Instruction for Ethics Advisors – Session 1

These are the instruction for your first discussion with the electrical engineering senior design project (SDP) team. While your job is to act as ethics advisor for the team, you must approach the interaction with care. Ultimately, the responsibility for acting and designing ethically, as well as crafting the ethics statement, falls on the engineering students. Your job is not to tell them what to do, to police them, or to tell them what is right or wrong; rather, your job is to help facilitate a better understanding, first, of their own ethical agency and responsibilities in the course of the project, second, to encourage their "moral imagination," and, third, to help them recognize the ethical and social issues that might be relevant.

The keys to being a good ethics advisor are (1) fostering a spirit of collaboration, humility, and helpfulness, (2) avoiding adversarial interactions, and (3) developing rapport with the engineering students. The following instructions are guidelines that will help you engage in a productive and helpful discussion with the SDP team. The most important thing is to NOT start by asserting claims about what is and isn't ethical. Start by asking a lot of questions; try to learn from them first. One of you should take point in the discussion, while the other two should focus on taking notes.

As each team will be different, you may find that you need to adapt these instructions over time.

1. Build Rapport with the SDP Team
   - Introduce yourselves to the team. Tell them about your own background, why you are taking History and Philosophy of Science, what the course is like, and be honest about your level of comfort (or discomfort) with their field of engineering.
   - Ask the team to talk about themselves and their project, including how they formed the team and why they chose this project.
2. Ask Questions about their Project
   - Let the team explain their project and their accomplishments so far.
   - Ask questions about how and why they made the choices they've made, and what problems and decisions they are concerned with right now.
   - Emphasize their role as choice-makers. Ask them about the other ways they could do things. Ask them to explain the consequences of the difference choices if they can.
   - At this stage, avoid explicitly bringing up ethical and social issues, though you should probe them with further questions about how they will handle such issues if they bring them up.
3. Explore Ethics Issues in the Project
   - Ask the SDP team what ethical issues they think they face.
   - Go through the Ethics Worksheet with them. Answer and clarify any questions they have for you (i.e., "Are safety issues *ethical* issues?"), but redirect any substantive ethical questions to the team; ask them what they think, or what other stakeholders would think, or what the social consensus is.
4. Schedule the next meeting.