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Professional Ethics in Higher Education

# Real World



# Real People

Conference Proceedings

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Two distinctive styles, one world class University

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## 2.3: Teaching Ethics In Croatian Higher Education

*Iva Sorta-Bilajac, Morana Brkljačić and Ivan Šegota*

### Introduction

The issue on ethical education is very ancient and, in some sense, still open to question. Long before, in ancient Greece, Socrates – one of the first ethicists from the ancient times – asked this question: Can virtues be assigned? If this is so, then the sons of Pericles would also have virtues of their great father. It is easy to say where you can buy a certain thing, but where can you buy virtue?<sup>1</sup>

Here we shall not become involved with extensive theoretic discussions whether it is, or not, possible and necessary to acquire knowledge on ethics and morality, in other words, medical ethics and bioethics. Our starting point is the following: If bioethics is a science and one of the most recent scientific disciplines, as it is, then it is necessary and possible to "learn" it, thereby to study it, master it, deliberate on it, research it, educate, etc.

The journal "Academic Medicine," published by the American Association of Medical Schools from Washington D.C., in 1989 dedicated a whole issue on this matter titled Teaching Medical Ethics.

At the beginning of the 90s, two foundations financed The Hastings Center for a project precisely on this matter, that is, bioethical education. The results were published on several occasions (in two books and the Hastings Center Report) under the title "Bioethics Education." The research within this project was directed at three main issues:

Do the bioethical principles take aim to improve the human character and behaviour, or do they limit themselves only on the perfection of human abilities to discuss on virtues?  
How can bioethical education at best be realized:

in a traditional academic manner on colleges and similar scientific-teaching institutions through lectures and seminars;

or, perhaps, practically, that is, through the analysis of particular cases and problems from the medical practice;

or combining both these methods?

What is the most efficient method for verifying the acquired knowledge:

through students' essays;

testing knowledge;

oral exams;

- and/or through insights on social-moral behaviour?

During the time when The Hastings Center competed for this project, bioethics was still mainly associated with the academic institutions, and education primarily included students of medical and related schools. By the end of the 80s (when bioethics finally obtained its academic status as a teaching subject, first, of course, on medical, and after on other schools for social and humanistic sciences), the circle of educated individuals began to expand. It expanded from students to medical professionals, and then to all those who began to deal with bioethical problems in their fields of profession as well as their private lives.

When we speak of bioethical education on universities, or medical and related schools that need such education the most, the primary issue refers to the purpose of such education. Because contents and methods of education ought to be subordinate to the goal.

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<sup>1</sup> Bošnjak, Branko, Greek Philosophy, MH Sgt., 1956, 87.

The main goal of bioethical education for students is that – according to the governing American opinion – it is applicable and serves for their practice. Students need to acquire theoretical knowledge first, and then apply it to experiences from practice. This, of course, is not always easy, because one needs to be persistent and able to recognize the abstract essence of cases from practice and draw practical solutions from the theoretic paradigm. Lack of such an approach gives no results, since empirics is blind without theory, and theory is unfruitful without practice.

## **Bioethics On Croatian Universities**

### ***The University of Rijeka***

Ethical education was introduced on the **Medical Faculty, University of Rijeka** in the academic year 1991/92, with an elective subject titled **The Hippocratic Oath Today**. The analysis of 10 moral norms of the Hippocratic Oath by students and their mentor PhD. Ivan Šegota, head of the Department of Social Sciences<sup>2</sup>, ascertained the following:

That this document could not give them the answers to numerous questions that characterize modern medicine;

That traditional issues of medical ethics in modern times gain new importance and that their interpretation can no longer be given exclusively by physicians;

That, from the mid '80s almost all medical schools in the United States introduced medical ethics into their curriculum, for the need of student discussions on professional ethical issues of medicine.

