Working definitions

**Morality:** The domain of *interpersonal* obligations including the virtues that support accountable, interpersonal relationships

* The core of morality is *moral autonomy*, where obligations to others are grounded in freedom and make sense to you or *are justifiable* by freedom.

**Ethics:** The domain of *human flourishing*, understood primarily from the standpoint of self-realization

* The core of ethics is *human capability*, where the freedom to do and to be is the focus.

**Civics:** The domain of *political responsibilities*, understood from the perspective of everyday people, not political officials

* The core of civics is *social justice*, where moral concerns are applied to political arrangements, using ethical judgment as a register of the quality of life.

**Definitions**

SAGES currently has learning goals that include ethical and moral judgment across all four years of courses. This is called *spiral learning*. The Francis Payne Bolton School of Nursing uses it too.

The 2016 SAGES survey of teaching faculty found that there was (a) unclarity about moral and ethical vocabulary and methods and (b) concern that moral education implies indoctrination or paternalism.
Included in CWRU’s accredited mission, vision and values

“improving and enriching people’s lives”
“an inclusive culture of global citizenship”
“providing students with the knowledge … necessary to become leaders in [the] world”
“scholarship that changes lives”
“civic and international engagement”
“academic freedom and responsibility”
“ethical behavior”
“shared governance”
“systems that support attainment of our mission”

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE ETHICS TABLE FELLOWS, 2011-2018

The 2011-12 Ethics Table Fellows called for a moral and ethical vision for CWRU in their end of year workshop.

The 2013-2014 Fellows called for moral and ethical learning in our professions and community outside the classroom.

The 2015-2016 Fellows called for the “practice of community.”

The 2017-2018 Fellows called for “roots,” including a sense of place and comprehensive spiritual health.
Our accredited mission isn’t possible without moral, ethical, and civic education

For example, if people do not learn how to be accountable to the freedom of others (moral respect), their lives will not be “enriched” or “improved.” Rather, their lives will be marred or corrupted.

Or, if scholarship does not also go alongside an understanding of human capabilities that are desirable for flourishing (ethical sensitivity), it cannot “change lives” in any good way. Rather, it will make lives bad or indifferent.

If we do not develop a sense of social justice in our students, then we cannot develop “civic engagement.”

Finally, if our curriculum and student life programs do not support moral, ethical, and civil learning, then we do not provide the “systems to support attaining our mission.”

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Results of the 2015-2016 Moral Development Study

Led by Prof. Adam Perzynski, this study of CWRU undergraduates that went well beyond saturation in its findings, determined that:

• CWRU is improving its culture of tolerance and inclusion in the eyes of mainstream students; but has continuing challenges with inclusion in the eyes of international and minority students.

• CWRU is sought out for its sense of academic integrity, but students lose their moral judgment around academic integrity to a significant degree over their time here.

• CWRU students are short-term thinkers about their future and seem to overlook making space for the goods of life that are not professional. Long term thinking about intrinsic goods is largely absent from their sense of purpose.

• CWRU students seem unmindful of social justice or civic engagement, on the whole. The sense of being part of a social structure for which they can have civic responsibility is largely absent.

CWRU 2026: “DEEP PRAGMATISM”

In the 2013-14 “CWRU 2026” (bicentennial) Committee, there was significant unclarity about what the value of an education might be. Given our track record of providing useful things to society and economy, I suggested that we develop "deep pragmatism," as our main value orientation.

Deep pragmatism is the orientation to producing good (ethical) things through long-range foresight and social responsibility (civics). Its antithesis is short-term or selfish thinking.
Good relationships

How can we develop an improved sense of intrinsic goods, social justice, and long-range purpose to life? These would include yet go beyond professions.

• A common complaint about CWRU among students (as well as staff and faculty) is that it is atomistic or cold.

• Students at CWRU seek out places where they can develop social relationships – emphasizing the wish for better mentoring, social support networks, and relationships where they are heard.

• Learning how to relate deeply and well seems to be a background wish, and it is also key to what is missing morally.

• Good relationships do a number of things: (a) they teach what is intrinsically good in life, not just useful or convenient; (b) they provide the basis for understanding why justice between people is important; (c) they develop relational virtues like compassion and accountability; and (d) they remind us what all our work is for.

• From a moral point of view, good relationships are grounded in moral autonomy. They should not be imposed on us and should improve our sense of what makes sense to us in life.

• In other words, what students seek depends on moral education developing with them, and that education would meet some of the deficits of development which seem currently out of mind.

SUSPENDING THE DIVIDE BETWEEN ACADEMIC & STUDENT LIFE

Since 2010, the Beamer-Schneider Professorship has operated with the assumption that both academic and student life contribute substantially to the moral, ethical, and civic possibilities of students.

Accordingly, the Professorship has worked with and learned from many student life units, organizations, and initiatives, including Greek Life.

The Professorship’s advisory committee is composed of many staff members from these units or organizations, including students themselves.
Spiral learning

If we were to look at both curriculum and student life, seeking to understand how deep pragmatism and good relationships might be intentionally fostered by our university in accordance with our mission, we might ask what model to rely on.

The Professorship, based on research into education, the Moral Development Study findings, and frequent discussion with administrators and faculty in multiple schools on campus, advocates for spiral learning.

Spiral learning depends on:

- Multiple learning sources
- Deepening learning engagement
- More refined application of learning to life
- Team reflection on coherence over a student’s time on campus

SAGES currently practices spiral learning in theory and there is a pedagogical structure in place to slowly develop it in practice. The Francis Payne Bolton School of Nursing practices it effectively. In the Moral Development Study, that school stood out for producing moral development across four years.

Since spiral learning is discipline or context specific as it becomes applied, it is not uniform. Disciplines and programs may develop it to suit their specific contexts of professional action.

What is crucial in spiral learning is a support system that meets to figure out (a) how to integrate the multiple sources and levels of learning into learning goals and (b) how to keep the learning goals honestly and modestly accountable to the mission of the university.

Examples of a spiral learning goals would be development of autonomous moral judgment and development of a sense of social justice in one’s profession.

UNDERGRADUATE MORAL DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

In 2018, the Professorship convened the Undergraduate Moral Development Advisory Committee, including faculty and staff from a wide range of areas in the university and initial representation by students.

The committee produced two recommendations for 2018-2019:

(i) To engage students more directly with the committee by (a) inviting more students onto it and by (b) reporting back out to student groups directly;

(ii) To advocate for more reflective spaces in campus life and in the curriculum.
A SPACE FOR ORGANIZING OUR SPIRAL LEARNING AROUND MORALS, ETHICS, & CIVICS

What if our strategic planning led us organize our spiral learning around morals, ethics and civics?

This would be a shared space – neither uniform, nor controlled by any professorship, discipline, or unit. Ethicists, social justice scholars, psychologists, etc. from across campus would be needed for this space, but the basic critical thinking of all of us around moral, ethical and civic issues would be the common capacity. Students would have a central place in this organizing activity helping us rethink our curriculum and practices together.

Coincident with our findings of what students need at CWRU, this organizing space would braid spiral learning goals with the goal of fostering good relationships – team-spirit, mutual accountability, appropriate care and concern, and respect for each other’s autonomous lives as professionals and as persons.