TEACHING PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION ETHICS IN HIGHER EDUCATION ON-LINE

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ABSTRACT

In performing their functions, public officials have to make ethical choices. Learning about making ethical choices should therefore not be left to choice. Public officials should be equipped with ethical decision-making skills. This paper focuses on the teaching of Public Administration ethics in higher education. [In this paper the academic subject is spelt Public Administration whereas the practice is spelt public administration, (i.e. the one of activity)]. The paper covers issues such as the significance of teaching Public Administration ethics, approaches to teaching Public Administration ethics as well as techniques for teaching Public Administration ethics. Different teaching techniques, which may be used to direct attention to ethical issues in Public Administration, include group-facilitating, guest lecturing case study method and on-line teaching. This paper pays special attention to online-teaching. It is the duty of teachers in Public Administration ethics to determine which technique(s) to use in a given situation.

INTRODUCTION

Public administration ethics refers to the determination of what is right, proper and just in the decisions and actions that affect members of the public. Thus concern with ethics in the public sector focuses on what is considered the right and proper behaviour of public employees. The words "right", "proper" and "just" are ethical terms, which express value judgments towards other people that are considered to be just. Public employees are expected to act in a "proper" and "just" manner in the provision of services to members of the public. To perform their duties in a proper and just manner, public employees should be provided with education and training in Public Administration ethics. This paper pays attention to the significance and status of teaching

Public administration ethics. It also focuses on the approaches and techniques for teaching public administration ethics in higher education.

SIGNIFICANCE OF TEACHING PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION ETHICS ON-LINE

According to Dennis (1987) the most frequently stated goals of ethics education in public administration are: (i) to produce a student who knows how to make moral judgments and (ii) to produce a student whose behaviour is ethical. Catron and Denhardt (1994) also note other goals that might be considered for Public Administration ethics. These include building capacity to tolerate ambiguity and differences of opinion, conveying knowledge of democratic values and the obligations of public employees operating in the framework of the country's constitution; developing practical under-standing of the constraints on and expectations of public employees (e.g. knowledge of codes of ethics and institutional norms and rules); developing skills in managing ethics by influencing institutional culture and bureaucratic norms, and modeling ethical conduct as a leader.

A study (Cooper, 2001:66) of ethics education underscores the wide variation in goals among ethics instructors surveyed. The top five goals for instructors (in order) include:

- developing an awareness of ethical issues and problems
- fostering ethical conduct in public service
- building analytical skills in ethical decision-making
- cultivating an attitude of moral obligation and personal
- responsibility in public service, and
- stimulating moral imagination.

Online teaching aims to address the need for courses on ethics that exists at universities and technikons. Since not all participants are able to attend courses on campuses of academic institutions, it is essential to develop a telematic course on ethics. Such a telematic course will allow participants to take the course through distance education by means of multimedia facilities at academic institutions. The appeal of an asynchronous (or different places at different times) learning network lies in the fact that it enables students to learn at any place and at any time as dictated by their personal propensities, discipline, access to information and computer technologies, and work obligations. In this regard, it is an appealing alternative method of achieving learning and educational goals in an environment where traditional methods cannot be utilized, or where they are not the ideal method to employ (Clapper & Greyling, 2001:206).

The telematic version of the course may include:

- Web CT training modules packaged on CD ROM. The CD will include all reading material, video clips that can be used to illustrate case studies, links to relevant sites, quizzes, assignments and self-study exercises

- online classes facilitated by experts at academic institutions and even lectures abroad

- a chat tool for class discussions and peer interaction

- online feedback on assignments, quizzes and tests

- electronic mail communication with lecturers and fellow students

- an electronic calendar for study planning requiring the lecturer to make public entries regarding due dates for assignments and tests, and the students can use this tool to plan their own studies.

TEACHING PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION ETHICS ON-LINE: THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA EXPERIENCE

Hanekom, Rowland and Bain (1995:170) argue that issues dealing with ethical dilemmas such as misuse of office, value choices and the relationship between senior and junior public employees, should be included in the Public Administration curricula of universities and technikons . However, not all public employees attend universities and techikons, and those that do, do not necessarily study Public administration.

The School of Public Management and Administration of the University of Pretoria offers a compulsory course at Master of Public Administration (MPA) level entitled: *Public Administration* (Selected Topics) (PAD 801). This course is presented to students on-line. The course includes a module on Public Sector Ethics. The module deals with the following topics: manifestations of unethical conduct, causes of unethical conduct, ethical foundations of Public Administration, measures for combating unethical conduct in the public sector.