From these conceptions emerged the following idea: to leave for the United States, research contents, goals and teaching methods and learn what can be adapted to the teaching conditions on the Medical Faculty in Rijeka, and gradually create and realize one's ideas on organizing and realizing the curriculum. Thus, professor Šegota visited the Hastings Center in New York in 1993, met Daniel Callahan and other important American bioethicists. Professor Šegota was especially interested in their projects on bioethical education (Teaching Ethics in Higher Education and Bioethics Education – Expanding The Circle of Participants) from 1980 until 1993, and at the beginning of 1994 spent three months at The Hastings Center in the capacity of visiting scientist elaborating the mentioned topic. During 1994 and 1995, and for the same purpose, he also stopped at other American and Canadian institutions such as the Cleveland Clinic Foundation and Society for Bioethics Consultations in Ohio, the Kennedy Institute of Ethics in Washington D.C., Center of Bioethics in Toronto, Center of Bioethics in Pittsburgh and elsewhere, and gathered valuable material on bioethical education. That is how he established a cooperation with all the most important world institutes, centres and departments for medical ethics and bioethics. Furthermore, this enabled him to establish a particularly valuable bioethics library at the Department of Social Sciences of the Medical Faculty in Rijeka. The collected material made the research of bioethical problems in Croatia possible, without having to depart for foreign countries, and among them the problem of bioethical education.

Alongside the preparations to introduce a course of lectures titled **The Hippocratic Oath Today** (1991), author Ivan Šegota issued an identically titled student text-book. The problems it deals with realized the basic purpose for which it was developed first, and that is to be a starting point for introducing students to the basic notions of medical ethics. The method through which the text-book actualizes the traditional Hippocratic medical ethics and compares it to the contemporary, namely bioethics, makes it a modern valuable text and an actual literature for preparing and realizing the curriculum.

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<sup>2</sup> Prof. Ph. D. Ivan Šegota is president of the **Croatian Bioethics Society**, established in 2000. The goal of the Society is to encourage, help and develop bioethics, bioethical education and bioethical researches.

Shortly after establishing the curriculum **Medical Ethics and Bioethics** (1993) for first year medical students, the Department of Social Sciences begins to issue a newsletter titled "**Ethics and Medicine.**" The purpose of running this paper was to, as professor Šegota explains in the introductory part of its first issue: "...popularize a new teaching subject and scientific discipline – medical ethics – that is, *eo ipso* seeking its place under the sun...". Unfortunately, only three editions of this newsletter were issued due to financial problems.

Ivan Šegota's text-book titled "**New Medical Ethics (Bioethics),**" was published by the Medical Faculty in Rijeka and publicly presented in 1994, and in the year 2000 it underwent a II adapted edition. Moreover, the text-book is catalogued in the Library of Congress, Washington D.C. and in the National Reference Center for Bioethics Literature, the Kennedy Institute of Ethics, Georgetown University, Washington D.C.

Two years later (1996), when the new curriculum for second year professional nursing students titled -- **Ethics of Nursing**, was introduced, the same author issued a homonymic text-book, that later served as a model for the book "**Ethics of Nursing**". This book, issued by Pergamena Press from Zagreb and the Medical Faculty in Rijeka, was printed as the first book within the **Bioethics Library**, and in frame of it performed numerous translations and text processing of all the significant world authors.

In the year 1999, the library, Bioethics Volumes was founded at the Department of Social Sciences of the Medical Faculty in Rijeka. The most significant works from the medical ethics and bioethics setting, of members and associates of this Department, as well as translations and text review of the world's most significant authors, are being published within this library.

From 1995, within the frame of the postgraduate scientific study "Biomedicine" on the Medical Faculty in Rijeka, a course of lectures, "**Ethics of Scientific Work in Biomedicine,**" is also studied, and for its wants a homonymic text-book issued by author Ivan Šegota.

The elective course **How to Communicate** was introduced yet in 1994, for second year medical students, and the academic year 2002/'03 witnessed a completely new component of this subject. The teaching subject was renamed into "**How to Communicate (with the deaf)?**", and in 2003 a homonymic mimeographed course material was issued by author Ivan Šegota. Thereby, this Department additionally confirmed that it is placed at the very top of world-wide bioethics reality. Namely, the Council of Europe recently issued a Reference 1958 (2003) that emphasizes the necessity to protect and promote sign language in member countries of the European Union. This was the precise aim of this curriculum, in other words, to qualify medical professionals for better communication with deaf patients as well as those with limited hearing abilities.

