

The Ethical Professor

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High Fidelity

(Note: we had intended to send this out before the fall term begins; but then we heard the disappointing news that about 70 fewer faculty attended graduation this year, leaving many empty seats on the dais. So we thought it appropriate to send this out now.)

The following topics have all recently been discussed by the Ethics Committee:

- One professor recently told us of a student who came at the last minute to beg for a **letter of recommendation**. The student explained that another professor had agreed long before to write the letter but reneged at the last minute saying s/he was “just too busy now.”
- While we are not aware of any data on the issue, there is certainly plenty of anecdotal evidence that some professors are unreliable about or notoriously neglectful of holding their posted **office hours**.
- Too many departments have at least one member who rarely or never attends **department meetings** and makes no contributions beyond their time in the classroom—even though both are part of our contractual duties.

All of these are examples of *infidelity*. This term ordinarily invokes thoughts of adultery—cheating on one’s spouse or lover. In ethics the term refers more broadly to the breaking of a promise or a failure to keep a commitment, a breach of trust, disloyalty. While there are many virtues to a culture that presumes individual integrity and relies on self-enforcement, it does also create the opportunity for the “free-rider” to shirk responsibility while others are pulling their own weight and, in some cases, much more.

Any cooperative venture—whether between two persons or among the thousands of individuals who make up a college community—in order to succeed must presume that everyone will keep their commitments, do as they said they would, and generally do their share for the common good. Fidelity to the College means not merely doing the bare minimum to meet one’s obligations, but to discharge one’s duties with enthusiasm for success, and by going above and beyond to make the best community college in the nation even better.

There are many opportunities for all faculty to commit to the college community. One great example of how full-time faculty can contribute to and participate in the life of the College is to advise a student club. The Academic Senate recently discussed changing the current policy to allow adjunct faculty to serve as student club advisors because students encounter such difficulty in finding full-time faculty who are willing or able to advise the growing number of student clubs. Part-time faculty have many other options to

both affect the direction of the campus and also enhance their attractiveness to a hiring committee.

Participation beyond one's duties is a way of making an investment in the community by trying to make it better. It also has many individual benefits: we create community by connecting with and supporting others; it is a great way to learn about and care about other members of our academic community; and making such contributions often produces the experience of "helper's high"—all of which can nourish the soul.

Fidelity? Crank it up!