**Living the Virtues at Culver: The 11th Grade Ethics Curriculum at the Culver Academies**

Abstract

This talk will be conducted by two faculty members from the Ethics team at the Culver Academies. We’ll introduce our Ethics curriculum to the audience and and then open up the floor for questions on any elements of our course design. What follows is a succinct summary of our institution and our commitment to a systematic introduction to ethics.

The Culver Academies, a boarding school in Northern Indiana, educate “students for leadership and responsible citizenship through integrated programs that emphasize the cultivation of character” (Culver Mission). As part of Culver’s commitment to cultivation of character in its students, all Culver students enroll in Ethics, offered through the Department of Leadership Education, in the 11th grade.

In this leadership laboratory, students don’t just think *about* ethics—they *practice* it; they succeed; they fail; they grow; they learn.

This course is unique in its aims and design.

First, our students, already inculcated in what we call the ‘Cardinal Virtues Plus Two’ (wisdom, courage, moderation, justice, transcendence, humanity) and the ‘Culver Values’ (honor, truth, service, duty) from their first year on campus, reflect on just what these virtues and values are and how they already feature in their lives on and off campus.

Second, our students immerse themselves in a study of Aristotle’s ethics and contemporary virtue theory, with an aim toward applying Aristotelian virtue theory to their own lives. This itself is drawn from Aristotle: “The end of [ethics] is action, not knowledge.” (NE 1095a5-6)

Last, students draw from insights derived from social psychology and behavioral economics to add an empirical dimension to their understanding of human ethical behavior and their own decision-making processes. Students are exposed to contemporary research on (among others) bias, systems thinking, dishonesty, empathic leadership, and human decision-making.

Throughout these areas of study students actively apply what they learn: Students develop their own and respond to others’ moral reasoning at the Harkness table; redesign our central institutional values and virtues according to their own specifications; conduct mock interviews for leadership positions centered on the virtues; write reviews for films with ethical dimensions; engage in probing, difficult case studies on the High School Ethics Bowl model; rewrite the Honor Code; re-enact an honor council case; and reflect throughout the course on their own *practice* of the virtues—and *improve* on their practice based on these reflections.

Together, these represent a rich, virtue-centered introduction for students to the lifelong pursuit of the good life.

**Evan Dutmer, Ph.D.,** is Instructor in World Languages and Cultures and Leadership Education at the Culver Academies, where he teaches Latin and Ethics. Before joining the faculty at Culver in Fall 2018, Dutmer taught philosophy and classics at both the college and high school levels in Illinois while pursuing his doctoral research.

Dutmer received his B.A. in philosophy from Northern Illinois University, where he also studied Classics and German. He graduated with an M.A. and Ph.D. in Ancient Philosophy from Northwestern University, specializing in ancient ethics and political philosophy. In 2018-2019, he was Research Visitor in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame. In 2019-2020, he serves as a research consultant in Classics in the School of Languages and Cultures at Purdue University.

**Don Fox** is a Senior Instructor in Leadership Education at Culver Academies. Mr. Fox returned to Culver, Indiana in 2013, following a 30 year career in the United States Government which culminated with his service as the General Counsel and Acting Director of the United States Office of Government Ethics in Washington, DC, the senior ethics official in the Executive Branch. Mr. Fox’s agency was responsible for reviewing financial disclosure reports of Presidential candidates and certifying Presidential nominees including potential cabinet secretaries for potential conflicts of interest. In addition, he led the agency’s oversight, policy direction, and training for ethics programs in more than 135 Executive Branch agencies serving 4 million civilian employees and members of the military to prevent and resolve conflicts of interest. Mr. Fox is a noted authority in the area of ethics and has been interviewed and quoted by national media including the New York Times, the Washington Post, Time Magazine, Forbes, CNN Money, CBS, NBC, MSNBC, and National Public Radio.

Mr. Fox’s government service also included tours as the Deputy General Counsel of the Air Force, Associate General Counsel of the Navy, and an officer in the Navy Judge Advocate General’s Corp, retiring from the Navy Reserve with the rank of Commander. Mr. Fox is a graduate of Culver Military Academy, holds a B.A. in Economics and International Studies from the University of North Carolina, a J.D. from Wake Forest University, and an LL.M. in International and Comparative Law from the George Washington University.