



SHS/EEP/TAC/04

United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

ADVISORY EXPERT COMMITTEE FOR THE TEACHING OF ETHICS

Report of the fourth Meeting

Division of Ethics of Science and Technology
Social and Human Sciences Sector
UNESCO

2006

**ADVISORY EXPERT COMMITTEE FOR THE TEACHING OF ETHICS
DIVISION OF ETHICS OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (SHS/EST)
UNESCO**

Meeting Minutes

Venue: UNESCO HQs, Bonvin Building
Room XVI
1, rue Miollis, 75015 Paris, France

Date: 30-31 August 2006

Attendance:

Members of Advisory Expert Committee:

- Professor Ruben Apressyan, Russia
- Professor D. Balasubramanian, India
- Professor Amnon Carmi, Israel
- Professor Leo de Castro, Philippines
- Professor Don Evans, New Zealand
- Professor Diego Gracia, Spain
- Professor Nouzha Guessous, Morocco
- Professor John Williams, WMA

Members of the Secretariat:

- Mr. Henk ten Have, Director SHS/EST
- Mr. Tee Wee Ang, SHS/EST

Discussion:

Mr. ten Have explained that the purpose of this meeting is to continue work started earlier this year on the proposed bioethics core curriculum, with the goal of completing its content by the end of 2006. Consultation will then be held with various groups to obtain feedback about the product. In addition to the planned consultative meeting with members of TWAS in early 2007, there are also other possible opportunities for consultation during various meetings organized by the Division towards the end of 2006. After the consultation process, the committee will then meet to revise the curriculum based upon the feedback compiled to create a final product.

Whereas each expert had taken responsibility for developing a few units within the proposed bioethics core curriculum prior to this meeting, in order to ensure cohesion within the final product, the committee will work in plenary from this point forward.

Committee members are encouraged to provide comments and resources for all units within the curriculum.

From the discussion, the following general concerns were highlighted:

- It was clarified that learning objectives for each unit of the curriculum should be framed from the perspective of the student, and should also be consistent with the overall course learning objectives. It was emphasized that ethical principles must be taught in conjunction with and within the context of clinical skills, with the underlying purposes of transmitting knowledge, skills, and attitude. As such the overall course learning objectives were refined to the following:
 - General Objective
 - To be able to apply the principles of the declaration in medical practice
 - Specific Objectives:
 - To be able to recognize an ethical issue
 - To be able to reason about ethical issues
 - To be able to justify ethical decisions
 - To be able to implement ethical principles in medical practice
- Since the curriculum will be a product of UNESCO, the bibliography of suggested publications is a potentially controversial and sensitive issue where competing authors could question the exclusion of their publications. As such, it was decided that only references from the following will be included:
 - Publicly accessible reputable websites and international resources (universities, institutions, and encyclopedias)
 - Publications from international organizations
 - Articles from the four most prestigious journals

There should be no references to specific books as far as possible. It should also be explicitly pointed out that teachers using the curriculum might find the references suggested helpful in developing the course, but it is not meant to be a suggestion of literature to be used for students (this is to be decided by the teacher).

- It was clarified that the document is aimed at teachers who want to introduce ethics teaching. As such, it was suggested that in addition to references pertaining to the specific topics covered in the curriculum, references on the teaching of bioethics should also be included.
- With regards to references suggested in the curriculum, they should cover a wide spectrum of opinions and materials, providing teachers with a broad and balanced menu to select from, avoiding the promotion of only a particular perspective. It was also suggested that it should be indicated in the final product that UNESCO has taken measures to ensure cultural sensitivity in the suggested references through the extensive consultation process carried out.
- It was further noted that it is necessary to include references in the 6 official languages of UNESCO wherever possible to increase accessibility of these materials around the world. However, it was also cautioned that the quality of references in different languages should be closely scrutinized to ensure that they

