In early 2009, I first heard about the Kenan Institute's Instructorship in Ethics fellowship, which provides an opportunity for a Duke graduate student to design and teach an undergraduate course in ethics. During that same time, I learned that the American Anthropological Association (AAA) had begun a process of reviewing its Code of Ethics with an eye for emphasizing the importance of transparency and openness in research and prohibiting members from sharing ethnographic information with military and intelligence institutions that was not also available to the general public and the populations studied. The juxtaposition of these two things led me to think that a course on the ethics of anthropological research would be particularly timely.

The holistic, four-field nature of anthropology makes it particularly well-suited to an ethics course. Anthropologists undertake a particularly wide array of research methods, from physical measurements and blood draws by physical anthropologists, to ethnographic interviewing and participant observation by cultural anthropologists, to the collection of sensitive material culture by archaeologists, and much, much more. As a result, anthropologists encounter wide-ranging instances of ethical dilemmas and debates. An exploration of such a variety of ethical issues could help Duke undergraduates from a range of disciplines develop a better understanding of the ethics involved in scientific research and representation. I applied for and was awarded the Kenan Instructorship in Ethics for the 2009-2010 academic year. I designed the course, "Anthropology and Ethics: Cultural Caring or Colonial Collusion," so that students could consider the interplay between ethics and anthropology in a number of different ways. First, they reviewed the ethics codes and statements of responsibility from a number of institutions, highlighting the similarities and differences between each. We discussed differences between the Code of Ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists, which emphasizes journalists' obligation to and responsibility for "public enlightenment," and the AAA's Code of Ethics, which states that anthropologists' primary ethical obligations are to "the people, species, and materials they study and to the people with whom they work." This provided students with a foundational understanding of varying ethical considerations. Continued on page 2.
Many of us wish we had a simple way to resolve ethical dilemmas. Beset by competing priorities and torn by conflicting obligations, who wouldn’t want a sure-fire way to answer life’s toughest questions?

As an ethics institute, we’re often asked to provide handy systems that can help students, researchers, administrators, professionals, and others to make ethical decisions. And over the last 15 years we’ve responded to some of those requests by adapting and developing tools ranging from a diagnostic to assess an organization’s ethical culture to training modules and case studies (many of which you can find on our website).

These tools, however, can make it more, rather than less, difficult to wrestle with thorny issues. This happens when the desire for a practical “hands-on” system replaces the combination of tradition, experience, and analysis that so often forms our best guide through the moral thickets.

Two stories in this issue capture this central truth. In one, junior Benjamin Elkin reflects on his experience this past summer as part of an Institute-sponsored research team working in a Bhutanese refugee camp in Nepal. He describes his initial assumption that refugees lacked independence and his surprising discovery—in the person of a Christian woman who had been a victim of domestic as well as political violence—of their often remarkably complex sense of personal agency. No off-the-rack tool could ever substitute for that capacity to be surprised or for the willingness to think differently based on experience.

In a second story, graduate student Aaron Thornburg reflects on an Institute-based undergraduate course he developed on the ethics of anthropology. He taught this course at the same time that the American Anthropological Association was revising its Code of Ethics to better address a series of difficult challenges in the profession. Professional codes of ethics, Aaron’s students found, can be useful, but not if they become a substitute for deeper moral reflection and a willingness to navigate an ongoing set of tensions that are built into the nature of their work.

Connecting those two is a profile of Rui Jiang, a Duke undergraduate who has been studying food cultures of Bhutanese refugees who have resettled here in Durham, North Carolina, and who found that research ethics was a significant part of her work.

As we celebrate our 15th year, these stories underscore that there’s plenty to reflect on and plenty still to do. We’ve come quite a distance since Frank Hawkins Kenan and President Nannerl Keohane sat at her kitchen table drawing up plans for our creation. Our research, teaching, and practical programming have all expanded.

