Welcome

Ethical Reasoning in the Library

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We’d like to thank ASERL for this opportunity and we’re also grateful to JMU Libraries for supporting our programming over the years.

At the tinyurl on the screen, we’re giving you this slide presentation and additional resources related to our ethical reasoning journey at JMU.

https://tinyurl.com/ethicalASERL

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I’d like to start by saying a few words about the Eight Key Questions. The Eight Key Questions are the focus of a campus-wide program at JMU called Ethical Reasoning in Action. Jenne, Michael, and I are volunteers with Ethical Reasoning in Action, an initiative working directly with students, faculty and staff to provide a framework for better decision-making on campus. Each August (except for this year), the three of us join a couple hundred volunteers to introduce the Eight Key Questions to all 4,500 first year students at orientation. We have customized that experience for JMU Libraries and for you here today. Our hope is you take this framework with you for improved personal and organizational decision-making.

Allow me to describe our conventional campus-wide orientation program we hope will resume next summer. For an hour and 15 minutes in the middle of orientation week, all 4,500 first year students gather in groups of 30 – 40 all over campus to discuss a common ethical reasoning scenario. The program is called It’s Complicated, but it’s also a minor miracle of logistics and the very best in volunteer spirit. We owe a big debt of gratitude to Residence Life for helping to pull this off. And then along came 2020. Move-in alone took four days and there wasn’t enough time and space left to work in over 100 instructional sessions of It’s Complicated before classes started.

Instead, students were given more material to review prior to arrival and once on campus Residence Life guided each student group in introducing the Eight Key Questions and reflection on the ethical issues of the day. After a period of discussion, students identified an ethical dilemma they personally have faced or think they will encounter along with the application of each of the Eight Key Questions – all written down on a personal worksheet. Currently, these worksheets are being evaluated for themes and ideas that will inform campus-wide programming for the rest of the school year. You can find a copy of the worksheet at the tinyurl.

For in-depth commentary on the Eight Key Questions, please see the Eight Key Questions Handbook.
We’ll briefly touch on the background topics, then model a common discussion format we use at JMU to improve our ethical reasoning skills. Saving the best for last, we’ll invite you to join us in an interactive conversation. Should be fun.
Ethical Reasoning in Action is a formal, campus-wide initiative because JMU takes accreditation seriously. The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools states the Quality Enhancement Plan (or QEP) shall have “broad-based support........focus on improving specific student learning outcomes........commit resources to implement the plan......and........provide a plan to assess achievement.”
Jenne was on the QEP committee in 2010 and suggested ways the Libraries could support Ethical Reasoning on campus. In the Library, our Ethical Reasoning programming began in 2015 and continues today.
In addition to being student-focused, Ethical Reasoning in Action also engages faculty and staff with workshops and other learning opportunities throughout the year. And that broader engagement with the campus community, specifically at the Library, is where much of our attention will be focused today.
We’ve used a variety of event formats. Most of the time we introduce an ethical dilemma for discussion. Colleagues are invited to submit discussion topics and at times we collaborate to anonymize the scenario or otherwise improve the subject for conversation.
These are some of the conversation topics we’ve used at library events. Many were suggested and written by participants. This year we recently concluded an in-depth book study on *The Righteous Mind*. *Tribe* was also a book study and Moral Courage focused on readings from Aristotle.

*The Righteous Mind*

*Tribe*
We’ve had some fun with surveys and prize drawings, but the most effective form of promotion has been one on one conversation with colleagues. The average attendance at our brown bags has been about 10 folks, while our workshops have drawn between 20 and 40 faculty and staff.
The 8KQ serve to open up our decision-making process, to invite our curiosity and to think more critically. In any organization, whether making decisions on our own or with others, there are practical concerns to consider, sometimes organizational politics to weigh, sometimes social and personal concerns to address, all of which have ethical factors and implications attached to them. The 8KQ framework zooms in on those ethical factors and implications, prompting us to reflect more critically and deeply about them than we might have had at first. They move us from reflex to reflection.

