### MCCC Core Skill C. Ethical Reasoning and Action: Students will understand ethical issues and situations

**C.1. Students will recognize, analyze, and assess ethical implications of an issue or a situation.**

**C.2. Students will analyze and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different perspectives on an ethical issue or a situation.**

**C.3. Students will integrate their knowledge, take a position on an ethical issue or a situation, and defend it with logical arguments.**

### Student Learning Outcomes – General & Context Flexible

1. Recognize the moral and ethical features of views, issues, situations, persons and groups (C.1)
   - A. Communicate the recognition of the difference between felt/reflexive moral views and deliberately framed ethical positions
   - B. Communicate the recognition of the major different ethical approaches/frameworks as sources of common terms in the expression of own positions and those of others

2. Develop the critical thinking skills relevant to relating facts and values, and general, group, individual and domain-specific constraints, translating moral views into ethical positions, and the analysis of one’s own and other’s ethical bases and judgments (C.1/C.2)

3. Cultivate communication and tolerance skills consistent with determining and reconciling the inevitable differences, uncertainties and disagreements about ethical grounds, problems and decisions. (C.2)

4. Develop a well-framed set of positions about ethical grounds and decision procedures about ethical identities, problems & issues, and on key issues as a personal, self-conscious approach to moral matters (C.3)

### C.1. Overview of Ethics – the fields here are inter-related, not distinct

**Metaethics** – the analysis of the nature and meaning of moral terms across theoretical frameworks, including the necessary and sufficient conditions to their verifiability

**Normative Ethics - General** Determines basic and broad foundations and methods, usually aims at the true and/or best moral theory that include justification for its basis and use

**Normative Ethics - Applied** Determines specific interpretations and applications of general theories into moral practice, usually aims at contextualizing these into fitting judgments and actions in particular circumstances; the challenge is to be sensitive to, but not just let material factors impose upon & regulate the morality, rather the reverse

**Prescriptive Ethics** – Normative guidance/rules about what to do

**Descriptive Ethics** – Non-normative - observed and empirically studied account of what moral commitments and behaviors people actually exhibit; based on observation without evaluation.

### C.2. Central Concepts

**Action** – active or passive behavior that is the result of reasoning (not acting counts if it is the result of a decision); contrasts with an Act, such as an unmeditated blink

**Freewill** – simply, self-governed, autonomous choice-making built on being rational and autonomous; if diminished by limiting conditions, this basis for responsibility is likewise diminished

**Good** – adjective for positively valued nouns; Or a noun for that which is positively valued

**Bad** – adjective for negatively valued nouns; Or a noun for that which is negatively valued

**Right** – adverb for positively valued actions/verbs; alternatively a noun for a sturdy trump card individuals/agents may have and use against more powerful/broader competing interests

**Wrong** – adverb for negatively valued actions/verbs; Or a noun for that which is negatively valued

**Sin** – a wrong that is additionally a violation, defiance or betrayal against an (absolute) authority, such as a deity. Or, an extreme wrong

**Duty** – a noun for an externally imposed requirement, whether assented to or not, that serves as an obligation

**Virtue** – adverbial noun for an internalized, habituated way of acting, embodying a positive value, that is usually deliberately cultivated after maturity

**Vice** – The same as a virtue, except for embodying a negative value instead

This is a summary guide to the basic goal of building on whatever moral stances and reflexes people have as they enter MCCC to successfully achieve the college’s goal to educate its students in ethical reasoning and action. In short, this entails the students learning to translate, define and frame their personal moral views into the ethical terms and methods of studied moral thought, as well as those others. This guide purports to serve as a counterbalance against the too common tendency of having personal, material, situational or discipline-based priorities trump or crowd out moral reckoning. Morality has traditionally been superseeded on circumstances, rather than being subordinated to local, non-moral concerns. . Success in this educational goal involves the increase of the students’ analysis and understanding of their own morality, as well as enabling them to render their views into positions framed in terms so that others can access, understand and evaluate them. These aims are consistent with the goal of developing well-prepared students, and the kind of ethical skills that are constitutive of productive citizens that make up healthy communities.

