

AIR WAR COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

**THE STAKES ARE HIGH:
ETHICS EDUCATION AT US WAR COLLEGES**

by

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Biography

Lieutenant Colonel Beth A. Behn is a US Army Logistics Officer who most recently served as the Chief of Sustainment (G4) for the 3rd Infantry Division at Fort Stewart, Georgia. Originally from Cedar Falls, Iowa, LTC Behn received her commission from the United States Military Academy in 1994. She holds an MA and PhD in History from the University of Massachusetts Amherst and is a graduate of the Army Command and General Staff College. She has commanded at the company and battalion level and has served in a variety of staff positions. She has also served as an Assistant Professor of History at the United States Military Academy. Her operational experiences include deployments to Haiti, Kuwait, and Iraq. LTC Behn is currently assigned to the Air War College, Air University, Maxwell AFB, AL.

Abstract

A series of high profile ethical lapses by senior military professionals has generated calls from levels as high as the Commander in Chief for a renewed emphasis on military ethics. Leaders engaged in Professional Military Education (PME) across the joint force have worked to ensure their programs support this call. This paper explores and assesses the ethics education programs at the Service Senior Leader Colleges (War Colleges).

There are the three fundamental questions facing those charged with teaching ethics to senior military officers: What are the desired outcomes of ethics education? How should the curriculum be structured to achieve those outcomes? And, finally, what is the correct faculty composition to develop and employ that curriculum? Using the answers to those questions to produce a rough framework for a model War College ethics education program, this paper then compares the current War College programs to this model form in order to determine areas of strength and weakness. This analysis reveals that the existing ethics education programs at the War Colleges compare favorably to the model program structure. However, leaders at these institutions could further strengthen their programs by creating and empowering an “ethics team” that includes both trained ethicists and military practitioners and by conducting more robust faculty development programs for non-ethicists.

“Leaders entrusted with immense power over other human beings and with the employment of immensely powerful weapons cannot take ethics lightly. The stakes are too high.”¹

INTRODUCTION

A series of high profile ethical lapses by senior military professionals has generated calls from levels as high as the Commander in Chief for a renewed emphasis on military ethics.² The Department of Defense (DOD) has taken a number of significant steps to address concerns about the apparent erosion of the military’s moral fabric to include establishing a list of Desired Leader Attributes (DLAs) which includes “the ability to make ethical decisions based on the shared values of the Profession of Arms.”³ Leaders engaged in Professional Military Education (PME) across the joint force have worked to ensure their programs support the DLAs. This paper explores and assesses the ethics education programs at the Service Senior Leader Colleges (hereafter referred to as War Colleges).⁴

In order to develop an assessment, this paper begins with a review of three fundamental questions facing those charged with teaching ethics to senior military officers: What are the desired outcomes of ethics education? How should the curriculum be structured to achieve those outcomes? And, finally, what is the correct faculty composition to develop and employ that curriculum? The answers to those questions produce a rough framework for a model War College ethics education program. The second portion of this paper compares the current War College programs to this model program to determine areas of strength and weakness. Finally, this paper concludes with recommendations for areas to be sustained and improved in the War College ethics education programs.

THESIS

The existing ethics education programs at the War Colleges compare favorably to the model program structure. However, leaders at these institutions could further strengthen their programs by creating and empowering an “ethics team” that includes both trained ethicists and military practitioners and by conducting more robust faculty development programs for non-ethicists.

Methodology

To answer key questions regarding the model structure of War College ethics programs, this paper begins with a review of the rationale for the military’s emphasis on ethics and then reviews the series of events that led to the CJCS’s call for a renewed emphasis on professionalism. It then establishes both the rationale for and appropriate objectives of War College ethics education programs. A close examination of a wide body of literature from a number of professions provides the background for forming the model curriculum and faculty structure. Having established the model structure, this paper then compares it to the existing War College programs to identify areas of strength and weakness. This paper concludes with specific findings and recommendations regarding the existing War College ethics programs and suggestions for areas in need of further research.

Rationale for Military Emphasis on Ethics

In a 2012 White Paper, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), General Martin Dempsey, called for a renewed commitment to the Profession of Arms, reminding the force that, “Our profession is defined by our values, ethics, standards, code of conduct, skills, and attributes.”⁵ The Chairman’s reminder was in keeping with the long-held belief among

American military leaders that “ethics, the study of reasoning about moral right and wrong, nurtures the moral consciousness and establishes the basis for right actions by military leaders.”⁶

Military ethics, as a subset of professional ethics, serves as a guide to members of the Profession of Arms as they “think through the moral challenges and dilemmas inherent in their professional activity.”⁷ It shares similarities with other professions, but is uniquely focused on those inherent moral issues of military service, namely the authority to kill or injure others. As one political theorist explains, “The great burden of military ethics lies in this: if those who control the power to kill and maim are evil or morally unfit, we unleash a torrent of sinister power.”⁸ Leaders’ recognition of the potentially catastrophic consequences for our nation if members of the Profession of Arms lack moral fiber has been the driving force behind inclusion of military ethics in PME for generations. The recent call for renewed emphasis, though, largely derives from ethical misconduct among senior leaders.

