**GSU 1010/PCO 1020: Welcome to Episode 7: Understanding Ethics and Integrity**

**Description**

In this episode we present important concepts related to Ethics and Integrity. To succeed in college, in your career, and in life, you must understand your rights and responsibilities, and how best to navigate those expectations. Having a clear sense of your purpose, principles and values is the foundation upon which you will determine the person you are and who you want to be. Growing up many of us are told by others what to believe and how to behave, and in college you have more freedom and opportunity to assess for yourself what you believe and why. Understanding your personal ethics and integrity helps you connect with others to build shared values and expectations as a community. It also enables you to navigate conflicts that will arise along the way, and resolve those with respect and civility.

This episode will help you understand how to analyze difficult ethical dilemmas, evaluate competing alternatives, and determine the best choices. The decision-making process requires fact-gathering, and in this episode you will also learn important policies that establish a shared set of goal to which all members of our community agree to uphold. Every student must be familiar with the Student Code of Conduct, especially the policies regarding academic honesty, to ensure you are doing your part to maintain our institutional ethics and integrity.

**Episode 7 Goals**

By choosing to join the GSU community, you are committing to do your part to maintain both your individual rights and responsibilities, along with the rights and responsibilities of the community. This begins by understanding yourself and your personal ethics and integrity, and learning the policies and practices that enable every member of the community to succeed. Sometimes different principles conflict, and that requires us to problem solve. Sometimes different individuals or groups within our community will have conflicting viewpoints, and that requires us to reflect on our own points of view and determine how best to respond. Maintaining your ethics and integrity is not always easy, but having the right tools to support you increases the likelihood that you will make successful choices.

By the end of this episode you will understand the importance of:

- Having a solid sense of your purpose, principles and values
- Using a consistent framework to analyze ethical dilemmas and guide decision-making processes
- Knowing the Student Code of Conduct and Academic Integrity standards
- Being an actively contributing citizen within every community you join

**Student Learning Outcomes:**

By the end of this module you will:

- Know how to find the Student Code of Conduct and that it is your obligation to understand it
- Understand the expectations for ethical behavior and acting with integrity while you are a member of the GSU community

Now let’s begin Episode 7: Understanding Ethics and Integrity.

**Slide 1**
Hi everybody – it’s week seven and you are almost halfway done with your first semester of college! Today we are discussing a really important topic both in your educational career and in your life – Ethics and Integrity. Your choices define who you are, who you become, and how others will perceive you.

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But this is not a new topic for you. Even before you knew what it was called, you have been making decisions throughout your life that have to do with Ethics and Integrity. A familiar phrase is being caught with your hand in the cookie jar. This can have lots of different meanings, but fundamentally refers to a common experience most of us have had. A child gets caught doing something, and is confronted. The child has the choice to tell the truth or lie. Which choice do you think most children make? When you were a child how did you respond when confronted about things you did wrong?

**Slide 3**

So what do the words Ethics and Integrity mean? Broadly defined, ethics involves the principles, purpose and values that govern either an individual’s behavior or a standard of behavior that might be expected from a group or profession, like business ethics or medical ethics. As a philosophy, Ethics asks us to think about what is good for us as individuals and for society as a whole. Ethics is often referred to as a moral philosophy because, as a thinking process, it is how we come to determine right and wrong, and why.

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Sometimes the term moral or morality makes people think about religion, which makes a lot of sense since every religion has a moral code that the followers of that particular faith seek to adhere to. Moral principles are often taught to us in childhood, and may or may not be related to religion or faith. The rules for good behavior we are taught in childhood may be accepted without much analysis, but as we enter adulthood it is common to question or revisit our views on all sorts of things. Here is where we get to use our Ethics to decide for ourselves the principles, purpose and values that we will choose for our own lives. Even if we end up landing in the same place we started, the process of evaluating our beliefs and fully understanding why we believe what we believe has inherent value, and makes us more likely to uphold our belief systems when we face ethical dilemmas.