- are consistent with the goals of the curriculum, and the principles of the declaration.
- It was also cautioned that the curriculum should not be too overwhelming that it discourages teachers from using it. The curriculum should provide advice with sufficient reference materials. As such, it was also suggested that the study materials suggested can be divided into two parts: core materials that are necessary for the curriculum, and additional references for further study. It was also suggested that perhaps an annotated bibliography would be helpful. It was further clarified that the final document will be used by Prof. Benyakar's group in Buenos Aires to develop resources such as texts and movies in the form of CD-ROMs. As part of these resources to be developed, it was suggested that videos of members of the committees teaching particular units in their classes should also be included.
 - On the issue of copyright, it was clarified that since materials within the curriculum are only suggestions, this should not be an obstacle at this stage. However, it should be pointed out to the teachers that if they intend to use these materials for their teaching purposes, they will have to check on whether copyright permission is needed. With regards to the CD-ROMs of resources to be developed by the Buenos Aires group, copyright is definitely a concern that needs to be taken into consideration.
 - The presentation format of all units within the curriculum should also be uniform, with a maximum of 1 page for the syllabus outline, and 5 pages for the teacher's manual. Detailed description of the outline should be included in the teacher's manual section. In completing the curriculum, members of the committee should provide as many suggestions as possible in all units; including sections within each unit that currently do not have content. The Secretariat will also work on keeping all units uniform in terms of layout and headings.
 - With regards to cases provided in the units, they should include a short description of at least one paragraph.
 - It was also pointed out that the introductory note to the curriculum should contain instructions on how to use it, explanation on what are its objectives, and the reasons for compiling it. It should also emphasize that teachers using the curriculum must exercise discretion on the methods used to convey the content of the curriculum, using some or all of the materials provided.

The following concerns for Unit 1 were highlighted:

- Since the curriculum is targeted towards medical schools, even though the content is excellent, the unit is approaching ethics from a very theoretical perspective and might not capture the attention of medical students.
- It was agreed that the one hour currently allocated for this unit is insufficient. As such, it is not possible to introduce a full philosophical and theoretical background for the unit, and the content should be more focused (even after more time is allotted). It was also pointed out that the content of this unit should be iteratively taught throughout all other units, with different concepts introduced throughout the course. Therefore, there should be a comment within the

introductory note to state that the teacher can take some parts of this unit to be implemented in other units.

- Further work needs to be done to ensure uniformity of format of the content. Members of the committee are also requested to provide more study materials.

The following concerns for Unit 2 were highlighted:

- It was pointed out that the content should include explanations of what is a principle; the difference between values and principles; and the differences between law, religion, and principles. Emphasis should also be put on introducing the principles of bioethics as outlined in the declaration. This will function as the first introduction of the declaration's principles in the curriculum.
- The content should also be modified to be consistent with the learning objectives of this unit, specifically the evolution from medical ethics to bioethics, the definition of bioethics, and the different levels of bioethics (clinical, research, and public).
- With regards to ethics committees, it was emphasized that there is a need to provide explanation on the different kinds of ethics committees. It was also suggested that references to UNESCO's publications on this subject be included. However, it was further emphasized that students should be made aware that they need to incorporate ethical considerations into their daily medical practice, and only refer very difficult cases to colleagues and ethics committees.
- It was pointed out that physician responsibility and autonomy in decision making should be added under the medical professionalism section of the syllabus outline.
- Further work needs to be done to ensure uniformity of format of the content. Members of the committee are also requested to provide more study materials.

The following concerns for Unit 3 were highlighted:

- Questions were raised about whether it is necessary to characterize human dignity as a virtue since it would be better to state that being a member of natural kind is already sufficient to qualify for human dignity regardless of whether the criteria outlined are achieved.
- It was also pointed out that the use of people as research subjects without consent undermines dignity.
- Further work needs to be done to ensure uniformity of format of the content. Members of the committee are also requested to provide more study materials.

The following concerns for Unit 4 were highlighted:

- Further work needs to be done to develop several sections of the unit. Members of the committee are also requested to provide more study materials.

The following concerns for Unit 5 were highlighted:

- Further work needs to be done to ensure uniformity of format of the content. The learning objectives will also need to be reformulated. In terms of reading materials, there is a difficulty to find references that meet the requirements outlined above. Members of the committee are requested to help seek out alternative references.

- It was also suggested that this unit can be treated as an introduction to Unit 6, so the number of hours allotted can be reduced.

The following concerns for Unit 6 were highlighted:

- Although it would not be possible to be included in a meaningful manner in this unit, it was noted that the syllabus should point out that communication skills are crucial in obtaining proper informed consent. It was further suggested that references on communication skills be included in the study materials.
- It was also suggested that the content should address the definition of express consent, and its alternatives.
- Further work needs to be done to ensure uniformity of format of the content. Members of the committee are also requested to provide more study materials.
- It was suggested that Units 5, 6, and 7 should be linked.

The following concerns for Unit 7 were highlighted:

- Further work needs to be done to ensure uniformity of format of the content. Members of the committee are also requested to provide more study materials.

The following concerns for Unit 8 were highlighted:

- Further work needs to be done to develop several sections of the unit. Members of the committee are also requested to provide more study materials.
- Suggested topics of interest include patient's security (such as protection from medical error), vulnerability of persons to unverified promises of medical science (expensive but unproven therapeutic treatments), and the use of vulnerable groups in clinical trials.
- It was also emphasized that vulnerability caused by social structure should be added to the syllabus.
- It was further determined that the time allocation for this unit will be reduced to one hour.

