Proposal Narrative

Introduction

Ethical reasoning is valued, necessary, and missing from the curriculum for **77%** of students seeking associate-level degrees at Montana State University Billings City College (City College). ***Ethics Bound: Embedding Ethics into the City College General Core Curriculum*** seeks to utilize a humanities initiative to embed applied ethics across the core curriculum through four themes: environmental, intercultural, medical, and technological. This will grow inter-disciplinary study among faculty, generate humanities-based resources, unify the general education curriculum, and expand students' ethical reasoning capacity. Hence, *bound*, from our project title, communicates the dual purpose of unification and goal orientation.

Intellectual Rationale

Higher education and employers value ethical reasoning. Historically, higher education embraces ethical reasoning as an essential outcome (Williams) where it can be traced back to the classical era (Noel, 8). An *exemplar* proponent of ethics education is John Dewey, the 20th century philosopher and influential education reformer, who held "school[s] and civic society" responsible for such education (Anderson). Yet, a 2008 study conducted by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) discovered "only 30 percent of the respondents, said they 'strongly agree' that their campuses emphasized refining ethical and moral reasoning" (Wasley). Similarly, employer based national survey data demonstrates ethical reasoning as an essential skill (Hart); yet again, locally—within Yellowstone County, Montana—employers express that it is a hard skill to find (Billings Works Workforce Council). This disconnect between the perceived value of ethical training by employers and the lack of such training at

institutions tasked with training the workforce is disconcerting and has been observed at City College.

City College is a two-year embedded college within Montana State University Billings (MSUB), a four-year regional comprehensive university. The City College general education department consists of communications, math, reading, and writing coursework. Any general education courses offered at City College outside those disciplines are staffed by university faculty or adjuncts. Seventy three percent of associates-level degree programs at City College are career/technical based and 77% of the student population, or 748 students, seeks one of these degrees (AAS, ASN) when controlling for certificate based degrees and dual-enrollment. For these Associate's-seeking students, the humanities are limited to writing, with ethical reasoning limited to workplace ethics. Only three technical programs have ethics related courses: accounting, business, and medical administration. This mirrors a traditional Career and Technical Education (CTE) mission and historical progression starting with CTE reform in the 1980s (Brewer). Further, this 30+ year old curriculum fails to prepare students facing climate change, artificial intelligence (AI), and globalization and it does not align with the administration's vision that includes institutional reform and the expansion of City College's focus. For these reasons--historical precedence, student and social needs, and institutional progress--the importance of embedding applied ethics across the general education core curriculum is timely and impactful.

The decision to adopt a four-themed embedded curricular approach across the general education core is fourfold. First, we work from an assumption consistent with two national ethics education models found within business and computer science. We assume that an integrated, cross-curricular model deepens student learning and cross-contextualizes learning outcomes. Ethical Systems, housed within New York University Stern's Business and Society Program,

emphasizes that an embedded approach enhances validity and improves long-term comprehension and application. Groz et al., from Harvard University's Embedded EthiCS program, furthers the point when stating "that recurring exposure to this type of reasoning across the curriculum will habituate students to thinking ethically when pursuing technical work."

Second, an embedded curricular model, by design, creates a unified curriculum and promotes interdisciplinary study.

Third, per the Common Course Numbering Program Administrative Guidelines for the Montana University System, courses with common numbers only need to meet 80% of system-wide learning outcomes (3). Hence, the addition of ethical reasoning as a learning outcome can be institutionalized at the college, department, or instructor levels

Fourth, there are four ethical domains we believe fundamental to the local context: environmental, intercultural, medical, and technological. These domains, or themes, cut across or align with various degree programs (i.e. environmental ethics w/ industry programs, medical ethics w/ healthcare, etc.) and are meaningful to the citizens of Montana, who must navigate issues such as the tension between conservation and industrial mining or the proliferation of mental health issues—Montana has the highest suicide rate per capita in the nation (CDC).