All of these publications originated on the development level of the "**Rijeka Model of Bioethics Education**" which implicates how each profile educated at the Medical Faculty in Rijeka has its own particular teaching content that expresses specific ethical issues of profession and vocation.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This model was explained in the first Croatian bioethics dissertation titled "Bioethics Education: Contents, Methods and Models", defended by Ms. Nada Gosić, also former assistant of prof. Šegota, in 1999, at the Philosophical Faculty, University of Zagreb. Today, she is an assistant professor with the Department of Social Sciences, Medical Faculty, University of Rijeka and teaches a course of lectures on Medical Ethics and Bioethics to students of stomatology and graduate sanitary engineers.

It is important to mention that the effort and activities of the Department of Social Sciences on the Medical Faculty in Rijeka, for promoting bioethics and bioethical education, have been recognized by the world's leading bioethics authorities. That is how this Department was consequently mentioned in the second edition of the Encyclopedia of Bioethics in 1995.<sup>4</sup>

### ***The University of Zagreb***

In 1995, the **Medical Faculty of the University of Zagreb** introduced the curriculum **Medical Ethics** for sixth year medical students. A text-book titled "**Medical Ethics – Reference Material**" was published in the same year. Its preface emphasizes that the plan and curriculum program base themselves on seminary work that processes topics from the medical practice setting that put forward the greatest challenges for ethical analysis.<sup>5</sup> The curriculum is realized on four lectures and seven seminary discussions.

A special part of the teaching programme on the **Theology College of the University of Zagreb**, and within its regional studies in Rijeka, Đakovo, Split and Makarska, is dedicated to bioethical issues and problems that are realized within the Department for Moral Theology.<sup>6</sup>

A Centre for Bioethics is open at the **Society of Jesus' Institute of Philosophy and Theology** in Zagreb. From the day of its foundation (1986) until today, it has been publishing material within the frame of the Bioethics Library.

The Sociology Department of the **Philosophical Faculty of the University of Zagreb** and the Croatian Society of Sociology, issue the journal "**Social Ecology**" from 1991. "**Social Ecology**" was defined a "journal for the ecological thought and sociological research of the environment," and as such, it publishes themes of bioethical subject-matter, especially those related to environmental bioethics. At the same faculty, bioethical themes at an informative level have been introduced into the degree of Philosophy, Section of Ethics, while postgraduate studies consist of cyclical lectures in bioethics which especially thematize the relation of philosophical ethics and bioethics.

### ***The University of Split***

Through intensive one week activity, a thirty-hour fund of lectures and seminary debates, the sixth year students of the **Medical Faculty in Split** deal with the contents of medical ethics. The lectures end with a panel discussion. Judges, sociologists, theologians and clinical physicians answer to students' questions and thoroughly work out aspects of medical ethics.

According to the organisation, methodology of lecturing, total hours at disposition and their allocation to lectures and seminars, and according to the professionals and scientists participating in the presentation of ethical issues, we can say that the bioethical education in Croatia is performed within three models: those of **Rijeka, Split and Zagreb**.

### **Methods Of Bioethical Education At The Medical Faculty Of The University Of Rijeka – The "Rijeka Model"**

The Department of Social Sciences of the Medical Faculty in Rijeka currently holds two curriculums for the degree of **Medical Ethics and Bioethics** and **Ethics of Nursing**, and one elective subject, **How to Communicate (with the deaf)?**, and the Department participates in postgraduate studies with the curriculum **Ethics of Scientific Work in Biomedicine**.

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<sup>4</sup> Reich, W., T., Encyclopedia of Bioethics, Revised edition, Volume 3, Medical Ethics – History of Europe, 1995, 1997.

<sup>5</sup> Medical Ethics – Reference manual, Medical Faculty Zagreb, Zagreb, 1995, 1.

<sup>6</sup> Valković, M., Bioethics in Croatia-Short Report, Social Ecology 3, 309-313.

At the moment, the Department is in the phase of developing a pre-clinical teaching programme (these curricula are taken on the first and second year of medical school, as well as the professional nursing study), with an ambition that this become an integral part of clinical teaching programme. For this purpose, a new curriculum and course of lectures, **Clinical Bioethics**, was proposed for fifth year medical students.

