ETHICS TRAINING IS WRONG

Lou van den Dries

Here is why:

(1) The idea that underlies ethics training is that ethics violations by faculty are significantly caused by ignorance of ethics, and that training in this subject will therefore prevent such violations. I am not aware of any evidence or argument favoring this idea. Ethics is not like an athletic skill, where lack of training does in fact cause diminished performance. Neither is it like a driver’s test, where the traffic rules are conventions that are to some extent arbitrary, and which therefore have to be learned by drivers in order to prevent accidents and chaos.

It defies common sense that ignorance of rules causes grave misconduct by faculty: surely, a combination of greed, expectations of not getting caught, lack of a moral compass, and self-destructive urges, is the underlying cause.

(2) Mandatory ethics training for adults is an Orwellian concept and has no place in a civil and free society. It is Big Brother reducing us to the status of children. Symptoms: monitoring of the test taking, the “award” of a diploma for passing the test. It betrays a totalitarian urge on those in power to infantilize the rest of us.

An unfortunate byproduct of the computer revolution is that it has given new tools in the hands of unwise rulers to annoy us for no good reason. Rather than go meekly along, we should vigorously protest and resist whenever demeaning schemes like ethics training rear their ugly head.

(3) Enforcing the ethics training requires extraordinary measures: The University has a so-called ethics office that is in the business of issuing “reminders” accompanied by threats. In addition, we, the faculty, are being bullied and hectored by email messages from University officials: President, Chancellor, and Provost. Compliance with the ethics training is plainly based on coercion. This kind of control-and-command operation may be reasonable in the Marine Corps or on a ship at sea, but is incompatible with a University environment based on reasoned discourse.

(4) Subjecting all state employees to ethics training because of corruption among a few politicians and their cronies is collective punishment, a notion that should be out of place in the State of Illinois. Trying to solve a local problem by a global act like the ethics training is hamhanded, wastes a lot of time and money, is enormously irritating to many of us, and thus breeds cynicism with a negative effect on ethical behaviour.

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1Specifically, the mandatory annual ethics training imposed on University faculty.
2In this case the Governor and General Assembly of the State of Illinois.