**Slide 5**

One well known theory of the stages of moral development was created by Lawrence Kohlberg, an American psychologist. Kohlberg theorized that young children choose how to act in order to avoid punishment, but as people mature they develop concepts of fairness, societal good, and eventually embrace universal ethics, moving beyond self-interest and what is good primarily for one’s own family or group of friends, to instead focus on a broader sense of what is good for
the community and even humanity as a whole. Another way to conceptualize your personal developmental journey is how your world view grows over time from your family, to your friends and neighborhood, to your state and country, eventually evolving to a global perspective that focuses on the greater good for all humanity. Chances are you’ll hear more about Kohlberg and many other developmental theories that help us understand how we evolve in our thinking about ethics in some of your other classes at GSU.

This is a brief and broad overview of Kohlberg’s theory, and there is a lot more to it than we will cover here.

The first stage is about Avoiding Punishment. Something bad could happen if you make a certain choice.

The second stage is about Aiming at a Reward. Something good could happen if you make a certain choice.

The third stage is what is called “Good Boy and Good Girl Attitude” or you make a certain choice because you want to please others.

The fourth stage focuses on Loyalty to Law and Order, and is where people start to shift their thinking beyond themselves to the society around them. You make a certain choice because the rules say to make that choice, and you believe that following the rules is a good thing.

The fifth stage goes beyond the letter of the law and focuses on Justice and the Spirit of the Law. You make a certain choice not just because a rule says you should, but because the reason behind the rule is a good reason and one with which you agree.

The sixth stage is about developing a set of Universal Principles of Ethics. The choices you make are not really focused on specific rules per se but because there is a greater good behind the choice and that greater good goes beyond you as an individual but is something that in theory could be applied universally to all people.

In a nutshell, each stage focuses on the motivation or rationale behind why we make the decisions we make, not necessarily the decisions themselves. For example, two people might both decide not to steal, but if one does it only because stealing might get them in trouble that person is likely in an early stage of moral development. Where the other person chooses not to steal because stealing is fundamentally wrong and that person is following an ethical principle, not necessarily a rule. Even if there was a rule that said, “sure, it is OK to steal, go ahead” that second person would rely on the greater ethical principle and choose not to steal. Both individuals in the end might do the right thing, but for very different reasons.

**Slide 6**
So is being ethical just about obeying the law? No! Throughout history there are lots of examples of laws that were unethical. One example is the Jim Crow laws that existed in the South prior to the Civil Rights Movement.

Some people use the terms legal and ethical synonymously, but ethics is much more than just following the letter of the law. The phrase “the law is blind” refers to equal treatment under the law, but sometimes ethics is about equity and not just equality.

For example, if you had an extra sandwich to share and had two friends, you could split the sandwich in half treating your friends equally. Or if one friend is low on money and is very hungry having not had anything to eat that day, while your other friend already had a meal earlier and has enough money to buy more food later, you might choose to give the whole sandwich to the hungry friend. That is not treating your friends equally, but may be treating your friends equitably based on how best you can help meet their current needs and circumstances.

Even within the law, and here at GSU within our conduct process, there is an investigation and analysis process that seeks to understand not just what happened but why. Even if people are found responsible for the same violation, the reasons and circumstances may differ and so the sanctions assigned could be different to find the most appropriate remedy based on the cause.

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Let’s talk about toilet paper! What does toilet paper have to do with ethics?

Let’s say there is a shortage of toilet paper and a local business owner just received a shipment of toilet paper but knows the nearby competing businesses don’t have any, and people have been desperate to buy toilet paper. The business owner normally charges $1 per roll and pays the manufacturer 50 cents per roll, so the additional mark-up in price covers the business owner’s overhead expenses to run the store, pay rent, salaries, etc. Because of the shortage the manufacturer has increased the cost to the business owner to 75 cents per roll to cover increased costs the manufacturer has endured. So, you would logically expect the business owner to increase the cost to the customer accordingly, maybe charging $1.50 per roll. But the business owner sees an opportunity and decides to charge $5 per roll, saying the law of supply and demand justifies the increase. Even if there is no law prohibiting the business owner from increasing the price by this amount, is it ethical?

Here is another scenario. Let’s say the same business owner receive the same shipment of toilet paper and set the price at $1.50 per roll. You arrive at the store right as the toilet paper is being stocked on the shelf. There is a sign that says “please limit your purchase to 2 rolls so we can serve as many people as possible.” You don’t really need the toilet paper, but you are aware of the shortage and since you hadn’t seen any in a while and there is plenty on the shelf at this moment, you decide to take 10 rolls. There is no law against it, and despite the sign
asking you to please only take 2 it is really just a suggestion out of courtesy to others but the store won’t stop you from buying more. Is it ethical to take 10 rolls?

