

# Ethical Character Development and Personal and Academic Excellence

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## Education

*“The process of developing the knowledge,  
mind, skill, and character of a person.”*

## Introduction

Welcome to the online workshop on ethical character development and its importance in the pursuit of personal, academic, and professional excellence.

There is one key idea behind this workshop:

**The development of ethical character virtues is the key to personal, academic, and professional success in life. You will realize happiness and self-fulfillment in life, achieve your highest potential in school and work, benefit those around you, and contribute to human society as a whole, if you pursue a life of virtue. Ethics is good for you.**

We are going to take a **balanced approach to ethics** with an emphasis on the **positive benefits of ethics**, and we are going to take a **character development approach to education**.

- There are positive consequences to being ethical and negative consequences to being unethical; we will identify both. But we are going to highlight the **positive consequences**, instead of just focusing on the negative.
- Instead of assuming that the primary purpose of education is simply learning theories, facts, and skills, we propose that the central goal of education is the **development of people of character** who will use their knowledge to benefit themselves and others.

## Academic Ethics and Integrity

**Academic ethics** is a big and growing concern at colleges and universities around the country. Numerous schools have developed “**Academic Integrity**” statements, policies, and campus wide programs to highlight, communicate, and enforce with faculty, staff, and students the importance of academic ethics. Included at the end of this workshop are a number of website links for those

interested in what colleges and universities are doing around the country. There has also been a considerable amount of research on the topic and what measures seem most effective in improving ethical behavior within academic settings.

### **Workshop Questions**

Throughout this workshop you are asked a number of questions. You should attempt to answer these questions. You can write down your answers or simply try to answer them in your mind. The questions are to get you thinking about ethics.

### **Outline of Workshop**

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## What is Ethics and Why is Ethics Important?

*Ethics can be defined as  
a set of principles of conduct or a system of moral values.*

**Ethics** is a topic often taught in philosophy classes, although there are courses in business ethics, professional ethics, medical ethics, research ethics, environmental ethics, and even bio-ethics offered as well at various colleges and universities. In fact, ethics comes up in almost every course offered in college – ethics is important across the entire academic curriculum.

In essence, ethics is the study and practice of what is good – what is moral – what is best.<sup>1</sup>

There are many ways to come at the question of ethics. There are many theories of what makes something right or wrong:

- Perhaps you believe that ethics is determined by some hard and fast rules, which should never be questioned or broken, such as, “Do not steal”, “Do not lie”, and “Do not murder.” This is an **absolutist** theory of ethics.
- Perhaps you think that such absolute rules should be followed by everyone. For example, many people (across all human cultures) believe in some version of the Golden Rule, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” Believing that everyone should follow the same ethical rules or principles is a **universalist** approach to ethics.
- Perhaps you think that you should consider the specific consequences of different actions in a given situation in determining what is right and what is wrong. Which choice leads to the best results or consequences? This is a **consequentialist theory** of ethics.
- Perhaps you think that instead of following some set of absolute rules, you should rationally think about ethics and what is the right thing to do. Ethics should be thoughtful rather than simply obeying rules. This is a **rational** approach of ethics. Or maybe you believe that feelings (emotions) should determine ethics. This is an **emotive** approach to ethics.
- Perhaps you think that love, care, and concern for fellow human beings should be the foundation of ethics. This is a **care** theory of ethics.
- And finally, perhaps you think that ethics is entirely relative and subjective – either relative to each person who individually determines what is right

or wrong for him or her – or relative to a specific culture. This is the **relativist** theory – either **personal relativism** or **cultural relativism**.

Even though there are many different approaches to ethics, everyone has some theory of ethics. Everyone has their do's and don'ts – everyone has their ifs, ands, and maybe's. A person's ethics may be clear, strong, and thoughtful, or half-baked, self-serving, vague and muddled, or some hodge-podge combination of different ideas, but everyone has some set of beliefs and principles for determining what is right and wrong. And everyone, to some degree or another, attempts to follow whatever ethics they believe in – sometimes more successfully, sometimes less successfully. (Maybe that is part of a person's ethics – to be flexible about breaking their own ethical rules.)

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### Questions

*What is the ethics you believe in and attempt to practice in life?*

*How well do you practice the ethics you state that you believe in?*

Be honest – in fact, ruthlessly honest on this second question. We all have a tendency to excuse our behaviors, to view ourselves in the best light possible. But here, it is important to be critical of oneself – to admit to one's failings – to show **honesty** and **integrity** – two key ethical principles described below. How can one improve unless one acknowledges one's shortcomings?

*Next, why do you believe what you believe? What reasons can you give for the ethics that you believe in?*

On this question, you could ask yourself why it is important for you to be ethical – as you understand ethics. What good – what value – what beneficial consequences - come from being ethical? This question is philosophical, but it is also very practical and psychological. It is important to remind yourself of what value (or values) you see in being ethical.

## What is a Value? What is a Virtue?

*Every life is a march from innocence, through temptation, to virtue or vice.*

*Lyman Abbott*

*A value is “A person’s principles or standards of behavior...one’s judgment of what is important in life.”*

*Virtues are personal character traits that embody and express values that are judged desirable or admirable. A virtue is a good value lived.*

A way to get clear about our personal ethics is to consider what we value.

What we do – what we think – what we want – reflect what we value. All humans have values and express them through how they behave and what they think and feel.

Values are the **ideals** or **standards** that people use to direct their behavior; values are what people strive to realize in their lives. Values are the standards we use in making judgments about what is important in life and what is right or wrong in human behavior. We judge ourselves and others in terms of our values. We may not agree with another person’s values, but everyone lives by values – everyone makes judgments about what is important in life through their values.

**Virtues** are character traits or dispositions in a person that embody and express values that are judged desirable or admirable. A person’s virtues define the **ethical character** of a person. Virtues are values that have become intrinsic to the personal identity and way of life of a person. If a value is practiced enough, it becomes part of the personality – the character – of a person. You become what you do – what you value and aspire toward.

Not all values lead to virtues; some values lead to **vices**. If one values money above all else, or power over others regardless of how we affect them, developing character traits that embody these values would not be seen by most people as examples of ethical character virtues. Do we see greed as a virtue? Do we see a domineering or manipulative personality as virtuous? Do we see a psychopath as virtuous, that is, someone who cares about his or her own happiness and personal gains (the psychopath’s central values) but not at all about others?

Hence, not all values are good. There are values that lead to unethical behaviors. If I value being rich – regardless of whether I need to steal from others or

manipulate them with false promises and lies to get rich – then I will develop a whole set of character traits that are vices, rather than virtues.

So, to review this key point:

**Even though everyone possesses values, not everything that is a value, if practiced, turns into a virtue. There are things that people value that lead to vices rather than virtues.**

There are though values that if pursued and practiced lead to recognizable virtues. Valuing truth leads to honesty, integrity, and courage; valuing justice leads to fair-mindedness; valuing freedom and self-determination leads to self-responsibility and autonomy; valuing others leads to respectfulness, compassion, and kindness. These character traits are generally valued around the world and have positive effects on one's life.

So as a general question: How are we going to determine what are good values to live by? How are we going to determine what character traits to develop within ourselves – traits that can be called virtues?

Part of the answer is that we should look at what values and character traits lead to **positive results in life** and which lead to **negative results**. This is (to recall the ethical theories introduced above) a consequentialist approach to ethics. More generally, we should **think about our values** – adopting a rational approach to ethics. And we should think about which values and practices seem to provide a solid foundation for everyone in creating success for themselves and benefiting others – the universalist idea.

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**Thinking About (Your) Ethics:** One can simply present a set of rules or values and state that these rules and values are the right ones and must be followed. This is an absolutist approach to ethics. In this workshop we are not adopting this approach. Rather, we will always ask “Why it is a good thing to adopt and follow a value or rule of ethics?” We will ask you to think about this question repeatedly as well. That is, we will approach ethics thoughtfully and rationally. What reasons or evidence can be provided that a certain ethical principle or character trait is indeed a good thing? If we follow this approach and you do the same, then we believe it will become apparent to you that the values and virtues we identify below are good principles to follow.

It is a goal of this workshop to get you thinking about ethics – to get you thinking about ethics in real life situations. When faced with a choice, you will think about what is the ethical thing to do, and you will act accordingly.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Question**

*What are your five most important values? Why these values and not others?*

Again, try to be honest. In answering this question, don't just go on what you tell yourself – or what you like to tell yourself or others – go on what shows up in your behavior. The way you lead your life – the goals that are actively pursued – reflect your real values. If you look at what you do, what does it tell you about what you value? Now reflect on these values. Do you consider them good values or not? What do you think about your most important values?

## Why are Character Virtues so Important in Life?

*“Happiness is not the reward of virtue, but virtue itself.”*

*“All things excellent are as difficult as they are rare.”*

*Baruch Spinoza*

**There are certain values that are positive and constructive and lead to character traits that are ethical virtues. These values and corresponding virtues will, in fact, be the key to creating a good life – a successful and happy life – academically, personally, and professionally.**

Let's start at a very general level and begin with **happiness** – something everyone presumably wants to pursue and realize. How does one achieve happiness in life?

One of the most interesting surveys of human values was conducted by the contemporary positive psychologist Martin Seligman and his associates, summarized in his book *Authentic Happiness*<sup>2</sup>. What is particularly important about his research is that it surveyed key values not just across cultures but across human history. A large selection of influential writings from different cultures and different historical periods was identified and presented to a group of investigators for review and summation. According to Seligman, six fundamental virtues across all cultures and historical time periods emerged from this review. The six virtues and subcategories are:

- **Wisdom** (Curiosity, love of learning, judgment, ingenuity, social intelligence, and perspective)
- **Courage** (Valor, perseverance, and integrity)
- **Love and Humanity** (Kindness, generosity, nurturance, and the capacity to love and be loved)
- **Temperance** (Modesty, humility, self-control, prudence, and caution)
- **Justice** (Good citizenship, fairness, loyalty, teamwork, and humane leadership)
- **Transcendence** (Appreciation of beauty, gratitude, hope, spirituality, forgiveness, humor, and zest)

Seligman's central psychological argument is that “**authentic happiness**” is built upon the exercise and development of these character virtues and this basic formula seems to be universal for all human beings.