An Ethical “Crisis” in the Military

High-level concerns about senior leader ethical misconduct emerged initially in 2012 in the wake of a series of revelations regarding inappropriate relationships, toxic command climates, bribery, and cheating by senior officers.⁹ The Department of Defense responded quickly to what appeared to be a “crisis” among senior military leaders.¹⁰ In November 2012, Secretary of Defense Panetta directed the CJCS to conduct a review of ethical standards among senior military officers. The report indicated that ethics training needed to start earlier in an officer’s career and be reinforced more often over the course of that career.¹¹ That finding contributed to General Dempsey’s decision to emphasize the role of PME in renewing the Profession of Arms. He published updated Joint Training Guidance in October 2013 that included the six DLAs, one

of which was DLA #5: “the ability to make ethical decisions based on the shared values of the Profession of Arms.”¹²

Congress applauded the Department of Defense (DOD) initiatives to assess and improve the military’s ethical culture, but questioned whether enough had been done to fix underlying problems. In May 2014, Congress directed the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to review the Defense Department’s ethics, professionalism, and integrity programs. The GAO report concluded that “DOD is unable to determine whether its ethics and professionalism initiatives are achieving their intended effect because it has not developed metrics to measure their progress.”¹³ The combination of the GAO report and the official adoption of the DLAs into the Officer Professional Military Education Program (OPMEP) in May 2015 serve as a mandate to review existing ethics education initiatives at all levels of PME. This paper focuses specifically on the War Colleges given their critical role in educating senior officers who ultimately hold responsibility for establishing an ethical climate across the force.

Rationale and Objectives for Ethics Education at War Colleges

At first glance, it may seem counterintuitive to argue that War College students require significant work in the area of ethics and professionalism. Officers selected for this level of schooling generally have between 18 and 22 years of service and, by virtue of their selection, represent the top 25% of their peer group. In theory, these officers have already internalized the need for military leaders to uphold ethical standards in order to maintain trust with the American public. Further, some might argue that the character of these officers is already firmly set; there is little that can be done at this stage of their careers to change or alter their moral compass.¹⁴ However, there are a number of compelling counterarguments to these claims.

The mission of War Colleges is to prepare senior military and civilian leaders for service in strategic-level assignments.¹⁵ The idea, then, that senior officers are incapable of learning something new undermines the whole idea of PME across the career spectrum and flies in the face of significant research on adult learning. For example, a study of graduate students at Harvard Business School revealed, “ample evidence that ethical consciousness and commitment can continue to undergo transformation at least throughout formal education.”¹⁶ As one long-time military ethics professor explains, “Our ethical development is lifelong; it is a process, never a product; it is never complete.”¹⁷ Beyond being capable of continued ethical growth, War Colleges should focus on ethical development due to the influential positions their graduates will hold – both in the US and in partner nations.

War College graduates go on to hold “high-level policy, command and staff responsibilities.”¹⁸ Their role as senior leaders who will make critical decisions and offer advice to civilian policy-makers regarding the use of force demands a deep grounding in ethical reasoning. Martin Cook, currently the Admiral James B. Stockdale Professor of Professional Military Ethics at the Naval War College, explains, “Above all, strategic leaders who set large-scale military policy, control training and organizational culture, and supervise the preparation of operational plans for national militaries need to think in ways deeply conditioned by just war principles.”¹⁹ Additionally, the presence of a significant number of international officers at the War Colleges presents an opportunity to build trust with key partners across the globe.²⁰ Exposing International Officers to the American military’s conception of moral structure and laws has the potential to “engender a common vocabulary and trust among partners that is so essential to building effective alliances.”²¹

Based on their capability for ongoing growth and development in ethical reasoning and their critical role as strategic leaders in both the US and partner nations, War College students are a prime audience for a well-structured ethics education program. But just how should such a program be structured? What is it that the ethics education programs at the War Colleges should strive to achieve?

The authors of one classic study on military ethics education warn that educators should have realistic expectations. Classroom teaching on ethics can and should lay the foundation for ethical behavior in the future, but it cannot guarantee it. Rather, the classroom setting provides conditions for a formal and systematic evaluation of what the moral requirements of military leaders are.²² Instead of focusing primarily on future behavior, ethics education at the War Colleges should have the goal of further developing senior officers' ethical habits of mind. Realizing that, as career military officers, the student body is already predisposed to ethical decision-making, War College ethics studies should, "influence students to internalize ethics so they wield their ordained power in a legal and ethical manner . . . by enhancing their ability to recognize and process ethical dilemmas and execute prudent behavior in response to them."²³ The ethics education program should further develop officers' existing ethical decision-making process and prepare them to apply that process at the strategic level. Importantly, the program must reinforce each officer's crucial role in maintaining the vital link between the military's ethical behavior and the nation's willingness to entrust the military with lethal force. With these goals in mind, the War Colleges can make appropriate decisions about the nature of the ethics curriculum and the appropriate faculty to develop and execute that curriculum.

Curriculum

Ethics programs cannot escape the truism that, at its core, curriculum development often comes down to making hard choices. Two major questions should drive decision-making. First, should ethics be taught as a discrete subject or should it be integrated across the curriculum? Secondly, what is the correct balance between general philosophy and practical application of that philosophy within the Profession of Arms? A review of research by ethics educators both from within the military and from other professions can serve as a guide to making difficult curricular decisions.

