Work Group Name: P4 Committee            Executive Committee Review: October 31, 2019

Question 2: Codes of Conduct – What do we need to update to hold all employees and students accountable for living up to our institutional values?

What is the problem/situation? VCU provides publicly available and accessible codes of conduct (codes) for employees and students. Dedicated offices (e.g., Integrity and Compliance Office, Student Conduct & Academic Integrity) provide ongoing oversight, measurement, feedback, and assurances to the Board of Visitors and administration that correspond to the respective codes. The code for employees was created in 2013 and was updated within recent months. The Student Code of Conduct was likewise developed in 2013. Stakeholder entities such as the Division for Inclusive Excellence, University Ombudsperson, Human Resources, Student Conduct & Academic Integrity, Residential Life & Housing, and New Student and Family Programs host initiatives throughout the year that highlight the importance of honoring stated institutional values for both employees and students. The priority is to establish a culture of accountability in which the codes are made real, or operationalized, within the context of the university core values.

What does the literature/research have to say about it? Implementing a code of conduct is a necessary yet insufficient step in fostering ethical behavior in organizations (O’Dwyer & Madden, 2006). Harnessing the intended impact of the code of conduct rests on enforcement mechanisms that ultimately position the code of conduct as an integral component of the organization’s cultural footprint. A tangible manifestation that the code is embedded in the organizational culture is its reflection throughout the “…web of organizational processes and routines” (Nijhof et al, 2003, pg. 67). Further, employees view organizational leadership as being primarily responsible for setting the organizational culture (Petersen & Krings, 2009; Bregman, 2016). Additionally, understanding the formal and informal accountability systems is critical to arriving at an accountability framework that influences individual behavior (Hall et al, 2007). A robust accountability model focuses on building intrinsic motivators of ethical behavior that foster a social responsibility to both act ethically oneself, as well as feel a responsibility to report incidents carried out by others (Petersen and Krings, 2009).

With respect to student codes of conduct and accountability, findings from a study of the multi-campus STARR Project supported the use of restorative justice practices over the use of one-on-one administrative hearing or board hearings. (Karp & Sachs, 2014). However, more recent studies are more skeptical of the impact of restorative justice programs. Institutional factors such as unit autonomy and shared governance structures (Mikus, 2014) and implications for reducing the occurrence of sexual assault (Kaplan, 2017) may warrant the use of traditional approaches to administering student conduct programs.
What does the work group recommend? (Prioritized recommendations are in bold face. The priority recommendations have potential for implementation within a year.)

[Employee-focused Recommendations]

- Commit to have routine senior leadership meetings and to include regularly scheduled time on the agenda(s) to address culture-related matters. These discussions, when appropriate, should have an action-oriented focus with explicit accountability measures.
- Establish “Culture Stewards” within each unit following the HR Associates staffing model. These individuals need not be from leadership positions but must have access and visible support from leadership to inform and alert colleagues of strategies that advance unit cultural saturation.
- Establish a common framework for implementation and dissemination of resources that help to foster intended behaviors. Where possible, these efforts should align and/or amplify other initiatives such as diversity and inclusion initiatives, sporting events, and social and recognition events.
- Explore strategies that provide “just in time” communication with the multitude of audiences at the university. Utilize those networks to regularly provide practical and actionable information that reminds individuals of their responsibility as members of the VCU community.
- Leverage the significant efforts of the recent Human Resources Restructuring to incorporate an assessment of core values on par with other functional or operational areas. This entails tying performance in meeting institutional goals to existing bonuses structures for employees. Performance goals and evaluations should be clear in expectations and consequences for not meeting goals around accountability. Individuals who do not demonstrate a clear commitment to ethical behavior should not receive bonuses. Additionally, encourage units to earmark funds for recognition of individuals who exhibit exemplary ethical behavior in alignment with institutional core values. To instill, or enhance, a peer accountability model, those who are recognized by others (students, peers, supervisors, etc....) should be rewarded but so should those who nominate others as they have noticed, and demonstrated a commitment to ethical values by supporting someone else.
- Update HR and compliance sponsored training materials to include components that address building self-efficacy among managers as accountability agents. Create enhancements to onboarding of all employee types in formal leadership roles to ensure comprehension.
- Clearly delineate the rewards and consequences associated with upholding university core values. Reward employees who advance your culture, and be open and honest with those who do not. Do this always and in tandem with every other culture initiative. The rewards and consequences system would likely benefit from positioning within a broader justice framework (e.g., Restorative Justice, Organizational Justice) to ensure there are established pathways for individuals to re-enter or re-engage the community (Pillay, American Management Association, 2018).

[Student-focused Recommendations]

- Examine the feasibility of incorporating restorative justice practices within the current board hearings model or establishing a model based on restorative justice practices.
- Consider student related data collection, analysis, and data-informed decision-making as in support of the strategic plan. What trends is the data revealing?
- Continually amplify VCU’s ethos in formal and informal opportunities as a means of animating the institution’s desire to create a culture of civility and ethical behavior.
- Consider adding resources and reporting mechanisms in the syllabus template for all students. Or, the bulletin.
- Focus the student culture and climate surveys around these organizational justice concepts. Once determining the benchmark, continue monitoring for deviations.
- Require a civility or organizational justice course in the general education program or offer a seminar during welcome back week for all students or for all student leaders.
• Engage those active students on this topic and related topics by inviting them to participate in creating and executing plans.

• Work through student groups and social media for messaging updates and providing feedback loops as to the progress of this ISB Project.

• Consider using certain disciplines of study or interests documented in advising or elsewhere to query students for related work wherein they can earn an hourly wage or course credit to advance these initiatives or host events with other students around accountability models and practical approaches to living our values in our modern times. Likely majors include: communications, journalism, political science, engineers, social work, public policy, econometrics, Education, SOM, Dentistry, Pharmacy, and Wilder School.
the infrastructure for either a restorative justice program or mediation.

John Wesley Lowery and Ed Stoner

Model Codes.

practices in the USA, comparing traditional conduct hearings that use restorative justice practices alongside traditional

for achieving culture

Leaders who show moral courage are 17

...through results,


...O’Dwyer, B. & Madden, G. J

...Karp


...Karp, D.R. & Sacks, C. (2014) Student conduct, restorative justice, and student development: findings from the STARR project: a student accountability and restorative research project, Contemporary Justice Review, 17:2,154-172, DOI: 10.1080/10282580.2014.915140


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