Striking a resonant chord with the Greek philosopher Aristotle and his **virtue based theory of ethics**, Seligman believes that authentic happiness is a

relatively enduring quality and is not necessarily associated with short term pleasure at all. Momentary pleasures tend to diminish quickly and people adapt to the frequent experience of a repeatable pleasure. Character virtues, on the other hand, require effort for their development and when practiced and pursued lead to long term benefits in the overall quality of life. Hence, authentic happiness is something that must be worked at and the pathway involves ethical growth in the individual through the development of virtues. For Aristotle “happiness” – which is the ultimate goal of life - is not the same as pleasure. Pleasure is a good feeling; happiness is an accomplishment, a form of excellence, and a way of life. Happiness is a sense of well being about one’s life. Happiness is not achieved through the practice of a **hedonism of the present** (pleasure for the moment) – it is achieved through **long term effort**.

For Seligman, **meaning** and **purpose in life** involve the development of character virtues and in particular the identification with some reality or goal beyond oneself. Our lives should serve a **transcendent** reality (God, country, spouse, family, community, etc.) rather than just being self-serving. “Transcendence”, in fact, is one of the primary character virtues in Seligman’s list. In many ways, transcendence contradicts our modern emphasis on the ego, self-gratification, and subjectivism – transcendence means realizing that there is something beyond our private reality that needs to become our center of gravity and our standard of truth and value. Consequently, extreme individualism or self-centeredness works against finding meaning and purpose. Consider the value of “me first/I’m number one/etc” – this value generates the character traits of selfishness, self-centeredness, and narcissism – clearly these are vices rather than virtues. They do not lead to a sense of self-fulfillment in life.

One can connect this point with education: Although it is important to strive for self-improvement through education and it is also important to pursue education to realize professional goals and advancement – these goals are one-sided and self-centered; one should also pursue education so that one can contribute something to the world – to humanity – to something beyond oneself.

Aside from the pursuit and development of virtues being the avenue to authentic happiness and purpose and meaning in life, virtues are also the foundation for the **pursuit of excellence** in all spheres of life. In fact, virtues are forms of character excellence – they define what we mean by excellence in many spheres of human life. Both the philosophers Aristotle and Spinoza made this connection between excellence and virtue. Specifically, for Aristotle, a virtue is an area of excellence in character. Further, Aristotle equates ethics with virtue; to be an ethically good person means that the person possesses character virtues and is a person of excellence. For Spinoza, a life of virtue is a challenge, and though a rare achievement, it is the path to excellence.

Taking the next step, a central hypothesis in this workshop is that **academic excellence** is based upon the development and practice of a key set of

educational character virtues. But also, these educational character virtues support authentic happiness, meaning, and purpose in the educational experience. These key educational character virtues are identified and described later in this workshop; also, why they are important, in fact, critical to academic success and a positive educational experience, is explained. To go back to a main point introduced earlier about ethics: What reasons can be given for a particular ethics – for a particular set of moral values? Plenty of reasons are provided why the pursuit of the set of ethical virtues listed below will not only lead to happiness and fulfillment, but to academic success as well.

One final reason why the virtues listed below are so important, in both life and education, is that exercising them will **benefit those people around you and humanity as a whole**. Not only does ethical behavior benefit you, it benefits others; conversely, behaving unethically not only hurts you but hurts others. In fact, one of the main reasons for behaving ethically has to do with the well being and happiness of others. Many ethical principles and values (such as the Golden Rule, respect for fellow humans and their lives, and the prohibitions against stealing, murder, assault, and adultery) specifically focus on how we treat others. Now it may not always seem obvious how our behavior and values invariably impact others, but as a general principle, we benefit others in numerous ways by being good people and we harm or hurt others in numerous ways by being unethical. “No man (or woman) is an island.” To be honest – to be fair – to show respect – send positive ripples out into the world around you; to lie, to cheat, to steal send out negative effects into the human sphere. Consequently by being concerned over your own ethics and values and pursuing a virtuous life you will practice the virtue of transcendence – you will demonstrate care and concern for others.

Our social reality can be significantly improved through the focused exercise and development of character virtues. The idea that the “good life” for all can be achieved through the internalization of character virtues in each of us goes back at least as far as Aristotle. For Aristotle, a life of virtue not only creates happiness in the individual but equally contributes to the well being of the community. The virtues listed below are not simply self-centered or self-serving – they benefit everybody.

Applying this idea to the present, contemporary society is beset with a variety of significant problems and challenges - environmental, economic, inter-cultural, and political<sup>3</sup>, but it could be argued that many of these problems and challenges can be constructively addressed through the exercise and development of ethical virtues. Many, if not most of our problems are due to a lack of ethical virtues – that is vices, such as, greed, discrimination, human suppression, selfishness, thoughtlessness, and the need for power over others. Hence, the solutions to our modern difficulties frequently are not technological or economical, but ethical – that is, through changes in the character of our behavior and the values we aspire to.

In conclusion, as a final factor to consider regarding virtues, the pursuit of virtues will help individuals make more valuable and positive contributions to the improvement of human society. This indeed should be a goal in education: To facilitate the development of individuals who will positively contribute to society. Contributing to the evolution of humanity is a form of transcendence and gives life purpose and meaning.

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### Questions

*How would you describe your own vision of the **good life** for yourself? What do you think you need to do to realize it? What values do you need to pursue and embrace? What character traits do you need to develop?*

## Educational Values and Virtues

Now let us focus on **education**. There are a key set of values and virtues connected with education, for example, learning, thinking, integrity, honesty, growth, and excellence. These values and virtues reflect the general goals and standards of behavior among educators and educational institutions. These values and virtues define what is judged as important in the educational process and what types of character traits are seen as reflecting these values.

Higher education, in numerous ways, attempts to **model** and **teach** those key character virtues which embody these central values. Beyond learning specific facts and skills, higher education highlights these virtues.

And further, educators invariably encourage their students to pursue these values and develop these character virtues as well.

The reason is simple: Modeling and teaching these values and virtues, and helping students to embrace and practice them, enhances their overall academic performance, serving as the necessary foundation for the acquisition of factual knowledge and intellectual skills. For example, the love of learning and thinking and the pursuit of excellence, enhances student performance in all academic disciplines. And further, it helps to create educated individuals who will benefit others and society as a whole.

**Although it is frequently assumed that natural intelligence, or being from the upper socio-economic class, or having educated parents is the key to doing well in school, the number one factor determining success is the practice of ethical character virtues – nothing else will help you as much.**

(The development of **just one** positive character trait – personal responsibility and control – wipes out the combined statistical advantage of both higher social-economic class and educated parents.<sup>4</sup>)

Hence, the primary focus of education should be teaching these character virtues. Further, becoming an educated person – a life long learner – involves living these virtues throughout one's life. It is often said that a main goal in education, in this fast paced, highly evolving world is facilitating the development of life long learners. Since things keep changing so quickly and knowledge is growing exponentially, everyone needs to keep learning throughout their lives. Character virtues are the key to developing this capacity and desire. Academic ethics is therefore necessary for one's survival in the future.

## **Essential Academic Values and Character Virtues**

What are the key academic values and associated virtues that if pursued and practiced, produce academic excellence and success? After introducing the list, each item is described in some depth.

- **The Pursuit of Excellence – The Value of Values** 14
- **Self-Responsibility and Accountability** 18
- **Truth, Honesty, Integrity, and Authenticity** 22
- **Justice and Fairness** 27
- **Love of Learning and Knowledge –  
Curiosity, Wonder, and Open-Mindedness** 30
- **Love of Thinking** 35
- **Discipline and Determination** 39
- **Growth and Optimism** 43
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of Knowledge to Life** 49

## The Pursuit of Excellence – The Value of Values

*“The secret of joy in work is contained in one word – excellence.  
To know how to do something well is to enjoy it.”  
Pearl Buck*

*“The quality of a person’s life is in direct proportion to their commitment to  
excellence, regardless of their chosen field of endeavor. “  
Vince Lombardi*

*“Excellence is an art won by training and habituation. We do not act rightly  
because we have virtue or excellence, but we rather have those because we  
have acted rightly. We are what we repeatedly do.  
Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit.”  
Aristotle*

### Definitions:

**Principle** – A rule or belief governing one’s behavior...a fundamental truth or proposition that serves as the foundation for a system of belief or behavior or for a chain of reasoning.

**Standard** – A level of quality or attainment... an idea or thing used as a measure, norm, or model in comparative evaluation.

**Excellence** – The quality of being outstanding or extremely good.

The idea of excellence assumes that things can be done well or done poorly; all actions and efforts are not equal in quality. Excellence within a given field usually involves **standards** and **principles** that define and prescribe the nature of a superlative performance. Such standards and principles of excellence are used to evaluate actions, products, and results, and are used both to identify what is very good and what is not good.

Excellence implies that there are values and standards relative to which we can **evaluate** our actions and the actions of others.

If one does not believe in the concept of excellence one can not define what it would mean to **grow**. To grow is to improve – to get better – and only if we assume that there is a better way to do things than we presently do, only then can we say that we have grown when and if we realize this better way.

The first step toward developing character virtues and pursuing constructive values is the realization that there are better ways to do things and worse ways; one can not believe that all actions are equal in quality and value, and also believe in excellence.

Aristotle, in fact, equated being **virtuous** with the pursuit of excellence; virtues are areas of excellence within one's character. Consequently, a vice would be an area of weakness, deficiency, or failing in one's character.

The belief in, and pursuit of excellence, will give **purpose** and **direction** to the educational experience – it brings with it goals and standards relative to which we aspire and evaluate ourselves - and it generates, when realized, a sense of authentic happiness in the educational experience. The achievement of excellence feels good.

- Pursuing excellence motivates us and generates **discipline** and **determination** (another set of virtues).
- Pursuing excellence keeps us **growing**.
- Pursuing excellence reflects **optimism** (another virtue).
- Pursuing excellence requires **courage** (another virtue).
- Pursuing excellence requires **honesty** in admitting mistakes and failings such that we will learn (another virtue).
- Realizing excellence produces **authentic self-esteem** and **real confidence**.

It is critically important that teachers and students support the idea that there are general standards and values of excellence. Our standards should always be open to further refinement and development, but we need to stand for something and practice and aspire toward standards in our behavior. In general, ethical leaders across the world agree on this basic point.

The noted futurist and sociologist, Wendell Bell, would describe it as believing in the “**value of values**” - the belief in evaluating behavior and performance relative to the best standards we can articulate amongst ourselves.<sup>5</sup>

In this era of **ethical relativism**, it is often argued that all human values are relative to culture, personality, and time, and that somehow this relativism implies that one belief system or mode of behavior is no better or no worse than the next.<sup>6</sup>

This workshop is based on the idea that there are critical values and virtues pertaining to education – that is principles of excellence - that make sense, that are important, if not essential, for success in education (as well as life in general), and even if we are not totally certain that these are the best values, they are clearly better than either holding other values in approaching an education, or believing that all values are equal.

