Learning and Internalizing Ethical Practices in Students: Advancing a Student Code of Professional Conduct

Danielle Ivy Joan Hunt[1] and Brenda Nicodemus[2]

Gallaudet University

Abstract

This paper revisits the roles and responsibilities of interpreter education programs to guide students into ethical practice as professional ASL-English interpreters. We discuss how the Gallaudet University Department of Interpretation and Translation drew on the NAD-RID Code of Professional Conduct (CPC) to create a Student Code of Professional Conduct (S-CPC). The S-CPC was designed with the goal of guiding undergraduate and graduate students in the ethical decision-making process throughout their educational journey. We describe how the S-CPC was implemented across the BA, MA, and PhD programs in our department and the making of an ASL version of the S-CPC in order to align with the university's bilingual mission. Finally, we summarize a few studies that explore the internal vs. external reward systems for maintaining honest behaviors that may be informative when implementing ethical guidelines in interpreter education programs.

Keywords: gatekeeping, Code of Professional Conduct, conduct, ethics, ethical behavior, bilingual.

[1] *Correspondence to: Danielle.Hunt@Gallaudet.edu*

[2] *Correspondence to: Brenda.Nicodemus@Gallaudet.edu*

2016 Biennial Conference – Out of the Gate, Towards the Triple Crown: Research, Learn, & Collaborate

Learning and Internalizing Ethical Practices in Students: Advancing a Student Code of Professional Conduct

How can interpreter education programs assess and guide students who do not behave in accordance with values and norms of the profession or the Deaf community? In higher education, *gatekeeping* is a term to describe the process of assessing students with the goal of determining their fitness to practice in a profession (Heller, 2004; Lafrance, Gray, & Herbert, 2004). As gatekeepers, academic programs are charged with establishing and adhering to protocols and policies that are intended to determine whether a student's behavior is suitable for professional work. Evaluating students' suitability for a profession is an important component in human service training programs since graduates take jobs in which they hold power and influence over people's lives (Cole & Lewis, 1993).

As with other human service professions, graduates of signed language interpreting programs work closely with people in critical areas of their lives (e.g., healthcare, educational, vocational, and judicial settings). When a person is seeking to enter the interpreting profession, who monitors and oversees their ethical conduct? Originally, the gatekeepers of ASL-English interpreters were members of the Deaf community who based their assessment on a person's ability to sign fluently, along with a positive attitude toward the community's language and values (Cokely, 2005). However with the burgeoning of interpreter education programs since the 1970s, the question of suitability of future interpreters often fell to institutions who provided training of these individuals

At the 2014 CIT conference, we presented the results of a two-year project culminating in a Student Code of Professional Conduct (S-CPC) for the Department of Interpretation and Translation at Gallaudet University. In this follow up paper we address three additional topics about our department's efforts. First, we discuss the logistics behind creating an ASL version of the S-CPC in collaboration with a team of Certified Deaf Interpreters. Second, we describe how the S-CPC tenets were infused into our programs via student orientations, classroom lessons, faculty reviews, qualifying exams, related readings, and comparative analysis with other ethical codes. We offer a case study analysis of how the S-CPC could be used to guide a student's growth toward professional ethics, which codifies the "positive attitude" promoted by Cokely (2005). Finally, we summarize research about the nature of intrinsic vs. extrinsic rewards in maintaining honesty, which may be informative when considering how to support students' ethical behaviors. Taken together, these topics provide an overview of our continued journey to make ethical behaviors a foundational component of our department and prepare students for the real-world challenges of professional practice.

History of the S-CPC: Addressing a Need

Beginning in 2012, the faculty in the Department of Interpretation and Translation at Gallaudet University became increasingly aware of a need to more actively address an issue of critical importance to students' development; that is, to establish a structured protocol that would guide students' behaviors toward professional practice. The impetus behind this change in our department was increasing recognition that our students were using social media in ways that might compromise tenets within the NAD-RID Code of Professional Conduct, specifically surrounding confidentiality and respect for others. As a result, over a two-year period we worked with community collaborators, interpreters, conduct specialists, human service programs, and others to create a Student Code of Professional Conduct. That process is detailed fully in a prior article from the 2014 CIT proceedings (Hunt & Nicodemus, 2014).