Ethics education scholars have long debated the question of whether ethics education is more effective as a stand-alone course versus integration across the curriculum. A full review of the contours of this debate are beyond the scope of this paper, but a basic outline of the pros and cons for each approach helps shed light on the issue. The benefits of teaching ethics as a discrete subject at the outset of a graduate program is that it provides students with a foundation upon which they can build in their other classes as they progress through the program. Placing a foundational course up front in the program also sends an important signal to the student body about the subject's relative significance.²⁴ This approach presupposes that the stand-alone course is taught by either a trained ethicist or faculty that has undergone extensive development with a trained ethicist.²⁵ Additionally, this approach assumes that faculty members who are expected to build on the ethics foundation in other courses understand what was taught in the foundational course and have been given the tools and training to build on that in their courses.²⁶ The question of faculty competence plays largely into decisions about the structure of the curriculum.

Arguments in favor of integrating ethics across the curriculum include sending a message to the student body that ethics play a role in every aspect of the profession and ensuring that students learn to recognize ethical aspects of a given scenario. By separating ethics out as a discrete course, students may get the impression that ethics is something to be discussed only in the abstract while failing to make the requisite practical application of ethical principles within the profession.²⁷ Learning to recognize the ethical implications of a given situation should be one of the premier goals of an ethics education program. Failure to integrate ethics across the curriculum would undermine this goal. For example, in a War College setting where students regularly debate the strategic merits of humanitarian intervention, strategic bombing, and use of nuclear weapons, recognizing the ethical implications in each of those scenarios must be deliberately built into the desired learning objectives. Again, the competence and willingness of all faculty members to engage in such discussions is of paramount importance.

While there is no clear consensus on this issue, several studies recommend a combination of the two approaches.²⁸ Programs should provide students with a foundational ethics course (or block) at the start of the program and then integrate ethics across the curriculum, with emphasis on providing all faculty members the tools and training to properly lead a discussion on the implications of ethical issues as they arise in their courses. Many of these studies further recommend surrounding the formal curriculum with extra-curricular initiatives such as guest speakers, brown bag lunches, and ethics symposiums.²⁹ Events of this nature serve to reinforce the institution's commitment to the primacy of ethics and provide further opportunities for students to develop ethical reasoning skills outside of the classroom. A final recommendation is to offer electives that give interested students an opportunity to delve deeper into philosophy.³⁰

This recommendation, again, depends on the availability of qualified faculty to teach such electives.

The second major area of consideration for curriculum development involves striking the correct balance between general philosophy and applied ethics. One of the leading advocates for a greater emphasis on classical philosophy was Vice Admiral James Stockdale who found his study of the classics to be of tremendous aid to him during his time as a POW during the Vietnam War.³¹ More recently, Rear Admiral Walter Carter, President of the US Naval War College, advocated for greater study of classical philosophical texts because, “a fuller understanding of ethics beyond compliance rests on the foundations of moral philosophy.”³² Looking specifically at senior officer education, Martin Cook asserts, “It is important that senior leaders understand just war more deeply and see that the positive laws of war emerge from a long tradition that rests on fundamental moral principles.”³³ While advocating strongly for grounding military ethics in classical philosophy, these leaders also recognize that a military ethics education program must address practical application of philosophical principles to service in the Profession of Arms.

The most common approach to applied ethics is the use of case studies.³⁴ Two important issues emerge from the literature on using case studies to teach ethics. The first is that the case study must present an actual moral dilemma (a choice between two “goods”) and the second is that the faculty member employing the case study in his/her class must have adequate background in ethics to facilitate the discussion.³⁵ The most relevant and morally challenging case study in the world will fail to be useful to students without a qualified instructor to facilitate the discussion.³⁶ As with the debate over stand-alone courses versus integration across the

curriculum, faculty competence plays an important role in selecting and utilizing appropriate case studies.

Faculty

The major consideration with regard to faculty involves balancing the utilization of trained ethicists along with practitioners to meet the War Colleges' twin objectives of enhancing students' moral reasoning skills and preparing them for the ethical dilemmas they are most likely to encounter at the strategic level. A review of the existing scholarship on this issue makes clear three interrelated points. First, it is incorrect to assume that uniformed faculty members are *automatically* prepared to teach ethics based on their experience as members of the Profession of Arms. Military expertise does not necessarily translate to ethics education competency.³⁷ One experienced educator warns that military officers are deeply conditioned to a training model of education that involves a technical approach to problem solving. This approach is particularly ill-suited to ethics education which is much more effectively taught through Socratic dialogue.³⁸

Secondly, faculty development and commitment are simultaneously the most challenging and most important components of a successful ethics education program, especially one that employs the integration across the curriculum approach.³⁹ And, finally, trained ethicists are a critical resource for developing curriculum, training other faculty members in the art of Socratic dialogue, creating effective assessment tools, and coordinating extra-curricular ethics initiatives.⁴⁰

Given these three considerations, an effective War College ethics program would ideally be headed by a senior military officer who also is also a trained ethicist or by a combination of civilian academically-trained ethicists and military officers with experience in the practical

application of ethical principles at the strategic level.⁴¹ In a program that employs the “ethics across the curriculum” approach described in the preceding section, all faculty members would undergo extensive faculty development workshops with the trained ethicists to learn how best to assist students with recognizing ethical implications of given scenarios and to facilitate small-group discussions on ethical decision-making and case-study analysis. This is a tall order for a number of reasons. Faculty members focused on teaching in their area of expertise (i.e. History, International Relations, National Security) may be either uncomfortable and/or unenthusiastic about taking time away from their subjects to discuss ethics. Additionally, faculty turn-over in the War Colleges, particularly among military faculty, is high, so faculty development efforts would have to be sustained and supported from year to year – a significant challenge given the need to balance time spent in collective faculty development sessions with each instructor’s individual course preparation requirements.⁴²

Importantly, though, the challenge of sustained faculty development does not in any way negate the significant negative implications of failing to adequately prepare instructors to identify and address ethical issues in their respective classes. Specifically, an instructor who fails to address ethical issues in his/her classroom sends the signal to students that ethics are either unimportant or a subject to be discussed only in the abstract. Worse, an instructor who lacks adequate ethics background and/or enthusiasm for the topic is likely to mishandle the subject of ethics when it arises, creating either cynicism or confusion among students.⁴³ Ways to mitigate the challenges associated with faculty development are discussed in the recommendations section.