At the same time, stories like Ben and Aaron’s remind me that there are rarely easy answers or perfect tools when it comes to moral reflection and engagement. There are always new challenges ahead and new opportunities to be surprised. I am thankful every day for the ongoing commitment of the faculty, students, administrators, advisers, and funders who make possible our efforts to meet those challenges and to discover those opportunities.

—Noah Pickus

Unending Lessons continued from cover

Students also read extensively about a number of “crisis moments” in the discipline of anthropology, such as the extensive debate surrounding the 2001 publication of investigative journalist Patrick Tierney’s Darkness in El Dorado: How Scientists and Journalists Devastated the Amazon, which questions the ethicality of research done in the 1960s and 1970s on the South American Yanomami people. We also studied debates behind several instances of clandestine research done by anthropologists for U.S. military and government agencies. Anthropologists’ ethical obligation to the people they study makes such cooperation with military and governmental institutions (as well as with commercial corporations) particularly problematic, as such institutions seldom want the resulting data and reports to be made available to the general public. Exploration of such historical “hot topics” allowed students to grapple with ethical issues from the multiple perspectives of people on all sides of these debates.

Perhaps most importantly, the course included a speaker series in which seven distinguished professional anthropologists spoke to and took questions from the students. Participating speakers included eminent anthropologists who have written extensively about anthropological ethics, such as University of South Carolina Professor Ann Kinggolver, and anthropologists who have had high-profile positions in debates in the field, such as University of Chicago Professor Emeritus Terence Turner.

More than any other aspect of the course, these interactions demonstrated to the students that ethical practice in anthropology is not something that can be read off of a list of ethical “dos and don’ts” or discovered by reviewing historical instances of crisis moments in the discipline. Rather, it involves a constant and consistent consideration of what course of action should be taken given multiple and competing “right courses of action.”

One particularly poignant moment came when Duke Evolutionary Anthropologist Brian Hare spoke to the class about his experience working with chimpanzees, lemurs, and dogs in the study of the evolutionary development of human faculties and behaviors. The students reviewed a number of texts related to animal research leading up to Professor Hare’s session; continued on page 4
Boredom was a bizarre and troubling thing to feel while taking my first walk through a refugee camp. Refugee camps: they are supposed to operate at the fringe of “normal” living and so evoke powerful emotions on the part of refugees and those outsiders who come in touch with them. “Wow, you’re a refugee?”—very little else in the realm of human experience seems to suggest as much emotional turmoil and to command as much deep, human respect as refugeehood.

Boredom, nonetheless, was a feeling that I had many times throughout my experience working with and conducting research among a population of roughly 100,000 refugees this past summer. I, along with four other undergraduate students, two graduate students, and Lou Brown from the Kenan Institute for Ethics, spent a good deal of time in Nepal over the summer talking to many of these refugees who fled Bhutan almost 20 years ago on threat of cultural persecution and physical violence.

The Bhutanese refugee situation is termed “protracted” in the wonky world of refugee policy. Over the course of the past 20 years the Nepali government has made repeated but fruitless attempts to convince the Bhutanese government to allow their citizens to return home. With both the Bhutanese government unwilling to readmit their citizens and the Nepali government uneasy about becoming a permanent home for roughly 100,000 stateless people, the refugees began two years ago to permanently resettle to the United States and a host of other countries.

Over the course of five and a half weeks, our team got to know many of these refugees intimately, giving presentations on the U.S. education system to those of them in high school, conducting extended interviews with close to 40 adults from various camps, and spending good amounts of time with many, many others. During my participation in this process, boredom was by no means the only thing that I felt—I also felt exhilaration and exhaustion and joy! But the fact that I did feel it elucidates, I think, a particular, insidious way of conceptualizing the world that I (and maybe many of us) am often guilty of.

Philosophy professor Marilyn Frye calls this outlook “the arrogant eye.” The arrogant eye looks at the world and sees everything with reference to itself. It tries to classify all that it encounters—objects, people, ideas—into categories that are smaller and less significant than it, the perceiver, and it thinks it can understand everything in these inferior terms. The arrogant eye shows up in each of us in many and varied contexts.