We often face situations where the rules may allow us to do something, but it just doesn’t feel right. That is where your ethics and integrity kick in.

**Slide 8**

Having a solid understanding of your own values, principles, and purpose that you’ve carefully and deeply contemplated and continue reassessing and reaffirming throughout your life is important. This is what we mean by integrity.

Integrity is commonly described as adherence to moral and ethical principles, maintaining a strong personal character, and being honest. The British writer C.S. Lewis described Integrity as doing the right thing, even when no one is watching. In other words, Integrity is about being consistently ethical and for the right reasons. Not because others are watching, or because of personal benefits you might experience as a result of doing the right thing.

In an academic setting, we talk about the purpose of research and the truth-seeking process. This is another important component of Ethics and Integrity, and we’ll talk more about academic integrity shortly.

**Slide 9**

When we say “truth” is there always only one thing that is true? Not necessarily. What do you see in this picture? Some of you may see an old lady. Others of you may see a young lady. Some see both. Some may see neither. What is true?

Sometimes your perception of truth is based on what you initially see and believe. But, if you are open-minded and willing to listen to others viewpoints, you might learn a new perspective that either changes your point of view or helps you understand how multiple truths might co-exist in certain situations. This picture includes both an image of an old lady and an image of a young lady, so if you and your friend can only each see one of those images you might end up in a huge argument over who is right when the truth is that you both are right!

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In Philosophy you may hear the term “capital T truth” for something that is always true and doesn’t change over time, or what is called an absolute or universal truth. For example, a mathematical absolute is that 1 + 1 = 2.

But there are also “little T truths” which includes things that may be true at one point in time but may not remain true forever based on the introduction of new knowledge or changing circumstances. For example – how many planets are in our solar system? The commonly
accepted answer today is 8 but when your parents were in school the commonly accepted answer was 9, before new scientific analysis declared that Pluto is not really a planet. So is the answer now and forever that there are 8 planets in our solar system? Maybe, maybe not. As new information comes to light our understanding of a situation can change.

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So if ethics is not just about following the law, or following religious rules, and is more than just what science currently tells us, and goes beyond current culturally accepted norms, and sometimes there are competing truths, is ethics completely subjective and just about what I personally feel is right and wrong? Not exactly. Ethics is more than just an outcome but is also about a process.

The Markkula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University provides a framework for making ethical decisions. This model helps take the complexity of ethical decisions and breaks down the components in a way that can guide the process, no matter what type of ethical dilemma you might face. The five steps may sound simple, but thinking through all the elements can be challenging.

The first step is to Recognize an Ethical Issue. Properly identifying the issue or problem helps to find the best possible solutions. Who is impacted by this issue, and what good or harm could come from it? Do the alternative options include a combination of good and bad alternatives, or are you choosing the best among many good options, or the least negative among many bad options?

The second step is to Get the Facts. There are often more alternatives to a situation than we realize and we need to resist the temptation to jump to the first conclusion or the easy solution. It is also helpful to include others in the process, especially those who might be impacted by the outcome.

The third step is to Evaluate Alternative Actions. There are multiple ethical viewpoints that can be considered. For example, the Utilitarian approach considers which options produce the most good and do the least harm. The Common Good Approach considers the options that best serve the whole community, not just some members. The Justice approach considers elements of equal and equitable treatment of individuals impacted. Depending on the approach, you may reach some very different conclusions.

For example, if you were in a student organization and everyone in the club was getting along great but there was this one really annoying student who was constantly arguing and disagreeing with everyone, is it OK to kick that one student out of the club? From a Utilitarian or Common Good approach some might argue it is ethical since the rights of the many should be given more consideration than the rights of the one. However, from a Justice or Rights approach each individual is afforded equal access regardless of whether the majority agrees
with or likes the individual, so from those perspectives some might argue it is unethical to remove the student.

The fourth step is to Make a Decision and Test It. Once you think you know the option you wish to pursue, fully map out all of the potential consequences and what the results might be. Kind of like playing a game of chess, before you move your piece you need to think through every possible combination of moves that might occur as a result. Another way to test your decision is to think about how someone you respect would react. What would your grandmother say if she knew? What if your decision was on the front page of the AJC, or widely spread across social media? What reaction would you expect, and would you still feel good about your choice?