The Model War College Ethics Program

The preceding sections have produced a rough answer to one of this paper's fundamental questions regarding the model curriculum and faculty structure for a US War College ethics education program. This model program should be developed by an "ethics team" that includes both trained ethicists and military officers with significant experience at the strategic level. It should include a stand-alone block of instruction at the beginning of the 10-month experience, signaling the important place of ethics education in the institution's priorities. This stand-alone block should include instruction by the trained ethicist on the philosophical foundations of military ethics and presentation by senior military practitioners of actual moral dilemmas they encountered at the strategic level. Students ought to be required to produce some type of deliverable (written paper, case study analysis, oral presentation) that entails demonstration of their ability to recognize an ethical dilemma and apply their personal ethical decision-making model.

Beyond the stand-alone block, ethics should be integrated across the rest of the curriculum. The "ethics team" should assist course directors with recognizing the ethical implications in their classes and further assist in conducting faculty development workshops that educate specialists from a variety of disciplines in facilitating discussions of ethical issues. Again, command emphasis is essential. All members of the institution, from the Dean to the course directors to the individual instructors, must come to internalize their obligation to address ethical issues as they arise in classes and – more importantly – to understand the regrettable signal it sends to students when they fail to do so.⁴⁴ Outside of the stand-alone block and the integration of ethics across the curriculum, each institution ought to look for ways to keep students (and faculty) engaged on the subject of ethics through a robust program of extra-curricular events such as

guest speakers, brown-bag lunches, and symposiums/summits. Finally, the War Colleges should offer a number of ethics-related electives for those students interested in a deeper understanding of this important subject.

Current War College Ethics Education Programs as Compared to the Model

The programs currently in place at the War Colleges generally compare favorably to the model program outlined above.⁴⁵ In terms of curriculum structure, the Naval War College (NWC), Army War College (USAWC) and Air War College (AWC) all teach between six to nine dedicated contact hours on ethics as part of their leadership courses, but primarily employ an “ethics across the curriculum” approach. With a significantly smaller student body (30 students versus 200-300 at the other service schools), the Marine Corps War College (MCWAR) teaches ethics as a stand-alone block (16.5 contact hours) near the beginning of the “Leadership and Ethics” course. MCWAR also integrates ethics across the remaining curriculum, with the Dean and each of the three course directors each teaching ethics-related classes. All four institutions offer ethics-related electives, although the number of available courses varies based on number of available faculty.

In terms of faculty, both MCWAR and NWC have an “ethics team” working on curriculum and faculty development.⁴⁶ Due to recent drawdowns, USAWC currently has only one trained ethicist (an active-duty Army chaplain) who develops the ethics curriculum and trains 23 other faculty members on the specific classes involving ethics.⁴⁷ Prior to October 2015, AWC lacked a trained ethicist on the faculty and relied on the course director for Joint Strategic Leadership to develop the ethics curriculum. AWC typically brought in a trained ethicist from a nearby civilian university to conduct faculty development once a year. Air University (AU) hired a

trained ethicist in October 2015 as part of the AU Distance Learning Program who, ideally, will assist with AWC's ethics education program in the future.

Most of the War Colleges surround their formal programs with extra-curricular events focused on ethics and professionalism. For example, MCWAR regularly conducts a "Directors Call" during which the MCWAR Director meets with students to discuss professionalism-related topics. Additionally, MCWAR utilizes its "Perspectives in Leadership" series to bring in five different general officers to discuss the practical application of military ethics at the strategic level. Both NWC and USAWC conduct ethics-focused symposia (3/year at NWC and 2/year at USAWC). AWC lacks a formal extra-curricular initiative, but utilizes its Commandant's Lecture Series to expose students to general officers who often speak about the unique challenges they have faced in the strategic environment.

Findings and Recommendations

The comparison of the existing War College ethics education programs to the model program described above reveals significant strengths in many areas. The Marine Corps' decision to embed a stand-alone block of instruction on ethics in the first portion of the Leadership and Ethics Course provides a clear message to the student body that ethics is important to the institution and viewed by senior leaders as the foundation for the rest of the curriculum. In the case of both MCWAR and NWC, the use of an "ethics team" to develop curriculum and promote faculty development is evidence of strong command emphasis and corresponding resourcing for the ethics education program. The extra-curricular initiatives at MCWAR, NWC, and USAWC are an effective means of reinforcing the significance of ethics and providing students the opportunity to hear from senior leaders and reflect upon strategic-

level issues outside of the formal classroom setting. Along with revealing strengths of the existing programs, this assessment also identified areas in need of improvement.