In addition, the School also offers a course as an online elective at MPA level entitled Ethics in the Public Sector (EOS 880). Topics covered in this course include the above topics as well as accountability in the public sector, socio-cultural instruments for promoting ethical conduct, oversight bodies for combating unethical behavior, professionalism in the public sector and "soft" and "hard" issues of performance management. "Soft"

issues of performance management refers to the fact that senior public employees must be accountable for their leadership and "hard" issues of performance management refer to Batho Pele principles provided for by the *White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery*, 1997:7. These principles are consultation, service standards, access, courtesy, information, openness and transparency, redress and value for money.

According to Piper and Gentile (1993:129) electives are a valuable component of a broad-based program. They are essential by virtue of the number of students they can reach and because they represent a source of tested materials for first-year courses and teaching/course development opportunities for lecturers for whom these issues are a central focus. Elective courses provide faculty members opportunity to focus on a particular aspect of ethics and thereby achieve a greater depth of understanding. However, a programme that relies heavily on electives is insufficient in two ways. First, only a small percentage of students take a particular elective, and those who do, are not necessarily those to whom the elective offers greatest potential benefit. Second, because electives are usually offered later in a student's course of study, their impacts on community norms and individual learning are usually limited. In addition, these are not arguments for abandoning electives. On the contrary, these strengths and weaknesses suggest the importance of building electives into a broad, integrated programme that also includes a required course early in the first year and integration throughout the first-year curriculum.

A strategy based on a single required course has many appealing characteristics. First, it is administratively easy, requiring little more than the presence of several ethics specialists, recruited either directly to the faculty or part-time from a neighbouring philosophy department. Second, issues of ethics would be at the very centre of the course, rather than an intermittent add-on as is often the case when responsibility is distributed across the faculty. Third, students would be presented with an integrated reasoning process that (if encouraged) might be used in other courses. Fourth, the existence of the required course, staffed by senior faculty members, would signal clearly and unambiguously the significance that the institution assigns to these issues. Unfortunately, an exclusive reliance on a required course is institutionally and pedagogically misguided.

Although a required course early in the first year is very important to the overall effort, there is strong evidence that issues of ethics must be addressed in all courses. There are two reasons for this. Ethical dilemmas arise in all functional areas and at all levels of the institution. They are embedded in the decisions that managers must take every day. Failing to address these issues when they arise in faculty courses inadequately defines the responsibilities school graduates will eventually assume. Second, when the faculty avoids these issues, they send an unintended but powerful signal that they are not a priority. They inadvertently erase to the good efforts of others. Finally, the refusal to recognize and to address these issues as they arise provides cynics with ammunition for charges of hypocrisy, and also provides students with flawed models of leadership (Piper & Gentile 1993:127-128).

To ensure effectiveness in teaching Public Administration ethics, Piper and Gentile (1993:127) argue that the need is for a broad programme that includes all three elements: a compulsory course, elective courses, and a purposeful distribution of issues across existing courses in the first year. No single approach has proven to be effective in placing leadership, ethics and corporate responsibility at the centre of the school experience. Each provides distinctive and essential benefits; but implemented in isolation, each has serious shortcomings.

APPROACHES TO TEACHING PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION ETHICS

The following approaches, to teaching Public Administration ethics are essential.

Ethics of duty

A morality of duty teaches that each act is to be judged in terms of obedience to a moral rule, principle or law; the basic moral distinction is between right and wrong. An ethics of duty emphasizes the rightness or wrongness of the act itself. It examines the intent and motive of the one who acts. The morality of duty (deontological ethics) state that public employees must not do wrong for its own sake - because it is wrong. "Duty" refers to "responsibility" or "moral obligation" or "that which we ought to do" or that which goes with the job. Ethics of duty is concerned with what public employees are morally obliged to do (keep promise, tell the truth, and take care of public property) without thinking of the possible good to which fidelity to these obligations may lead. If somebody has signed a contract it is his/her duty or obligation to carry it out. Failure of which he/she can be charged with "dereliction of duty" - the neglect of which is incompatible with the obligation that goes with an employee's rank and responsibilities (Brennan, 1973: 10-11&81-83).

According to Brennan (1973: 82), classical Chinese philosophers taught a doctrine called "Rectification of the Names". This was the first principle of governing themselves as well as provinces and states. If one has the name father and he takes no thought of his children's upbringing or education, there is something seriously out of line between the name he bears and the neglect of his children - and this should be corrected. In the same token, if one is a public employee and promotes personal or private interest rather than public interest, his/her name or else his/her unethical conduct needs to be corrected. Other manifestations of unethical conduct which need to be corrected include outside employment, discrimination, self-dealing, gift-giving traditions and entertainment, nepotism and favouritism, sexual harassment, misuse of public office, conflict of interest and bribery.

It should, however, be stated that Public Administration is value-laden. It depends on the here and now - the time and circumstances. What is ethical to one society may be unethical to another society. What is ethical to a specific section in a society may be unethical to another section of the same society. Each society defines what is ethical or unethical on the basis of its culture, tradition or convention. It is essential to teach students about these unethical behavior and the consequences they have in the promotion of public interest, effective governance and morals of the whole society.

