

## **Barriers to Moral Development from the CACE National Advisory Council April 2002**

### **What are the contemporary pressures affecting moral development and challenging moral growth?**

The [National Advisory Council](#), chaired by Dr. C. Everett Koop, met on Wheaton's campus to consult with a select group of faculty and students about the barriers, pressures, or challenges that hinder moral growth. This meeting, held on September 28, 2001, contained two components. First, Dr. Koop and NAC member Mr. Don Holt made brief presentations in which they identified barriers. Second, NAC member Mr. James Anderson guided the participants in a two-step decision process resulting in a prioritized list of barriers.

The participants numbered about 12. Faculty selected had participated in the 2001 CACE summer seminar on the topic, "Traditions in Moral Development: From the Mind to Society" or are currently serving as members of the CACE Steering Committee. Students were selected by faculty based on interest and commitment to the theme.

**NAC Statements:** *Condensed and edited by Kyle MacKenney.*

**Dr. C. Everett Koop** addressed three major barriers to morality in today's society: the lack of proper education on personal accountability, excessive access to materials which are "over the edge," and lack of opportunity to be with positive role models.

He referenced a trend on college campuses of "every student a victim," where the student is not responsible for anything. As soon as a student has a problem, "it must have been his mother, father, the President, the kid next door, or society who did this to him." This lack of personal accountability releases one from the need for personal ethics.

Dr. Koop lamented the availability of materials which are "over the edge." He told a personal story about buying the largest cable channel package, hoping to watch good classic movies at night. Instead, after channel 132, "there are only pay-per-view movies, or pictures that you really don't want to see if you have any moral sensitivity, you definitely don't want to be caught watching, and you don't want anyone else in your house to look at." He believes that the new era of film is erasing the lines between soft and hard pornography. Many of the sex scenes now visible on television during any hour of the day are more lurid than the sex scenes he saw while working on President Reagan's Presidential Commission on Pornography.

**Mr. Don Holt** identified four major obstacles to the moral life: relativism, inconsistencies, ambition verging on greed, and complacency. He argued that when one has no sense of moral absolutes, there is no progress to be made in discussion regarding the moral life.

Holt sees many inconsistencies in public life, and what troubles him most is the failure to follow through with one's commitment. These inconsistencies ranged from governmental missteps, such as the internment of Japanese citizens during WWII, to televangelists committing marital infidelities. He also sees inconsistencies in the lives of society's role models. As a news magazine editor for many years, Holt saw a great deal of expedience disguised as necessity or virtue. For instance, a company may

close a plant without regard to the communities and people involved, or company management justifies the withholding of information concerning dangerous products. Mr. Holt also expanded on greed. Greed is closely connected with ambition and, consequently, is honored in our society. Greed is often a hidden, more personal barrier, where very few other people will see it. The ambition of climbing up a company or social ladder can cause people to do things that they would not normally consider.

Finally, Mr. Holt addressed the issue of complacency, or laziness and sloth, as these will hold someone back from making any progress in moral life.

### **Identifying Barriers:**

**Mr. James Anderson** used a flipchart to list the barriers mentioned by Mr. Holt and Dr. Koop. He then gave all in attendance the opportunity to suggest additional barriers. From these suggestions, Mr. Anderson created a master list. Each participant voted for four items on the master list, listing them in order of importance.

Of course, the results are merely suggestive. All participants saw this exercise as a preliminary step leading to further discussion and inquiry.