Having full and explicit support of the administration—Provost, Dean, and Department Chair—with the goal of curricular institutionalization, the impact of embedding applied ethics across the curriculum is significant on multiple levels inside and outside the institution. *See Appendix IV*. An average of **673 students** per semester takes communications, math, and writing courses to fulfill their general education requirements. With the implementation of this project, these students will engage, at least, three out of four ethical themes through the lens of three

different disciplines, improve their ethical reasoning, and meet the needs of local employers as well as shape personal and civic choices.

This project will initially impact **nine full-time faculty** and eventually expand to include eight additional adjunct and dual-enrollment faculty for 17 faculty total. As a general education department, we are inherently interdisciplinary, but with limited inclusion of the humanities. Expertise includes communication studies, developmental education, mathematics, reading, and writing. Ken Bain's seminal study, *What Makes the Best Teachers*, highlights the importance of interdisciplinary study as one indicator of faculty success. Our faculty agrees knowing that the outcome of this project will be a more well-rounded learning experience for our students.

The binding of three separate disciplines around applied ethics creates a more cohesive and purposeful curriculum that will impact **17 courses**, in communications, math, and writing, with most having multiple sections. This unification eliminates a cafeteria style approach to general education where disciplines are currently siloed and expands an important skill set through cross-contextualization. Further, the purchased **texts** from this project will begin our first department based interdisciplinary library and expand our **online resources** to promote future interdisciplinary study and curricular unification. *See Appendix I*. The adaption of an embedded, cross-curricular model at a two-year college will serve as a national model for CTE institutions and general education programs at community colleges.

Content and Activities

The complexity and coordination of embedding applied ethics across the curriculum comes with a particular set of challenges as noted by Harvard's Embedded EthiCS faculty. Relevant challenges include: 1) faculty insecurities, 2) discipline specific methodology and vocabularies, 3) assessment, and 4) institutional challenges (Groz, et al.). Instead of embedding

philosophers into courses per their model, for practical reasons (i.e. not having a graduate degree philosophy program) the decision was made to utilize philosophers **Dr. Ana Diaz and Dr. Walter B. Gulick** from MSUB's four-year campus, to work alongside our two-year college faculty to train and co-design the embedded applied ethics curriculum. To adequately meet the challenges stated above, a two-and-a-half year program of activities with at least 40 faculty contact hours has been created, and will be implemented in three phases: Phase I – faculty development, Phase II – curriculum development, and Phase III – implementation and assessment. *See Appendix I*.

Phase I (2020 February—July). Project co-directors, **Austin Grant Bennett** and **Roger MadPlume** confirm seminar dates/content with consulting scholars, purchase faculty textbooks, and prepare faculty assessments. **Feb-Apr**: Faculty attend a bi-weekly series of seminars (three total) and discussions (two total). Dr. Diaz and Dr. Gulick provides seminars on applied ethics—history, fundamental theories, and decision-making models. After each seminar, Bennett/MadPlume facilitate a faculty discussion applying learned content to a discipline-specific case study. **May-Jun**: Faculty complete readings on applied ethics and the four ethical themes. **Jul:** Faculty attend a two-day seminar focused on the four ethical themes. Dr. Diaz covers intercultural and medical ethics. Dr. Gulick covers environmental and technological ethics. As a transition toward curricular development, consulting scholars are encouraged to use techniques and lessons with faculty that model teaching undergraduate students. **Aug:** Phase I wraps up with the dissemination of a reading list on teaching ethics and assessment. **Goal**: Phase I is designed to meet the first challenge, *faculty insecurities*, by providing faculty with a working knowledge of applied ethics especially within the four themes.