Both USAWC and AWC could benefit from hiring or gaining access to additional trained ethicists to work with military practitioners in order to develop a more robust “ethics team.” Additionally, AWC’s lack of extra-curricular ethics initiatives suggests that ethics education is not an institutional priority. Creating an annual ethics symposium or a series of panel discussions with senior leaders would strengthen AWC’s program. AWC is currently the only program that does not require an ethics-focused deliverable such as a written paper, case study analysis, or oral competence exam. Again, greater command involvement and the creation and empowerment of a dedicated “ethics team” could help address these shortfalls.

The single biggest challenge facing USAWC, NWC, and AWC is ensuring that ethics is properly integrated across the curriculum and that all faculty members are prepared and enthusiastic about discussing ethical issues as they arise in their classes.⁴⁸ For these three institutions that primarily employ the “ethics across the curriculum” approach, faculty commitment and development is essential to each program’s success.

How can the War Colleges best mitigate the challenges associated with faculty development? First and foremost, senior War College leaders (Deans and Commandants) must establish ethics education as a priority for the institution. Command emphasis is essential to broad-based faculty commitment and empowerment of the “ethics team.” Secondly, the War Colleges should conduct a “barriers study” as outlined by those responsible for establishing the Leadership, Ethics, and Corporate Responsibility Initiative at Harvard Business School.⁴⁹ This type of study involves bringing in faculty from all disciplines to determine the most significant

“barriers” to incorporating ethics into their courses. Having identified the barriers, the “ethics team” is then able to develop “levers” or strategies for overcoming those barriers. At Harvard, for example, one of the levers developed to overcome the barrier of junior faculty’s discomfort with teaching outside of their area of expertise was the establishment of teaching groups that provided “powerful opportunities for raising awareness and creating norms among new and continuing faculty around the integration of ethics into the management curriculum.”⁵⁰

Importantly, use of a “barriers study” holds the potential to generate broad-based faculty ownership of the ethics education program.

Additionally, War College leaders should continue to support and encourage involvement of their “ethics teams” in collaborative events with others involved in professionalism initiatives such as the JPME Ethics Working Group, a semi-annual gathering of leaders from across the PME spectrum to exchange ideas and discuss challenges. Additionally, representatives from each of the War Colleges should be routinely invited to attend and participate in the ethics symposiums hosted by fellow institutions. Events of this sort allow educators to learn of the work being done by their colleagues at other institutions and to discuss challenges and issues associated with ethics education.

Finally, the War College accrediting body, the Process Accreditation of Joint Education (PAJE), should incorporate the model structure outlined in this paper into their accreditation process. With guidance from the Joint Staff Director for Joint Force Development (J-7), PAJE conducts a comprehensive review of all JMPE institutions every six years.⁵¹ Moving forward, the PAJE team should include a trained ethicist to look specifically at the ethics education component of the War Colleges. With the right subject matter experts as part the team, PAJE can provide the War Colleges important insights into the quality of their ethics programs.

Conclusion

This paper followed a two-pronged approach to create the structure for a model War College ethics education program. First, it reviewed the rationale for military ethics and, specifically, examined the need for senior officers to be grounded in both classical philosophy and the practical application of that philosophy to ethical decision-making and moral reasoning in the military. Secondly, it drew on ethics education scholarship from a wide variety of professional disciplines. This review of literature facilitated identification of best practices in the areas of curriculum and faculty. Beyond the scope of this paper, but very much in need of additional research, is the issue of assessment. How can the War Colleges determine whether their programs are meeting established objectives? A review of the broad scope of ethics education scholarship from other disciplines could provide a starting point for more research in this critical area. Additionally, more research is needed to determine whether the model structure outlined here is applicable at other levels of JPME.

Comparing the existing programs to a model structure revealed both strengths and weaknesses in the War College ethics programs. War College leaders are well-served to review and, where appropriate, adopt the best practices from other civilian and military institutions. For those areas in need of improvement, particularly the lack of adequately robust “ethics teams” and faculty development programs for non-ethicists, now is the time for War College leaders to provide command emphasis and resources to enhance and expand their existing programs.

There is, perhaps, no level of PME at which ethics education is more important than the War Colleges due to the influential positions these officers will hold as they return to the operational force. As one group of scholars explain, “If at the influential levels of power in the armed forces

moral reasoning is faulty or nonexistent, the military and America are in trouble. Commitment to the teaching and learning of ethics at the bottom of the military hierarchy will sustain itself only if junior leaders see evidence of good moral reasoning at the top.”⁵² Strengthening existing War College ethics programs requires a significant investment of scarce resources, to include time, money, and institutional energy. However, given the mandate from our nation’s most senior leaders to renew the Profession of Arms, an investment in senior leaders is worth the cost. War College graduates play an essential role in establishing an ethical climate across the joint force and in maintaining trust between the military and the American public. The institutions charged with producing leaders capable of and committed to upholding the ethical standards of the Profession of Arms must strive to be the home to the nation’s premier ethics education programs.

Notes

¹ Peter L. Stromberg, Malham M. Wakin, and Daniel Callahan, *The Teaching of Ethics in the Military* (Hastings-on-Hudson, NY: Institute of Society, Ethics, and the Life Sciences, 1982), 30.

² Craig Whitlock, “Military Brass, Behaving Badly: Files Detail a Spate of Misconduct Dogging Armed Forces,” *Washington Post*, 26 January 2014. In addition to detailing senior officer misconduct, this article cites an email from Caitlin Hayden, a White House spokeswoman, indicating that President Obama “conveyed to the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff that instances of senior general and flag officers not living up to these standards must be addressed effectively.”