These **core academic values** give teachers and students **standards of quality** and a sense of direction and purpose, which could not be achieved or obtained if these values were thrown out the window. These values generate excellence. All values are not equal.

First consider that there is in fact strong support and evidence that fundamental human values show a strong degree of constancy and **universality** across all cultures around the world. There are values that are critically important to human life and define the “**good life**”. According to Wendell Bell, despite cultural diversity, all human societies share the common values of human life and health, knowledge, truth, and evaluation itself. (As noted above, all cultures believe in the value of values.) According to Bell, there are many other almost universal values, including justice, peace, loyalty, courage, friendliness, trust, self-realization, and autonomy.

Rushworth Kidder, another social researcher, also suggests that there is a significant degree of **global consensus on human values**. Interviewing a number of culturally diverse people, each of whom has been acknowledged by their peers for their ethical thinking and behavior, the following eight common values emerged from the interviews.<sup>7</sup>

- **Love**
- **Truthfulness**
- **Fairness**
- **Freedom**
- **Unity**
- **Tolerance**
- **Responsibility**
- **Respect for Life**

As noted above, Martin Seligman identified **six fundamental character virtues** that generally all cultures throughout recorded history have esteemed as admirable human traits: **Wisdom, Courage, Love and Humanity, Temperance, Justice, and Transcendence**.

In a more general vein, the anthropologist Donald Brown has compiled a vast list, numbering into the hundreds, of “human universals” across all cultures. This list includes social conventions, modes of behavior, conceptual distinctions, and values.<sup>8</sup> The contemporary emphasis on cultural relativism appears clearly contradicted by Brown’s research. We seem to have been misled by the propaganda of extreme individualism. As a species, we think and behave in very similar ways, and part of this commonality is in our values. It is simply not true that most of us believe or practice a philosophy of “anything goes” or that one thing is as good as the next.

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### **The Special Circumstances Argument**

This discussion of ethical relativism is very important at a practical level. One of the most common problems associated with unethical behavior is that people will excuse or rationalize unethical behavior due to situational, personal, or special circumstances. A person might acknowledge as a general principle that stealing or lying is wrong, but engage in such actions in particular situations, believing that in this special case it is OK to do so. There, in fact, may be cases where breaking an ethical rule is warranted – but these are very special cases. What happens though in the real world is that people too frequently invoke the “special case” (or it’s relative to the circumstances) excuse/rationalization for their unethical behavior; in so doing, it becomes a slippery slope and a habit of behavior.

**Individuals who pursue excellence – who have high standards and constructive values regarding their behavior – who expect the best out of themselves - as a rule do not make excuses for behaving unethically or below their standards. Again, they expect the best out of themselves and do not slip into the habit of doing less than the best.**

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### **Summary – The Value and the Virtue**

The **value** is the principle of excellence itself – the belief that what is superlative, superb, or very good can be defined and demonstrated in action, and that it is through believing in and pursuing excellence, that life is given meaning and purpose. In this case, the virtue associated with this value is the general quality of “**being virtuous**” (or believing in and pursuing virtue) – being principled or possessing “**character**” – the virtue is the practicing belief in and pursuit of excellence in all spheres of life.

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### **Questions**

*In what ways do you practice the pursuit of excellence? What benefits come from this area of strength in you? In what ways don’t you pursue excellence? What adverse effects come from this? In what ways can you improve yourself on this virtue?*

## Self-Responsibility and Accountability

*“Irresponsibility cancels out every ethical precept as soon as it enters consciousness. The self without a feeling of responsibility would no longer be the self...”*

*Arthur Schnitzler*

*“Let everyone sweep in front of his or her own door,  
and the whole world will be clean.”*

*Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*

### Definitions:

**Responsibility** – Being the cause or explanation of something...able to answer for one’s conduct or obligations.

**Accountability** – Synonym of responsibility...subject to giving an account.

Within education (and within life) it is important to take responsibility for one’s actions rather than to blame or explain away one’s behavior through situations and the influence of other people. Responsibility assumes that each individual acts according to **choices** he or she makes. “We make our own beds and then we sleep in them.”

Until one accepts responsibility for one’s actions and one’s present reality one is disempowered to change things. One becomes **empowered** through accepting responsibility. If a person can not see or accept how their present situation is of their own doing, they can not see what they can do to change it – they remain a victim of circumstances in their own eyes and disempowered.

Achieving authentic happiness and developing character virtues are first and foremost **accomplishments**. It requires effort, rather than being something that can be purchased, or something that can be realized through momentary pleasures. Virtues can not be bestowed upon you – these qualities require self-initiative, action, and work. Developing character virtues requires **self-effort** and produces a sense of personal achievement. Hence, a prime virtue that is required for the exercise and development of all other virtues is self-responsibility. One needs to take responsibility for realizing a good life and becoming a good person. What is good in life is achieved rather than given to us. One must see this and take responsibility for realizing it. Nothing of value is easy.

**A key implication to education: Becoming educated is something accomplished or achieved; it is not something purchased or given to us.**

**We earn it. A second equally important implication: Whenever problems or difficulties arise in doing well in school or in particular classes, the first question that should be asked is, what you can do to improve things – never what someone else can do.**

Again, it is important to empower yourself regarding difficulties or challenges; to see how you can correct the problem, or else you remain a victim.

Through the accomplishment of goals, one strengthens one's sense of **self-efficacy**. Without self-accomplishment there is no sense of self-efficacy. Perceived self-efficacy is the degree to which one sees oneself as capable of accomplishing goals – that is, the degree to which one feels a sense of personal power. People show different degrees of “self-efficacy”. A person with low self-efficacy believes he is relatively powerless with respect to the future, whereas a person with high self-efficacy believes he has a high level of control or influence on the future. High self-efficacy is the opposite of **perceived helplessness** and counter-acts the feelings of depression and defeatism. People who don't take responsibility for their life have a low sense of self-efficacy.

A critical belief connected with the idea of self-efficacy is that you can transform your life for the better. Behind this belief are a set of key assumptions.

- You are assuming that the future is not determined by uncontrollable forces.
- You are also assuming that you are not trapped by the past.
- Additionally, you are assuming that you have the power through self-initiative and the exercise of various capacities to significantly influence the future.

Your future is not a result of causes that affect you but of choices and effort to realize your ideals. What is it that you hope to achieve? What can you achieve? Values and choices based on these values, rather than external causes, will determine your future.

Developing and maintaining a sense of responsibility is one of the biggest challenges facing everyone today. Although our Western culture emphasizes individualism, there are several factors that work against nurturing a sense of responsibility in our society:

- Psychology is used by people to explain away their behavior, e.g., upbringing, personality type, childhood environment, and genetic disposition are all used by people to “excuse” their behavior.
- Also people expect “quick fixes” that don't require any personal effort. People expect that problems can be solved through pills or more efficient customer service. People expect that problems can be solved through technology. People expect problems can be solved quickly.

- Although we espouse individualism, we are all influenced by social pressures and norms of behavior. If everyone cheats, then so can I.
- Ethical relativism is excessively used as a way to justify all types of questionable behaviors.

To review, self-responsibility involves first off accepting responsibility for the present situation – with its problems and short-comings – and second, believing that it is through one’s own efforts that the present problems can be solved. Even if it seems totally clear and obvious to you that someone or something else is to blame for your present problems – even if this were true - it does the individual no good to focus on these external causes. It **dis-empowers** you to change. Even if someone or something else got you into this mess, it is up to you to get out of it. (And of course, chances are you have something to do with the problem anyhow.)

Within psychology there is a distinction made between people who act and think from a perceived **internal locus of control** versus those people who act and think from a perspective of **external locus of control**. That is, some people see themselves as in control of their life – other people see themselves as being controlled from the outside – as victims.<sup>9</sup> Developing a sense of responsibility involves developing more of a sense of internal locus of control. It means giving up the role of the victim.

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### **Responsibility and Accountability**

One of the most common reactions of students (or people in general) when unethical behavior is pointed out to them, is to deny or rationalize away responsibility for the action. A person can say that he or she didn’t know the action was wrong, or that there were external factors or special circumstances that strongly influenced their behavior. That is, people at times won’t accept responsibility for their actions. But avoiding responsibility can lead to other unethical actions, such as being dishonest about the facts, and again, it dis-empowers the individual to change his or her behavior. Further, it interferes with learning; one can’t learn if one doesn’t acknowledge one’s mistakes. Responsibility entails **accountability**. We should be able to explain why we do what we do, openly admit that we committed the action (own up to it), and we should be able to accept the consequences.

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Although self-responsibility refers to an individual character trait and virtue, without individuals accepting responsibility, social cooperation and collaboration can not form. One can count on and **trust** people who are responsible – one can not count on irresponsible people. **Irresponsibility** undermines cooperation,

collaboration, and constructive social relationships. Since education is a social reality (as well as life in general), education cannot function well if those involved are irresponsible. Teachers trust that students will do their assignments; students trust that teachers will grade the assignments. Without self-responsibility on the part of both teachers and students, this condition of trust could not be realized.

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### **Happiness, Mental Health, and Self-Responsibility**

Several of the key character traits associated with mental health and human happiness are directly connected with the trait of self-responsibility. Autonomy, purpose and direction, and environmental mastery are all central to happiness and psychological well-being;<sup>10</sup> without these qualities people feel depressed, pessimistic, hopeless, aimless, and impotent/helpless. Again, to drive home the message: Ethical behavior – the pursuit and practice of character virtues – is good for you.

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### **Summary – The Value and the Virtue**

The value behind self-responsibility is nothing short of the belief that each individual can and should determine (chose) their own life and make their own destiny. The value is **individual freedom** and **self-determination**. The general virtue is self-responsibility; specific character traits (or subsidiary virtues) connected with self-responsibility include being trustworthy, dependable, self-initiating, conscientious, and autonomous.

The opposites of being responsible include negligence, undependability, unreliability, untrustworthiness, passivity, and self-victimization – carried to the extreme these are all vices.