When we presented our work at the 2014 CIT conference in Portland, we were stunned by the number of interpreter educators who attended the talk and expressed that they were dealing with the same issues that we were experiencing. Two years after implementing the S-CPC in our own department, we presented at the 2016 CIT conference about how we have progressed with our efforts to implement the S-CPC into our department. We recognized that as interpreter educators, our shared goal is to guide students about behaviors that align with the values of the Deaf community and ethical practices of the interpreting profession by beginning with breaches in ethical conduct. In that spirit, we offer this follow up article from our presentation.

Review of the S-CPC

To briefly summarize our presentation from the 2014 CIT Conference, the Student Code of Professional Conduct (S-CPC) is a document created by the Gallaudet University Department of Interpretation and Translation. The S-CPC is comprised of four parts: (a) Overview, (b) Tenets, (c) Discussion Form, and (d) Flow Chart. The S-CPC was created over a two-year, collaborative process that involved a stakeholder task force made up of students, faculty, members of the Deaf community, and professional interpreters. After exploring related human services fields and related research, the task force was established to draft, review, and approve a Student Code of Professional Conduct that mirrored the structure of the National Association of the Deaf-Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf Code of Professional Conduct (NAD-RID CPC). The S-CPC is now an established part of our program and all faculty are trained in its use. The full document is posted online and students must sign off on each section of the S-CPC as part of their program requirement. A more thorough history of the development process and related references may be accessed in an earlier article by Hunt and Nicodemus (2014).

Creating an ASL Version of the S-CPC

In keeping with the bilingual-bicultural mission of Gallaudet University, we created the S-CPC in a bilingual format, both a written English version and a video recorded American Sign Language version. The task force first created the S-CPC document in a written English format, which was followed by its translation into American Sign Language. Below we offer the steps taken to produce the ASL version, which may be useful for other programs wishing to create a similar video recorded product.

To begin the process of creating an ASL version of the S-CPC, we secured the services a Deaf interpreter who would serve as the director of translation and of filming. The director was critical to the success of creating the final version. First, the director selected a translation team composed of two Certified Deaf Interpreters (CDIs), both of whom had a long professional history in creating English-ASL translations. The director gave the CDIs a written version of the S-CPC and the team divided the tenets between themselves. As the interpreters developed their individual translations of the text, the director worked alongside them to create cohesion between their translations. Once the translations were prepared, a full day of filming was scheduled. The team decided to film the translations in an active campus setting, rather than in a studio. We chose the upper floor of a contemporary academic building on Gallaudet's campus, which provided a dynamic backdrop of background movement and activity. Throughout the filming session, the director and the translation team worked collaboratively to shape the translations. After completing the video recording of the translations, the director made the final selections on which clips should be included in the final ASL version. A doctoral student volunteered to edit the video and worked with the team to select font types, fade-ins, lighting, and other visual details. The director and CDIs were paid out of the Department of Interpretation and Translation budget for their work on the project both for preparation of the translation and the video recording.

In creating an ASL version of an English document, we recommend the following steps:

- Create a project plan and timelines
- Insure adequate funding for the project
- Secure a qualified Deaf director to oversee the hiring and translation process
- Obtain an experienced videographer to do filming and editing
- Select an interesting venue in which to record the video

We are pleased to make the ASL version of the S-CPC available for use to other programs. It may be obtained by visiting https://youtu.be/VxJWf8Ymvs0. The written version of the S-CPC may be found in Hunt and Nicodemus (2014). If your program uses the S-CPC or creates new guidelines, we would appreciate hearing about your process. Please contact danielle.hunt@gallaudet.edu.

Infusion of the S-CPC into our Department

The Department of Interpretation and Translation at Gallaudet University currently offers degrees at three levels – bachelors, masters, and doctoral. We recognize that needs vary for each level of our students, so their initiation into the S-CPC is slightly different based on students' status.

We begin here by discussing how students are first introduced to the S-CPC. Prior to entering the BA program, incoming students are required to read and/or view the S-CPC and sign an agreement that they understand the procedures and will adhere to the tenets. Individuals will not be accepted into the Gallaudet BA program without signing the agreement to adhere to the S-CPC. During their initial program orientation, BA students learn more about the purpose and procedures of the S-CPC and how it guides the ethical culture within the department. Similarly, incoming MA students receive information about the S-CPC during their first-year orientation and must sign their assent by the second week of the semester in order to continue in the program. Additionally, a copy of the S-CPC tenets is included in the Graduate Student Handbook, which is distributed to MA students at the beginning of the semester. For PhD students, the department does not require a signature adhering to the S-CPC since all students must

be nationally certified (as an admissions requirement), but the S-CPC is included in the Doctoral Student Handbook given to students at the beginning of the semester. In this way, doctoral students are aware of the requirements to which both BA and MA students must adhere.