It is worth noting that, across the Department of Defense, terms/phrases such as “military ethics”, “professionalism”, and “the professional military ethic” are often used interchangeably. This usage is problematic in that it conflates related but distinct concepts. Work needs to be done to disentangle these terms and provide greater clarity to what exactly is meant by each. For example, is the personal conduct of an individual officer necessarily part of military ethics, or is the latter primarily concerned with how the military prosecutes war? Does it naturally follow that an officer’s personal character is causally related to his/her ability to follow the principles of the just war tradition? When the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff called for a renewed emphasis on professionalism, was he talking about the personal conduct of senior leaders or adherence to the laws of armed conflict or both? Unfortunately, this important project of disentanglement exceeds the scope of this paper, but it is worth acknowledging the problem of muddled terminology and admitting that this paper is guilty of failing to adequately distinguish among these terms.

³ CJCSI 1800.01E, *Officer Professional Military Education Policy (OPMEP)*, 29 May 2015, A-3.

⁴ As defined in the OPMEP, the Service Senior Leader Colleges include the Air War College (AWC), US Army War College (USAWC), Naval War College (NWC), and the Marine Corps War College (MCWAR). Other senior service colleges that fall under the umbrella of National Defense University are also governed by the OPMEP, but have a slightly different charter and thus different guidance. While this paper is particularly focused on the Service Senior Leader College, many of the implications are equally applicable to the other senior service college programs. For a breakdown of the guidance to these various programs, see *OPMEP*, 29 May 2015,

⁵ CJCS White Paper, “America’s Military – A Profession of Arms,” 23 Feb 2012.

⁶ Stromberg et al., *The Teaching of Ethics in the Military*, 1.

⁷ Martin L. Cook and Henrik Syse, “What Should we Mean by ‘Military Ethics’,” *Journal of Military Ethics* 9, no. 2 (2010): 119.

⁸ James H. Toner, *True Faith and Allegiance: The Burden of Military Ethics* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 134.

⁹ In late 2012, reports surfaced that General David Petraeus had engaged in an extramarital affair while serving as the Commander of NATO forces in Afghanistan. The Petraeus incident might have been written off as exceptional were it not for a series of additional issues coming to light in the following months to include a sex and bribery scandal involving senior Navy officers, evidence of systemic cheating on nuclear weapons handling proficiency tests in both the Navy and Air Force, the Army's court-martial of Brigadier General Jeffrey Sinclair on charges of sexual assault and adultery, and the demotion of the former AFRICOM Commander, General William "Kip" Ward, following revelations that he had fraudulently used thousands of government dollars for unauthorized travel expenses. For a summary of these incidents, see Craig Whitlock, "Military Brass, Behaving Badly: Files Detail a Spate of Misconduct Dogging Armed Forces," *Washington Post*, 26 January 2014. See also, Editorial, "What the Air Force Can Learn from the Nuclear Cheating Scandal," *Washington Post*, 6 April 2014; Sam Lagrone, "Navy Expels 34 Sailors in Nuclear Cheating Scandal," *USNI News*, 20 August 2014, <http://news.usni.org/2014/08/20/navy-expels-34-sailors-nuclear-cheating-scandal>; "4-Star Who Headed AFRICOM Demoted," *Army Times*, 13 November 2012.

¹⁰ James Joyner, "The US Military's Ethics Crisis," *The National Interest*, 13 February 2014, <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/the-us-militarys-ethics-crisis-9872>.

¹¹ Cheryl Pellerin, "Panetta Directs Review of Officers' Culture of Stewardship," *DoD News*, 15 Nov 2012, <http://archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=118551>. See also, Jim Garamone, "Panetta Briefs President on Dempsey Ethics Findings," *DoD News*, 7 Dec 2012, <http://archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=118741>.

¹² CJCS Notice 3500.01, *2014-2017 Chairman's Joint Training Guidance*, 10 October 2013. Additionally, in early 2014, Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel expressed concern that systemic issues may be degrading the "health of the force" and, in turn, undermining the public's trust in the military. He created the position of Senior Advisor for Military Professionalism, appointing RADM Margaret Klein to that post, in order to coordinate DoD's efforts on professionalism. See Jennifer Hlad, "Hagel Appoints Top Ethics Officer," *Stars and Stripes*, 25 March 2014, <http://www.stripes.com/news/hagel-appoints-top-ethics-officer-1.274483>.

¹³ United States Government Accounting Office. *Military Personnel: Additional Steps are Needed to Strengthen DOD's Oversight of Ethics and Professionalism Issues*. GAO-15-711. Washington, D.C.: United States Government Accounting Office, September, 2015.

¹⁴ For an articulation and subsequent refutation of this argument, see A. Edward Major, Lee Deremer, and David G. Bolgiano, "Ethics Can Be Taught," *United States Naval Institute Proceedings* 138, no. 12 (Dec 2012): 58.

¹⁵ *OPMEP*, 29 May 2015, E-D-1.

¹⁶ Thomas R. Piper, Marcy C. Gentile, and Sharon Daloz Parks, *Can Ethics Be Taught? Perspectives, Challenges, and Approaches at Harvard Business School* (Boston: Harvard Business School, 1993), 13.

¹⁷ James H. Toner, "Mistakes in Teaching Ethics," *Airpower Journal* 12, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 46.

¹⁸ *OPMEP*, 29 May 2015, E-D-1.