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### **Questions**

*In what ways do you practice self-responsibility? What benefits come from this area of strength in you? In what ways don't you accept or practice self-responsibility? In what way do you make excuses for your behavior or life conditions? What adverse effects come from this? In what ways can you improve yourself on this virtue? In what ways can you take more responsibility for your life?*

## Truth, Honesty, Integrity, and Authenticity

*"Honesty is the first chapter in the book of wisdom."*

*Thomas Jefferson*

*"The best mind-altering drug is truth."*

*Lily Tomlin*

*"By a lie a man throws away and, as it were,  
annihilates his dignity as a man."*

*Immanuel Kant*

*"Men occasionally stumble over the truth,  
but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing ever happened."*

*Sir Winston Churchill*

*"Believe those who are seeking the truth;  
doubt those who find it."*

*Andre Gide*

### Definitions:

**Truth** – The state of being the case...what really is.

**Honesty** - Adherence to the truth...refusal to lie, cheat, or deceive.

**Trust** – Confidence...a reliance on the integrity, veracity, justice...of another person or thing.

**Courage** – The ability to do something that frightens one.

**Integrity** – The quality or state of being complete or undivided...firm adherence to a code or set of values...synonym of being honest.

**Authenticity** – Trustworthy...genuine.

Academic disciplines value **truth**. It is the ultimate goal of all academic inquiry – the assumption underlying all statements of belief. (If you believe in something you think it is (at least probably or tentatively) true. Science searches for an accurate and true understanding of nature – when scientists report their findings, it is always expected that they are reporting the truth regarding their findings. The most damaging flaw one can uncover in a scientific paper is that the scientists did not report the truth of what they discovered. To intentionally lie or deceive, and be caught at it, is often the end of a scientist's career. The same would be true for any researcher in education.

Educators value truth. It is expected that teachers should always strive to present the truth of what they know as best as they can. Just as in science, without the intent of being truthful, there can be no **trust** – in this case between teacher and student - no credibility in anything said. Truth is a basic value of critical thinking. In thinking we strive to get at the truth – again, as best as we can. The opposites of truth are falsity and deceit (presenting something as true while knowing that it isn't).

The ideas of learning, information and knowledge all assume the concept of truth. Acquiring false beliefs or information is not learning; false information is misinformation; mistaken beliefs do not constitute knowledge. Truth may come in degrees and truth may be complex, but there is still a difference between being correct and being mistaken.

Truth is an **ideal** that we strive for. We can never know for certain if what we believe is true but we should make every effort to find the truth, to assess the truthfulness of our beliefs, and to check on the truth of statements of others. In fact, the end of the quest for truth – of truth itself - comes when we think we possess the final definitive answer and stop thinking, questioning, and checking our beliefs. The ideal of truth is served through openness, dialogue, and critical thinking.

In general, the road to knowledge and learning in general requires that we **diligently and actively pursue** the truth as best as we can. Truth does not always come easy. We should pursue it with a passion. The active critical thinker (discussed below) realizes that truth is something that needs to be pursued. If truth is an important value for us, it stands to reason that we would search it out with energy and diligence. One can't be lazy about the truth.

Truth and honesty are critical in life and in education. Education could function if educators were dishonest or falsified information. Although politicians are often stereotyped as manipulators of the truth, if not downright dishonest, without some level of **truthfulness** among human beings, society could not function. Without an effort among humans to be truthful, there can be no **trust**. Truth is a **universal human value** and a **universal human distinction** across all human cultures. And trust, which involves the pre-conditions of both self-responsibility and honesty, ranks high as a universal human value as well as being one of the central values identified in college Academic Integrity programs.

When people present ideas or statements to others that they know are not true, they engage in **deception** and lies. When people omit facts or information that is relevant or important to an issue or question they also engage in deception and **dishonesty**. In both cases such behaviors, across human cultures, are seen as vices.

When a student presents work on an assignment that the student didn't do – when the student copies the work of another – this is **deceit** and it is a **breach of trust**. And if one considers the consequences that follow from such deceitful behavior, the situation gets even worse.

Assume a person is getting educated in a particular profession (such as nursing, accounting, or auto mechanics). Assume assessments are required to test if the person has actually learned the relevant knowledge and skills to competently practice the profession. But the person presents the work of others as evidence of their own knowledge and passes the assignment. Hence the person goes out into the world never having really demonstrated that he or she learned what is necessary to be competent in their profession. No one would want to be treated by a doctor who cheated on his or her final medical exams – who did not really demonstrate sufficient knowledge of medicine. Therefore, the degree and professional credentials are a deception which is now perpetrated on those individuals who trust and depend upon the competence of the presumed professional. This is a breach of **public trust**. And the deceiver knowingly puts in jeopardy the well being of those he or she serves by practicing the profession without authentic qualifications. It is the **responsibility** of all professionals to really learn the necessary knowledge and skills required to demonstrate their professional competence.

The effects of unethical behavior ripple out. Mistakes compound upon mistakes; vices, gone unchecked, provoke other unethical behaviors.

Often either speaking the truth or admitting the truth requires **courage** – another important character virtue – one of Seligman's key virtues. We may be afraid to speak the truth because it would upset someone or jeopardize ourselves; we may be afraid to admit the truth because it would be admitting a mistake or some unethical behavior. Of course, one has to practice good judgment regarding what to say or admit, but people often start to engage in deceitful or dishonest behavior simply because they lack the courage to be honest.

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### **Self- Honesty and Self-Understanding**

One of the major goals of education is to foster increased self-awareness and self-understanding. Just as one should become knowledgeable about the world, one should strive toward increasing self-understanding. Knowing oneself is a key ingredient to success: What do you really want in life? What do you believe? What are your key values? What are your feelings and thoughts about yourself? What are your weaknesses and what are your strengths? Answering these questions is essential to determining what direction and goals you should pursue.

Honesty is a key element in the development of **self-understanding**. One cannot become self-aware without self-honesty. Self-honesty involves developing a fair and accurate self-assessment, admitting one's mistakes, and therefore taking responsibility for correcting them. Unless one is honest with oneself one cannot grow and learn – you can't fix a mistake or failing unless you admit to it.

You can't believe in the reality of mistakes – of errors – unless you believe in the concept of truth. You can't be wrong unless you can be right.

Courage is often necessary in order to be honest with oneself – we may not want to admit to ourselves things we do not like about ourselves.

Intellectual performance and intellectual growth is enhanced though through active and honest self-assessment. Evaluating one's beliefs and one's understanding turns the individual into an active learner and a thinker, and this facilitates the process of learning.

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### **Courage**

**Courage** is one of the key virtues identified by Seligman. Courage comes into play in many ways in life. It takes courage to accept self-responsibility for one's life; it takes courage to be honest and admit to one's mistakes; it takes courage to face the challenges and uncertainties of the future; it takes courage to tenaciously pursue one's goals; it even takes courage to love. Integrity requires courage, as does hope. Pessimism and depression probably involve a lack of courage.

Academic Integrity programs in colleges around the country often state that one needs to be committed to its values and ethical principles "...even in the face of adversity..." It is much easier to be ethical if one doesn't have to deal with real life challenges, problems, and pressures. It requires courage (among other things) to be ethical in the face of adversity.

The vice usually associated with a lack of courage is being a coward, but it is important to keep in mind that courage does not entail a lack of fear – rather courage is the capacity to act even with the fear. Cowardly behavior involves being ruled by fear.

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**Integrity** refers to consistency in thinking and behavior. It means practicing what one preaches. It means expressing the same beliefs to different people instead of saying one thing to one person and another thing to someone else simply to please each person. Of course, people modify their behavior depending on social

context, but when one carries this behavior to an extreme one loses integrity. The opposites of integrity include **hypocrisy**, deceptiveness, being a coward, lack of conviction, and insincerity.

Being **authentic** is connected to integrity, for people often sacrifice integrity through lies and distortions of what they believe and think. Authenticity is similar to being honest, presenting oneself without distortion or deception.

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### **Summary – The Value and the Virtue**

Honesty and truthfulness are the character virtues associated with the value of truth. Honesty pertains to both what we tell other people and how truthful and open we are to ourselves about ourselves. Courage, as another important character virtue, is often necessary in order to be honest. An atmosphere of trust depends on honesty and truth.

Integrity and authenticity are other character virtues associated with honesty and truth. One can't learn and grow without being honest. And open-mindedness, a quality discussed below under the love of learning and thinking, can't be realized without being honest and possessing a real concern for the truth.

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### **Questions**

*In what ways do you practice honesty and integrity? In what important ways do you value truth? In what important ways do you demonstrate courage? How do you pursue increasing self-understanding? What benefits come from these areas of strength in you? In what ways don't you practice or pursue these qualities? What adverse effects come from this? In what ways can you improve yourself on this virtue?*

## Justice and Fairness

*“...moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue.”*

*Marcus Tullius Cicero*

*“Justice is that which is most primitive in the human soul, most fundamental in society, most sacred among ideas, and what the masses demand today with most ardour. It is the essence of religions and at the same time the form of reason, the secret object of faith, and the beginning, middle, and end of knowledge. What can be imagined more universal, more strong, more complete than justice?”*

*Pierre-Joseph Proudhon*

*“Justice is the first virtue of social institutions,  
as truth is of systems of thought.”*

*John Rawls*

### **Definitions:**

**Fairness** – Marked of impartiality and honesty...free from self-interest, prejudice, or favoritism.

**Justice** – Conforming to a standard of correctness...impartial...synonym with fairness...equity

One of the key intellectual values connected with critical thinking is **fair-mindedness**. Being fair is weighing both sides of an issue – listening to both sides of a debate – basically attempting to be unbiased. Hence being fair is connected with being open-minded and non-egocentric.

**Justice** is a central value within all functional social organizations. Without justice, social systems deteriorate and fall. All human societies around the world have systems of justice. Everyone expects justice where rewards and punishments are equal and commensurate with actions and deeds. Justice can not be achieved without being fair.<sup>11</sup>

Fairness and justice come up as values within education in several ways. Students expect to be treated fairly (without bias). Where unethical behaviors are exhibited within education, there should be justice. Wrongs should not be tolerated – wrongs should be righted. Everyone expects to be rewarded appropriately for their accomplishments and efforts.

This last point deserves special attention. Receiving a reward for something one hasn't earned is not justice. Receiving a reward for something one hasn't earned when others had to earn the same reward is not justice. When one receives a passing grade on an assignment, where the work on the assignment was copied or plagiarized off of another student or another source, this isn't justice.

