

ETHICS HAS ITS CENTER



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Following several years of reflection on how to shape values, and following steps made by higher education institutions in different parts of the world, the Universidad del Rosario has launched its Ethics and Citizenship Education Center.

What are the values we should be aiming for? How are they taught? What agencies should take part in their education? How is it coordinated? These were among the questions carefully mulled by several professors and administrators of different departments of the Universidad del Rosario, working within the framework of a learning community that applies thought to the teaching of ethics. Now, five years on from that first moment, they have put their answers into the Phronimos Ethics and Citizenship Education Center.

"We have got together to think about this process of education values, because ethics and citizenship training is a fundamental mission of any higher education institution, a cen-

tral task, and that has led us to a design of values education and a center to manage this design. Centers are necessary because education in citizenship and values requires the cooperation of different units of educational institutions. It is not something that belongs to one specific subject, so it involves a rallied effort by different actors," explains professor of the School of Human Sciences, Wilson Ricardo Herrera, director of the Center.

Phronimos may only have got up and running recently, but education in values is nothing new at the Universidad del Rosario. Networking with other universities - and individually - it has carried out several different actions such as training courses for students and professors, as well as an Ethics Week, which completed its fourth year in 2018. These and other tasks were coordinated by the Universidad del Rosario's School of Human Sciences, while they have been put into action by other academic units of the institution, outstanding among these, the Dean-ship of Student Welfare, the Outreach Management Office, and the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Teacher Development (CEAP).

"These tasks call for a big coordination effort and dialogue spaces not necessarily channeled through the different centers. Around the world, different prestigious and long-running universities have created centers and academic units to respond to these needs," points out Professor Herrera, who is qualified as an economist and philosopher at the Universidad del Rosario, and holds a PhD in Philosophy from Binghamton University - State University of New York.

The universities of Harvard, Stanford, and Notre Dame (USA) all have their own ethics center, as do the universities of Toronto (Canada), and the University of Deusto (Spain). Recognized centres in Latin America include the University of Chile and the Monterrey Institute of Technology and Higher Education (Mexico), among other benchmark academic

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higher education centres for the Universidad del Rosario.

The Monterrey Institute of Technology and Higher Education contributed a key component in this area by training a high number of persons, doing so from a technological level. Its ethics and citizenship education programme, which has won worldwide recognition, is coordinated from the vice-chancellery and educates 100,000 students, not merely through didactic strategies but also through follow-up and evaluation.

COLOMBIA IS NO EXCEPTION

The thinking and dynamics taking place at prestigious universities on other latitudes in relation to training in values and citizenship, also occurs in Colombia. At the Universities of Los Andes (Ethics Center), the Universidad Javeriana (Bioethics Institute), the UNIMINUTO (Ethics Department), and ICESI University (Center for Ethics and Democracy), spaces exist for reflecting on different ways of teaching values, and their training and research activities are streamlined into ethics and citizenship.

Among the functions they fulfil, at both national and international centers, are training, dissemination, research, and outreach, just as is being carried out by the Phronimos Ethics and Citizenship Education Center. This falls in line with the academic consensus among scholars of values teaching, with regard to training in citizenship, namely that it is a cross-cutting process that covers the diverse spheres of university life.

As it states in the center's launch document: "training in ethics cannot be limited exclusively to a series of subjects, nor to disparate activities taking place in non-curricular spaces. Works like those of Lawrence Kohlberg, Martin Hoffman, and Nel Noddings show that the effectiveness of this type of education is conditioned by the degree to which there is a concerted and coordinated effort

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The new Ethics and Citizenship Education Center was launched in the framework of the institution's inaugural lesson.

between, on the one hand, different academic units and departments handling non-curricular activities—such as in welfare and outreach—and on the other hand, the main actors in the educational community, meaning students, teachers, managers, families, graduates, and administrative staff."

As opposed to the centers mentioned, Phronimos includes among its functions several activities related to student welfare. This is because empirical research points firmly to extra-curricular activities as being one of the most effective spaces for education in values and citizenship. Sporting areas, for example, and student councils, cultural activities, and voluntary work all come in this area. In this sense, the Universidad del Rosario's Ethics and Citizenship Education Center joins up curricular functions with non-curricular spaces under the management of Student Welfare and Outreach Management.

THE FOUR TASKS

In educating ethical behavior, the Center is looking for those who pass through its courses to improve their judgement ability so they can take reasonable and informed decisions in specific contexts and develop habits that allow them to fully meet their moral responsibilities towards others. This places emphasis on the affective and emotional side of people. This



is why the University's teaching model is based on creating awareness, reflection, and motivation. These pillars are clear in the training axes. These courses comprise ethics subjects at the core of the University's teaching approach, and the courses from the transversal ethics program in each of the different faculty's study plans. In addition, the center offers teaching development courses for training in values, but also training

FOR PROFESSOR WILSON HERRERA, ETHICS AND CITIZENSHIP TRAINING IS A FUNDAMENTAL MISSION OF ANY HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION, A CENTRAL TASK.

for administrators on ethical management. "We have tried to base ethics courses on analysis of cases. To do so, since 2009 we have carried out research into the pedagogics of ethics, and we created a guide for case analysis to give to professors as a reference. We have also insisted on the focus being one of applied ethics. This means that is above all a course based on analysis of ethical problems that crop up in different areas of a person's life, and shows how ethics theories can help illuminate what happens in these cases.

"Simultaneously, the center's working team and its ethics professors has been experimenting with new didactic strategies for teaching values, such as project work, ones that consider ethical challenges arising in different areas of social life. Students then propose solutions for these challenges. Carrying out this type of project work as a team helps them develop important abilities, such as actively listening to others, expounding their own ideas, solving conflicts, among other purposes," explains Professor Herrera.

When it comes to research, the Center's aim is to construct pedagogical lines for teaching ethics in higher education that efficiently respond to social expectations surrounding the issue, to the demands of politics, and to the cognitive specifics of teaching values. This requires the setting up of discussion spaces between researchers and professors devoted to instructing ethics with the pedagogical models for secondary, middle, and higher schooling.

In outreach, the University considers it has a social responsibility to educate values at different levels: professional associations, state bodies, private businesses, state and private schools, and citizens in general.

"Finally, in communicating this material we have different activities. One of these is an ethics teaching conference organized jointly with several Colombian universities and now in its seventh edition. There is also Ethics Week, which we hold every year with the Deanship of Student Welfare, and whose aim is to create awareness among students on the importance of ethical problems. We want to form good citizens," adds the center's director. ■