¹⁹ Martin L. Cook, *The Moral Warrior: Ethics and Service in the US Military* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), 37.

²⁰ Edward A. Major, "Ethics Education of Military Leaders," *Military Review* 94, no. 2 (March-April 2014): 59.

²¹ Major, "Ethics Education of Military Leaders," 59.

²² Stromberg, et al., *Teaching of Ethics*, 48-49. The authors explain that establishing the unattainable goal of producing leaders who always live up to the ethical standards of the profession can have significant negative consequences. Specifically, it can lead to "unrealistic modes of evaluation, and, ultimately, general disillusionment that the venture has any value at all." (Quote from p. 43). In other words, program goals based and measured primarily on future behavior could lead to the ethical failures of a few undermining the ethical development of many. For more on the goal of ethics education being development of moral reasoning skills rather than practice of ethical behavior, see Tine Vynickier, et al, "Effectiveness of Ethics Education as perceived by Nursing Students: Development and Testing of a Novel Assessment Instrument," *Nursing Ethics* 22, no. 3 (2015): 303; and Daniel Callahan, "Goals in the Teaching of Ethics," in *Ethics Teaching in Higher Education*, ed. Daniel Callahan and Sissela Bok (New York: Plenum Press, 1980), 69-70.

²³ Major, "Ethics Education of Military Leaders," 56.

²⁴ For a superb discussion of the stand-alone versus integrated across the curriculum debate, see Laura P. Hartman and Edwin M. Hartman, "How to Teach Ethics: Assumptions and Arguments," *Journal of Business Ethics Education* 1, no. 2 (2004): 170-172. For another perspective written by a literature professor based on her experiences incorporating ethics into nonethics courses, see Susan Resneck Parr, "The Teaching of Ethics in Undergraduate Nonethics Courses," in Callahan and Bok, *Ethics Teaching in Higher Education*, 191-203.

²⁵ Kathy Lund Dean, Jeri Mullins Beggs, and Charles J. Fornaciari, "Teaching Ethics and Accreditation: Faculty Competence, Methods, and Assessment," *Journal of Business Ethics Education* 4 (2007): 7. The researchers in this study concluded that the instructor must possess "ethics competency" which one they define as "the possession of background in enduring philosophical thought in ethics, such as the moral foundations of Kant, Aristotle, Socrates, Rawls, and so forth." Quote from p. 7.

²⁶ Piper et al., *Can Ethics be Taught?*, 107.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 127-128. See also, Hartman and Hartman, “How to Teach Ethics,” 170.

²⁸ See Piper et al., *Can Ethics Be Taught?*, 118 and 127; Hartman and Hartman, “How to Teach Ethics,” 171-173; and Dean et al., “Teaching Ethics and Accreditation,” 10.

²⁹ See Piper et al., *Can Ethics Be Taught?*, 118 and 127; and Dean et al., “Teaching Ethics and Accreditation,” 10. Both of these studies also recommend surrounding the formal curriculum with extra-curricular initiatives. Specific recommendations about extra-curricular initiatives can also be found in Major, “Ethics Can be Taught,” 61.

³⁰ Major, *Ethics Can Be Taught*,” 61.

³¹ Cook, *The Moral Warrior*, 47.

³² Walter E. Carter, Jr. “Ethics in the US Navy,” Paper written in support of the Navy Leader Development Continuum and Strategy (US Naval War College, Newport, RI, March, 2014), 7. For a similar argument in favor of studying the classics, see, Major, “Ethics Can be Taught,” 61.

³³ Cook, *The Moral Warrior*, 22.

³⁴ Focusing specifically on senior leaders, Cook argues, “that discussion of complex cases among peers is the most effective approach to improving skills for moral reasoning . . . insuring such discussions are a part of PME at the most senior levels is vital.” Cook, “Professional Military Ethics Across the Career Spectrum,” Paper presented at the Fort Leavenworth Ethics Symposium, 15 Nov 2010, and published in Mark H. Wiggins and Chaplain (Maj.) Larry Dabeck, eds., *Fort Leavenworth Ethics Symposium: Exploring the Professional Military Ethic, Symposium Report* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: CGSC Foundation Press, 2011), 12. For additional discussion of the need for practical application, see Heidi von Weltzien Hoivik, “Learning Experiences from Designing and Teaching a Mandatory MBA Course on Ethics and Leadership,” *Journal of Business Ethics Education* 1, no. 2 (2004): 240. According to one survey of nursing students, students reported gaining little from purely philosophical discussions, but found courses that focused on applied ethics through the use of case studies to be highly beneficial. Specifically, the researchers concluded, “Indeed, our results and those from previous studies clearly indicate that linking ethics with daily practices is important.” See, Vynickier, et al., “Effectiveness of Ethics Education as perceived by Nursing Students”: 303-304.

³⁵ For a discussion on the importance of using case studies that involve actual moral dilemmas, see Paul Robinson, “Ethics Training and Development in the Military,” *Parameters* 37, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 31; Major, “Ethics Education of Military Leaders,” 60.; Le Gene Quesenberry, et al, “Ethics Assessment in a General Education Programme,” *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* 37, no. 2 (March 2012): 208; and Piper et al., *Can Ethics Be Taught?*, 53. For the need for faculty competence, see Dean et al., “Teaching Ethics and Accreditation,” 10; and Hartman and Hartman, “How to Teach Ethics,” 171-172.