How is the S-CPC incorporated into program instruction? In the BA program, compliance with the S-CPC is incorporated into syllabi as a course-level requirement. A small portion of each course grade depends on students' successful adherence to the S-CPC tenets for the semester. In addition, the S-CPC is discussed in professional practice courses and other classes throughout their entire program of study. At the MA level, a copy of the tenets is included in selected course syllabi as an expectation of student behavior; however, MA students do not receive points for their adherence to the S-CPC directly. In MA coursework, the S-CPC is discussed in depth as a part of professional practice courses and is compared to the NAD-RID CPC along with interpreting codes of ethics from other countries. Students in the PhD program, who focus on both interpreting pedagogy and research, are required to complete teaching internships as a part of their graduation requirements. In the Gallaudet PhD program, students teach BA-level courses and thus must be familiar with the S-CPC tenets, as well as its infusion into program syllabi.

The faculty works as a team to provide oversight on students' behaviors and seek any opportunities where they can guide ethical and professional development. During BA, MA, and PhD program meetings, the program coordinator and faculty review each student's behaviors in their courses and in the program. In at least one meeting per semester, students' conduct is discussed in terms of adherence to the principles of the S-CPC. This evaluation allows a holistic view of students' actions in the educational program and faculty determine if further guidance is needed.

Case Study

In our 2016 talk, we presented the following invented case study of a BA student whose decisions may raise concerns about professional practice. We offer this case study as a tool for other departments as an initial step in considering the practices for managing potential breaches of ethical behavior.

> Roberta, a 21-year-old fourth year student in a bachelor's program in ASL-English Interpretation, has begun doing pro bono work as a part of her program requirements leading to graduation. She is an outgoing student both in the program and campus-wide, and a member of the Student Body Government. She resides in a dormitory on campus. She has been receiving accommodations through the Office for Students with Disabilities for a documented Attention Deficit Disorder.
>
> Roberta is a B/C-level student. She has passed her coursework including a class on Professional Practices in which ethics is a primary topic. Her strength as a student has been seen in skills courses, rather than theoretical courses. She has navigated the program of study with little incident except on two occasions when she has not followed the chain of command within the program. She also frequently speaks while signing despite being repeatedly reminded of department and university protocol to use American Sign Language in all public spaces. She has a small group of friends but some students avoid her.
>
> During regular program meetings, faculty members have occasionally mentioned Roberta as being "a student of concern." For example, students have discussed Roberta's behavior in the labs, citing that she talks and signs and listens to loud music on her headphones. When Roberta has expressed a concern about the department, she also has not followed the "chain of command" as described in the student handbook. Several faculty members

have met with Roberta privately about these behaviors, but have not taken formal action. The department chair has been informed of Roberta's behaviors.

In her final year, Roberta has begun actively posting to Facebook about her experiences in the BA program. Mid-semester, another BA student sent the BA program coordinator a screen shot of a Facebook post made by Roberta which reads:

"I shouldn't be interpreting for free, but this Saturday from 1-3 pm, I'll be interpreting a party downtown for [name of well-known Deaf person]. It's a social event, but s/he's the only Deaf person going. Cool!"

Questions to be considered in regards to this case study include the following:

- What might have motivated Roberta to create this post?
- What are the issues and potential outcomes of Roberta's actions?
- How would your program address this situation?

  In your view, what would be an ideal way to address this situation?

There are several reasons that Roberta may have chosen to create her social media post, including a lack of information about (or regard for) confidentiality. She may be posting these types of messages to boost her own ego and for self-promotion. She could be seeking dialogue with her peers or looking to share more information about the interpreting profession and/or access in general. The post may also have been made out of a naïve excitement about interpreting the assignment. Whatever the reason, the post revealed information that appears to be confidential and follow up with the student is warranted. Rather than acting reactively and/or sanctioning the student, more information needs to be gathered.

In our department, we would respond to Roberta through the use of the S-CPC. If a situation arises (either through the student review or through an individual action brought to the attention of the faculty), the S-CPC procedures begin via email or face-to-face contact with the student. The student's advisor calls a meeting with the student to address the situation. In their meeting, the advisor discusses the tenet in question with the student and seeks input. The S-CPC Discussion Form is used as a means of co-constructing an action plan, including timelines, with specific behaviors to be completed by the student. The advisor maintains the Discussion Form and follows up with the student by the agreed-upon timelines. Action plans may include activities as writing an apology, removing a post, reading relevant literature and providing a summary, meeting with a person, or attending a workshop, among other actions. Upon completion of the activity, a follow-up meeting is held between the advisor and student to assess learning and continue building relationships. In this way, students' behaviors are guided as a learning experience, in which opportunities for growth are offered in a supportive manner.