The fifth step is to Act and Reflect on the Outcome. How do you plan to implement your decision? Once you do, how did it work out? We won’t always make the right choices, but what we learn from our mistakes is vitally important to our future decision-making process.

To learn more about this Framework for Ethical Decision Making, click on the link to the PDF at the bottom of the slide.

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Another tool that might be helpful when thinking through ethical decision making is a set of principles developed by Karen Kitchener in her research on counseling psychology. She identified five key principles that can help us reflect on the decisions we make and how they impact ourselves and others. These include:

First, Respect Autonomy. Every individual has the right to decide how to live their lives, as long as their actions do not interfere with the welfare of others. We each have the right to act as a free agent, and have freedom of thought and choice.

Second, Do No Harm. As ethical beings we are obligated to avoid inflicting physical or psychological harm on others.

Third, Help Others. We live our lives in communities, and as such we are obligated to improve and enhance the welfare of others, even when it might inconvenience or limit the freedom of the person offering assistance. Some describe this as being a good citizen, or the idea of leaving the world a better place than how you found it.

Fourth, Be Just. In our dealings with others we must strive to provide equal and equitable treatment for all, affording each individual their due portion, and in general, observe the Golden Rule of treating others as we expect them to treat us.

Fifth, Be Trustworthy. Tell the truth, keep your promises, and maintain respect and civility in all of your interactions with others, even those with whom you might vehemently disagree.
Like all principles, sometimes there will be situations where these come in conflict with each other and difficult decisions need to be made to follow one principle over another. Layering these principles upon the Ethical Decision Making Framework we just discussed is one way to help ensure you are thoroughly engaging the process and seeking to reach the best possible outcomes.

**Slide 13**

Georgia State University is a public university that is part of a larger university system comprised of 26 different institutions, including University of Georgia, Georgia Tech, Georgia Southern, etc. The University System of Georgia establishes policies and procedures that all public institutions must follow, including GSU. One of these is the USG Ethics Policy. This policy states that the USG is committed to the highest ethical and professional standards of conduct in pursuit of its mission to create a more educated Georgia. Accomplishing this mission demands integrity, good judgment, and dedication to public service from all members of the USG community. That includes all employees and students at GSU.

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The USG Ethics Policy also includes a Statement of Core Values that every member of the USG is expected to uphold. These include:

Integrity – we will be honest, fair, impartial, and unbiased.

Excellence – we will foster a culture of excellence and high quality in everything we do.

Accountability – education in the form of scholarship, research, teaching, service, and developing others is a public trust. To live up to this trust we must safeguard our resources and be good stewards of human, intellectual, physical, and fiscal resources.

Respect – we recognize the inherent dignity and rights of every person, and we will do our utmost to fulfill our resulting responsibility to treat each person with fairness, compassion, and decency.

The USG policy also includes a high level Code of Conduct that provides a framework for the more detailed Codes of Conduct that GSU provides to its employees and students.

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The GSU Student Code of Conduct is a living document, which means that it is regularly reviewed by students, faculty, and staff, and amended as circumstance may warrant with input from all across the university. It is really important that you Know the Code! It is your guide to your rights and responsibilities as a member of our community. The Code, along with other important documents like the general catalog and student handbook, will answer important
questions you might have and provide excellent guidance when you are not sure how to handle various situations you might encounter while at GSU. Everything you need is available online, and GSU also has an online Policy Library that houses important official policies from across the university that apply to students and employees. The weblinks are on the bottom of the slide.

The Office of the Dean of Students oversees the Student Code of Conduct and is your resource for understanding the code, and addressing concerns that might arise related to violations of the code. The conduct process is designed to be developmental and educational, not punitive, understanding that the key to helping students grow and learn is to help them understand why they make the choices they do, and how those choices impact themselves and others. Some choices can have grave and long-lasting consequences, and we want to avoid those.

The Dean of Students also collaborates with University Housing to help students who live on campus understand and comply with the Community Standards that help ensure all members of the residential community can have equal enjoyment of their time living on campus.

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One of the most important sections of the Student Code of Conduct covers Academic Conduct Policies and Procedures. Every student especially needs to fully understand the Policy on Academic Honesty. At its core, the policy is focused on the ethical principle of Academic Integrity, which is defined as acting with the values of honesty, truth, fairness, respect, and responsibility in learning, teaching, and research.

