

Introduction to Professional Ethics for Engineers

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MEE Practice I

October 18, 2007

Definition of a “Profession”

1. Requires extensive training of a theoretical and intellectual nature
2. Knowledge and skills are critical to society’s well-being
3. Exercise a near monopoly on provision of professional services in an area of specialization
4. Enjoy an unusual degree of autonomy in the workplace
5. Claim to be self-regulated by a code of ethics

Which is a Profession and Why?

Dentist

Automobile Mechanic

Musician

Beautician

Professor

Engineer

Engineering Might be a “Profession”

1. Requires extensive training of a theoretical and intellectual nature *(but undergrad is not enough)*
2. Knowledge and skills are critical to society's well-being
3. Exercise a near monopoly on provision of professional services in an area of specialization
4. Enjoy an unusual degree of autonomy in the workplace *(only at Ph.D. & Sc.D. level)*
5. Claim to be self-regulated by a code of ethics

What is the Definition of “Ethics”?

1. A system of moral principles: the ethics of a culture.
2. The rules of conduct recognized in respect to a particular class of human actions or a particular group, culture, etc.: medical ethics; Christian ethics.
3. Moral principles, as of an individual: His ethics forbade betrayal of a confidence.
4. That branch of philosophy dealing with values relating to human conduct, with respect to the rightness and wrongness of certain actions and to the goodness and badness of the motives and ends of such actions.

<http://www.dictionary.com> (last accessed 10/16/2007)

What is a “Code of Ethics”?

1. Professional ethics, not personal ethics or common morality
2. Furnishes agreed-upon standards for professional conduct
3. Enables professionals to act faithfully for a client or for society; but contrary to personal ethics and common morality without retribution
4. Usually administered by a professional organization (NSPE for engineers)
5. Provides focus for discourse on (ever-changing) obligations of professionals

What a “Code of Ethics” is Not

A code of ethics is not a prescriptive solution providing the correct outcome to every ethical problem.

The discussion of situations where our code of ethics is uncertain or silent on an issue is the most interesting and enlightening aspect.

MEEN1110 Reading Assignment

For next week, read Chapters 1 and 2 of Engineering Ethics: Concepts & Cases by Harris, Pritchard, and Rabins.