The 8KQ framework does not guarantee that we will make the ‘right’ decision, whatever that may be. The framework instead pushes us to better understand the ethical complexity of a given situation, preparing the way for a better-informed and well-reasoned decision, for the best choice we can make at the time.

These 8KQ did not appear out of nowhere. Faculty in JMU’s Department of Philosophy and Religion, working with faculty in related disciplines across JMU, distilled these eight questions from influential and enduring ethical theories and traditions found across the east and the west, spanning millennia.

We find, for instance, a question taking up the importance of character, of cultivating virtue, a notion dear not only to the ancient Greeks philosophers but to many religious figures and thinkers. Another question takes up the importance of one’s moral duties and obligations, which finds perhaps its most comprehensive expression in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. There is, you will see, a question which asks us to consider outcomes, a key consideration for utilitarian philosophers but also important to a karmic vision of the world. I will stop here, but the roots of all these questions run deep. For more on their roots, I encourage you to have a look at the Eight Key Questions Handbook. So then, the questions.
Authority Is Constructed and Contextual

Information resources reflect their creators’ expertise and credibility, and are evaluated based on the information need and the context in which the information will be used. Authority is constructed in that various communities may recognize different types of authority. It is contextual in that the information need may help to determine the level of authority required.

I’m going to touch briefly on each of the 8 Key Questions and suggest ways that many of us are probably already using them, in our decision making and our policies and services. I think that’s part of the reason this framework is so useful, it does not require us to radically change our thinking, but rather to usefully reflect before we make a decision.

At the college level, one way we teach students about authority is based on the ACRL information literacy framework. We help them understand who is an authority and why that’s important.

All libraries consider authority in our collection development policies.

Authority might also be the library board or funding source, in the sense that they can exert some influence over how libraries operate.
Rights come from being part of a group. All Americans’ rights are outlined in our constitution. Likewise members of communities served by libraries have rights, and libraries themselves have rights to make decisions and to provide services and collections, as outlined by the ALA’s Library Bill of Rights.
Empathy can come into play in our services, policies, and even staff training. Like staff, library users are real people with real lives and real confusion about how we operate as libraries.

When I worked on the reference desk, I often had desperate students trying to complete a paper the night before it was due. While this was frustrating to me, I tried to tap into my empathy to help them find something that would help.

Likewise in the public library setting, many of us have probably encountered library users who simply don’t understand our call numbers or shelving, or can’t find materials in our databases. Our systems don’t make sense to them. I think it is important to talk about empathy for our users in our training, to help us understand the challenges our users can experience.
Fairness can relate to differing perspectives about an issue or differing beliefs. How do we provide access to controversial information? Fairness can also relate to justice in providing access to materials.

In public libraries fairness may come into play when thinking about the languages spoken in our communities and the languages of our library materials. Do they align?

In academic libraries we try to be fair and equitable in allocating resources for all of the programs at the university. Materials for different disciplines can vary widely in cost, and we have to try to balance the amount we allocate with the size of the programs and our own budgets.
Anticipating outcomes can be difficult. This question helps tease out the pros and cons of our decisions. It is also helpful to think about short-term outcomes and long-term outcomes, and whether they support or contradict each other.

In this example we have a 3D printer and a 3D printed object. One outcome of providing 3D printers in our libraries is that there may be an increase in interest in using the machines and learning the software. Another long term outcome may be that users print things that are dangerous or offensive. Thinking about the various outcomes can help us create good policies for new services that are not arbitrary and line up with our values.
Liberty has to do with consent. In libraries we should help our users understand what we do with information that we have about them. Parents of minor children need to know what information about their child’s library use they can get, just like teenage users need to know what information we will release to their parents.

At JMU we try to tell our users what information we are collecting about them through our various systems and how it might be used. We also consider what information a professor (or honor council) might want to know about a student and what information we will and will not provide.

Another place where we need to think carefully about consent is in managing our oral history recordings. These recordings may contain sensitive information, and narrators as well as librarians and archivists need to understand what consent is requested and provided when recordings are made and hosted.
Character gets to our mission and values as individuals and as libraries. It prompts the questions “What kind of library do we want to be?” or “What kind of librarian do I want to be?” or “How can I lead by example?”