There are multiple forms of academic dishonesty that violate the Code, many of which you likely already understand from your earlier educational experiences like cheating, but some are more complex than they might seem, like all the different forms of plagiarism. The standards of academic integrity in higher education in the United States are very high, and can have significant consequences if violated. Academic Integrity is a value that has cultural context, so it is important for international students coming to the US from countries that have different standards regarding shared academic content to understand that what might have been acceptable in their home country may not be acceptable in the US. Likewise, US high schools may share the same academic expectations but might not fully enforce them in the same way.

The common types of Academic Dishonesty include plagiarism, cheating, unauthorized collaboration, falsification, and multiple submissions.

Plagiarism in a nutshell is about giving proper credit. Unless you created an original idea on your own and it is fully yours alone, you are expected to disclose where the information that helped inform your thinking came from. This is most commonly done through providing proper citations that disclose the original sources, but that isn’t just about citing the books, articles, and websites you use for research papers. Anything you summarize, paraphrase, or incorporate in any way into your work, regardless of where you found it, must be cited. This is more than just published works but also includes anything written, spoken, online, in a video or movie, or
expressed in any other form. Also note that failing to properly cite is considered a violation. The most common styles used for reference citations are the American Psychological Association or APA, the Modern Language Association or MLA, and Chicago Style sometimes called Turabian. If a professor requires one style and you use the wrong style, or mess up the formatting, that is considered a type of plagiarism.

Even plagiarizing yourself is a violation. For example, you wrote a great paper and received an A in your Fall term English class. Then in another English class in the Spring term the professor gives a similar assignment so to save time you figure you’ll just make a few edits and submit the same paper. Unless the professor gives you permission to do so, that is a Multiple Submissions violation.

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Both cheating and unauthorized collaboration are pretty commonly understood, but what students may not always think about is that just by having access to certain information even if you don’t actually use it to actively gain personal benefit, can be a violation. For example, if you are part of a GroupMe for Chemistry, and someone who took the exam in the morning course section posts some questions and you are taking your exam in the afternoon, just being in that GroupMe and having that access can get you in trouble.

The best way to protect yourself is to report any violations you witness immediately to your professor or the Dean of Students office. If you are ever in a GroupMe or any other form of online chat, or even an in-person study group, and you become uncomfortable because other students are doing or saying things that violate academic policies, remove yourself from the situation and report it.

While we are talking about technology and social media, always think before you post! The digital footprints we leave often follow us for a long time and can have significant consequences. From a conduct perspective, anything that is discoverable by the university is fair game in a conduct process. Anyone can have a bad day or feel like venting, but remember that everything you say and do reflects on your ethics and integrity.

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On the Dean of Students website – deanofstudents.gsu.edu - you will find lots of resources, including workshops and videos that can help you understand more about these specific challenges and expectations, and how those can impact you and the community.

Our shared goal is to build a culture of care through access, equity, and inclusion, and that goal is grounded in the principles of ethics and integrity.
While the Code outlines the university’s jurisdiction over conduct matters and the rules for which every member of the community will be held accountable, the university also espouses strongly held values and beliefs to which we hope every GSU student will aspire.

As a marketplace of ideas, the university fully supports the constitutional free expression rights of every student, understanding that any community as large and diverse as ours will involve multiple different and sometimes conflicting viewpoints. Some of these viewpoints may even be considered hateful and upsetting to some students. Our desire is for every member of our community to feel empowered to express themselves, and hopefully do so in a respectful way that embraces the civility that reflect our personal ethics and integrity. Find your voice and let it be heard, but also leave room for other voices to join the conversation, and not just the voices you agree with.

**Slide 19**

The University Mission Statement talks about how Georgia State readies students for professional pursuits, educates future leaders, and prepares citizens for lifelong learning. One of the most important elements of being a productive and successful citizen is understanding and embracing ethics and integrity in all that you do.

The Creating Effective Citizens Program coordinated through the Office of the Dean of Students is one of the ways that the university applies the principles in the Code of Conduct to real-world activities that you experience both inside and outside the classroom, and will continue experiencing throughout your personal and professional lifelong journey.

You are a GSU Panther for the rest of your life, and everything you do provides you the opportunity to let your Panther Pride shine. Be your best self, and forever represent TheStateWay!