Phase II (2020 September-2021 May). **Sept-Nov:** Faculty attend biweekly seminars (three total) and brainstorming sessions (two total). Dr. Diaz presents on curricular development including learning outcomes associated with ethical reasoning (i.e. identification of an ethical problem). Dr. Gulick presents on teaching ethics through using a personal, discussion oriented, case-based approach. **Dr. Robert Hubert,** a nationally recognized leader in ePortoflios and assessment, presents on the implementation of ePortoflios, student benefits, and their use for curricular assessment. Between seminars, Bennett/MadPume facilitates curricular brainstorming sessions to identify how applied ethics specifically ties into each discipline and course. **Dec-Jan:** Faculty explore the resource list including case-study databases. **Feb-May:** Faculty participate in four/five biweekly workshops dedicated to different aspects of the curriculum, such as learning outcomes, rubrics, coordination of ethical themes, case-study selection, and ePortfolio reflection prompts. Attention will also be given to selection of quantitative assessments, for example, pre-test/post test, Defining Issues Test (DIT-1, DIT-2), and Sociomoral Reflection Objective Measure, among others. Bennett/MadPlume begin developing a digital self-study and resource guide within the college learning management system (D2L). **Goal:** Phase II meets the second, *discipline specific methodology and vocabularies*, and third, *assessment*, challenges through curricular seminars, brainstorming sessions focused on synthesis, and workshops on short-term and long-term quantitative and qualitative assessments.

Phase III (2021 September-2022 May): **Sept-Nov:** Faculty implement curriculum into one to two courses. Faculty department meetings leveraged for implementation updates. Bennett/MadPlume continue developing a digital self-study and resource guide. **Dec:** Faculty assess curriculum. **Jan-Apr:** Faculty revise curriculum and implement throughout general education core courses. Bennett/MadPlume finalizes the digital self-study and resource guide.

Faculty meet and plan for implementing a sustainable process that may include yearly professional development, an embedded curriculum coordinator(s), faculty mentorships for part-time faculty, and including annual assessment of the ethics program included in accreditation reports. **May:** Faculty assess curriculum. Bennett/MadPlume completes final evaluation of project. **Goal:** Phase III meets the fourth challenge, *institutional challenges*, through the completion of a digital self-study and resource guide especially for adjunct, dual-enrollment, and new faculty; and implementation of a sustainable process.

Project Personnel

Austin Grant Bennett and **Roger MadPlume** will serve as the project co-directors. Both Bennett and Madplume have been awarded institutional grants. Bennett recently managed a Strada Education Network funded sub-grant to assess the needs of veteran students at City College and currently serves on academic senate. MadPlume previously managed a half-million dollar grant funded by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission while teaching at Blackfeet Community College and served on the Professional Development committee, which awards internal grants to faculty. *See Appendix II*. As co-directors, Bennett will be responsible for project planning and logistics where MadPlume will be responsible for oversight of the project budget and report submission. Facilitating workshops, project assessment, presentations, and development of the digital self-study and resource guide will be completed collaboratively.

Other participating full-time **faculty** includes one communications instructor (**Christine Whitlatch**), four math instructors (**Eric Gilbertsen, Lance Mouser, Andrea Payne, Chairsty Stewart**), and two writing instructors (**Anne Cole, Allison Bailey**). Known for leadership and innovation, five faculty won the Walter and Charlotte Pippenger Excellence in Innovation Award for co-requisite course development and implementation, and one faculty recently created a Math

for Healthcare course that received state-level approval. This totals nine permanent faculty, including the co-directors, dedicated to this project. *See Appendix II*.