The academic discipline of ethics, or moral philosophy, deals with three chief concerns:

1. Right and wrong; 2. Good and bad; 3. How to live (well). To recast these: 1. How to act?; 2. What has value?; 3. Why? The third is probably the least focused on important area. It begins with questions about what range of attributes that make up human nature, but aims at the features that (howsoever) mark a well-lived life. While brief and handy codes have their instrumental values, the reasons behind succinct summaries are of central concern. For instance, the aims of a person who understands her/himself to be most fundamentally an individual are likely to differ from another who finds her/himself to be most fundamentally a member (of a family, community, etc.), and vice versa. Bases such as this in turn ground the methods and motives that determine the first two concerns.

### C.1. Basic Definitions

**Morality** – The common/informal notion is what a person or group sense or feel as involving socially and personally positive behavior, generally in term of what is good and right & bad and wrong. Often thought of as just being there, some one constant standard. In studied/formal terms, the generally conditioned, often un-deliberated/unreflected upon accepted moral set of reflexes, values, beliefs, commitments and views people have. In both sets of terms, usually associated with conscience and often little distinction with ethics is drawn. For our purposes, is that with which everyone who comes to Mercer walks in. Based on whatever prior influences from childhood to the present (the mixture of instincts, reflexes, senses, faiths, beliefs, theories, cultures, authorities, experiences, etc.) that faculty, staff, students and visitors who come to campus and live in our communities bring with them; it’s the product of whatever set of moral development factors they have, their moral inertia.

**Code of Ethics** – an outline or summary of key moral criteria; does not generally include reasons for or guidance about its basis, interpretation and application

**Framework** – a generally stable and coherent set of terms providing the criteria and meanings of moral terms, such as theories and/or approaches

**Grounds** – The foundational set of facts, values or commitments that serve as the basis of justification

**Theory** – a well-developed set of terms often built on establishing the rational and/or empirical grounds that define and account for the bases & methods for determining, directing and judging moral actions, expressed in terms of principles; not mere speculation; can contrast with view/perspective or considered to be a substantiated view or perspective

**Approach** – A coherent or at least asserted way or basis to define or decide moral views, perhaps without a clear, or at least systemic, argument to support it

**Perspective** – a standpoint that guides moral priorities & actions, sometimes a summary of a framework’s standpoint, or sometimes without well-developed reasons for its basis and/or methods for determining, directing and judging moral actions

**View** – a moral stance that is not (yet?), or cannot be, rationally and/or empirically established; expresses preference, taste, what is liked, or not

**Position** – a moral stance with a rationally and/or empirically evincing basis; expresses what has been determined to be successfully convincing in some explicit set of terms

**Belief** – A views/positions based on generally, commonly held bases, such as rational and empirical evidence, but not always based on such reasons; held in varying degrees proportionate to the strength of the justifications, entitlements and/or warrants; often synonymous with faith and religion

**Faith** – A view that is not necessarily, but often is, based on commonly held bases, such as reasonable and/or observable (or not) evidence, experiences, texts, etc.; often held with the certainty of knowledge, but without the demonstrable justification outside of a unique or one’s own framework, or even any concern about such; can be only an attitude-based commitment, or mixed with some recognized evidence; religion

**Knowledge** – A position or judgment based on rational certainty and/or empirical findings that approach certainty; like a perfected belief when all-to-reasonable doubt is absent based on the justification; justified-true-belief; working knowledge is like very strong belief

**Value** – the ranking or priority that establishes worth, either personal/local or generally

**Values** – A generally durable if not fixed collection of thought and action guiding commitments, which are usually a mix of developed and merely assented to understandings, often held in common with like-others

**Case Studies/Casuistry** – Often in contrast with a theoretical approach, uses examples and analogies to establish, or at least illustrate, relevant parallels between like cases

**Agent** – A being capable of moral/ethical decisions/actions usually based on reason & self-awareness

**Moral Community** – Inclusively comprised of beings with recognized moral standing, generally agents
C.2. Basic Moral Decision-Making (adapted from U of Nebraska) Other models

1. Existing rules: Examine positive morality in the form of relevant law, ethics codes, and custom, along with ethical frameworks

2. Openness: Be open to all considerations. Get information and opinions

3. Impartiality: Consider the issue from all points of view.

4. Discussion: Speak about the issues and possible resolutions.

5. Processing: General values: Consider what values, frameworks and perspectives are at all connected.

Specific values: Determine all affected parties and what and whose interests and frameworks are significant in which ways given the situation.

6. Justification: Can the resolution be explained with transparency and be reasonable to reasonable people? Can the decision be justified in multiple ethical approach frameworks?

