The Humanities Virtues Project: Bringing a Virtue-based Approach to Responsible Conduct of Research Training to the Humanities

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The Larger Project

• Develop a curriculum using a virtue theoretic framework
  • Focus on dispositions (virtues) to act appropriately rather than a series of rules to follow
  • Ask ‘what is it to be an excellent researcher/scholar?’
    • Different fields and disciplines may have different views on excellence and the dispositions that support it.
  • Incorporate traditional RCR training tools into our larger framework
• Use the virtue schema to reframe RCR and research ethics issues
• Starting with workshops on the virtues with further developments to come
Started with Science and a Toolbox

• Toolbox Dialogue Initiative
  • Philosophically infused dialogues
  • Prompts used to initiate discussion and reveal underlying assumptions and differences in definitions/conceptions
  • 300+ workshops nationally and internationally

• Adapted in light of the Scientific Virtues Project
  • Modules designed around virtues and RCR concepts
  • Moderated more directly due to pedagogical needs
    • ‘Socrates in the room’
  • 50+ workshops to date
The Workshops

• Aim to help participants connect practices with the values that inform those practices.
• Discussion prompts range from abstract (e.g. the nature of discipline/field) to concrete (RCR concerns).
• Interactions with other scholars reveal nuances of ethical situations.
• Offer opportunities to develop skills and familiarity in discussing ethically complex (and in some cases sensitive) issues.
  • Helps at both the individual level as well as the cultural level.
• Tie proper action to the values inherent in the discipline
  • Motivation from within
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• Humanities remain underserved in RCR
  • MSU mandates that *all* graduate students receive RCR training
• MSU looking at culture change on campus
  • Virtues projects as ‘dual purpose’ – helping with RCR instruction 
    *and* developing a culture that supports open discussion
• Not simply dropping a science model onto humanists
  • Working with departments to tailor workshops
  • Build on what we have learned in science to develop a model that 
    works for humanists
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• Graduate students from across college together in one discussion
  • Philosophy; Art, Art History, and Design; Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures; English; Theatre; Romance and Classical Studies; Religious Studies; Linguistics and Germanic, Slavic, Asian, and African Languages

• Prompts aimed at what it means to be an excellent researcher in humanities disciplines.

• Participants encouraged to discuss similarities and differences among their viewpoints.

• Moderator can play Socratic role when needed.

• Six 3-hour workshops held this year, with an avg. 4-5 participants.
What we are seeing... preliminarily

• Humanists tend to see RCR as a ‘science thing’, but embrace the focus on excellence in research.
• Graduate students greatly prefer discussion-based training.
• Participants benefit from encounters with other disciplines.
  • Moral perception/sensemaking
  • Logical consequence and *aporía*
• Both similarities and differences between humanists and scientists
  • Different manifestations of the same values/virtues
• Participants reflect on the discussions after workshops are over.
• Graduate students appreciate spaces to be naïve.
Future directions...

• Expand and refine humanities modules.
  • Develop prompts for specific virtues
  • Introduce more RCR topics
• Explore new modes of assessment based on our theoretical framework.
  • Philosophy and psychology of action
• Use what we have learned to expand to other domains
  • Currently in talks with 4 other colleges within MSU
• Continue working with the Graduate School at MSU to make RCR and research ethics a part of the broader graduate curriculum.
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