In this paper we shall present the methods of bioethical education in the curriculum, **Medical Ethics and Bioethics**. The forms and class methodology on this Faculty that teach this subject are **lectures, seminars and student workshops**.

### **Lectures**

Lectures are directed at adopting theoretical comprehension of ethics, offering conceptual and historical standpoints on medical ethics and bioethics, and developing consciousness on the complexity of moral conclusions in modern medicine. Of the total predicted amount of time at disposition, it is estimated that 35% should appertain to lectures, and 65% of class activities should appertain to seminars and workshops. Students of a whole generation placed in a large auditorium (the Aula Magna of our Faculty), follow the lecturer's teaching, sometimes supplemented with conversation and students' questions. To make the lectures more attractive and dynamic, the Department has introduced **team lectures** within which two lecturers alternately discuss the ethical problem. One of the lecturers is an employee of the Department, and the other is usually a lecturer-visitor of clinical background or representative of the social and humanistic sciences. Lecturers mostly use projectors, Power-Point programmes and slides, and often, during lectures, watch documentaries as well as feature films that treat a specific bioethical problem.

Lectures offer participants of bioethical education with an interdisciplinary view to specific ethical problems, and are also significant for **stimulating moral imagination and empathy** in students.

### **Seminars**

By reason of overcoming a shortage of lectures with a large number of participants, and above all, due to the impossibility of professor-student dialogue, at the beginning of the 20th century in the United States, universities introduced work in smaller groups. From then to this day developed a couple of its models, and from the 60s the interest for such educational methods grows in our country as well.<sup>7</sup>

The dominant characteristics of similar education express in a higher communication degree among participants, an equal appreciation of thoughts and ideas and autonomy in the process of education. On our Faculty seminars take place with groups of 20 students. Most recently, a fellow researcher – younger assistant, coordinates the seminar; while in the first years, undergraduate assistants – senior students exceptionally familiar with the bioethical problems, coordinated the seminars. The goals of seminars are to **recognize and define ethical problems and introduce students with the skill of analysis**. Since students bring into discussion their personal sensitivity, they immediately become complementary creators of bioethics.

### **Student Workshops**

Located in a lecture-room that enables sitting at a round table and "face-to-face" communication, students can (organized in groups of 20), fully express their creativity. That creativity demonstrates itself in discovering numerous ideas for an individual topic and problem, in such that they singularly or with help of a mentor, search for literature or particular cases from practice to give emphasis to the topic. Taking into account the instructions of American and Canadian lecturers of ethics and bioethics that one cannot approach all topics in the same way, three methods of group work are applied: **programmed teaching, opposed groups and case analysis**.

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<sup>7</sup> Bogнар, L., Matijeвић, M., Didactics, Školska knjiga, Zagreb, 1993, 171.

The strategy of **programmed teaching** is usually approached with a mutual elaboration of topics from lectures. Here students divide the ethical problem into basic elements and analyze them in front of a group.

An **opposed group** method separates 3 students from the group who will function as a jury. The remaining students divide into two subgroups – of affirmation and negation – and using the adopted knowledge and available literature, explain standpoints FOR and AGAINST a certain bioethical problem. Then the subgroup exchange roles. After all proposed arguments, the students – jury, give their observations on which group best defended its positions, and the methods of communication in each group.

The method of **case analysis** is prepared in workshops, and students are given a specific ethical case from practice. On the following course of lectures, a couple of students from the group present this case in form of a play, explaining their standpoints with which they prove their ethical judgment. The other students systematize the given subject-matter and draw conclusions.

**Examination and grading** are primarily carried out through oral preliminary examination in the winter term, for which students need to have knowledge from theory and prepare a paper on a specific topic. The final examination is taken in the summer term and consists of a written examination conceived in two parts: a set of 30 questions that interrogate the fact-oriented knowledge, and essay on a specific topic that requires the ability to use the adopted knowledge for stating personal ideas and ethical standpoints. Students unsatisfied with their grades can always approach an oral exam.

**Evaluation of course lectures** is specific to the "Rijeka model." Since we believe in mutual evaluation of the subjects of the educational process, at the end of each school year we ask students to estimate the realization goals, the contents and methods of bioethical education as well as give suggestions for improving the work.

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