

Foreword

Every day, legislators, administrators, and teachers make decisions, some of which will have lasting consequences for individual students or even whole education systems. The discomfort surrounding these hard choices is understandable, and decision makers sometimes imagine that their burden would be lifted if only they had more or better data. Of course, other things being equal, more and better data *will* help. But data do not—indeed cannot—drive decisions. All decisions are grounded in values: to know whether one decision is better than another, we need to know what the overall aims are and what values the agent should be pursuing. Thinking well about aims and values is difficult enough. Thinking well about aims and values in complicated contexts that do not allow for ideal outcomes is harder still. Debates about higher education often invoke normative concepts; there is no shortage of appeals to equity, diversity, social justice, excellence, academic freedom, inclusion, or liberal education, to mention just a few. But these concepts are contested—each is understood differently by different people. How they should guide action in specific circumstances, especially when they are in tension with one another, is often hard to discern. We do not, as a sector, have rich and inclusionary intellectual resources for learning from one another about where we differ and where we agree about the concepts, let alone how to apply them. And it can be hard to make progress when debate stays at the level of abstract philosophical deliberation about values, undisciplined by directing attention to the kinds of decisions people really have to make.

This is the lacuna that Rebecca M. Taylor and Ashley Floyd Kuntz—and their collaborators and contributors—begin to fill with *Ethics in Higher Education*. The seven case studies at the center of this book have

been carefully wrought to draw attention to the ways in which different values come into tension in realistic, if fictionalized, case studies of specific decision points. Each case identifies an individual or collective decision maker, provides sufficient information for the reader to have a sense of the conflicts the decision maker faces, and provokes reflection on both the choice to be made and the values that should guide it. Chapters focus on the tensions between intellectual diversity and inclusion on campus; what norms should govern faculty use of social media; how institutions should balance different interests in responding to sexual misconduct; what responsibilities colleges have to students caught up in the criminal justice system; questions about funding for higher education; how to weigh priorities in deciding on candidates for leadership at a historically Black college or university (HBCU), and the tensions and dilemmas that surround colleges' relationships with their surrounding communities.

None of these cases allows for an easy answer. Each brings out genuine conflicts in values, and reasonable people are bound to disagree about how to weigh those values in the particular circumstances. But we can make better choices about what values to prioritize and, ultimately, what to do through careful airing and consideration of different perspectives. Deliberative collective reflection on values and on how to weigh them against each other in contexts where the salient features are clearly brought to the forefront improves our decision-making capacity, both collectively and individually, because such reflection among good-willed, reasonable, and well-informed people generally (though not always) yields progress.

To facilitate this kind of deliberation, the volume brings together commentators across several boundaries. Different roles—teacher, or institutional leader, or student service professional, or enrollment management professional, or legislator—enable people to see some features of the situation more clearly, while probably obscuring other features. As a teacher and an administrator, respectively, the two of us suspect that administrators sometimes find it difficult to discount the significance of very loud voices that falsely claim to represent wider constituencies, whereas faculty members sometimes find it difficult to appreciate—or even to access—the perspectives of, say, student services personnel or enrollment managers. So the volume brings administrators, faculty, and college leaders into dialogue with one another.

The commentators also cross disciplinary boundaries. All of economics, sociology, philosophy, anthropology, political science, and policy studies have distinctive resources to bring to bear; they also all have disciplinary knowledge gaps. As a philosopher and an economist, we humbly suggest that philosophers tend to naivete when it comes to institutional detail and economists tend to myopia when it comes to ethical nuance. Well-designed dialogue across disciplines will bring the actually salient issues to the fore and enable a richer and more productive deliberation than practitioners of any particular discipline can manage by themselves. And, importantly, the commentators bring different ethical perspectives to the problems: these are offered in a spirit of, and as a resource for, mutual learning, as they must be for progress to be made.

The set of commentaries on each case provides ideas and perspectives that will help the readers to formulate their own judgments about the case, reflect better on what values and principles inform those judgments, and be better prepared to enter a dialogue with colleagues and other stakeholders when approaching the decisions they have to make. We believe that the value of the intellectual and ethical resources developed here is not limited to decisions about the particular areas of higher education singled out by the seven cases. Whatever your areas of responsibility, we think that the method of reflection displayed, as well as the substantive ethical ideas deployed, will prove helpful. We hope that this excellent volume will be read widely and that readers will not be satisfied with simply consuming it, but will use it to provoke and structure wide-ranging discussions across disciplines and institutional roles on their campuses.

—Harry Brighouse and Michael McPherson