate course entitled "Professional Ethics in Psychology" by W. Brad Johnson and Riah'det Corser, George Fox University (1998)

**Course Design:**

During the first third of the semester, the class studies the APA's guide on ethical principles, state laws and regulations relevant to psychology, state ethics committee rules and regulation, different models of ethical reasoning, and written case studies. The remainder of the semester focuses on specific content areas within the ethics code. During this second phase, the first hour of the two-hour weekly course is spent discussing a specific ethical dilemma; the second hour is reserved for a meeting of the "State Ethics Board" committee, a 3-4 students team randomly chosen that week. The mock committee exercise, unlike the traditional analysis of case studies, promotes personal interaction with and internalization of core ethical concepts.

A student is selected to serve as the accused psychologist, and the committee receives a copy of a formal ethics complaint. The student playing the psychologist also receives a copy of the official complaint as well as a detailed description of the case, including the hypothetical professional's motives and reasoning. The committee describes and discusses the case in such a manner that the class, which is observing but not participating, can follow the details and the reasoning. The psychologist testifies before the committee; the committee then discusses whether an ethical violation has occurred and if so what is the appropriate course of action. After the committee renders its decision, the class and the participants discuss the issues raised by the exercise.

**Higher Level Learning:**

The Ethics Committee exercise offers students the opportunity not only to examine in great detail a specific ethical question but also to experience the ambiguities associated with certain kinds of ethical dilemmas (**Thinking**). By directly engaging ethical questions, students gain insight into the challenges they will face as professionals

and into how to find ethical answers to practical questions (**Connecting, Caring**). The exercise models and promotes the self-awareness and self-analysis required of professionals (**Self, Others**).

**Active Learning:**

Whether participating in the Ethics Committee hearing (**Doing**) or sitting in the audience (**Observing**), students are confronted by difficult questions related to the practical application of professional ethical principles. The exercise prompts participation from all of the members of the class who, when the class reconvenes as a whole, have the opportunity to compare how they interpret the situation and how they understand the professional guidelines (**Dialogue with Others.**)

Johnson, W.B., & Corser, R. (1998). Learning ethics the hard way: facing the Ethics Committee. Teaching of Psychology, 25 26-28.