Ethics in Public Life
November 9, 2005
Academic Integrity and the Undergrad Experience

Summary of Table Discussions

The facilitators reported lively and interesting discussions at all tables. Some tables discussed all three scenarios equally, while others spent the majority of their time discussing just one. Below is a brief summary of the issues that these groups discussed:

- Participants wrestled with whether there is a positive obligation to report wrong-doing and whether such a requirement should be a part of an institution's honor code/academic integrity policy. At one table, participants agreed that reporting a violation resulted in significant work, time, or stress for all involved. Several tables discussed the negative connotation attached to people who make such reports. While some COE participants feel that the COE honor code's reporting requirement does work, participants at several tables doubted that such a requirement could be generally effective at an institution as large as U-M.

- Participants discussed their perceptions of who cheats, why and how. Several groups attributed the problem not to desperate students, but to serial-cheaters who have learned they can game the system and get away with it. This is exacerbated by the size of the University, where many students feel no one will notice if a student does act in an academically unethical way.

- Participants tried to define the boundary of ethical action in each scenario. Their discussions demonstrated that the particulars mattered greatly in framing their likely responses.

- Participants at several tables discussed the role friendship would play in their responses to the three scenarios.

- Participants at several tables discussed the value of creating a "safe space" at the University where students could discuss ethical dilemmas.

- Participants at one table discussed whether the effects of academically unethical behavior differ from other types of unethical behavior in the "real world."

- Participants discussed whose responsibility it is to foster ethics. Some felt these situations were best handled among peers – and clearly stated they would not involve the University. Other participants encouraged instructors to address academic integrity as part of their courses. At one table, they recommended requiring ethics courses for all students. Several tables recommended that the University do more to clarify what is ethical and to explain how consequences differ for different types of actions and for 1st time offenders vs. serial cheaters.