

Exploring the Implementation Path of Legal Professional Ethics Education from the Perspective of Combining Moral and Legal Education—Taking Guangzhou College of Commerce as an Example

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Abstract: Cultivating Moral Character: Forging the Soul of Legal Talents. Future legal professionals must possess not only legal knowledge but also legal ethics. Law students are in the golden age of shaping their legal professional values. Law schools strengthen legal professional ethics education at multiple levels by integrating professional ethics content into required courses and other courses. Legal professional ethics instructors tailor their teaching to specific lessons, employing diverse methods to overcome issues such as student lack of attention, lack of interest in classes, and a single assessment mechanism. While teaching theoretical knowledge, they focus more on guiding students' legal professional awareness, enabling them to recognize the importance of legal professional ethics and uphold ethical standards, ultimately aiming to cultivate legal professionals who integrate knowledge with practice.

Keywords: Legal professional ethics, teaching issues, implementation path

1. Introduction

"Law is the art of kindness and justice," but law alone is not enough. When General Secretary Xi Jinping visited China University of Political Science and Law, he emphasized: "Building a country, government, and society under the rule of law, and achieving scientific legislation, strict law enforcement, impartial justice, and universal compliance with the law, all require a high-quality legal workforce. If the training of legal professionals is not up to par, and if the legal field cannot produce a large number of talents, it will be impossible to do a good job in comprehensively governing the country according to law." To build a country under the rule of law, it is not feasible to rely solely on scientific, complete, and just "laws." The key lies in the people who use the law. Mr. Sun Xiaolou once said: "Having legal knowledge but not legal morality is not in line with the essential meaning of law, nor with the purpose of legal education."^[1] Legal professional ethics education has emerged in response to the background of building a country under the rule of law.

2. The Current State of Legal Professional Ethics Education

2.1 Legal Professional Ethics is a Required Course for Students

Although the course on legal professional ethics was included as a "recommended elective" in the "Master of Laws Professional Degree Training Program" as early as 1999, its academic status is low and it has never received attention from major law schools.

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In 2018, the Ministry of Education released the "National Standards for Teaching Quality of Undergraduate Law Programs in Regular Institutions of Higher Learning" (hereinafter referred to as the "National Standards"), proposing that core legal courses adopt a "10+X" classification model, with legal professional ethics ranking among the 10 compulsory professional courses. In October 2018, the Ministry of Education and the Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission issued the "Opinions on Adhering to the Combination of Moral and Legal Education and Implementing the Excellent Legal Talent Education and Training Program 2.0," reiterating the need to strengthen the cultivation of students' legal professional ethics and offering a compulsory course on "Legal Professional Ethics" to all law students.

In 2021, the Ministry of Education revised and released the "National Standards for Teaching Quality in Law", changing the core courses for law majors from "10+X" to "1+10+X", where "1" is "An Introduction to Xi Jinping's Thought on the Rule of Law", while the status of legal professional ethics as a discipline remains unchanged.

2.2 This Course is Currently in an Exploratory and Developmental Stage

In response to the Ministry of Education's national standards in 2018, the Law School of Guangzhou Business College launched its first course on Legal Professional Ethics for the 2019 cohort of law students in the spring of 2019. This course was heavily theoretical, and the instructors lacked experience in teaching it, relying on traditional lecture methods throughout the semester, which failed to engage students. To date, the course has been offered four times at the Law School, and six instructors are being trained to teach Legal Professional Ethics. Each time the course is offered, the instructors have implemented various reforms: from initial theoretical lectures to student-led presentations with teacher feedback and vice versa; from adapted cases to vivid examples of legal figures and the stories behind them...The Legal Professional Ethics course offered by the Law School is establishing its academic standing through a continuously evolving and progressive approach.