What does research tell us?

At the conclusion of our 2014 presentation about the S-CPC, one audience member asked a question that we found difficult to answer. The questioner stated, "I like your work on the S-CPC and it seems that it might be helpful for managing certain behaviors, but how can you change a student's heart?" Recently "heart" has recently become a buzzword in the interpreting profession and is used to characterize individuals who understand and honor values of social and communication equity for Deaf people and who make decisions that reflect those values. However, "heart" is a slippery term because numerous factors influence ethical decision-making, thus each situation must be analyzed within a set of principled guidelines and its specific context. Given those conditions, how does one change a student's heart? Perhaps more critically, is it our role as an educational institution to "change heart" or, using a more nuanced description, is it to provide guidelines and models of a professional path to be incorporated by each individual in their individual journey?

We argue that the "heart-changing" business is best left to surgeons, while the "heart-guiding" process might be a more realistic description of what we can achieve as an academic institution. This discussion warrants much discussion, but in our search to resolve the issue for ourselves, we found some related studies that helped guide our thinking. The studies center on the types of mechanisms (external punishment vs. intrinsic reward) that motivate people to maintain honesty. We argue here that honesty is an aspect of ethical behavior and so we present a brief summary of a few findings for consideration.

The standard perspective of humans has been one in which the individual is a rational, selfish human being who is interested only in maximizing his or her own payoff (Hobbes & Macpherson, 1968; Smith & Skinner, 1997). This perspective would claim there is nothing intrinsic to drive a person's decision to be honest, because motivation is dependent solely on external benefits (e.g., money, status) and possible external costs (e.g., losing points, ethical grievance) (Hechter 1990; Lewicki 1984). In other words, in this view, with every decision to be honest, individuals face a cost-–benefit trade-off.

Contrary to this classic perspective comes evidence from other academic fields, including psychology, sociology, anthropology, and neuroscience. Experts in these fields claim that there are not only external rewards for honesty, but that internal reward mechanisms also influence people's decisions. While the external vs. internal reward mechanisms are complex, some studies support the claim that when internal standards become activated, they can override the desire (and temptation) for external rewards. Applying this principle to the case study example given earlier, it is possible that Roberta's internal standard of adhering to the S-CPC and feeling the personal satisfaction of adhering to ethical tenets could override the external reward system of getting an ego boost from sharing news about her assignment.

If internal standards for honesty can override external reward mechanisms, the question becomes, how can we activate internal reward mechanisms in our students? According to Duval and Wicklund (1972), one key lies in objective self-awareness. Heightening an individual's self-awareness induces self-evaluation in relation to standards and options that are available in the immediate situation. This awareness can lead to motivation to meet the standard. When a person is placed in situations such as being in front of a real (or imagined) audience (Duval and Wicklund 1972), standing in front of a mirror (Carver & Scheier 1978), or even writing short stories about oneself (Fenigstein & Levine 1984), the individual becomes more aware of herself as an "object in the world" (Mazar & Ariely 2006: 8). When awareness of the self is increased, people are also more likely to be aware of discrepancies between how they want to view themselves (the ideal self) and how they actually behave. Given the tension of these external-internal pulls, people might work actively to reduce this discrepancy by changing their behavior to act more in accordance with their ideal self.

As the result of reading about studies that point to individuation as a key aspect of maintaining honesty, our own

department has made efforts to shape students' heart by increasing our recognition of them as individuals. We are a big department (over 100 students) at a university in which students may be experiencing a new bi-lingual bi-cultural norm for the first time in their lives. This shift can be frightening and disorienting; thus, we attempt connect with students in a number of ways, such as assigning them faculty advisors, selecting them for various tasks that use their talents, hosting gatherings in which faculty and students can mingle, using newsletters to name and present photos of students, giving awards to students, and other means. If the studies' claims are true, this individuation helps support students in their decision making because they have more self-awareness about themselves as an individual member of the department with an ethical standard to uphold.

