

UNESCO
INTERNATIONAL BIOETHICS COMMITTEE
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BIOETHICS EDUCATION IN
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

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BIOETHICS EDUCATION IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

INTRODUCTION

Bioethics in Latin America and the Caribbean has been characterized as “medico-philosophical, having a humanistic tradition and a projection more political, social and sanitary than clinical, founded on traditions in a process of social and political personalization more ample than the clinical sphere.”

J.A. Mainetti

We should also point out a particular trend of bioethics in the region towards a “critical” bioethics, and an “interventional” bioethics.

V. Garrafa

The teaching of bioethics in the region started in the late 80’s and has been mainly focused on the bioethics in clinical practice, public health and biomedical research. Some efforts have centered on bioethics and law and in social bioethics and to a lesser degree on global bioethics.

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“The cultural and institutional characteristics of Latin-American countries causes some topics to be treated in special ways, for example the relationship between religious faith and the great bioethical debates that affect individuals and groups have in the continent a particular tension.”

The assimilation, incomplete, of foreign practices in the shape of administrative rituals, cause to confuse ethical evaluation with the uttering of slogans or beliefs and in that way hinder the reflective character that the bioethics enterprise should have.”

Laws in the continent retain echoes of other traditions and without a doubt contribute to the process of bioethics alphabetizing of the populations, but it should also be recognized that in topics that are complex from the scientific point of view are not always appropriate or opportune”

F. Lolas

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“Bioethics in Latin America is more global than the Anglo-Saxon bioethics, more ambitious, medico-philosophical, sanitary, of a humanistic tradition, and a projection more political, social and sanitary than clinical, and founded on traditions in a process of social and political personalizing more ample than the clinical sphere.

Bioethics as a discipline in Latin America, in addition to being the expression of the ethics of life, must be the ethics of vital culture, in which the principles of well-being, liberty and Justice predominate, embodying also a model of institutionalized ethics.”

J.A. Mainetti

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“In Latin America the development of social groups arises out of a radical unity with the land, the idiosyncrasy and the culture, in a perspective of total rootedness with the context.”

“Building a Latin American bioethics must be determined by what is axiologically ours: cultural nuances, biodiversity and ethnic richness, and the need to establish the hierarchy of the more urgent problems that affect the , such as poverty, violence, malnutrition, infectious diseases, vulnerability and social inequities; to have a clear concept of the specifics of the various types of problems generated by marginalization and under-development; and emphasize the dynamics of divulging the pedagogical quality of bioethics to confront the ignorance of large segments of the population”

J.C. Salas

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“Our underdeveloped countries had become aware, both the intellectuals and public opinion, of the decisive importance of bioethics and of the need of not remaining marginalized by scientific and technological progress; of not being a passive receptor but being a participant in that progress and to use it for integral human betterment.”

H. Gros Spiel

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“In Latin America and the Caribbean bioethics should be critical, secular and rational”
L. Santos-Vargas

“Bioethics of intervention for the peripheral countries is morally justified in the following contexts: In the public sphere by prioritizing policies and decisions that benefit the largest number of people; and in the individual or private sphere by the search for viable alternative practices and solutions to conflicts arising from the context of the study itself. This theory proposes a concrete liberal alliance with the historically weaker part of society, including the rethinking of various dilemmas, among them: autonomy vs. justice, equity and universality; individual vs. collective benefits; individualism vs. participation; merciful, pitying compassion vs. solidarity; superficial and temporary changes vs. concrete and permanent transformations.”
V. Garrafa

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Garrafa consider that the bioethics of the so-called ‘peripheral countries’ must preferably be concerned with persistent situations, that is, with those problems that are still happening, but should not happen anymore in the 21st century and that the resulting conflicts cannot be exclusively be analysed based on ethical (or bioethical) theories derived from ‘central countries.’

The authors warn of the growing lack of political analysis of moral conflicts and of human indignity actions. “The indiscriminate utilization of the bioethics justification as a neutral methodological tool softens and even cancels out the seriousness of several problems, even those that might result in the most profound social distortions”

V. Garrafa

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“This approach takes as a theoretical reference the fact that natural resources (which all of us are) are finite, and that corporeal, pleasurable and painful matters (which affect us all) are relevant. Based on these premises, and on the concept that equity means ‘treating unevenly the unequal’, a proposal of a hard bioethics (or intervention bioethics) is introduced, in defense of the historical interests and rights of economically and socially excluded populations that are separated from the international developmental process”

V. Garrafa

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EPISTEMOLOGY OF EDUCATION IN BIOETHICS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

The courses and programs offered in different countries of the region have used “as an epistemological foundation the spectre of plurality in medical knowledge, in a process that goes from the general to the particular, combining theory and practice, and seeking the inter-relation of medical practice with intellectual methods shared with other natural sciences and with the great philosophical ideas about life, being, personhood, goodness, truth, causality, prudence and randomness, and with a methodology leaning towards an education with a humanistic plan.” J. Tealdi

In general the emphasis is on biomedical bioethics with scarce reference on global bioethics.