3. Problems in Legal Professional Ethics Education

The principle of "cultivating morality and fostering talent, integrating moral and legal education" establishes the theoretical basis for the establishment of legal professional ethics courses. The saying "fear prevents recklessness, and virtue is thus cultivated" implies that morality can be educated. The fact that over 170,000 people were disciplined in the first nationwide rectification campaign of the political and legal system provides a practical basis for the necessity, requirement, and effective implementation of legal professional ethics courses. However, cultivating legal professionals with both moral integrity and competence requires a long and arduous journey in legal professional ethics education.

3.1 Relying Solely on This Course is Insufficient

The Ministry of Education clearly stated that law majors should "achieve legal professional ethics education throughout the entire process of cultivating legal talents." However, in practice, legal professional ethics courses and other branches of law have not formed a system in terms of legal professional ethics. Although ideological and political elements are integrated into the teaching of branch law to varying degrees, very few belong to the level of legal professional ethics. This leads to law majors placing heavy responsibility for the education of "morality" of legal professionals on legal professional ethics courses. However, moral internalization is a long process, and the emphasis on theory and neglect of practice in law majors further highlights the difficulty of cultivating high-quality legal professionals solely through legal professional ethics education. "The goal of legal professional ethics education is not to directly create morally upright individuals in the profession, but to promote the understanding of legal professional ethics." [2] Even if the educational goals of this course are lowered, the mere 32 class hours per semester are insufficient to make students fully aware of the importance of legal professional ethics for engaging in the legal profession and building a rule-of-law state, and the effect of the course in cultivating morality cannot be strengthened.

3.2 Theoretical Content Attracts Little Student Attention

Legal professional ethics education not only includes knowledge of behavioral norms but also education on professional ideals, honor, and attitudes at the conscious level. However, the conscious level of content cannot be directly seen in textbooks. Most students, when browsing textbooks, mainly see content on the professional ethics of judges, prosecutors, lawyers, notaries, arbitrators, and administrative law enforcement personnel. This content is highly theoretical;

for example, the professional ethics of judges mainly consists of "three cores": fairness, integrity, and service to the people; and "five requirements": loyalty to the judicial cause, ensuring judicial fairness, ensuring judicial integrity, upholding the principle of serving the people through the judiciary, and maintaining the image of the judiciary. Students, with preconceived notions, perceive legal professional ethics as a dry, time-consuming course that can be passed by rote memorization before exams. At the same time, the employment threshold for law students, which generally requires passing the legal qualification exam, exacerbates the exam-oriented trend in legal education at local universities. Since legal professional ethics education, which is already theoretical, does not directly bring students workplace benefits, students do not value this course.

3.3 Traditional Teaching Methods are Unpopular

According to psychology, the ages of 14-25 are the golden period for cultivating ethical and moral values. In the long run, offering a course on legal professional ethics in universities can guide the worldview, values, and money views of law students who will engage in legal professions in the future. However, ethics is a practical virtue, which relies more on introspection and practice, and cannot be accomplished through simple preaching. [3] Due to the short duration of the course, teachers have not been able to change their thinking from traditional teaching methods in time and have tried their best. However, students have a sense of being forced to attend classes "just to go to school", which makes the teachers doubt themselves and dare not expect to guide students' values.

3.4 The Mechanism for Evaluating the Effectiveness of Education is Too Simplistic

As a required course for law students, Legal Ethics aims to deepen their understanding of legal professional ethics and cultivate their legal professional ethics. Does passing the exam mean the course is over? Clearly, exam scores cannot adequately assess the course's educational effectiveness. Therefore, while attendance is included in the regular assessment based on students' understanding and practice of their obligations as students—a fundamental manifestation of moral character—this creates a sense of pressure for students. Furthermore, the final exam is too traditional: multiple choice, short answer, and adapted case analysis questions reduce what should be a diverse course to one where "memorization is enough to pass." This singular assessment mechanism not only fails to compensate for students' lack of attention to Legal Ethics but also exacerbates this disregard, and fails to effectively consolidate the course's educational impact.

