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CHOICES: Ethical Decision Making for Personal and Professional Success

William Peace University has chosen ethical decision making as its QEP topic in response to data which indicated some students lag in areas critical to achieving our mission of helping students develop an appreciation for life-long learning, a focus on meaningful careers, and skills for ethical citizenship. Based on our review of existing literature, we have chosen to define ethical decision making as follows: Ethical decision making is the process of making decisions about human conduct. It requires individuals to: (1) assess their ethical values and the social context of problems; (2) recognize ethical issues in a variety of settings; (3) consider the ramifications of alternative actions; and (4) justify their final decisions. Making ethical decisions requires individuals to have knowledge of ethical constructs, values that guide ethical decision making, and reasoning skills that allow them to appreciate the complexities of a situation and arrive at a well-reasoned conclusion. Opportunities for student learning on our QEP topic, launched in the summer of 2011, are infused throughout curricular and co-curricular programming beginning with first-year student orientation and followed by required courses in the first year, junior year, and senior year. An eight-question model for evaluating ethical dilemmas and core values related to ethical decision making is used in each of the three required courses. Our learning strategies take students through a developmental process in which they first examine personal ethical issues typically faced by first-year college students, to career and workplace ethical issues, and finally to societal ethical issues. Our QEP is also developmental in that students first gain self-awareness of their values and decision making styles, then learn to apply ethical reasoning when confronted with ethical dilemmas, and conclude by beginning to integrate values and ethical reasoning. These required elements are supplemented by the incorporation of ethical case studies in a number of classes and an annual ethical case study competition. The curricular and co-curricular experience, which lasts from the first year until graduation, is aptly named CHOICES as a way of reflecting both the complexity and responsibility of becoming an ethical decision maker.