2003-2004 Assessment Report for E-focus Courses

For the academic year of 2003-2004 the E-focus Board (Ron Pine, chair, Marcia Roberts-Deutsch, Bob Vericker) continued the facilitation of offering hallmark certified courses for the HCC E-focus requirement for the HCC AA degree. Eight sections were offered in the Fall semester and eight sections in the Spring semester. All sections were the same, except that WS 151 was offered in the Fall and REL 151 was offered in the Spring. REL 151 was previously given blanked approval by Manoa, but was not approved at HCC until Spring 04. One section of PHIL 101 was offered E-focus at Hickam and one section at Schofield for the Winter and Spring accelerated SOCAD terms respectively. One section of POLSC 120 was offered at Hickam for the Fall SOCAD term.

Since the beginning of our program, eight (8) courses taught by seven (7) different instructors have been approved for E-focus by the Board. For details see:
http://www.hcc.hawaii.edu/~pine/ethics/approv-elists.htm

For the hallmarks and other materials, see:
http://www.hcc.hawaii.edu/~pine/ethics/e-hallmarks.htm

For the Fall semester we implemented the first round of E-focus evaluations. For the instrument used, see:
http://www.hcc.hawaii.edu/~pine/ethics/e-evaluation.htm

Everyone complied with the evaluation request except one instructor of an online E-focus course. (The particular instructor did do evaluations for three of his on-campus courses that were listed as E-focus.) One hundred and twenty-two (122) student evaluations were returned.

Overall the student responses to our evaluation of Fall offerings indicate that a lot of ethical deliberation is taking place in the courses for our program. Everyone is doing E-focus and complying with what they said they would do when they applied for this focus designation. From the student responses, everyone seems to be devoting 50% or more of time to contemporary ethical issues. That is the main positive assessment result.

Confirming though what we have heard anecdotally from a few students, many of our instructors need to improve on the tools-hallmark. According to our guidelines:

"It is important that E-courses not be purely descriptive, merely characterizing, for example, the moral commitments of a person, a society, or a discipline. Nor is it intended that the pedagogy be value-free, using approaches that maintain an 'arms-length' relationship with current ethical issues. Instead the goal of such courses, at least in part, must be to equip students with some degree of proficiency in ethical deliberation. Accordingly, it would not be enough simply to survey a range of abstract moral theories, the professional ethics of a discipline, or a vocational code of ethics without bringing them to bear fruitfully and responsibly on living moral questions. Nor will it suffice to introduce a range of divergent opinions without giving students the tools to assess these. For instance, the professional ethics of a discipline are appropriate E-topics provided that they are brought to bear on contemporary problems."

We are not suppose just to give a number of opinions on an ethical issue, but provide disciplinary tools for assessment and deliberation. This is most easy to do in the discipline of philosophy as was evident in how well Chris Ann Moore did on this part of the evaluation for her Phil 101 classes. Most of her students knew that providing tools meant that in addition to discussing both sides of an ethical issue, philosophers have various suggestions (ethical theories) on methodology. Most of a good 101 class is spent covering and applying those methodologies. Whereas in many other classes students responded with comments such as, "saw videos, read articles, looked at Internet sites." Some students responded with "Do not understand the question."

This does NOT mean that all E-focus courses have to start teaching philosophical moral theories. Moving in that direction would violate the inclusive spirit of the E-focus requirement. But it does mean that as a program we need to
do some work on making clearer what specific critical thinking tools we are providing students in order to accomplish reasoned deliberation on ethical issues. Just providing both sides of an ethical issue is not a sufficient tool. We need to think more about what guidelines are provided to students for deliberation and/or resolution of ethical debates. At a minimum, we need to be more specific on what processes are required beyond just listening to the instructor lecture on both sides of an ethical issue. Do students discuss the issues in groups? Do they write papers? Journal responses? Most important, exactly how are students guided in thinking critically about ethical issues? A vague hand-waving reference, "Well I have my students do critical thinking," is not enough.

Hence, a meeting was scheduled in April to discuss how to implement the tools hallmark better. Subsequently, four instructors reviewed their E-focus designations for Fall and some progress was shown in bettering the tools hallmark in the renewal applications. For the renewal form, see:


This aspect of our assessment effort is, of course, only partial. As in WI, this evaluation only focuses on making sure that instructors are doing what they claimed they would be doing in their original approved applications. The next phase of assessment should be student-outcomes oriented. This work is scheduled to begin Fall 04 and may involve a capstone project similar to the type of assessment that was recently done with WI.