In addition, we encourage and model active listening, which has been used in both corporate and educational worlds. This is manifested in a number of ways. For example, we follow best practices for creating a visual learning environment in the classroom. Faculty face students who are speaking in class, and ensure that sightlines are maintained in a way that each student can be noticed. They also pause to listen when a student is making an important point. Ideas are written on the board for later consideration, and faculty work to teach the art of piggybacking ideas in class discussion so that students learn to connect what they are saying to the ideas of the person who spoke before them. In addition to leading by example, teaching, and modeling active listening, faculty discuss ethics frequently in their classes. We offer opportunities for decision making and note students' ethical behavior. In these ways, faculty guide students as they internalize ethical practices prior to their being placed in decision-making situations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is undoubtedly true that the ultimate goal of all interpreter education programs is to graduate students who will behave knowledgeably, responsibly, and ethically within their chosen profession. The S-CPC has become our tool to guide students to make changes within their own hearts in order to uphold ethical practices when working as interpreters. By offering up our process for creating an American Sign Language version of the S-CPC, we hope that the process may be easier for other programs.

In the Department of Interpretation and Translation at Gallaudet, we promote ethical behavior in several ways. First, faculty and staff model adherence to the Student Code of Professional Conduct tenets and principles through leading by example. During classes, meetings, and department events, faculty teach and model active listening. In all programs, ethics is frequently discussed as a class topic and for the BA program the S-CPC comprises five percent of a student's grade. In addition, we reward ethical behavior through department honors and awards. We train students in ethical behavior and responsible decision-making. By promoting work-life balance and participation in the Deaf community, we in the Department of Interpretation and Translation prime students prior to them being placed in situations requiring decision-making. We close with the disclaimer that we do not claim to have all the answers for how to guide students in their personal and professional journeys. We offer our journey here with the hope that it may be helpful to other programs and as a way to continue the dialogue within our profession.

Acknowledgments

We wish to give thanks to the following individuals for their involvement in creating the ASL version of the Student Code of Professional Conduct: Margie English, Kirsi Grigg-Langdon, Annie Marks, and Steve Walker. Thanks are

also due to Dr. Isaac Agboola who provided funding for the video recorded version of the S-CPC. Finally, thanks are due to Dr. Melanie Metzger, the chair of the Department of Interpretation and Translation at the time, for her unwavering support of this project.

References

Carver, C. S. & Scheier, M. F. (1978). Self-focusing effects of dispositional self-consciousness, mirror presence, and audience presence. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 36*(3), 324–332.

Cokely, D. (2005). Shifting positionality: A critical examination of the turning point in the relationship of interpreters and the deaf community. In M. Marschark, R. Peterson, and E. A. Winston (Eds.). *Sign language interpreting and interpreter education* (pp. 3-28). New York: Oxford University Press.

Cole, B. S. & Lewis, R. G. (1993). Gatekeeping through termination of unsuitable social work students: Legal issues and guidelines. *Journal of Social Work Education, 29*(2), 150–159.

Duval, S. & Wicklund, R. A. (1972). *A theory of objective self awareness.* New York: Academic Press

Fenigstein, A. & Levine, M. P. (1984). Self-attention, concept activation, and the causal self. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 20*(3), 231–245.

Hechter M. (1990). The attainment of solidarity in intentional communities. *Rationality and Society, 2*(2), 142–155.

Heller, D. A. (2004). *Teachers wanted: Attracting and retaining good teachers.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Hobbes, T. & Macpherson, C. B. (1968), *Leviathan.* Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books.

Hunt, D. I. J., & Nicodemus, B. (2014). Gatekeeping in ASL-English interpreter education programs: Assessing the suitability of students for professional practice. In D. I. J. Hunt & S. Hafer (Eds.) *Proceedings of the Conference of Interpreter Trainers Conference,* Portland, Oregon.

Lafrance, J., Gray, E., & Herbert, M. (2004). Gate-keeping for professional social work practice. *Social Work Education, 23*(3), 325–340.

Lewicki, R. J. (1984). Lying and deception: A behavioral model. In M. H. Bazerman & R. J. Lewicki, (Eds.) *Negotiation in organizations* (pp. 68–90). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

Lifton, R. J. (1986). Reflections on genocide. *Psychohistory Review, 14* (3), 39–54.

Mazar, M. & Ariely, D. (2006). Dishonesty in everyday life and its policy implications. *American Marketing Association, 25*(1), 1–19.

Smith, A. & Skinner, A. S. (1997), *The wealth of nations: Books I–III*. New York: Penguin Books.