Maybe part of the disengagement that I felt at various points throughout my time in Nepal arose from the fact that I was trying to look at the refugees in this arrogant, reductionist way but was finding that the refugees and the camps in which they lived did not fit into my conceptions.

On that first walk through the camps, reality just did not match up with what I wanted the camps to be. They were well-organized and well-kempt. They were more like an average Nepali town than like my preconception of a refugee camp: Young folks kicked around a soccer ball, older folks hung around outside their homes, and the camps were contiguous with surrounding native Nepali communities, to the degree that for some the point at which community ended and camp began was imperceptible. Caught up in my desire for the camps to fit into my preconceptions, I disengaged from the experience. It was not the only time that my tools for conceptualizing my experiences would not match up with reality.

During a course about the Bhutanese refugees that all members of the research team took prior to our trip, we, among other things, started to create for ourselves a set of expectations about what we might encounter once actually engaged in our research. One of the major notions that I walked out of the class and into the camps with had to do with personal agency in the lives of refugees: Refugees in international aid camps ostensibly seem to have astonishingly little control over their lives and few opportunities to make their own decisions. They are fed, they are medically treated, and they are housed. All of this follows the fact that they were forcibly expelled from their homes, most often for reasons that they could not control. And so, the analysis goes, they do very little of the stuff of living their own lives—providing for themselves and determining where and how they want to live. As such, some describe the refugee experience as one that sucks up personal agency.

But in some cases, the agency that the individuals I talked with exhibited was actually extraordinary—or, really, extraordinarily complex. Subitra [name changed to protect privacy], for example, was a refugee of a very, very strong Christian faith who had been the victim of repeated domestic violence in the course of her relationship with her ex-husband. She had suffered an astonishing amount and done so, most shockingly, by sharing the full extent of her experiences with no one. Did she lack agency? Was she meekly folding into her experiences, conditioned by the secondary status of women and the intrinsic ingenuity that one expects out of refugees?

No. Despite all that she had suffered, she repeatedly described a feeling of superiority and suggested that she, in fact, held a great deal of agency. She claimed her experiences. These things happened to her, she said, because it was continued on page 4
continued from page 3

her responsibility to bear them and to play a role as a messenger of Christian love. Seeing herself as a courier of love and bearer of the sins of others gave her a tremendous sense of power and led her to very nearly compare herself to Jesus.

It may be up for debate whether or not Subitra’s intentional silence was actually an exercise of agency. What is not up for debate (and what I am somewhat shocked it took me this experience to realize) is that Subitra—or any of the other refugees, for that matter—is far beyond an easy, reductive categorization. And she is particularly beyond any categorization that is meant to service me and my ego.

Big Questions and Next Steps
With this realization in mind, the reality of what I saw, the ways in which that reality belied my preconceptions, and perhaps most revealingly the way in which I responded to the disconnect between preconception and reality all point to some big questions.

How is it that we have come to privilege political refugees over those in economic need? It is striking to me that a group of people that has integrated into surrounding Nepali society and on the whole done well in providing for its basic needs has so consistently received aid from the international community because of its form of victimhood (political and religious persecution) is something that the world gives credence to. This fact is drawn more sharply in light of how many native Nepalis live out of their rickshaws as victims of global economic inequality—a form of victimization that the international aid community tends, arguably, to be less than beneficent about. Does our focus on political refugees have something to do with that idea of the arrogant eye?

Elkind in a tea field on the way to Ilam.

Unending Lessons continued from page 2

these included the writings of extreme animal rights activists, who argue against any animal research. The students spent the class exploring an entire spectrum of positions regarding the use of animals for research purposes.

One student talked about animal research projects she had been involved in at a zoo in her hometown prior to coming to Duke. She said that at the time she had not given much consideration to the ethics of performing the research, and that it was only in the context of reading arguments against such research in combination with Professor Hare’s discussion that she began to feel “uncomfortable” about her part in it. In response, Professor Hare suggested that being uncomfortable is a very useful and productive state to foster when conducting anthropological, or any, research, in that maintaining a level of tolerable discomfort allows researchers to remain vigilant in perpetually questioning their own practice. In fact, the discomfort of which the student spoke is the very hallmark of ethical researchers.