Justice implies that one receives a reward commensurate with the quality of one's work. Each person should be treated equally in this manner – each person should receive rewards commensurate with the relative quality of their work. In philosophy, this is referred to as **distributive justice**. Hence, an individual who wants a reward for presenting the work of someone else as their own, is actually committing an injustice against his or her fellow students. Getting a passing grade for work not done is unfair relative to those students who received a passing grade for work they actually did. A person plagiarizing or cheating may think that he or she is only trying to fool the teacher or the system, but in fact, the person in question is behaving in an unfair and unjust fashion relative to his or her fellow students. From a student's perspective who did not cheat to earn his or her grade, it seems totally unfair and unethical (which indeed it is) that someone who did not do their own work receives the same reward.

**Retributive justice** refers to incurring negative consequences for unethical behaviors. If a student receives a zero on an assignment for plagiarizing or cheating, this is retributive justice. In our general social systems, we expect that individuals who commit unethical actions get punished for them. If nothing else, society sets up deterrents (potential negative consequences) against unethical behaviors, in the hope that these deterrents will reduce the amount of unethical behavior. Almost all systems of justice have both distributive and retributive dimensions. Both types need to be diligently enforced if the system is going to work. We should accept the negative consequences of our ethical transgressions; we should expect the positive consequences associated with our positive efforts. In both cases, we are valuing the importance of justice.

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### **Summary – The Value and the Virtue**

The values associated with this standard are justice and fairness. Generally, the same terms or similar ones are used to describe the virtues – a fair (or fair-minded) person or a just person. The vices associated with this standard include bias, favoritism, and greed, or being unfair, self-centered, and inconsiderate.

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### **Question**

*In what ways do you practice justice and fairness? What benefits come from this area of strength in you? In what ways don't you pursue justice and fairness? What adverse effects come from this, both on yourself and others? In what ways can you improve yourself on this virtue?*

## Love of Learning and Knowledge – Curiosity, Wonder, and Open-Mindedness

*“I know of no disease of the soul but ignorance.”*

*Ben Jonson*

*“The central task of education is to implant a will and facility for learning. It should produce not learned but learning people. The truly human society is a learning society, where grandparents, parents, and children are students together. In a time of drastic change it is the learners who inherit the future. The learned usually find themselves equipped to live in a world that no longer exists.”*

*Eric Hoffer*

*“I wonder why, I wonder why.  
I wonder why I wonder.  
I wonder why I wonder why  
I wonder why I wonder!”*

*Richard P. Feynman*

*“The most beautiful and most profound emotion we can experience is the sensation of the mystical. It is the dower of all true science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead.”*

*Albert Einstein*

*“It is good to be open-minded but not so open that your brains fall out.”*

*Jacob Needleman*

### **Definitions:**

**Learning** – The acquisition of knowledge or skills through experience, practice, or study, or by being taught.

**Knowledge** – Facts, information, or skills acquired through experience or education... true justified belief... awareness or familiarity.

**Love** – An intense feeling of deep affection... a great interest or pleasure in something.

**Wonder** - A cause of astonishment, amazement, or marvel ...amazed admiration...to feel doubt, uncertainty, curiosity

**Open** – Having no enclosing or confining barrier... not shut or locked... free from concealment.

**Learning** can be seen as having value in itself or can be seen as having value as a means to an end. If learning is valued in itself it has **intrinsic worth** – if learning has value as a means to an end it has **instrumental** or secondary worth. Education values learning in both ways.

Though not to discount instrumental learning, if learning is not intrinsically valued, a person will approach education as simply the procurement of a degree, a necessary step for job advancement, or as a way to satisfy the expectations or hopes of significant others. Consequently they will see no problem in getting grades or degrees without having learned anything. If learning has no intrinsic worth, learning is nothing but a means to an end. The lack of valuing learning for its own sake opens the door to a variety of unethical behaviors in education.

What does it mean to value learning for its own sake? It means that a person possesses the “**love of learning**” – that the person emulates the spirit of philosophy – the love of wisdom and knowledge. It means that understanding something new is an enjoyable experience – without having to ask what it is good for. Of course, a person who enjoys learning will probably be able to give various reasons why learning is a good thing and has an instrumental value, but fundamentally learning is its own reward. Just as Spinoza’s said that “virtue is its own reward”, learning is its own reward as well.

A person who values learning for its own sake possesses the virtue of **inquisitiveness**. Psychologists have studied the drive to know - the curiosity or exploratory motive - and they have found that there seems to be in both animals and humans a motive to learn that is independent of satisfying any other primary or biological drive.<sup>12</sup> This natural drive or tendency needs to be nurtured and reinforced; it can’t wither on the vine. Studies in critical thinking reveal that the ideal critical thinker possesses a strong trait of inquisitiveness (an active wanting to learn about things) that is essential for good critical thinking skills.

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### **The Value of Deep Learning**

The love of learning is connected with what psychologists and educators refer to as **deep learning**. Without a positive experience of learning, the result is frequently only **surface learning**. Some of the main differences between deep learning and surface learning are:

Deep learning involves getting the **big picture** - a synthesized and comprehensive understanding of a domain of study, rather than simple surface learning of a set of disconnected facts. Whereas surface learning never penetrates to the **core** ideas of a learner, deep learning penetrates and affects the learner's fundamental values and beliefs. Deep learning involves conceptual re-organization; in surface learning nothing of importance in the learner's mind changes. Deep learning is carried into the future and affects decisions and problem solving; deep learning **transfers** from the original learning situation to new situations. Surface learning is the opposite – it doesn't transfer. Deep learning **empowers** the individual. Deep learning is achieved through **thinking** about the subject matter; surface learning involves rote memorization. In fact, deep learning means that a person can think about the new ideas learned and can think with these ideas – the new knowledge becomes operational - it is active and **useable knowledge**. Surface learning is inert, floating on the surface of the mind, and a person's thinking processes and problem solving do not incorporate the new knowledge. Hence, deep learning creates practical knowledge – knowledge that can be used – whereas surface learning is the accumulation of trivia. Deep learning also connects with **self-awareness**, reflection, and meta-cognition; when individuals engage in deep learning, they think about their own thinking processes and beliefs. Surface learning occurs without self-reflection. Finally, deep learning is usually associated with an intrinsic motivation to learn and the associated emotional affect is positive. Surface learning is extrinsically motivated (e.g., to pass a test) and the associated emotional affect is frequently negative, involving anxiety, fear, and stress. Deep learning is an active and exhilarating process; surface learning is more passive and often felt as mere drudgery. All these qualities of deep learning apply to the type of knowledge possessed by wise individuals.<sup>13</sup>

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For teachers, it is important to demonstrate a love of learning – a love of understanding and wisdom - to evince fascination – to show a desire to “figure things out” – to explore and inquire – to question and ponder. It is also important to reinforce and stimulate this value and virtue in student behavior and performance. As a student, it is important to cultivate the love of learning and to practice deep learning. It is important to question, to think about, to actively engage the subject matter.

Perhaps all real learning – all meaningful understanding – begins with a state of **wonder**. All thinking begins with the question. The love of learning begins in inquisitiveness. Until we wonder we are basically unconscious.

The unknown is not something to fear – it is something to revel in – something to approach. Students are often afraid or closed off to the mystery of it all. Wonder requires **courage** (another example of the importance of this virtue in education). Without wonder there is no drive for learning.

Without wonder, as Einstein notes, the mind and the human spirit is as good as dead. In fact, the mind is dead. Igniting or re-igniting wonder in your mind is in essence bringing your brain back to life. Wonder is the breath of life of the mind.

Learning various skills or techniques may not involve any sense of wonder. Working toward a degree may not involve any sense of marvel or astonishment. Looking up at the stars and feeling overpowered by the immensity of it all is the beginning of true learning and wisdom.

Wonder is, in part, an **emotion**. Education consequently is more than developing cognitive or intellectual skills – it is more holistic. The capacity to feel wonder is a virtuous emotion. Teachers often comment that many students seem apathetic or indifferent – such students lack a sense of wonder.

Education should astonish through what it reveals to the student’s mind.

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### **Open-mindedness**

**Open-mindedness** as a character trait applies to both the love of learning and the love of thinking as well. The human mind needs to be open in order to learn. One can not learn if one’s mind is closed. As noted above, the person who loves learning is inquisitive. Having a closed mind destroys inquisitiveness. Being open means being receptive and thoughtfully considering new information or ideas. One cannot be honest and self-aware without being open; defensiveness closes off self-examination.

Through exchange with others, one’s ideas can be tested and one can learn new perspectives on various topics. The desire to dialogue and discuss demonstrates **social openness**. Dialogue is not simply exposition of one’s own views, but an exchange of ideas. Dialogue is both listening and talking. Dialogue in fact is a cooperative activity where all parties allow for a give and take in the discussion.

Dialogue opens the mind to other points of view. The opposite of critical thinking is egocentric thinking – only being able to see things from one’s own point of view. To move out of biased or one-sided perspectives one should consider a diversity of points of view. Hence, the virtue of being open-minded connects with the virtue of being a thoughtful person – a good critical thinker.

Being open, listening to, and considering other points of view does not mean simply accepting or believing whatever someone else says. The ideas of others need to be assessed through the principles of critical thinking and other intellectual standards.

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### **Summary – The Value and the Virtue**

Education values knowledge and learning (the acquisition of knowledge). The corresponding virtues include inquisitiveness, wonder, curiosity, open-mindedness, or simply the love of learning. The vices or deficiencies associated with this standard include apathy, disinterest, close-mindedness, arrogance, defensiveness, anti-intellectualism, or simply a lack of fascination with life.

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### **Question**

*In what ways do you demonstrate a love of learning, curiosity, and open-mindedness? What benefits come from this area of strength in you? In what ways don't you demonstrate these virtues? What adverse effects come from this? In what ways can you improve yourself on this virtue?*

## Love of Thinking

*“Learning without thought is labor lost;  
and thought without learning is perilous.”*

*Confucius*

*“Reading furnishes the mind only with materials for knowledge;  
it is thinking [that] makes what we read ours.”*

*John Locke*

*“Thought is subversive and revolutionary, destructive and  
terrible, thought is merciless to privilege, established  
institutions, and comfortable habit. Thought looks into the pit  
of hell and is not afraid. Thought is great and swift and free,  
the light of the world, and the chief glory of man.”*

*Bertrand Russell*

*“The unexamined life is not worth living.”  
Socrates*

### Definitions:

**Rational** – Relating to, based on, or agreeable to reason.

**Thinking** – The process of using one’s mind to consider or reason about something.

**Critical Thinking** - The art of thinking about your thinking while you are thinking in order to make your thinking better...