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Some regional organizations have spearheaded bioethics education in Latin America and the Caribbean:

- ELABE
- FELAIBE
- PAHO
- FLACEIS
- RedBioetica UNESCO

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ELABE- The Latin American School of Bioethics

Located in Gonet, Argentina, was created in 1989 with a conception of bioethics defined as an “academic discipline and program of reform, to try to generate educational and political changes and as an academic program to reform society.” Within this conception, ELABE planned an educational program with the explicit goal of modifying the present status of bioethics in Latin America and the Caribbean at that time. Their core effort was the establishment of committees in hospitals, local healthcare systems and in governmental institutions.

Starting in 1990 several international courses in bioethics were held, with the participation of attendants and speaker from several countries from the region and the collaboration of various international organisms such as the International Association of Bioethics (IAB), the Kennedy Institute of Ethics and the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO).

J.C. Tealdi

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FELAIBE- The Latin American Federation of Bioethics Institutions

Founded on 1991 to foster the dissemination of the bioethics pedagogy in most of the Latin American countries through the promotion of the interdisciplinary analyses of the dilemmas originated by the modern biotechnology and collaboration for the development of bioethics education in several school and health faculties.

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PAHO- Bioethics Program of the Pan American Health Organization

“The Program was created in association with the University of Chile and the Chilean Government. Its purpose was so support countries and territories in the Americas and the Caribbean in healthcare reforms, improvements of scientific structure, and provision of medical and sanitary services. Its long-term mission is to have public policy and scientific practice informed by bioethical principles and it aims at establishing public health as a value-based discipline, complementing its evidence-based orientation in the countries of the Americas and the Caribbean.”

The two key principles in bioethical work (of the program) are the use of dialog and the ethical sustainability of public policies. Parts of a general policy for reducing inequities between and within countries, they meet the challenges of the unfinished agenda in health, and promote bioethically grounded value-based healthcare and research”

F. Lolas

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FLACEIS- The Latin American and Caribbean Forum of Ethics Research Committees

Founded in 2000, in Mexico City, has developed an active and permanent process in training members of IRBs in the continent and promotion of the international norms in research on human beings.

This forum as others around the world, was created under the Strategic Initiative for Developing Capacity on Ethical Review (SIDCER) of the WHO/TDR

FLACEIS main activities are:

- Workshops for discussions of research ethical issues
- Promotion of the cultural traditions and values of the region in research ethical review processes
- Collaboration to improve communication exchange among the research ethics committee
- Assuming a leadership role in the promotion of the principles of research ethics in Latin America and the Caribbean

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RedBioetica-UNESCO Bioethics Network for Latin America and the Caribbean

In 2006 the Redbioetica UNESCO the Permanent Program in Education in Bioethics, aimed at social- and health-area professionals from the region. With certification by UNESCO and the coordinated by Redbioetica, the courses are held online, in virtual classrooms, emails, discussion forums and video-conferences by specialized academics from the different countries in the region. The objective is to train professionals from different fields in the basic knowledge needed to undertake educational, consultative and normative tasks in bioethics, having as a framework a bioethics founded in the universal human rights, paying attention to the historical, social and cultural values of the region and using as a stage the regional reality.

Two courses are presently offered: 1) Introduction to the ethics of research in human beings and 2) Introduction to clinical and social bioethics. To date 863 professionals from 22 different Latin American and Caribbean countries have attended these courses.

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BIOETHICS EDUCATION IN UNIVERSITIES IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

By means of an Internet survey we gathered the following data on existing bioethics education programs in Latin American and Caribbean Universities. There are:

- 5 PhD Degree Programs
- 28 Master Degree Programs
- 21 Specialty courses Programs
- 237 Bioethics modules in Postgraduate Health Sciences Programs, 195 of these in Brazil
- 1,468 Undergraduate courses in Universities Health Sciences Careers, 1390 of these in Brazilian Universities
- 4 Online Courses

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CONCLUDING REMARKS

- Bioethics education in Latin America and the Caribbean is present in most of the countries of the region at different levels and with different modalities
- Efforts should be made to include in the bioethics educational programs the holistic approach of bioethics in accordance with Potter's original vision of an environmental perspective in which the life and health problems would be analyzed in the context of a complex scheme of natural, social, individual and collective relationships

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CONCLUDING REMARKS

- There is a need to pursue more uniformity in the bioethics teaching process in Latin America and the Caribbean. The Bioethics Core Curriculum promoted by UNESCO's Division of Ethics of Science and Technology could be used as a model for this task
- The UNESCO Chairs and Networks in Social and Human Sciences, The UNESCO Latin American and Caribbean Bioethics Network, the PAHO's Regional Bioethics Program, The Latin American and Caribbean Forum of Ethics' Research Committees, and the Latin American Federation of Bioethics Institutions could promote a continental survey in order to identify the training needs in bioethics in Latin America and the Caribbean and assist in the development of interdisciplinary courses, training, research and exchange of information and experiences in this field