The following concerns for Unit 9 were highlighted:

- It was pointed out that the unit should explain that privacy is a concept that involves more than just information, and covers everything that belongs to the self (right to selfhood).
- It was also noted that the concept of "serious harm to others" is different according to social and cultural context, and the explanation provided in the syllabus should be acknowledged as an example that might not be applicable across all communities.
- Further work needs to be done to ensure uniformity of format of the content. Members of the committee are also requested to provide more study materials.

The following concerns for Unit 10 were highlighted:

- It was emphasized that the definition for distributive justice should be refined, and social justice should be added under the types of justice. It was also suggested that in the case of medical students, a case should be used to illustrate the different conceptions of justice and how they would operate.

- Further work needs to be done to ensure uniformity of format of the content. Members of the committee are also requested to provide more study materials.

The following concerns for Unit 11 were highlighted:

- Examples of positive discrimination raised include veteran medical care, triage during war situation, and priority groups for vaccination in the case of an avian flu pandemic.
- It was also pointed out that more weight should be given to the exceptions to non-discrimination as these situations are where most ethical questions arise.
- Since wikipedia is not a respected academic reference, it should be removed from this unit. References to specific books should also be removed. All movies on stigmatization suggested in the unit should be removed.
- Further work needs to be done to ensure uniformity of format of the content. Members of the committee are also requested to provide more study materials.

The following concerns for Unit 12 were highlighted:

- With regards to this unit, it was noted that there would be an overlap of study materials with other units, especially Unit 6. It was decided that this is agreeable as long as the contents of the syllabus do not overlap.
- Referring to the section in the syllabus on “limits to respect for cultural diversity,” it was suggested that this phrase should be reformulated to state that if specific features within a culture infringes upon the other principles outlined in the declaration, then these features should not be taken into consideration. It was clarified that this principle is the weakest element when balancing different principles of the declaration, can cannot be invoked to override the other principles. More guidance should also be provided on how to reason a decision when balancing principles.
- It was clarified that pluralism as formulated in Article 12 of the declaration refers to pluralism of values.
- Further work needs to be done to ensure uniformity of format of the content. Members of the committee are also requested to provide more study materials.

The following concerns for Unit 13 were highlighted:

- Further work needs to be done to develop several sections of the unit. Members of the committee are also requested to provide more study materials.
- It was emphasized that the notion of solidarity will have to be developed thoroughly.

The following concerns for Unit 14 were highlighted:

- It was pointed out that the definition of health and disease should be addressed within this unit.
- It was suggested that the first hour of this unit could be focused on analysis of the domestic situation, and the second hour could be focused on the global context. There needs to be further elaboration on how this would work and examples of how to proceed in the teacher’s manual.

- References to specific books should be removed, and articles should only be limited to the top four journals. It was also suggested that studies on access to clean water should be used in this unit.
- Health promotion and education should also be covered in this unit.
- Further work needs to be done to ensure uniformity of format of the content. Members of the committee are also requested to provide more study materials.

The following concerns for Unit 15 were highlighted:

- It was suggested that the points mentioned in Article 15 be included in the outline of the unit.
- It was also emphasized that there is a need to add internal/national mal-distribution, instead of only global inequality.
- Further work needs to be done to ensure uniformity of format of the content. Members of the committee are also requested to provide more study materials.

The following concerns for Unit 16 were highlighted:

- Further work needs to be done to develop several sections of the unit. Members of the committee are also requested to provide more study materials.
- UNESCO publications on future generations and precautionary principle should be used for this unit.
- It was also suggested that reproductive cloning and genetic modifications be included in the syllabus outline and explanation.

The following concerns for Unit 17 were highlighted:

- Further work needs to be done to develop several sections of the unit. Members of the committee are also requested to provide more study materials.
- UNESCO's upcoming publication on environmental ethics should be used for this unit.

The committee also decided to redistribute time allocation for the following units:

- Units 1 and 2 were increased to 2 hours each unit from 1 hour.
- Units 5, 8, 16, and 17 were reduced to 1 hour each unit from 2 hours.
- The total number of hours for the entire curriculum was reduced to 30 hours from 32 hours.
- It was also emphasized that the definition of an hour in this context is 60 minutes, and not an academic hour.

The committee further decided that the following units are linked and should be executed as a set (this should also be included in the introductory note):

- Units 1 and 2
- Units 5, 6, and 7
- Units 13, 14, and 15
- Units 16 and 17

It was also suggested that teachers who use this curriculum be encouraged to provide feedback on the product, as well as additional cases that are deemed useful. This will enable the committee to improve on the curriculum in a year or two.

All revisions for the units should be submitted to the Secretariat by 9 October 2006.