³⁶ Toner, “Mistakes in Teaching Ethics,” 49. Toner explains, “I do not argue that good curricula are unimportant; of course they are. But good teachers create good curricula; good curricula, of themselves, cannot make good teachers.”

³⁷ Joan Johnson-Freese, *Educating America’s Military* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 81.

³⁸ Joseph J. Miller, “Squaring the Circle: Teaching Philosophical Ethics in the Military,” *Journal of Military Ethics* 3, no. 3 (2004): 206-208.

³⁹ For works that emphasize this point, see Stromberg, et al, *The Teaching of Ethics in the Military*,” 67; Wayne Norman, “Put an Ethicist on the Team! A Promising but Neglected ‘Third Way’ to Teach Ethics in a Business School,” *Journal of Business Ethics Education* 1, no. 2 (2004): 263; Piper, et al., *Can Ethics Be Taught?*, 132.

⁴⁰ I define a “trained ethicist” as one who holds an advanced degree (MA or PhD) in philosophy. For superb discussions of the benefits of incorporating trained ethicists into an ethics education program, see Miller, “Squaring the Circle,” 213; Hartman and Hartman, “How to Teach Ethics: Assumptions and Arguments,” 172; Norman, “Put an Ethicist on the Team,” 258 and 262. On the specific issue of developing rubrics for assessment of student case study analyses, see Matthew W. Keefer, et al, “The Importance of Formative Assessment in Science and Engineering Ethics Education: Some Evidence and Practical Advice,” *Science and Engineering Ethics* 20 (2014): 251; and Quesenberry, et al, “Ethics Assessment in a General Education Programme,” 208.

⁴¹ Stromberg, et al., *Teaching of Ethics in the Military*, 61. These authors make a unique recommendation regarding faculty for intermediate and senior PME. Specifically, they recommend that the Staff and War Colleges hire senior officers who, while they were junior officers, received advanced degrees in philosophy in preparation for teaching at the military academies. In theory, these officers would have rotated back out to the operational force following their teaching assignments at the academies, gained additional exposure to likely ethical dilemmas, and be uniquely prepared to teach ethics to other senior officers. In short, they recommend that the services each look to build a nucleus of trained ethicists who are available to teach at each level of PME. For this specific recommendation, see pages 67 and 73.

⁴² A number of works discuss the need and challenges associated with faculty development. Specifically, see Dean, et al, “Teaching Ethics and Accreditation,” 9-10; Norman, “Put an Ethicist on the Team!,” 263; Robinson, “Ethics Training and Development in the Military,” 29.

⁴³ Dean, et al, “Teaching Ethics and Accreditation,” 9-10; Hartman and Hartman, “How to Teach Ethics,” 170-172; Piper, et al., *Can Ethics Be Taught?*, 95. As Joseph P. Miller explains, poorly led ethical discussions could potentially produce officers who, “make moral decisions about false dilemmas using mechanical decision matrices that are based on partially formed and poorly understood intuitions.” Miller, “Squaring the Circle,” 210.

⁴⁴ For the powerful signal sent by the omission of ethics, see Piper, et al., *Can Ethics Be Taught?*, 6. See also Norman, “Put an Ethicist on the Team!”, 263; and Dean, et al, “Teaching Ethics and Accreditation,” 9-10.

⁴⁵ My knowledge of the current programs in place at the four US War Colleges is based on information that I received from those responsible for the ethics education program at each institution. Between October and November 2015, I informally solicited and received their feedback on curriculum, faculty, assessment procedures, and extra-curricular initiatives. Gene Kamena, Course Director, Joint Strategic Leadership, Air War College, email to the author, 27 Oct 15; CH (COL) John L. Kallerson, Professor of Ethics, US Army War College, email to the author, 13 Nov 2015; Thomas J. Gibbons, Associate Professor, US Naval War College, email to the author, 16 Nov 2015; COL Chris Thompson, Director, Marine Corps War College Leadership and Ethics, email to the author, 20 Nov 2015.

⁴⁶ MCWAR benefits from access to trained ethicists at Marine Corps University and the extensive utilization of senior leaders (mostly general officers) and outside speakers. NWC’s “ethics team” includes trained ethicists from the College of Operational and Strategic Leadership that falls under the NWC umbrella. Additionally, NWC benefits from having established the Admiral James Bond Stockdale Chair of Professional Military Ethics in 2006.

⁴⁷ USAWC previously had three trained ethicists on the faculty. However, one of the two military ethicists departed as a result of the Army’s FY14 Selective Early Retirement Board for Colonels. USAWC eliminated the civilian ethicist position when it was forced to cut ten Title 10 professor positions in 2014-15. CH (COL) John L. Kallerson, Professor of Ethics, US Army War College, email to the author, 16 Dec 2015.

⁴⁸ With only 30 students and eight faculty members, MCWAR faces fewer challenges with ethics integration and faculty training. Combining its relatively small size with clear command emphasis, ethics is currently thoroughly integrated across the curriculum at MCWAR.

⁴⁹ For a full discussion of the “barriers study” at Harvard, see Piper, et al., *Can Ethics Be Taught?*, “Chapter 3: Engaging the Power and Competence of the Faculty,” 73-115.

⁵⁰ Piper et al., *Can Ethics Be Taught?*, 90.

⁵¹ For a complete overview of the PAJE process, see *OPMEP*, 29 May 2015, Appendix F: Process for Accreditation of Joint Education.

⁵² Stromberg, et al., *Teaching of Ethics*, 6.

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