Professors Ann Kingsolver and Gail Wagner have suggested that “[d]iscussions of ethics do not necessarily lead to ethical behavior, and might indeed lull both students and faculty into thinking that the topic has been ‘covered.’”* I do not believe that any of the undergraduate students who took my course think that they, as a result, have the knowledge needed to “be ethical.” Rather, I suspect they recognize that complex conversations regarding ethical positions and practice are never really “done.”

Similarly, as the AAA considers recommendations that may shape its code of ethics in the future, it is important to recognize that any changes can in no way be considered the last word on ethical practice by anthropologists. As it currently states, the AAA’s code is merely intended to provide anthropologists with the tools needed to engage in the development and maintenance of an ethical framework. It is equally if not more important to foster the analytical skills necessary for continuing the unending process of determining the most ethical course of action. Whether or not any of the undergraduate students in my class decide to become professional anthropologists, I believe that their participation laid a foundation for doing just that.

How has the nature of elite power-holders’ affinity for refugees impacted the structure of refugee aid? Perhaps we are attracted to refugees because they present us with the opportunity to operate in a position of power, as the grantors of aid and assistance, and that this underpinning of our attraction shapes a refugee aid system that is harmfully patriarchal. It would be, in such a case, something that primarily and perhaps only services those in power.

I think that these are important questions but ones that are just a bit difficult to see translated into research. That said, maybe some of the best work that researchers can do is to reveal that the groupings we use to think about and categorize individuals often do not relate in important ways to the people we are categorizing. Rather those categories often times emanate from a need to minimize others to a role that is simpler and inferior to the category-transcending state of us researchers.

Ultimately, I was most interested in my work in Nepal once I was able to see and appreciate that the refugees operated independently of me and how I wanted them to operate. Those who I found most interesting were not the individuals who fit cleanly into my categories for understanding them. I was and continue to be most engaged when I can see and feel the autonomy and accompanying mystery of the people about and from whom I’m learning.

* “Teaching Anthropological Ethics at the University of South Carolina,” in Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban’s Ethics and the Profession of Anthropology, 2nd Edition

Aaron Thornburg is a Ph.D. candidate in Duke University’s Department of Cultural Anthropology. He is currently a part-time instructor at Elon University, where he is teaching the "Anthropology & Ethics" course he developed during his time at the Institute.
Doing Ethics: Reflections on 15 Years

As part of the Institute’s 15th anniversary this year, Ethics in Action editor Aimee Rodriguez asked Director Noah Pickus to reflect on the Institute’s past, present, and future.

What do you think of when you think “15 years”?
I think of the Institute’s long transition from an entrepreneurial start-up to a stable, focused operation that continues to innovate. Started in 1995, the Kenan Ethics Program established proof of concept that a university-based ethics center could serve as a bridge between theory and practice—that we could do good in the world and be a home for scholarship at the same time.

After the Program became an Institute in 2001, the focus turned to creating internal structures that allowed for more products to emerge and established sustainability for more programs. That was the challenge when I arrived.

In our third and present phase, we’ve become one of the university’s seven signature institutes and we’ve focused on increasing our impact by enabling faculty, students, and practitioners to take on leadership roles of our programs and projects.

You came to the Institute in 2004 as associate director, working with founding director Elizabeth Kiss until her departure in 2006. How would you describe her legacy? Elizabeth’s legacy is multiple. She took something that wasn’t clear it could succeed and she made it work. She successfully experimented with all kinds of programming. And, most important, she helped faculty, students, and staff to view ethics as an opportunity to wrestle with difficult questions and to collectively shape our community, rather than as the province of moral scolds. In that way, she showed that ethics doesn’t have to be just peripheral, it can be central to the university. It’s impossible to underestimate how important that was. Everything we do now is because she made it possible.