Ethics of aspiration

Ethics of aspiration aims at excellence and the fullest development of human capacities. In ethics of aspiration, the moral good lies in the aspiration or in the end or goal aspired to - to grow, to flourish, and to realize oneself (Brennan, 1973:10-11). In this section, attention is paid to different categories or approaches, which inspire public officials to act in an ethical manner. These approaches are constitutional values, normative values, virtue ethics and professional ethics.

Constitutional values

Constitutional values refer to those values, which have been provided for by the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, 1996 (Act 108 of 1999). Section 195(1) of the Constitution provides that public administration must be governed by the basic values and principles such as those of representativeness, accountability, transparency and those of efficiency and effectiveness.

In addition to the above values, the teaching of Public Administration ethics should include the identification and specifications of the functions of state institutions supporting constitutional democracy. These institutions are also called watchdog or oversight bodies. They include the Public Protector, the Auditor-General, the Electoral Commission, Commission for Gender Equality, the Human Rights Commission and the Public Service Commission (Sections 181(1) and 195(1) and (2) of the Constitution of 1996).

In addition to providing candidates with the description of the functions of these bodies, the instructor should also provide them with a critical analysis of their roles as well. Thus, an instructor should not only provide them with positive aspects but should also request them to identify their shortcomings. These shortcomings will serve as the basis for determining the effectiveness of these bodies. The candidates may also identify some of the cases brought to these bodies and then try to analyze some questionable decisions made by them, if any.

Normative values

In South Africa, there are extensive literature on normative values, also known as ethical foundations of South African Public Administration. They are also called the basic guidelines as they guide the behaviour of public employees. Cloete (1998:91), argues that public administration is recognized as a distinctive field of work because of the requirements that political office bearers and public employees in a democratic state have to respect specific guidelines that govern their conduct when carrying out their work.

Normative values include political supremacy, public accountability, respect of societal values fairness and reasonableness and efficiency and effectiveness. In order to instill values, the teaching of Public Administration should include instruction in these normative values.

Virtue ethics

Aristotle (in Brennan, 1973: 108-109) argues that the virtues or excellences are states of character. People are not born good persons, but are naturally adaptable to the good. This is accomplished by cultivation of good habits, for which training by parents and teachers is essential at first, but which individuals must continue on their own when they have left their parents' home and have finished their education. To Aristotle the good person does the good from habit. Indeed good habits are voluntary; they are done in situations where genuine choice is confronted by a moral choice. He/she does good by habit and needs to deliberate only rarely. He/she not only studies, he/she has the habit of studying.

Aristotle further argues that there are two types of virtues, *intellectual* and *moral*. The intellectual virtues pertain to mind, or intelligence, and its use. The pursuit of knowledge is an intellectual virtue and at its highest point of development may be called *wisdom*. The moral virtues pertain to the proper exercizing of those human powers that are not specifically rational. But public employees need not leave everything to chance, that's why they have to exercise self-control or temperament (which is the Greek word for "virtue").

Public employees, especially senior ones, should be able to lead by example. They must not say "do as we say it, but as we do" (Mafunisa, 2000). Hart (1992:15) emphasizes that acting morally, or intentionally and voluntarily, is essential for moral character in public administration. Such moral actions are exemplary when they proceed from genuine qualities of character. He further defines exemplary public employees of good character with four distinguishing elements. First, good moral character is not the sometime thing; it is a constant aspect of the personality of the exemplary public employee. Second, he/she must act intentionally, voluntarily and freely with no compulsion from rules or

senior institutional authority. Third, the exemplary public employee must be relatively faultless - not perfect in all things but striving toward it. Lastly, the exemplary public employee's actions are not frivolous, and must result in "real good, even in failure".

Professional ethics

Professional ethics encompasses all issues involving ethics and values in the roles of the professions and the conduct of professionals in society (Bayles, 1981:4). Professional ethics are sets of rules of conduct of narrower scope than more general moral rules. Persons in various callings are supposed to follow specific prescribed practices for the good of their particular profession. For example medical doctors have a set of professional rules, many of which go back to Hippocrates - some are moral rules, some not. A medical doctor is bound by a precept against giving his/her patient a "deadly drug" even if his/her patient wants it, as well as by a rule barring him/her from advertising in newspapers (Brennan, 1973:5). Various acts of Parliament and the *Code of Conduct for Public Servants* formulated by the Public Service Commission provide for ethical rules for both political office bearers and public employees respectively.

