

# **BETTER WORLD THEATRE: TEACHING ETHICS THROUGH THE ARTS**

**Presented by:  
Azalea Hulbert**

**Performers/Facilitators:  
Kristin Aebli, Cat Forman, Claire Gaxiola, and Christina Witt**



# SAMFORD AT A GLANCE



- Chartered in 1841 as Howard College by Alabama Baptists.
- Eight schools: Arts, business, divinity, education, humanities & sciences, law, nursing, and pharmacy.
- 4,758 students (62% undergraduate).

# THE MANN CENTER



- Frances Marlin Mann Center for Ethics and Leadership: founded in 2008 as a university-wide entity in the provost's office.
- Mission: "Promote the moral development of Samford students...serve as a center of teaching excellence...foster a university culture that values productive, moral discourse..."
- Programs, development and resources support Samford faculty, staff and students.

# SAMFORD SURVEY ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

- **The Samford Survey on Academic Integrity was conducted online in Spring 2011. Findings included:**
  - **There is no single source of information on academic integrity recognized by students and faculty at Samford.**
  - **Faculty are generally more likely than students to take cheating seriously, and to think cheating is a serious problem at Samford.**
  - **There is a significant discrepancy between the number of student respondents who think they would report cheating and those who actually have.**
  - **Samford's findings are not significantly different from those of other institutions who have participated in this survey.**

# STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

- Use ICAI research method to define the terrain and establish a baseline for future assessment.
- Gain the active support and involvement of the eight academic deans.
- Work closely with faculty in all schools as communications and educational programming is developed.
- Enlist student leaders as advocates of academic integrity on campus.
- Set the tone by conducting interventions with students as they enter the university and its professional programs.

# COLLEGE LIFE: A CRITICAL PERIOD FOR MORAL DEVELOPMENT

- Teens tend to underestimate risks and overvalue short-term benefits, and their capacities for complex moral judgment are limited...
- ...but development of the pre-frontal cortex makes it possible for college students to engage in more complex reasoning; to take into account the wider and longer-term consequences of their actions; and to deal more competently with ambiguous or conflicting moral claims.

# COLLEGE LIFE: A CRITICAL PERIOD FOR MORAL DEVELOPMENT

- College life can and does affect moral development – for better or for worse – as students:
  - Question the values and beliefs of their upbringing as they formulate their own moral identities.
  - Make important life decisions with moral implications.
- However, without explicit attention in the curriculum to developing ethical competencies, studies consistently show that the impact of professional education on ethical judgment is neutral (no gains).

# THE FOUR-COMPONENT MODEL OF ETHICAL DECISION MAKING

- **Component 1: Ethical Sensitivity and Recognition**
  - Students should be able to recognize issues as “ethical,” identify alternative courses of action, and discern where the difficulty lies in each problem.
- **Component 2: Ethical Reasoning and Judgment**
  - Students should formulate judgments about possible courses of action by identifying and applying the ethical principles, values, duties, laws and norms at stake; foreseeing cause-consequence chains of events; and considering effects on all parties concerned by demonstrating empathy and role-taking skills.

# THE FOUR-COMPONENT MODEL OF ETHICAL DECISION MAKING

- **Component 3: Ethical Motivation and Identity**
  - Students should be able to identify key virtues, values and obligations; make these virtues, values and obligations part of their own identity; and act on them despite conflicting pressures and priorities.
- **Component 4: Ethical Implementation**
  - Students should be able to execute and implement decisions with integrity, given the complexities of tasks and situations.
  - This involves “competencies” like conflict management, listening, courage, standing alone, negotiation, leadership, dealing with ambiguity, organizational agility, political savvy...

# INFORMAL INFLUENCES ON MORAL DEVELOPMENT

- Faculty mentoring and exemplary role models (faculty, staff, other students, practitioners).
- Co-curricular activities that encourage students to think critically about ethical issues and to assess their own values and assumptions.
- Multi-level independent friendships.
- Exposure to diverse people, places and ideas – unlike students' usual experiences.

# FORMAL INFLUENCES ON MORAL DEVELOPMENT

- Exercises to sharpen competencies in ethical reasoning across the curriculum.
- Active participation in moral discourse about important questions and issues.
- Service learning designed to encourage moral reflection, sensitivity and self-examination.
- Formation of professional identity based on moral obligations to others and society.

# THE CASE STUDY APPROACH

- **The use of case studies is a valid way to:**
  - Make students aware of complex issues; and
  - Teach them how to analyze those issues.
- **However, there are drawbacks:**
  - Case studies can be less than engaging.
  - Case studies – and the accompanying analysis – are often unrealistic.
  - Case studies fail to effectively guide students through all four components of the ethical decision making model.

# THE PERFORMANCE-BASED APPROACH

- Performance-based approaches to teaching ethics address these issues in the following ways:
  - Short plays that focus on difficult ethical issues are rarely boring – they engage the audience and provoke emotional responses.
  - Analysis of the ethical issues in a theatrical production is much more realistic.
  - Plays guide students – at least by proxy – through all four components of the ethical decision making model.

# CLASSROOM TECHNIQUES

- Integration of ethical analysis into course content.
- Use of students' own dilemmas.
- “Living-case” engagement with practitioners.
- Formal analysis of current issues.
- Simulations and role-plays.
- Application of established standards and expectations of the professions.

# THE MANN CENTER'S SOLUTION: *BETTER WORLD THEATRE*



- Students produce, direct, perform – and in some cases, write – scenarios they are likely to encounter, either in school or in the professional world.
- They are not assessed on their acting skills, but on how well they lead the audience in a discussion of the ethical issues in the play.

