

Salisbury University's Re-envisioning Ethics Access and Community Humanities (REACH) Initiative: Integrating Community and Curricular Ethics is grant-funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Humanities Connections Program. REACH, led by Co-Directors Michèle Schlehöfer, Timothy Stock and Jennifer Nyland, focuses on ethics, ethics literacy and ethics agency through new curricular and co-curricular resources, and connecting with the community.

REACH Co-Director Dr. Tim Stock receives Award

Dr. Tim Stock, REACH co-director and professor in the Philosophy Department, was one of three Salisbury University faculty recently recognized by the University System of Maryland. He was awarded a 2024 University System of Maryland Board of Regents Faculty Award for Excellence in Teaching. Dr. Stock was selected from nominees across the USM for his innovative approach to teaching which includes programs which connect SU students and faculty to the community, such as his work with REACH. For REACH, he has developed innovative ways to teach students and community members about ethics. In addition to his work with REACH, Dr. Stock has facilitated philosophical book discussions between SU students and people incarcerated in the Eastern Correctional Institute (ECI), and he has expanded the regional Ethics Bowl program to include an ethics team from ECI. The [full press release](#) is available on SU's website. Congratulations, Tim!



Certainty: A Stumbling Block for Ethics

Moral certainty is tempting. What we often want out of ethics is something like universal moral "Capital 'T' Truths" that hold across time, place, and context. Beliefs that are rooted in moral certainty abound in our society and can express themselves through our political, social, familial, and religious commitments. Often those truths and the desire that they be absolute are tied directly to our sense of self, though our values. These beliefs also have a practical appeal; they make it easier for us to make decisions by providing black-and-white rules to follow. Most people believe that common examples of moral wrong are universally wrong (killing, lying, adultery, theft). But does this kind of universality apply to more controversial cases, for example a "white lie," killing in self-defense or war, or stealing for survival? However we might answer these questions in the abstract, it's worth taking a moment to appreciate how moral certainty often presents more of a stumbling block for practicing ethics within organizations and across various social groups.

First, consider that sometimes moral beliefs *can simply be incorrect even if we hold them with a great degree of certainty*. While I may be certain that lying is wrong, I still might allow someone to lie to save face, to keep an important secret or hold confidentiality, or to wait for information to come out in an appropriate context. Despite my certainty in desiring to be radically honest, I need to appreciate that telling the truth can also *create harm*, and thus the ethical action should be weighed in context and without absolute rules.

However, morally certain beliefs pose a more serious issue: *They erode the ability to engage in dialogue and empathize with people who think differently*. This is particularly the case when we engage in moral certainty around controversial social and political issues, such as attitudes toward abortion, animal rights, questions of economic justice, trade-offs between environmental protection and growth, or the morality of capital punishment. If we believe with moral certainty that our position is "the right one," then there is no need to empathize with, listen to, and find common ground with others with different viewpoints. This can lead to narrow-mindedness, informational echo-chambers, and partisan division. Black-and-white conceptions of certainty are thus a direct invitation to oppositional discourse. People who think differently on a topic are villainized and characterized as morally wrong. In this way, holding moral certainty stifles ethical deliberation and negates the ability to compromise across ethical divides before dialogue even starts.

Given this, it benefits us when we can approach ethical dialogues – even on topics we feel passionate about – with curiosity, as opposed to moral certainty. What might such an approach look like? We offer the following:

- **Practice intellectual humility.** Recognize the limits of your knowledge and that other people might have insights that you had not considered.
- **Practice reflexive thinking.** Take the time to probe the basis of your ethical beliefs and ask yourself critical questions to identify and challenge your assumptions. Why do you hold these beliefs? Where did you learn them? What biases might you hold, and why?
- **Seek—and listen to—diverse perspectives.** Too often, we surround ourselves with those who agree with us, and we listen to diverse viewpoints to *respond*. Instead, seek out diverse perspectives and listen to *understand*. Why do some people think differently than you? What are the commonalities across your perspectives?

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- **Embrace complexity.** Social and political issues are complex. While universal “Truths” might have a simplistic appeal, ethical decision-making is typically ambiguous and holds uncertainty.
- **Stay curious and open to growth.** Ethics are not stagnant, and thus being ethical means providing yourself with room to adjust and refine your thinking. Be open to different viewpoints and consider new information and viewpoints that challenge your existing beliefs. Admitting to yourself and others that your attitudes on an issue have evolved over time or in response to new information is admitting to moral growth.