You were appointed as the Institute’s new director in July 2007. Coming in, what were your thoughts on where you’d like to see the Institute headed?
I had three goals. Intellectually, I wanted to enhance our research base in what was traditionally a humanistic approach to ethics—one that included philosophy, political theory, theology—and connect much more with knowledge coming out of disciplines such as public policy, psychology, sociology, and behavioral economics. I imagined the Institute as a place where those two broad streams—the social scientific and the humanistic—could coexist and make for new conversations and new ways of thinking about problems in the world.

Educationally, I thought we could supplement our work of infusing ethics across the university by expanding our own suite of programs. These programs could offer new opportunities for students to experience and address moral challenges in and outside of the classroom.

And programmatically, I hoped we could strengthen how we shaped public policy and institutional practices and address issues—from financial regulation to refugee policy—in which the ethical dimension is crucial but can often be slighted.

I think we’ve made really good progress on all three fronts, and we’re well-positioned to strengthen our own programming while continuing to provide added-value across the university.

But I’d imagine most students don’t come to Duke saying, “I have an interest in ethics.” It’s much less tangible than that. How do they end up making that connection?

The word “ethics” attracts some students but it can be a barrier to others. We offer lots of different doors through which students can enter and discover the connection between their own interests and the kinds of questions and practices that are important to their personal and professional development.

So they may have a stated interest in entrepreneurship or human rights, and we help them see the ethics involved within those topics. For example, we have students studying immigration and refugee policy in the classroom and in summer projects in Nepal and in North Carolina. These are practical policy ventures, but the work is suffused with questions about the very nature, and limits, of obligation—an ethical issue if there ever was one!
It was a combination of doing community-based research for a summer service project for the Service Opportunities in Leadership Program, an interest in global and cross-cultural health in Duke’s Global Health Institute, and participation in Suzanne Shanahan’s class on ethical and health-related issues surrounding refugee resettlement that Benjamin Duke Scholar Rui Jiang found herself talking about food with Bhutanese refugees who had recently resettled in Durham.

Jiang spent the summer as part of the Institute’s Working Group on Bhutanese Refugees, doing language tutoring through Church World Service and researching how family eating habits and food customs change with resettlement.

“I wanted to know how resettlement had affected the health and food traditions of this group of people,” she says. “What kinds of foods are they eating here? What are the factors that are changing their food habits and practices?”

She describes how the refugees had a very specific diet in the camps because their food was provided to them in rationed distributions. Jiang went into her research thinking she might find signs of food insecurity. “I wondered if the refugees were worried about having enough food here, about where their food would come from, about whether there were safe and available means of obtaining food.” In fact, she says she found quite the opposite. “They felt there was more than enough readily available food.”

She also found that the refugees’ food ways were evolving based on their surroundings in more complex ways. “Parents told me they wanted their kids to like American food, mainly out of their excitement to become a part of the culture here,” Jiang says. “Unfortunately, with the most widely-distributed American foods being French fries, hamburgers, and pizzas, and by not having someone to show them other options, they’ve come to know fast food as the only American foods to introduce to their children.”

Jiang also witnessed the shifting of power dynamics within families based on food. “Children are learning English at a faster pace than their parents. It seems to me that they are playing a much larger role in making decisions here—what foods to eat, what food to purchase—than they did in the camps in Nepal.”

Looking back, Jiang says she didn’t expect ethics to play a significant role in her research. “I didn’t realize how much it would come up,” she says. “I think about how the research will eventually help the refugees and their community here, but that the effects won’t be immediate.

In the meantime, that’s at the cost of my taking time away from them when they are trying to survive in a new place—in school, in their jobs. Our discussions about research ethics really opened my eyes to those competing interests.”

Jiang plans to take that knowledge with her as she explores new paths. “I really appreciate having worked with the refugees. I’m currently applying to medical school, but I know that the reason I want to practice medicine or advocate for public health is because of the contacts and the relationships that I have built through this work.”

