

# The Humanities Virtues Project: Bringing a Virtue-based Approach to Responsible Conduct of Research Training to the Humanities

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Center for Interdisciplinarity  
**MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY**

# The Larger Project

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- Develop a curriculum using a virtue theoretic framework
  - Focus on dispositions (virtues) to act appropriately rather than a series of rules to follow
  - Ask ‘what is it to be an excellent researcher/scholar?’
    - Different fields and disciplines may have different views on excellence and the dispositions that support it.
  - Incorporate traditional RCR training tools into our larger framework
- Use the virtue schema to reframe RCR and research ethics issues
- Starting with workshops on the virtues with further developments to come

# Started with Science and a Toolbox

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- Toolbox Dialogue Initiative
  - Philosophically infused dialogues
  - Prompts used to initiate discussion and reveal underlying assumptions and differences in definitions/conceptions
  - 300+ workshops nationally and internationally
- Adapted in light of the Scientific Virtues Project
  - Modules designed around virtues and RCR concepts
  - Moderated more directly due to pedagogical needs
    - ‘Socrates in the room’
  - 50+ workshops to date



# The Workshops

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- Aim to help participants connect practices with the values that inform those practices.
- Discussion prompts range from abstract (e.g. the nature of discipline/field) to concrete (RCR concerns).
- Interactions with other scholars reveal nuances of ethical situations.
- Offer opportunities to develop skills and familiarity in discussing ethically complex (and in some cases sensitive) issues.
  - Helps at both the individual level as well as the cultural level.
- Tie proper action to the values inherent in the discipline
  - Motivation from within

# The Humanities Virtues Project

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- Humanities remain underserved in RCR
  - MSU mandates that *all* graduate students receive RCR training
- MSU looking at culture change on campus
  - Virtues projects as ‘dual purpose’ – helping with RCR instruction *and* developing a culture that supports open discussion
- Not simply dropping a science model onto humanists
  - Working with departments to tailor workshops
  - Build on what we have learned in science to develop a model that works for humanists

# The Humanities Virtues Project

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- Graduate students from across college together in one discussion
  - Philosophy; Art, Art History, and Design; Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures; English; Theatre; Romance and Classical Studies; Religious Studies; Linguistics and Germanic, Slavic, Asian, and African Languages
- Prompts aimed at what it means to be an excellent researcher in humanities disciplines.
- Participants encouraged to discuss similarities *and* differences among their viewpoints.
- Moderator can play Socratic role when needed.
- Six 3-hour workshops held this year, with an avg. 4-5 participants.

# What we are seeing... preliminarily

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- Humanists tend to see RCR as a 'science thing', but embrace the focus on excellence in research.
- Graduate students greatly prefer discussion-based training.
- Participants benefit from encounters with other disciplines.
  - Moral perception/sensemaking
  - Logical consequence and *aporía*
- Both similarities and differences between humanists and scientists
  - Different manifestations of the same values/virtues
- Participants reflect on the discussions after workshops are over.
- Graduate students appreciate spaces to be naïve.

# Future directions...

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- Expand and refine humanities modules.
  - Develop prompts for specific virtues
  - Introduce more RCR topics
- Explore new modes of assessment based on our theoretical framework.
  - Philosophy and psychology of action
- Use what we have learned to expand to other domains
  - Currently in talks with 4 other colleges within MSU
- Continue working with the Graduate School at MSU to make RCR and research ethics a part of the broader graduate curriculum.

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