By adopting these strategies, you can avoid the trap of moral certainty and foster ethical perspectives that reflect the nuance of social and political issues.

REACH Presents at CFES Nonprofit Summit

REACH Co-Director Dr. Michele Schlehofer led a training on “Ethical Accountability for Nonprofits” at the April 26, 2024, Nonprofit Summit co-organized by the Community Foundation of the Eastern Shore and SU’s Institute for Public Affairs and Civic Engagement (PACE). The training led attendees through identifying the ethical frameworks that guide their organization’s work and presented different models of building accountability processes with a variety of stakeholders. Attendees left with a clear understanding of the importance of community accountability for ethical practice and learned additional procedures by which their organization could create and maintain accountability to the community. REACH team members are available to give trainings on this and other topics to regional organizations.

Help Us Learn About Housing in Our Area

Help us learn about housing affordability and access in Wicomico County. The REACH team is conducting a survey of area residents. People are eligible to participate if they are (1) age 18 or older and (2) reside in Wicomico County. Take the survey by Friday, May 31, for a chance to win one of five \$50 Amazon gift cards. Please distribute to people in your networks.

The image displays three survey posters for the 'Housing Affordability and Access Survey'. Each poster is designed for a different language: English, Haitian Creole, and Spanish. They all feature the Salisbury University logo at the top, a house icon, and a QR code for scanning. The English version (left) states: 'Help us learn about housing affordability and access in Wicomico County. Take the survey by May 31st for a chance to win 1 of 5 \$50 Amazon gift cards! You qualify if: • You are 18 or older • You live in Wicomico County. Quick and Easy Just Scan Here! IRB Approval 363 Questions? Contact REACH@Salisbury.edu'. The Haitian Creole version (middle) states: 'Ede nou aprann sou lojman abòdab ak aksè nan Konte Wicomico. Ranpli sondaj la anvan 31ye me pou yon chans pou genyen 1 nan 5 kat kado Amazon \$50! Rapid ak fasil Jis Eskane Isit la! Ou kalifye si: • Ou gen 18 an oswa plis • Ou abite nan Konte Wicomico. Kesyon IRB Apwobasyon 363 Kontakte? Contact REACH@Salisbury.edu'. The Spanish version (right) states: 'Ayúdenos a conocer la asequibilidad y el acceso a la vivienda en el condado de Wicomico. ¡Responda la encuesta antes del 31 de mayo y tendrá la oportunidad de ganar 1 de las 5 tarjetas de regalo de \$50 de Amazon! Cumple los requisitos para participar si: • Es mayor de 18 años • Vive en el condado de Wicomico. Es rápido y simple. ¡Escanee aquí! Aprobación de la IRB 363 ¿Tiene alguna pregunta? Comuníquese a través de REACH@Salisbury.edu'.

English Version

Haitian Creole Version

Spanish Version

ETHICS PROFILE: Daon Johnson

Regional Manager - DC Metro Market

Mentor Maryland DC



Tell us about your organization and what you do.

MENTOR Maryland | DC's mission is to fuel the quality and quantity of mentoring relationships for Maryland and DC's young people and to close the mentoring gap. We provide connection, consultation, certification, collaboration and coeducation for any and all organizations (non-profit, for-profit, government, public schools, colleges, universities, and workforce development organizations) that contribute to the mentoring landscape from cradle to career.

What drew you to be a part of the Community Ethics Network?

The Community Ethics Network allows us to provide our stakeholders with opportunities to constructively engage with issues that affect our communities across multiple sectors. Simultaneously, partnering with CEN allows us to form a community network of programs working collectively to raise the level of care for our young people.

How does ethics improve your work?

Ethics greatly improves Mentor MDDC's work by helping us create a collaborative, regional community that prioritizes the importance of trust, credibility, transparency, accountability, fairness, and equity. As we elevate the need for best practices among our stakeholders, it improves our opportunity to effect long-term systems change (Education System, Juvenile-Justice System, Economic System, Political Systems).

Join Our Community Advisory Board!

Do you have ideas on how to improve ethics training and ethical practice?

We are seeking motivated individuals from our region to serve on our Community Advisory Board! The Community Advisory Board meets regularly and provides the REACH team input on current community-facing initiatives, as well as helps steer what types of products the REACH team develops and implements in our local community. We seek a diverse array of representation across multiple sectors: government, nonprofit, business and advocacy groups. [Please apply](#) by scanning the QR code below or email us at REACH@salisbury.edu if interested.



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