4. Implementation Path of Legal Professional Ethics Education

Based on the current state of legal ethics education in law schools, and considering the pain points in this course, such as a lack of systematic ethics education, students' lack of attention, lack of interest in class, and a simplistic assessment mechanism, teachers can try the following approaches:

4.1 The "Two Integrations" Ensure that Professional Ethics Education is Integrated Throughout Legal Education

"One course, two responsibilities"[4], the law school integrates courses in its overall planning. On the basis of affirming that legal professional ethics is the core link of moral education, a legal professional ethics course construction group was formed to sort out and plan as a whole, and transmit professional ethics content that can be integrated into other courses to the teachers, forming an atmosphere in which the whole school talks about "ethics". For example, the basic principles of legal professional ethics (emphasizing equality and pursuing justice) are integrated into the values of law in "Jurisprudence", which can also help to clarify the legal significance of legal professional ethics; "Evidence Law", "Procedure Law" and "Lawyer Practice" integrate the professional norms of lawyers in litigation (rules such as the right to meet with clients, the right to investigate and collect evidence, and the right to review case files), and emphasize the situations in which lawyers cannot do it; "Trial System and Practice" integrates the professional ethics of judges; "Prosecutorial System and Practice" interweaves the professional ethics of prosecutors, etc., "combining Tai Chi" to continuously strengthen legal professional ethics education.

"Combining internal and external approaches" breaks down the limitations of time and space, integrating legal professional ethics into daily life. Fully utilize existing resources to implement the cultivation of legal professional ethics in all aspects. For example, in evaluation activities such as awards and commendations, moral ethics should be considered;

in the selection and evaluation of student cadres, procedures should be open and fair, with moral character being the top priority. Unconsciously forming behavioral habits that conform to legal professional ethics in daily study and life—this subtle and pervasive influence—is the most effective way to cultivate legal professional ethics.

4.2 "Setting Lifelong Examples" Emphasizes the Emotional Enlightenment of Students

In legal ethics classes, the theoretical knowledge that teachers painstakingly impart is often poorly absorbed by uninterested students. Teachers have been constantly pondering what this course should actually teach to transform the dull lessons and truly impact students. The story of prosecutor Ablilin Abliz, who strived to be a good student of Jiao Yulu, remaining loyal to his beliefs, incorruptible, and self-disciplined, and continuing to serve the people with his knowledge even after retirement, inspired teachers. While the ideological aspects are difficult to teach, "a single lever can move the world," and a single role model can profoundly influence a life. This could significantly benefit students and deeply impact their lives. Therefore, embedding "role models" as a lifelong learning principle in legal ethics courses allows students to deeply experience the legal professional emotions of real figures like Zou Bihua, Zhang Biao, Li Zengliang, and Hu Guoyun while learning professional ethics standards. This helps students understand that "respect for the law" is the foundation of a bottom-line mentality. Students attend classes because of these stories, reflect on their own behavior through these stories, and promote the unity of knowledge and action, striving to achieve their professional ideals.

4.3 Experiential Learning Emphasizes the Student's Active Role

By tailoring instruction to individual needs and specific teaching methods for each lesson, teachers can employ various experiential teaching methods such as clinic-style teaching, blended classrooms, flipped classrooms, and practical teaching to highlight the students' active role and cultivate their independent thinking abilities.

The clinic-style teaching method clarifies for students how to handle ethical conflicts in the legal profession. It sets up various ethical conflict scenarios in the legal profession, such as the relationship between emotion and law, interests and law, procedural justice and substantive justice, how to handle the conflict between efficiency and the pursuit of justice, how to resolve the conflict between lawyers maintaining confidentiality and pursuing justice, and whether prosecutors should submit evidence collected in favor of the defendant to the court. Students are organized to discuss these scenarios, actively express their opinions, reinforce conflict resolution methods, and correctly guide their values.