According to the American Philosophical Association,

*“The **ideal critical thinker** is habitually inquisitive, well-informed, trustful of reason, open-minded, flexible, fair-minded in evaluation, honest in facing personal biases, prudent in making judgments, willing to reconsider, clear about issues, orderly in complex matters, diligent in seeking relevant information, reasonable in the selection of criteria, focused in inquiry, and persistent in seeking results which are as precise as the subject and the circumstances of inquiry permit.”*

Education values thinking. According to Peter Facione "Education is nothing more nor less than learning to think." It is not enough to simply memorize

information – one must be able to think about the information – to evaluate, question, and think through the meaning of what is being learned. Thinking also involves going beyond simple belief – having a belief is not thinking. Thinking involves the active examination and evaluation of information and beliefs. Thinking may involve bringing into serious question what one believes. The **capacity and willingness to question** – especially one’s own beliefs – is a virtue – it is openness, humility, and courage.

Thinking improves the quality of learning – it facilitates deep learning. Quality learning is an active process and the mind becomes active in thinking. When a person begins to think about some topic, the person becomes mentally active and alive – thinking is the active use of one’s mind. Thinking is **empowerment**.

Thinking is also a **skill**. Although all normal adults think, the capacity and ability to think varies among people.

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### The Values of Critical Thinking

There are **standards and principles** of skillful thinking. These standards and principles provide a set of criteria for assessing the level of skill or quality in thinking. These standards define **excellence in thinking**. These standards as described by the *Critical Thinking Consortium*<sup>14</sup> are:

- **Clarity** means that the meaning of a term, expression, or statement is understandable. The opposite of being clear is being vague, confusing, and ambiguous.
- **Accuracy** means that a statement is true. The opposite of being accurate is being false or wrong.
- **Precision** means that a statement provides sufficient detail. The opposite of being precise is being too general.
- **Relevance** means that a statement is meaningfully connected with the topic being described or addressed. The opposite of being relevant is being disconnected or without significance to the topic.
- **Depth** means sufficient examination of the richness and complexity of a topic. The opposite of depth is superficiality.
- **Breath** means how broad a perspective one takes on a topic. Are other viewpoints considered? The opposite of breath is being narrow and singular in viewpoint.
- **Logic** means being rational – drawing conclusions that follow from premises – being consistent in one’s thinking. The opposite of logical is being contradictory, disconnected, or opinionated without any reasons to support one’s views.

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## The Virtues of Critical Thinking

In the study of critical thinking, according to Richard Paul and Linda Elder, there are a set of intellectual virtues or universal standards that are essential to good thinking. **Good thinking necessarily involves good solid character virtues.** The virtues are listed below together with their opposites (intellectual vices).

- Intellectual **Humility vs. Intellectual Arrogance**
- Intellectual **Courage vs. Intellectual Cowardice**
- Intellectual **Empathy vs. Intellectual Close-mindedness**
- Intellectual **Autonomy vs. Intellectual Conformity**
- Intellectual **Integrity (Honesty) vs. Intellectual Hypocrisy**
- Intellectual **Perseverance vs. Intellectual Laziness**
- **Confidence in Reason vs. Distrust of Reason and Evidence**
- **Fair-mindedness vs. Intellectual Unfairness**

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Educational and psychological research reveals that the skill of thinking can be significantly improved and developed through the learning and practicing of these standards and principles.

Improvement in the skill of thinking will help you in all aspects of life, but in particular, improvement in thinking skills will educationally benefit you in the learning and understanding of information and the acquisition of knowledge. The development and active use of thinking skills improves academic performance. Again, this skill can be improved or developed with practice and effort; it is important to take self-responsibility for the level of one's thinking.

Improvement in thinking skills will also support the development of **active, life-long learning**. Given the rapid and continuous changes in our world, it is important to keep learning throughout one's life. Further, it is important to be **self-motivated** and self-responsible in this pursuit of knowledge. People are much more likely to persist in activities if they are self-motivated. The development of thinking skills empowers the individual to become a self-motivated, proactive, and life-long learner.

The skills involved in thinking include logical reasoning and critical thinking. Educators value the capacities to think rationally (or logically) and to think critically. Teaching and reinforcing these skills is one of the most important and central values that educators try to instill in their students.

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## Summary – The Value and the Virtue

It is important to emphasize that in the case of thinking the value involves standards and principles. There are normative criteria that define the value, e.g., clarity, precision, relevance, and consistency. There are rules for good thinking. The virtues pertaining to good thinking include being **rational**, **reflective**, and **thoughtful** – which refer to specific intellectual virtues associated with critical thinking. The vices connected with this standard include mental laziness, impulsiveness, presentism/a narrow range of consciousness (not considering the past or the future), narrow-mindedness, foolishness, immaturity, dogmatism, and authoritarianism.

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## Questions

*In what ways do you demonstrate a love of thinking? What benefits come from this area of strength in you? In what ways don't you? What adverse effects come from this? In what ways can you improve yourself on this virtue?*

## Discipline and Determination

*“Learning is not attained by chance,  
it must be sought for with ardor and attended to with diligence.”*

*Abigail Adams*

*“Genius is one per cent inspiration and ninety-nine per cent perspiration.”*

*Thomas Edison*

*"Nothing in the world can take the place of Persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent. The slogan 'Press On' has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race."*

*Calvin Coolidge*

### **Definitions:**

**Work** – Activity involving mental or physical effort, done in order to achieve a purpose or result.

**Effort** – A vigorous or determined attempt...strenuous physical or mental exertion.

**Determination** – Firmness of purpose...resoluteness

**Disciplined** – Showing a controlled form of behavior or way of working.

One variable, that seems to have more to do with success and learning than almost anything else, is **effort**. All gimmicks and learning techniques aside, the more time and energy a person puts into study, the better the person does. This principle applies to life in general. Again, as a general truism, nothing of real value in life is easy. The character virtue is being a “hard-working” person; the vices are laziness, sloth, and self-entitlement.

The virtues of **discipline** and **determination** connect to the general virtue of self-responsibility. Practicing self-discipline and tenacious determination reflect a sense of self-responsibility in the realization of what one wants. A person takes responsibility for their success and in so doing makes a self-initiated, conscientious, and determined effort to succeed.

A problem that educators face today is that education is being commodified and commercialized – it is being advertised as a product that can be purchased. Buying something though requires no more effort than going to the store and

handing over your money. Education though, like anything else of value in life, can not be bought; it is earned and it is earned by the student. (You can buy a degree but getting a degree is not necessarily getting an education.) As noted earlier, virtues are accomplishments – they can not be purchased, they can not be given to us – they must be earned. And all worthwhile accomplishments are going to involve significant effort, persistence, and determination.

Teachers can of course try to help students in many different ways, but since learning is an active process involving doing, teachers can not do the reading, the studying, the thinking, and the writing for the student. All these processes must be done by the student. Teachers can inspire, teachers can show, teachers can explain, and teachers can guide, but teachers can not do for students what they have to do. This simple fact needs to be emphasized. Teachers and academic institutions can not promise students success without effort. Students can not expect success without effort.

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### **Key Principles of Success**

There are certain key principles and practices behind discipline and determination:

If you want to achieve something – to create something – to realize a dream - commit yourself to a schedule for working on it and do not waiver from it. There are always excuses. Life is a bottomless pit of rationalizations and reasons for not doing something, so you must simply not allow for any. **Regularity** is critical to discipline and success; get a rhythm and work schedule going in your life and keep banging on the drum. Accomplishments are built upon a steady, incessant accumulation of individual actions.

**Focus** and **concentrate** on what you want to do – on the task at hand. The surrounding world should fade away – there but not there. Forget the world – forget yourself. There are always things to worry about – to distract your mind – to intrude on your attention. But you must immerse yourself in the object of your desire – your interest - your aspiration.

Accept the fact that you will encounter **challenges** and difficulties along the way – be ready to exert yourself – to suffer some pain, anxiety, and disappointment. Relish the sweat, struggle, toil, and intense expenditure of energy you will need to experience in the process of growth and evolution. Derive pleasure from accomplishments that involve great effort and some level of distress. That which opposes you or challenges you strengthens you.

Taken together, this point and the last one describe some essential features of what the psychologist, Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, refers to as “**flow**” – the

experience of immersion and exertion in a challenging task.<sup>15</sup> Cultivate flow – realize it everyday; it will create and amplify purpose and direction in you. It will charge you. It will open the future. Flow is not something you walk into; it is something you must seek out and nourish.

Identify an over-arching goal or direction in the future. See what you are doing today in the present in the context of the future. You are on a journey through time – the time of your life - and the light ahead of you – the light you imagine and build off of in the future will give meaning and coherence to what you are doing today. But you must set the light burning and keep it burning – you must feed the future. **Future goals** give order to things, define a sense of progress, and combat the influence of chaos, distraction, confusion, and apathy that can easily come into one’s life. Regularity comes through having a goal set in the future. Having purpose and direction in life is another one of the key factors supporting psychological well-being and happiness.

**Tenacity** (or persistence) also comes through having a goal and you must cultivate tenacity, above all else. People who possess talent frequently fall by the wayside because they give up. You can waiver in the moment and avoid doing what you intended to do today, or you can waiver in the long run and not stay with something long enough to bring the endeavor to fruition and completion. It is a fundamental truism that there are ups and downs in everything – there are challenges, defeats, sometimes even disasters. There is no such thing as a smooth and steady ascent upward – roads are rocky, filled with holes and crevices, and we frequently stumble, fall, and slide backwards along the way. Tenacity is maintaining forward determination and continual action through these interludes of chaos and momentary failures. Having long-term goals or aspirations gives you tenacity – it keeps you going when you want to give up (and everyone at one time or another wants to give up) – it picks you up after you have fallen down. It defines the value of what you are doing – of the meaning and direction you are taking. As the psychologist Abraham Maslow pointed out, even self-actualizing people feel anxiety, fear, frustration, anger, and depression – but they pass through it and keep growing and living.<sup>16</sup>

**Regularity, focus, struggle, flow, goals for the future, and tenacity** – these are some of the key factors behind success, accomplishment, and the realization of one’s dreams. These are some of the key factors that go into discipline and determination.

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### **Summary – The Value and the Virtue**

The key values associated with this standard are excellence, success, and personal accomplishment. The virtues include discipline, self-determination and

self-motivation, focus and purpose in life, persistence and tenacity, and enthusiasm. The vices include laziness, sloth, passivity, and defeatism.