Our primary consulting scholars, **Dr. Ana Diaz and Dr. Walter B. Gulick**, are faculty at the MSUB University campus. Besides their professional expertise serving as vice president on the Montana Board of Medical Examiners, Diaz, and the community ethicist on the MSUB Institutional Review Board (IRB), Gulick, they share a similar student demographic with City College faculty and are familiar with local ethical concerns without an explicit political motivation found in many community organizations. They have been involved in preliminary preparation including content guidance, providing texts for the project reading list, and committing to support this project through its completion. **Dr. David Hubert** is a nationally recognized expert by the AAC&U on ePortfolios and curriculum assessment and has agreed to help guide us through this process including a sustained dialogue. *See Appendices II & III.*

Institutional Context

City College was founded in 1969 as the Billings Vocational Technical Education Center (BVTC). In 1987, BVTC was absorbed into the Montana University System and subsequently merged with then Eastern Montana College to form Montana State University Billings in 1994. Based on a three-year-average, City College has 1,415 students: 358 dual enrollment, 748 associates of applied science/associates of science in nursing, 225 associates of arts/science, 79 certificates, and 5 non-degrees. *See Appendix V.* Although City College has evolved to serve as a comprehensive two-year institution, the overwhelming majority of associate-level majors, **73%**, are applied science or professional degrees with only one associate of arts degrees in general education. Almost all associate's degree programs require general education core classes including communications, math, and writing. Only six associate's degree programs require

multiple humanities courses. For **77%** of students seeking an associate-level degree, humanities offerings are mainly limited to writing courses. Currently, only three technical degree programs include ethics courses—accounting (AAS), business (AAS), and medical administration (AAS)—and only one associate of science degree in criminal justice (AS). Of the four ethics courses, only one program requires a true philosophy course—taught only one semester per year averaging only 14 students. The majority of City College students graduate without having any ethics education at all.

Since rebranding MSUB College of Technology to MSUB City College in 2001, the administration has continued to expand the college's focus. Starting in Fall 2018, the administration began the process of program alignment with the goal of being more responsive to local employer needs. With the majority of our associate-level degree programs exceeding the typical 60 credit standard, it is an arduous task to incorporate new courses to meet employer needs. An embedded (as opposed to a stand-alone) ethics curriculum provides an institutional solution that impacts the majority of City College students while fulfilling strategic goals.

Follow-up and Dissemination

By spring 2021, we will have **9 full-time faculty** teaching applied ethics embedded in **17 courses** with multiple sections. Initially, an average of **498 students** will receive ethical training within at least one general education core course. Over the next two years, those students will eventually receive ethical training in three out of four themes through three different disciplines. During this same period, eight additional adjunct and dual enrollment faculty will be trained utilizing the applied ethics texts from the newly formed general education department interdisciplinary library and the digital self-study and resource guide maintained by the embedded curriculum coordinator(s). **By 2024**, we plan to scale the embedded curriculum to

include **17 full-time and part-time faculty** teaching **17 courses** across all sections reaching an average of **673** students per semester. **By 2025,** we plan to conduct a study on the embedded curriculum's long-term impact on alumni's ethical reasoning.

Additionally, we will make four presentations on our curricular model and process. We will present to the MSUB general education committee—once during Phase I and once at the end of Phase III—followed by an open forum to the general MSUB faculty. By 2022-2023, we will present at a national conference such as the AAC&U Annual Meeting.

Evaluation

In addition to meeting the goals outlined under the previous heading, **formative assessments** will utilize qualitative instruments to meet the needs of faculty and make curricular adjustments. End-of-term interviews and frequent questionnaires will measure faculty's working knowledge of and comfort with applied ethics, the four themes, and the curriculum. Following the project's conclusion, similar instruments will be applied to part-time faculty trainings involving the digital self-study and resource guide. Student reflection samples from ePortfolios will measure curricular cohesion, cross-contextualization, case-study relevancy, and effectiveness of ethics based exercises/assignments. Annual curricular assessment will become part of the seven-year accreditation cycle. **Summative assessments** will utilize quantitative instruments to determine student gains in ethical reasoning and institutional impact. Course pre/post tests, or standardized moral inventory tests, will measure student gains per course or courses if taking more than one general education course within a semester. Long-term gains will be measured via alumni survey three years after the project completion. Lastly, Bennett/Madplume will work with the Institutional Research office to track gains in retention and student grades by comparing like data prior to curricular implementation.