A set of professional values should develop among professionals through the socialization process. One of the major tasks of professional schools is to carry out the first major steps in socializing future members of the profession, at the same time those future members are learning their professional roles. Professional education includes more than the learning and mastery of skills; it also involves a habituation into an ethos, an acceptance of common values and identification with appropriate role models. In most cases these are not explicit; teachers, role models and peers generally are not aware of, or do not think about the socialization as they go about their jobs teaching, training and collaborating. Nonetheless it occurs and influences one's perceptions and habits. Thus professional education has a moral element in that it shapes character and inspires commitment (Gartner, 1991:130-131).

TEACHING PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION ETHICS ONLINE AND PROFESSIONAL SOCIALIZATION

It is quite possible that issues related to professional socialization raised by distance education will change the "landscape for learning" in Public Administration. "Professional socialization" refers to the imparting, through social interaction, of attitudes and values that guide subsequent decisions about appropriate behavior. It is well known that faculty members in some settings can have an effect on the attitudes of their students about behavior appropriate to professionals. Educators have emphasized the importance of socialization and its relationship to normative, as well as cognitive learning. Some educators in Public Administration believe that ethical training is best con-

veyed by personal example - through the socialization that occurs when students interact face-to-face with teachers and practitioners who, themselves, are committed to the values of citizenship and public service that are distinctive to public sector practice (Brower & Klay, 2001: 5).

Distance education physically alters interaction between instructors and pupils, so it almost certainly alters student socialization processes. It is becoming unnecessary to come to universities to access the written knowledge in their libraries. Physically coming to campuses to faculty members might also seem anachronistic to students who are accomplished web surfers. If people no longer need to come to campuses to access their libraries and faculties, what is the future of campus-based research and faculty members who have congregated on campuses to accomplish that research? Where will future socialization processes occur? Deliberations about distance education must contemplate the future of the campus as a "place" from which academics operate.

Brower and Klay (2001: 5) conclude that electronic technology will become increasingly pervasive. Its potential to alter education processes, and even society itself, cannot be dismissed. If professional socialization is not effective through distance education, the new technologies could constitute a threat to the normative foundations of public service.

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY FACILITATORS AND STUDENTS

According to (Clapper & Greyling, 2001: 221-222), challenges encountered by facilitators include:

- resistance to change and fear of technology are the prominent challenges. It may be difficult to convince lecturers to take plunge and change their role from being "sage on stage.." to being "...guide on the side". It holds the implication that the classes of such lecturers become "public" (even though the courses are protected by the password), since permanent record of what they do, is published on the World Wide Web, open to scrutiny

- copyright issue unique to on-line courses and materials pose a challenge to the course developer and course facilitator

- lecturers also have to create the necessary infrastructure to facilitate the course from home, which implies additional costs that have to be borne by the lecturer.

Challenges encountered by students include poor computer literacy, which causes a double learning curve for students: they have to master the technology as well as the course content and the problem of access to the necessary infrastructure in South Africa.

Few students have access to personal computers at home, and if they do, few have a stable Internet Service Provider. Some students prefer traditional learning environments to online learning due to the belief that they learn more through face-to-face interaction that traditional methods offer. In addition, due to technophobia, some students experience frustration learning with new technologies (Clapper & Greyling, 2001:221 - 222).

EFFECTIVENESS OF ON-LINE TEACHING OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION ETHICS

According to Thompson (1990:82), in designing programmes for ethics training in the public sector the following questions should be addressed:

- what outcomes should realistically be expected from ethics training programmes? This may sound like outcomes-based training, but it is essential to avoid such programmes from degenerating into public relations publicity.

- can training programmes in ethics make a difference or contribute in terms of promoting ethics within institutions to the benefit of the individual, the institution and society at large? This requires that criteria to evaluate programmes' effectiveness are designed.

- will senior public employees genuinely commit themselves to the ethics-training programme in word and deed? This is essential, because they set the ethical tone of the institution and should therefore not feign commitment to ethics programmes merely for the public relations value.

A critical gap in the literature on ethics education in Public Administration schools involves effectiveness. Mainzer (1991: 3, 11 & 21) notes that the difficulty in teaching ethics lies in the lack of correlation to ethical behaviour later in life. He argues that ethics is the element most difficult to teach because teachers can hardly ever reasonably assume that they have succeeded in their goal: making a difference in how students will behave in their actual public administration responsibilities. Unable to accompany students through life, the teacher may only hope to have strengthened their sense of possessing a detached, judgmental element within themselves.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Universities and technikons should use different approaches to teaching Public Administration ethics. These approaches include constitutional values, normative factors and professional values. Constitutional values are essential as they serve as the constitutional basis for teaching Public Administration and Management ethics. Section 195(1) of the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, 1996 (Act 108 of 1996) identifies the basic values, which are to be promoted and maintained by the Public Service Commission. Schools or departments of Public Administration and Management must work closely with the Public Service Commission in teaching ethics in Public Administration and Management online.

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