“Looking at this research, I see ethics as a converging field that’s committed to a diversity of approaches and to enhancing genuine political dialogue. I also see us continuing to try and find ways in which our own efforts are magnified and multiplied by the involvement of faculty, students, and practitioners who have embraced both ethics and the Institute as their own.”

Rui Jiang is a senior at Duke University majoring in chemistry and pursuing a certificate in global health.
What is “Ethics at Duke”?:
Good Question

Intentionally or not, everyone “does” ethics, oftentimes extraordinarily well. All you have to do is wonder or argue about how to act, what lives to emulate or honor, or which obligations to embrace or ideals to pursue. And, at its best, scholarship can sharpen and refine how we ask, and answer, such core moral questions.

At Duke, it isn’t hard to find faculty grappling with a remarkable range of moral questions: What constitutes good and evil? What are the biological or psychological origins of ethical judgment? What are the causes of moral catastrophes?

We want to highlight the work of these scholars whose research brings ethical questions to the fore and whose knowledge can be brought to bear on questions to which all of us can relate.

Over the course of the next year, we’ll feature a new series in conjunction with Duke Magazine that does just that. “Good Question: An Exploration in Ethics” will offer a neuroethicist’s views on moral and legal responsibility, an environmental scholar’s assessment of the role natural resources can play in peace-building efforts, and a philosopher’s analysis of whether it’s possible for “bad” people to become “good.”

The series will also address how parents can influence their children to do the right thing, what makes a “free market” free, and what happens when we blur the line between what is real and what is virtual.

Read more about the questions, and the answers, that Duke faculty are pursuing at dukeethics.org and in Duke Magazine starting this month.

Announcements

2010 Kenan Distinguished Lecture in Ethics
Samuel Bowles will deliver the 2010 Kenan Distinguished Lecture in Ethics on November 29 (4:00 pm, Nasher Museum Lecture Hall). Bowles is Research Professor and Director of the Behavioral Sciences Program at the Santa Fe Institute and Professor of Economics at the University of Siena. He will discuss “Machiavelli’s Mistake: Why Good Laws are No Substitute for Good Citizens.” His talk will be followed by responses from Ruth Grant (Political Science and Philosophy), Kieran Healy (Sociology), and Rachel Kranton (Economics).

DukeEngage Dublin and Discover University
This year DukeEngage Dublin students worked with the Discover University Program—a new collaboration between the National College of Ireland and the Institute where Duke and Irish college students work alongside one another to provide a taste of the college experience to 50 disadvantaged Irish and migrant youth from across Dublin and engage them in an active notion of citizenship so they might understand how they can lead change ethically in their own communities. Visit dukeethics.org to watch videos created by the youth groups about their experiences with the program.

Connect with Us
Want to know more about what’s going on at the Institute? There are a number of ways to connect: Follow us on Facebook, sign up to receive our email news, download our programs from iTunesU, watch videos on YouTube, or browse photos on Flickr. Visit dukeethics.org to connect today.

Visit dukeethics.org for more information.
On Community

The Institute’s 2011 Ethics Film Series features four films that touch on the theme of “community,” addressing the tensions that arise between individual rights and the common good and examining how individuals become members of and valued by their communities. The series kicks off on January 25 (all films will be shown at 7:00 pm in the Griffith Film Theater except where noted). Highlighted here are quotes from three of the featured films. Visit dukeethics.org/events/ethics-film-series/ for more information.

“The best guy we have out here just got killed. What’s gonna happen to me? What’s gonna happen to the guy to my left and my right?”
—from Sebastian Junger and Tim Hetherington’s documentary, Restrepo, for which Hetherington himself will join us here at Duke for the post-film discussion, screening February 15

“It’s one of those things everybody goes through. It’s called being human.”
—from When the Light Turns Red, screening March 15 in the Perkins Library Rare Book Room

“You grow up when you decide to do what’s right…and not what’s right for you, what’s right for everybody.”
—from Lars and the Real Girl, screening April 5