

Ethics Round Table Chapter Established in Victoria

A “Round Table on Ethics” has been established in Victoria to provide an open forum for people to gain a better understanding of the practice of ethics in their work and lives.

An inaugural meeting this Summer attracted 20 individuals from all levels of government, a First Nation, Royal Roads University, the University of Victoria, Forces Canada, local health services, and private business consultants.

A brief followup survey indicated participants liked the facilitated-discussion approach and opportunities to meet informally once a month or quarterly to discuss a range of ethical issues. Their primary interest in ethics was getting to “the moral fitness of a decision.” People indicated they liked general discussions on ethics in society and the needs for codes of ethics. Knowing yourself and the study of moral philosophy were also in the domain of ethics, they noted.

A second round table was organized and held at the Swans Hotel in Victoria to discuss “Your Role in Media Ethics.” This meeting attracted a diverse range of individuals who discussed the subject from a number of perspectives.

In this gathering over dinner, UVic geography student Claire Atkin raised the ethical implications of posting personal information on social media networks such as Facebook. The need for individuals to be aware of privacy and content ownership policies in these new realms was reinforced.

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Conflict of Interest Commissioner for British Columbia, the Honourable H. A. D. (Bert) Oliver, shared his experience and views on institutions and individuals adopting a policy of “prevention over cure.” The esteemed retired Justice of the Supreme Court of British Columbia and newly appointed Ethics Advisor to the Vancouver Police Board and Chief of Police provided critical insight from his experience in weighing facts and values in both law and governance.

“I liked Mr. Oliver’s views on whether there was a real conflict of interest or just an appearance of conflict and how, if neither of these

were an issue, an individual could act in a way that was ‘lower case political’ in their interests,” said Brian Menzies, President, Direct Public Strategies.

The subject of media ethics triggered other conversations in the evening session. The importance of understanding and using traditional media—radio, television, newspapers—and the new electronic media—email, YouTube, Facebook, and so on—to effectively convey information was supported by a number of individuals. Communicating effectively using the tools available was considered an important ethical task.

Behind the scenes decision-making is often complex and misunderstood by the public said Canada Revenue Agency’s Kris Sheridan, citing a need for deeper public understanding of the ethics involved in government.

Jennifer O’Neill, access analyst with the Ministry of Attorney General in BC, said she frequently works with individuals in the news media who utilize the province’s *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* to access government records. She defined her department’s role as ensuring whether the information contained in the records requested can or cannot be released under law because there are sections of the privacy act that “require us to withhold the information.”



Sharing his experience, wit, and wisdom with Terry Rowsell (right) and UVic geography student Claire Atkin at an EPAC event is BC's Conflict of Interest Commissioner H. A. D. (Bert) Oliver. The esteemed retired Justice of the Supreme Court of British Columbia and newly appointed Ethics Advisor to the Vancouver Police Board and Chief of Police provided critical insight into the importance of institutions and individuals adopting an ethics policy of "prevention over cure."

Helping individuals "focus on the research material they request" involves both law and ethics. In the process, journalists understand why portions of the records are withheld. "The ancillary personal information involving third parties or other details, such as those that could harm law enforcement, may not be relevant, and are required to be protected," O'Neill said.

In another perspective on media ethics, the understanding of the consequences of media consumption was raised. Instant voting on *Idol* shows and the possible effect on representational democracy was brought up. The promotion, even the legitimizing of torture on the hit series *24*, was discussed in the context of both ethics and law.

Handouts at the Round Table meetings included recent news clippings to inform participants of the wide range of ethics in society, as well as more practical information. "The Thinker's Guide to Ethical Reasoning," a booklet from the Foundation for Critical Thinking (www.criticalthinking.org), was given to the chapter's founders.

The Victoria Round Table on Ethics is an initiative of the Ethics

Practitioner's Association of Canada (EPAC) whose stated goals are to

- promote ethical practices in Canadian organizations including private, public, and nonprofit corporations, charities, government entities, industry, and professional associations;
- provide practitioners (and future practitioners) with information and education about organizational ethics and opportunities to discuss best practices;
- promote awareness of the role of ethics practitioners and how to find them;
- maintain and improve the qualifications and standards of the profession;
- work with and establish relationships with other organizations in an effort to achieve the above objectives.

For more information on Round Table events, EPAC membership, and starting a professional or local chapter, please visit the Association's Website. <http://www.epac-apec.ca/> ▲