If early literacy is part of our mission, then supporting children’s programming should be a priority, even during times of budget cuts.

At the university, if we say we support open access then we need to work be sure that our users can find open access materials as easily as other kinds of materials. And we need to try and publish our own scholarship in open access sources when possible.
Responsibilities asks what **duties** apply.

If our users are at risk of overdosing, do we have a responsibility to stock and administer Narcan?

If our staff is averse to hands-on first aid, should we stock Narcan and how should we train them?

What is our responsibility?
Why Not COVID-19?

• Reprise of VLA Presentation
• Learning at a Distance
• For Your Consideration

While the 8KQ framework can help us think through some of the issues that the COVID-19 pandemic poses to libraries, we’ve decided not to use it as our case scenario.

Three reasons for this: (1) We are reprising a presentation from last fall’s Virginia Library Association conference pre-COVID days.

(2) When being introduced to a new decision-making process, a new reasoning framework, it helps to have some distance from the example being used to teach that process. This helps ensure that one is learning the process itself and is not carried away at the start by the emotional impact the example might have for someone. The 8KQ process is designed to move us away from a reflex response toward greater reflection. The opioid epidemic is indeed an urgent issue for many of us, and it does have implications for all of us. Yet not all of us are facing it daily, and so it provides us with a real-life example to consider somewhat objectively, somewhat at a distance as we learn about the 8KQ process.

(3) The last reason we chose not to address it through the example here is because we’d like to invite you to consider for yourself the ways the 8KQ may apply to library challenges related to COVID-19. If there is time at the end, we’d like to hear from some of you about the challenges your library faces. But even if there isn’t time, we encourage you to use the 8KQ framework to think through those challenges.
Ethical Reasoning with the 8 Key Questions

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6oZoPFE3cYQ
• Employees in the Madison Wisconsin Public Libraries are ready to step up and administer the life-saving drug Narcan before first responders can arrive.
• Libraries have always welcomed people from all walks of life. With increases in opioid use and abuse on the rise, the libraries have decided to have Narcan on hand to administer when an overdose is suspected.
• 70 library staff have volunteered to be trained to administer the nasal spray. The spray is safe, and won’t do any harm if it is given in a non-overdose situation.
• The company that makes Narcan has offered two free doses to every library and YMCA in the country.

Now we are going to watch a very brief video that shows how one library system is addressing many of these questions within the context of the opioid epidemic. After the video we’ll talk through how the 8 Key Questions can help us make policy and procedure decisions.

I would like to point out that this is similar to the way that we work with students at JMU during their orientation, we ask them to watch a video and then we have a structured conversation about the 8 Key Questions and how they relate to the scenario. In the Libraries we tend to use written materials, scenarios, books, and other readings.

I would also like to mention that the video describes the Madison Wisconsin Public Libraries, not James Madison University.

Watch the video [here](#).
Which 3 of the 8 Key Questions are the most relevant to consider in deciding whether your library should accept the Narcan?

Now we are going to engage in a thought experiment. Complicated issues take time to sort out, but for the purposes of this presentation we are going to accelerate the decision-making process.

The first thing we should consider is pausing to reflect on the Eight Key Questions. Take about 30 seconds to identify which three of the Eight Key Questions are most relevant to the Narcan scenario on the video. Please make a mental note or jot it down.
The Eight Key Questions

**Fairness** - how can I (we) act justly, equitably, balancing interests?

**Outcomes** - what possible actions achieve the best short- and long-term outcomes?

**Responsibilities** - what duties and/or obligations apply?

**Character** - what actions help me (us) become my (our) ideal?

**Liberty** - how do I (we) show respect for personal freedom, autonomy, consent?

**Empathy** - how would I (we) act if I (we) cared about all involved?

**Authority** - what do legitimate authorities (e.g., experts, law, my god) expect?

**Rights** - what rights (e.g., innate, legal, social) apply?

For in-depth commentary on the Eight Key Questions, please see the [Eight Key Questions Handbook](#).
We’d like to start the interactive part with a little bit of technology. On your smartphones or other devices, please go to Menti.com and use the code 71 40 99 5. Enter the number without spaces. We’re asking you to rank the Eight Key Questions that most apply to the Narcan scenario - please use the scrollable list to select your top three choices. The iPhone interface is depicted....after each selection has been made, select ‘Done.’ If you’re using a web interface or other device, you may be able to move on to the next choice without clicking ‘Done.’