7. Follow up: How can the results be assessed and learned from?

What is Ethical Deliberation? Ethical deliberation is an open-ended process, with three main features.

1. Ethical deliberation goes beyond simply following a particular set of rules. Although rules like "be kind," "tell the truth" and "promote the general good" might help you to be more ethical, you have to notice when you are in a situation in which the rules apply if they are to be of any real use. Since every person faces slightly different circumstances, you also have to understand how the rules can be applied to a wide variety of situations. There will also be times when you need to figure out whether any rules are justified or whether any of the usual rules are applicable at all. Your judgments may often depend crucially on the details of the particular case.

2. Ethical deliberation is an ongoing activity that lives in the background of all human endeavors. It is not a special kind of thinking, or something that you can decide to engage in now and then. Every choice has an ethical dimension, because every choice reveals something about what you currently value, and in some sense, who you really are.

3. Ethical deliberation is never purely personal. Everyone spends at least some time thinking about how well they are living their life, because everyone wants to make their own life as worthwhile and enjoyable as possible. But while you must ultimately be able to live with ourselves, you must also be able to live with other people. If you cannot justify your choices to anyone other than yourself, you have at least some reason to question the adequacy of your own deliberations. Despite the open-ended character of ethical deliberation, not just anything can count as an ethical choice. You must be able to give reasons for your choices, and to articulate values or principles that other people can understand.

C.2.3. Evaluating Moral Arguments

Evidence – Common sense and readily observed plus scientifically established facts, tending toward the more empirical, but also including the facts about how relevant, applicable frameworks, laws and other social or cultural constraints set the terms of understanding, i.e.: framework dependent facts, such as how the Roman Catholic Church has determined/evaluated that the use of contraception is wrong – this value is rendered into a fact as framed; some use values like facts, as useful ideas to think with successfully;

Logic – Deductive – when claims are certain, necessary, universal and/or absolute in scope and/or specificity; usually non-consequentialist approach, principle or duty based frameworks aiming at true answers; arguments structured such that if the premises are true, the conclusion must be, or generally, argued from universal or general principle to a particular conclusion. Inductive – when claims are probable, conditional, general and/or limited in scope and/or specificity; usually consequentialist, evidence based frameworks aiming at best answers, arguments structured such that if the premises are true, the conclusion is probably true, or generally, arguing from particular examples/analyses to a general conclusion; Abductive – when claims are based on hard to reconcile/compare terms, like facts and values, or conflicting duties/principles/laws, leaving the likelihood of even a probable finding hard to recognize and achieve; called an argument to the best explanation/result and often associated with virtues or mixed approaches; relies on how alternatives are rendered, no typical structure, though often like

Rhetorical Force – Appeals to emotions, traditions, etc., where relevant feelings are in- and provoked and can be very persuasive, but more for appeals to morality (or non-cognitive ethics) than to reasoned ethics, but can serve to augment or to illustrate ethics, and bring the force of convictions into relief.

C.2.8. Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving (MCCC Core Competency)

Students will use critical thinking and problem solving skills in analyzing information.

1. Students will distinguish among opinions, facts, and inferences.

2. Students will identify and critique underlying and implicit assumptions.

3. Students will thoughtfully evaluate diverse perspectives and alternative points of view.

4. Students will ask informed questions and make informed judgments.

5. Students will solve problems by applying discipline-appropriate methods and standards.

Four Stages of Ethical Argument (that aims at what is the true or best conclusion, not simply at winning their daily, most successful persuasively) (adapted from Peter Suber)

Stage 1: To say nothing in support of your claim. To make an assertion without argument. Alone, the form of dogmatism and ideology.

Stage 2: To offer an affirmative argument, relating general bases and particular applications. This affirmiting can be positive or negative on the issue, but not yet both; the form of much rhetoric.

Stage 3: To offer both an affirmative and alternative arguments. To argue (at least) two-sidedly, honestly laying out the bases & applicability of each, but without comparative analysis; the form of being informative without being constructive.

Stage 4: To offer affirmative and alternative arguments, to anticipate objections to those, and to respond to those objections. To argue two-sidedly and responsively, with the evidence and logic of the responses establishing the grounds for the determining the best justified finding. The form of an instructive and motivating considered judgment.

The stages are not independent of the quality of the logic and evidence, but neither do they correspond to particular standards of empirical and rational evidence, thus the evaluation of the logic and evidence is likewise neither independent nor correlated to specific stages.