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### **Question**

*In what ways do you practice discipline and determination? Specifically, how do you practice discipline and determination within your educational activities? What benefits come from this area of strength in you? In what ways don't you? What adverse effects come from this? In what ways can you improve yourself on this virtue?*

## Growth and Optimism

*"Our only security is our ability to change."*

*Anonymous*

*"Perfection would be the end of evolution,  
the end of freedom, the end of creativity."*

*Elizabet Sahtouris*

*"The sages do not consider that making no mistake is a blessing. They believe, rather, that the great virtue of a person lies in their ability to correct their mistakes and continually to make a new person of themselves."*

*Wang Yang-ming*

### Definitions:

**Growth** – The process of developing physically, mentally, or spiritually...the process of increasing in amount, value, or importance.

**Optimism** – Hopefulness and confidence about the future or the successful outcome of something.

Educators emphasize the importance of **growth** and **progress**; teachers look for improvement rather than perfection in their students. No one is perfect in anything – in fact, it is impossible to even define what perfection could mean regarding human beings. The belief in perfection, in fact, interferes with continual learning and critical thinking. If one is perfect, what is there new to know? Perfection would set a limit on things and there is no limit to how much people can learn, how much they can grow, and what they can be. Awe, wonder, curiosity, and humility, all would be undermined if one believes one is perfect. Everyone can always be better at whatever they do. Seek growth and improvement – seek excellence – but give up the idea of perfection.

Growth is a value; it is a value that if pursued leads to positive psychological well-being. If a person believes they are growing or improving, they are happier than if they believe they are stagnant or without direction.<sup>17</sup>

Believing in the possibility and desirability of growth reflects an openness and willingness to change and an appreciation of the **value of change**. Valuing growth is therefore connected with valuing openness – a character quality

described either under the love of learning. And of course one won't see the value in growth and learning if one believes that one is perfect or that one possesses the absolute truth about things. Valuing growth reflects **humility** – an openness to one's limitations and being willing to admit to mistakes - arrogance, close-mindedness, and egocentric thinking (the opposite of critical thinking) resist growth. If one is perfect, one won't admit to mistakes.

People may believe that things can (or will) get better in the future, especially regarding their own life, or people may believe that their situation is hopeless and going from bad to worse. People may believe in the possibility of growth or they may not. The former are optimists; the latter are pessimists. Believing in the possibility of growth and improvement is one way to define the character trait of **optimism**.

If a person believes that they can improve themselves – that they can grow and achieve progress in their lives – they stand a much better chance of success. Believing that one can not improve – that one can not learn – maximizes the chances of failure and stagnation. Both optimism and pessimism are **self-fulfilling prophecies**. Each way of thinking gets reinforced in life since each tends to produce the very results it anticipates - either constructive (optimistic) or defeatist (pessimistic) behaviors. "It may not be true that where there's a will there's a way, but if there ain't no will, there ain't no way."

Seligman, who has studied the attitudes of optimism and pessimism extensively, argues that the belief that one can positively affect the future is critical to optimistic thinking. Optimism involves a strong sense of **self-efficacy**. Hence, optimists have a strong sense of self-responsibility – a positive sense – regarding the creation of their future.

Seligman defines optimism as a way of thinking involving the beliefs that misfortunes are relatively short-lived, limited in their effect, and due to external circumstances.

Pessimists, on the other hand, not only have negative images about the future, they believe that they cannot positively affect any change in what is to come. They believe that they are doomed to failure. They feel hopeless and helpless. Seligman defines **pessimism** as involving the beliefs that misfortunes have long-term and pervasive effects and are the fault of the individual. Seligman contends that depression is primarily due to pessimistic thinking.<sup>18</sup>

Seligman sees optimism and pessimism as "**habits of thought**", which obey the laws of reinforcement. He believes, based on considerable research, that these habits of thought can be changed through re-learning, education, and training.

Psychological studies reveal that optimism is always better than pessimism. Optimists tackle problems – they approach life. Pessimists, because they

anticipate failure, run from problems – they avoid life. Because optimists look at life’s challenges in the eye, they are more realistic; because pessimists run and avoid, their perceptions of reality are impoverished. Optimists have more positive feelings about life; pessimists more negative feelings. Positive feelings contribute to increased performance and creativity. Optimists experience hope toward the future; pessimists feel despair.<sup>19</sup>

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### **Optimism, Self-Efficacy, and Unethical Behavior**

Optimists believe that they are capable of positively affecting their future. Pessimists do not believe that through their efforts they can create a positive future. Optimists believe they can do it and tackling life challenges, figure out how to do it. Because a pessimist is a defeatist about life and has a low level of confidence in his or her abilities, a pessimist may resort to dishonest or unethical behaviors to achieve their goals.

Believe that you can achieve your goals through your own personal efforts and figure out how to do it. Adopting this mindset will make one much less susceptible to trying to find disingenuous or easy ways around life’s challenges.

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### **Summary – The Value and the Virtue**

The values are growth, development, and improvement. The associated virtues are optimism, hopefulness, courage, flexibility and a willingness to change, humility, hopefulness, and self-confidence. The vices include pessimism, perceived helplessness, nihilism, defeatism, inferiority, and arrogance.

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### **Question**

*In what ways do you demonstrate optimism in life? What benefits come from this area of strength in you? In what ways don't you – in fact, are pessimistic? What adverse effects come from this? In what ways can you improve yourself on this virtue?*

## Social Conscience and Mutual Respect

*"No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main...any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bells tolls; it tolls for thee."*

*John Donne*

*Tsze-Kung asked, saying, "Is there one word which may serve as a rule of practice for all one's life?" The Master said, "Is not 'reciprocity' such a word? What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others."*

*Analects of Confucius*

### Definitions:

**Social Conscience** – An inner sense of concern for other human beings...for humanity

**Respect** – High or special regard...esteem.

**Mutual** – Experienced or done by each of two or more parties toward the other or others...having the same specified relationship to each other.

**Reciprocity** – The practice of exchanging things with each other for mutual benefit.

Emphasizing in education the importance of this value is critical in counter-acting certain negative trends in both popular culture and higher education today. Aside from education being increasingly seen as simply a means to an end, the ends that education serves are increasingly defined as self-serving. Financial and professional advancement are important considerations in life to be sure, but such goals are self-centered. Even personal enlightenment and enrichment are self-centered. We would hope that education also serves the purpose of instilling in students the desire to contribute to human society and the betterment of the human condition. We need to counter-balance the "cult of individualism" that pervades our culture. In an age of increasing globalization and global consciousness, this value is all the more important.<sup>20</sup>

Students need to consider in their own career choices and educational development the contributions they can potentially make to the welfare of humanity. What can they do to make the world a better place?

One of the central driving forces in history is the human desire for recognition and respect.<sup>21</sup> Everyone wants to be respected. Everyone wants to be treated with value. Student performance improves when students are given attention,

respect, encouragement, and recognition for their efforts to learn. Faculty and teachers want to be acknowledged by students for their education, position, wisdom, and the numerous ways in which they attempt to help students.

**Mutual respect** generates a climate for cooperation and collaboration. Without mutual respect, or as Francis Fukuyama states, “reciprocal recognition”, society falls apart and education does as well. It is important in this regard to understand that although we have the right to expect respect from others, we have the responsibility to show it to others; one can’t expect what one doesn’t give. This is a principle of social justice. It is amazing how much respect one gets once one starts to show it to others.

**Civility** is a key feature of respectful relations between students and teachers. Hostility, personal insults and attacks, vulgarity, rudeness, and demeaning language all undermine an atmosphere of mutual respect. Most academic institutions have rules for civility between teachers and students, and this issue has become an increasing concern with the emergence of online education where people can express critical comments and negative feelings toward others without having to face them in person. If nothing else, such behavior is an expression of cowardliness – an indication of lack of courage. It is important to always ask oneself, how one might improve a social interaction or relationship where tension or bad feelings are rising. Can we look at the situation from the other person’s point of view before going on the attack? Did we at least make an effort to move toward a peaceful and constructive interaction? This demonstrates open-mindedness and the transcendence of ego-centricity. No one is suggesting that a person shouldn’t defend his or her self, if unfairly criticized or attacked. But it is important to consider how best to deal with such situations and to make sure that you are being wronged or attacked.

Many concepts of justice and fairness derive from the idea of **reciprocity**. The expressions “An eye for an eye...do unto others... and you scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours” all describe social reciprocities. Reciprocity is a key principle underlying the idea of partnerships.<sup>22</sup> Reciprocity – developing mutually beneficial relationships and forms of exchange - is a key factor in driving the evolution of human societies.<sup>23</sup> Cultivating **win-win** relations is an expression of reciprocity; viewing life as win-lose encounters reinforces competition and excessive individualism. Reciprocity highlights the essential dimensions of cooperation and interdependency within human life.

Reciprocity is also behind the Eastern principle of *karma* – a form of cosmic justice - “What goes round, comes round.”

At the most basic level, integrating the idea of reciprocity into one’s philosophy and behavior means acknowledging one’s interdependency with the rest of humanity, with nature, and even with the cosmos. It means giving up the mistaken notion of extreme individualism – that each of us is a separate self-

contained entity. No one truly does anything alone; everyone depends on others. In our emerging global society, it is critical to see our interdependency with each other. Reciprocity as an ethical duty means giving to others knowing full well that others (and society as a whole) have given to you.

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### **Summary – The Value and the Virtue**

The values are the betterment of human society, reciprocity and justice, and mutual respect. The virtues are social conscience, a sense of responsibility and desire to contribute to society, empathy, care and concern for humankind, and respect for others. The vices are disrespectfulness, narcissism and self-centeredness, entitlement, and insensitivity to others.

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### **Question**

*In what ways do you demonstrate social conscience and respect for others? What benefits come from this area of strength in you? In what ways don't you demonstrate these qualities? What adverse effects come from this? In what ways can you improve yourself on this virtue?*

## Wisdom and the Ethical Application of Knowledge to Life

*“Knowledge is power...”*

*Francis Bacon*

*Wisdom is the highest expression of self-development and future consciousness. It is the continually evolving understanding of and fascination with the big picture of life, of what is important, ethical, and meaningful, and the desire and ability to apply this understanding to enhance the well being of life, both for oneself and others.*

*Tom Lombardo*

### **Definitions:**

**Application** – The action of putting something into operation or action.

Information obtained in school can be perceived as relevant or irrelevant to life. Individuals can learn information and never consider how that information could be applied to life. On the other hand, a person can view new knowledge as contributing to the improvement of their own life, if not relevant to helping others as well. As Francis Bacon said, “Knowledge is power...”