https://www.menti.com/

Enter the code 7140995

NOTE: Codes will only work on day of the presentation.
In any event, after your three selections are made, don’t forget to hit ‘Submit’……….and please remain logged in. We’ll take maybe 30 seconds entering our choices and then discuss the results. At the end of that discussion, we’ll have you vote “Yes” or “No” on the Narcan issue itself……again at Menti.com.

https://www.menti.com/

Enter the code 7140995

NOTE: Codes will only work on day of the presentation.
Which of the Eight Key Questions Most Apply??
Please Rank Your Top Three Only

1st: Responsibilities
2nd: Empathy
3rd: Outcomes
4th: Authority
5th: Character
6th: Rights
7th: Fairness
8th: Liberty

35 participants responded to our poll.
The Eight Key Questions

**Fairness** - how can I (we) act justly, equitably, balancing interests?

**Outcomes** - what possible actions achieve the best short- and long-term outcomes?

**Responsibilities** - what duties and/or obligations apply?

**Character** - what actions help me (us) become my (our) ideal?

**Liberty** - how do I (we) show respect for personal freedom, autonomy, consent?

**Empathy** - how would I (we) act if I (we) cared about all involved?

**Authority** - what do legitimate authorities (e.g., experts, law, my god) expect?

**Rights** - what rights (e.g., innate, legal, social) apply?

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The circle process is a technique that we use when we teach ethical reasoning at JMU. It involves rules about passing a talking piece, offering perspectives, and active listening. We will briefly model the circle process with one round of sharing.

**Jenne:** Outcomes concern me a lot. The short-term outcome of accepting the Narcan may be that lives are saved. But what if the long-term outcome is that the library becomes known as a place where it is safe to use drugs? Won’t that bring more drug users in and drive library users away? I also think about our responsibility to the community to provide services that enable them to learn. But I wonder whether making Narcan available is the responsibility of the library. Can’t we leave that up to the fire department? I also wonder if it’s right to ask library staff to assume this responsibility and what if none of them are willing? **Empathy** is a consideration too, and I ask is my empathy for drug users who overdose stronger than my empathy for the kids who use the library to learn and who would be very frightened by an overdose situation.

**Bob:** Outcomes, Responsibilities, and Empathy were also high on my list, but **Fairness** stood out as an argument to provide broad access to a simple life-saving treatment at a location where vulnerable populations are found. For me, it’s a matter of equal access.

**Michael:** I’d say **Character** should be considered here. What kind of library do we want to be? I’d agree with Jenne about the library’s responsibility to the community to provide services that enable them to learn. This is central to what the library does. But to be the best library we can be in this regard we need to listen and respond to the entire community we serve and that means providing resources and services that enable the community to address the issues they actually face. So, I’d argue that we don’t just make Narcan available but we procure informational resources on opioid addiction, prevention, treatment, and Narcan, helping to foster a well-informed conversation across the community. As the library, we may be in the best position to offer resources and a space for community forums and programing on the opioid crisis and the role Narcan can play.

**Jenne:** Normally the talking piece goes around until everyone has had a chance to surface all questions related to each of the 8 Key Questions.
Discussion

Should your library accept the donated Narcan?

The ultimate decision. Should your library accept the donated Narcan? Let’s take a vote.
You should now be able to vote ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ on the Narcan issue. Please remember to hit ‘Submit.’ The voting screen should be available, but if not simply go to Menti.com and enter the code 71 40 99 5.

https://www.menti.com/

Enter the code 7140995

NOTE: Codes will only work on day of the presentation.
Should your library accept the donated Narcan?

31 participants responded to our poll.
Discussion

What issues does your library currently face that the Eight Key Questions might assist with?

Feedback from the audience...
Questions from the audience...
Thanks for your attendance and participation today!

https://tinyurl.com/ethicalASERL

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