Blended classrooms supported by internet technology enhance the fun and interactivity of courses. "Online + Offline" blended teaching broadens the scope of instruction: "Offline" refers to traditional classrooms, while "online" refers to platforms like Rain Classroom, Learning Tong, and WeChat for supplementary learning. Teachers publish extracurricular audiovisual resources and internet case studies online, allowing students to independently engage in extracurricular learning and reflection. "Listening + Hands-on" blended teaching focuses student attention: In "offline" classrooms, teachers use Rain Classroom's bullet-screen feature to encourage students to express their opinions and actively learn from teacher-implemented role models, enlivening the classroom atmosphere and increasing the number and frequency of student participation.

The flipped classroom^[5] transforms students from passive to active learners, further enhancing their emotional experience. Six ideological and political topics were set up, including the professional ethics of judges, the professional ethics of prosecutors, the norms of the relationship between lawyers and clients, the norms of lawyers in litigation and arbitration activities, the professional ethics of notaries, and the professional ethics of administrative law enforcement personnel. Students were randomly grouped, drew lots, and assigned tasks. Each group of students collected no less than five stories of people on the corresponding topics, used legal thinking to think, extract key points, make courseware, and share in class. Teachers combined the content of legal professional ethics to analyze and explain, praising positive cases and criticizing negative cases. Students learned about others and gained enlightenment in their own experience, realizing that professional ethics are more important than legal knowledge for legal professionals, and that only by always adhering to the bottom line can they safeguard their beloved legal profession.

Teachers lead by example, testing students' understanding of the unity of knowledge and action through practical teaching. In practical teaching activities such as "duty at the legal aid center," "bringing legal services to rural areas,"

"doing practical things for the community," and "legal exchange and learning," teachers not only teach the visible aspects of the rule of law but also the invisible ones: by setting an example in public service, using their own legal knowledge and experience to protect the public, and constantly reminding students of the public-spirited mission they bear.

4.4 "Multi-Faceted Assessment" Reinforces the Effectiveness of Ethics Education

Affirming students' "morality" in practical life. For students who exceed the volunteer hours reported by counselors, students who demonstrate outstanding interpersonal skills in extracurricular activities reported by teachers in charge of practical teaching, and students who voluntarily apply for assistance at the legal aid center, the instructors will give students a reward for their participation in class activities, encouraging students to follow the most basic truths, goodness and beauty in their hearts and use what they have learned to serve the public.

Homework reflects the "morality" aspect at the cognitive level. Flexible assignments are given outside of class, one for each student, and included in regular assessments. Examples include: Appreciation assignments: students summarize their insights and shortcomings based on exemplary figures they have learned from or observed; Criticism assignments: students independently observe online or in-person court hearings and write down whether the words and actions of judges, lawyers, and prosecutors were appropriate from a legal professional ethics perspective; Reflection assignments: students discuss their views on content that conflicts with legal professional ethics, based on their understanding of the characters' handling of situations, using examples from films and television dramas such as "The Bottom Line," "Silence," "In the Name of the People," and "Silent Witness." Teachers should take these assignments seriously and understand students' inner thoughts. Students with deviating values should receive timely and appropriate guidance.

The exam should focus on the concept of "virtue" in ethical education. Objective questions in the final exam can be based on political and ideological cases shared by students, reinforcing their understanding of specific acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. Subjective questions should minimize rote memorization and focus on students' self-awareness, such as the meaning of "respect for the law," career ideals and plans, understanding of a famous quote, the reasons for offering a legal ethics course, which protagonist in a real case they remembered, what lessons they learned from memorable figures, and even suggestions for offering a legal ethics course.

5. Conclusion

Law students on campus are in the golden period of shaping their legal professional ethics. Teachers teach students about the importance of legal professional ethics by combining diverse teaching methods, guiding them to develop in the right direction, with integrity, uprightness, and positive values. The goal is to ensure that the "role models" planted in their minds take root and sprout, helping them become well-rounded legal professionals with both moral integrity and legal expertise.

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