Further, people can take classes and learn information that relates to and is significant regarding their pre-existing beliefs, yet they may or may not apply this new knowledge to their personal beliefs. Personal beliefs may grow and change as a consequence of information or knowledge learned in school –a person may change their mind about their previous beliefs – a person may even be significantly transformed as a consequence of what he or she learns in school - or on the other hand, personal beliefs may stay the same – the person may stay the same, impervious to whatever information is acquired in school. The former case typifies what happens in deep learning; the latter what happens in surface learning.

Educators value the **relevance** and **applicability** of **learning and knowledge to life**. Although educators intrinsically enjoy the processes of learning and teaching, they also believe that the acquisition of knowledge improves the quality of life, enhances and enriches consciousness, and can even transform a person’s character.

Valuing learning and knowledge for its relevance and applicability to life is not the same thing as valuing a degree because it will improve one’s professional and financial situation. In the former case the knowledge is applied to real life situations and to improving one’s beliefs and practices. In the latter case, the information acquired in gaining a degree may not even be applied to one’s

profession – the only thing that matters is that the degree leads to a better job. Has the knowledge been applied to life, or is the degree simply a means to some end?

In order for information to be retained and to really have a value in improving the quality of life, it is important that students actively work at connecting the knowledge learned in school to life and to pre-existing beliefs and values. Although teachers should strive toward helping students to see the connections between knowledge and life, to a significant degree it is the responsibility of students to go look for the connections. This is part of active learning.

Both “the love of learning” and striving to see “the relevance and applicability of knowledge to life” enhance the process of learning and the growth of knowledge in the human mind. The more a person enjoys learning and the more a person attempts to apply new ideas and information to life the better the learning.

A person who applies knowledge to life acquires the virtue of educated or informed **competence**. A person who applies what they learn to life in an ethical and broad, holistic fashion acquires the virtue of wisdom.

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### **A Special Focus on Wisdom**

The virtue of wisdom is often identified as the highest potential level of human development.<sup>24</sup> Wisdom though should be seen as a journey or process rather than some fixed end; people grow in wisdom throughout their lives and it is never-ending. Again, there is no perfection.

The study of wisdom has a long history, beginning with ancient philosophy, religion, and spirituality. Through the ages cultures around the world have attempted to define what it is and there are many definitions of wisdom. Clearly it has been revered and it is one of Seligman’s six universal character virtues. More recently, there has been a renaissance of interest and study in the nature of wisdom; philosophers, psychologists, spiritual thinkers, and educators have attempted to delineate its basic features.

It can be argued that wisdom should be the central or over-riding goal of all higher education – what students should aspire toward above all else, and what educators should model and practice in their profession. The pursuit and practice of wisdom should be the main focus of education. It is the highest form of knowledge and human development, integrating heart and mind, and ethics and practice. This conclusion aligns with the idea that that the development of

character virtues and ethical values, rather than simply the accumulation of knowledge and skills, should be at the core of education and academic inquiry.<sup>25</sup>

It can also be argued that wisdom is exactly what we need more of – a lot more of – in successfully addressing the challenges and problems facing society today. We have plenty of money – we have plenty of technologies – we have plenty of creativity - but we are lacking in ethics and wisdom in using these resources and capacities.

Putting these two points together, education should focus on developing in students the capacity for wisdom, for this is exactly what is needed to create a positive personal future and contribute the improvement of humanity as a whole.

Many contemporary educators argue that the teaching and cultivation of wisdom would greatly benefit both modern society and educational practice.<sup>26</sup> If the virtue of wisdom more strongly influenced problem solving and decision making in our modern world, we would make great progress in solving the social problems of today and creating a better world for tomorrow.

The question then is what is wisdom? And the answer, in fact, is not that complicated.

- First wisdom is something acquired through ongoing deep learning and critical thinking throughout one's life; the foundation of wisdom is in the love of learning and thinking. Consequently wisdom is associated with openness, humility, curiosity, wonder, and awe.
- Second, the pursuit of wisdom involves trying to figure out what is really important in life; that is, wisdom involves thinking about values and evaluating different values.
- Third, wisdom involves applying this knowledge to life – wisdom is highly informed practical knowledge. Wisdom, in fact, grows through dealing with the challenges and problems of life. Wisdom pulls together the knowledge acquired in the past and applies it to making the best possible decisions for the future. Wisdom involves seeing the consequences of things.
- Fourth, various studies have demonstrated that the pursuit and development of wisdom leads to happiness in life; wise people enjoy the pursuit and practice of wisdom. Wisdom is the pursuit of the good life.
- Fifth, wisdom transforms the human personality; there are an identifiable set of personality traits connected with wisdom. Wise people show great integrity and self-awareness, and engage reality with enthusiasm and optimism (the belief that they can positively affect the future through their actions).

- And finally, and critically so, wisdom is not just an intellectual or practical ability or repository of knowledge, but an ethical concept – in fact a virtue. Wisdom involves the ethical and constructive application of knowledge to life. Wisdom involves compassion and empathy for others – wise people use their knowledge, not only to bring themselves happiness, but to help others realize it as well. Further, wisdom subsumes many other character virtues – that is, in order to become wise one needs to develop a whole set of virtues, including courage, honesty, self-understanding, optimism, self-responsibility, and respect for others.

Wisdom has been placed as the last ethical character virtue in this workshop because it pulls together most of the other virtues discussed already and because it can serve as the central or all-encompassing virtue to pursue and practice in becoming an educated person – in living a life of excellence and achieving success.

In summary, the main features of wisdom include:

- Deep learning and understanding about life and reality
- The capacity to see the big picture - understanding of the connectivity of things
- A synthesis of past and future - seeing long-term consequences of actions
- Highly developed practical ability – applying knowledge to concrete problems in life
- Excellent thinking skills
- Capacity to see multiple points of view – open-mindedness
- A self-stimulating, evolving, and open system of knowledge balanced and driven by questions, doubt, and a degree of uncertainty
- Curiosity, inquisitiveness, wonder, engagement with reality - a love of learning and thinking
- Compassion and empathy for others
- A sense of happiness and well-being associated with the pursuit and use of wisdom.
- The application of knowledge, guided by ethics, to the well-being of both oneself and others – ethics in thinking
- Courage, integrity, fair-mindedness, humility, and reverence
- A sense of connection between the self and other people, human society as a whole, nature, and the cosmos
- Exceptional self-awareness and the capacity for self-reflection - self-transcendence and a widening of the egocentric
- Self-accomplishment and an act of will that requires continual effort<sup>27</sup>

As can be seen from the above list, wisdom as a character virtue, synthesizes almost all of the other character virtues described in this workshop. This is why it is the most central and important character virtue to pursue in education.

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### **Summary – The Value and the Virtue**

The first value identified in this final section is the practical relevance of knowledge to life, based on the belief that the acquisition and application of knowledge will improve the quality of life and improve the character of the person. The virtue connected with this value is informed competence.

Regarding wisdom, there are numerous values associated with it. Aside from believing in the practical utility of knowledge, there is the love of learning and thinking, and a particular fascination with understanding the big picture and asking big questions. Wise people value growth and personal development, purpose and meaning in life, excellence and living well, the happiness and well being of others and the desire to help them, and the application of ethics to life. As noted above, almost all the virtues discussed in this workshop, including honesty, courage, curiosity, social conscience, self-responsibility, the love and pursuit of excellence, and thoughtfulness are components of wisdom.

The vices associated with this section include foolishness, indifference toward learning, thinking, and growth, self-centeredness, a disregard for ethics (including psychopathic tendencies), aimlessness, and willful ignorance.

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### **Question**

*In what ways do you pursue wisdom in life and attempt to practice it? In what ways do you apply what you have learned to improving your life and helping others to improve theirs? What benefits come from this area of strength in you? In what ways don't you? What adverse effects come from this? In what ways can you improve yourself on this virtue?*

## Summary and Conclusion

To review, the central idea presented in this workshop is that the **development of character virtues is the key to academic success**. These character virtues, in fact, define the essence of academic success or academic excellence. Becoming an educated person amounts to practicing and pursuing these virtues.

The character virtues, identified and described in this workshop include self-responsibility, the love of learning and the love of thinking, honesty, fair-mindedness, and wisdom. Wisdom is seen as the highest and most comprehensive of the character virtues that are developed through education.

Principles of deep learning, critical thinking, and positive psychology (including flow, self-efficacy, and optimism) are essential to realizing these character virtues.

The development of character virtues address a variety of general life concerns, such as happiness and meaning and purpose in life, and furthermore, character virtues such as wisdom, optimism, courage, and self-responsibility support a constructive and positive approach to the future.

Ethics is the key to academic excellence, as well as excellence in life.

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### Final Question

*Describe how you would apply the ideas and principles presented in this workshop to the improvement or enhancement of your educational experience and your level of success and accomplishment as a student, or if applicable as a teacher. Take each of the ten values/virtues and include it in your plan, noting its importance for you and in particular, where you may need to improve yourself in regards to the pursuit and practice of each virtue. If you wish, you may also add how each value/virtue has relevance to your personal and/or professional life as well.*

## Academic Integrity Websites

Center for Academic Integrity - <http://www.academicintegrity.org/>

Fundamental Values Project (Academic Integrity)  
[http://www.academicintegrity.org/fundamental\\_values\\_project/index.php](http://www.academicintegrity.org/fundamental_values_project/index.php)

Ten Principles of Academic Integrity  
[http://sa.sjsu.edu/judicial\\_affairs/faculty\\_and\\_staff/academic\\_integrity/ten\\_principles\\_for\\_academic\\_integrity.html](http://sa.sjsu.edu/judicial_affairs/faculty_and_staff/academic_integrity/ten_principles_for_academic_integrity.html)

Syracuse University – Office of Academic Integrity  
<http://academicintegrity.syr.edu/index.php?page=66>

VAIL (Virtual Academic Integrity Laboratory) –  
[http://www.umuc.edu/distance/odell/cip/vail/faculty/AI\\_overview/def\\_integrity.html](http://www.umuc.edu/distance/odell/cip/vail/faculty/AI_overview/def_integrity.html)

Academic Integrity and the World Wide Web  
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