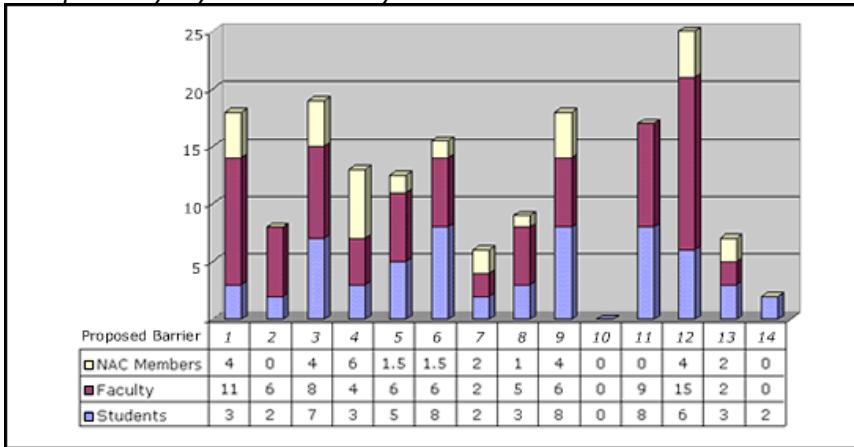
### **Raw Data:**

#### **Master List**

1. Lack of proper education on personal accountability.
2. Excessive access to materials which are "over the edge."
3. Lack of opportunity to be with "positive role models."  
Editorial note: *Similar to 5 (as relating to personal role models/government)*
4. Relativism.  
Editorial note: *Similar to 8.*
5. Inconsistencies among personal role models and government; expediencies disguised as virtue.
6. Greed/ambition.  
Editorial note: *Similar to 11 and 5 (as relating to expediencies disguised as virtue).*
7. Complacency/comfortableness.
8. Acceptance of tolerance as a guiding principle.
9. Family failures.  
Editorial note: *When families fail, opportunities lessen for positive role models and education in morality.*
10. Lack of integrity in government despite claims to it; hypocrisy.
11. Crude utilitarianism; evaluation in light of cost/benefit.  
Editorial note: *Similar to 6.*
12. "Bondage to sin;" nature of man/seared conscience.
13. Ignorance of/lack of respect for the Bible.
14. Misguided zealous leaders.

## Voting Results:

Compiled by Kyle MacKenney.



For the purpose of this graph, each vote represents a certain number of points; a vote of "4" (most important) is granted 4 points on the graph, a vote of "3", 3 points, etc. For example, Proposed Barrier to Moral Development #1 ("Lack of proper education on personal accountability.") received two student votes (a "1" and a "2", for a total of 3 points), three faculty votes (a "3", and two "4s", for a total of 11 points), and two NAC votes (two "2s", for a total of 4 points).

### Summaries: Top-ranking Barriers by Group

<b>Students</b>	#6	<i>each 8 points</i>
	#9	
	#11	
<b>Faculty</b>	#12	<i>15 points</i>
	#1	<i>11 points</i>
	#3	<i>8 points</i>
<b>NAC Members</b>	#4	<i>6 points</i>
	#1	
	#3	
	#9	
	#12	

### Reflections on the Data

By Dr. Ken Chase

By grouping the items and responses, we can further summarize the "barriers, pressures, and challenges" to moral growth. The universal condition of human sinfulness serves as the theological grounding for human moral failings. The sinfulness takes particular forms and is expressed in particular ways. We can reduce the responses to three categories:

Lack of proper education on personal accountability. This includes family failures where children simply aren't taught the discipline of responsibility. This also includes failures in the education system at all levels. Colleges are not immune to this indictment.

Crude utilitarian thinking. People use cost/benefit analysis to make decisions. Greed and ambition often serve as the frame of reference for assessing the disadvantages and advantages of any possible outcome.

Lack of opportunity to be with positive role models. This includes the fact that many celebrated role models have had significant failings, thus leaving a legacy of inconsistencies and disappointments.

## **Barriers to Moral Development**

### **Part II: Shaping Moral Growth, NAC Forum**

#### **Background**

Last April, the [National Advisory Council](#) (NAC), chaired by Dr. C. Everett Koop, met on Wheaton's campus with a select group of Wheaton College faculty and students about moral development. The purpose of this meeting was to identify the most significant factors shaping individual moral growth and the ability to make moral decisions. After a time in which each NAC member identified key factors in his or her life, NAC member Mr. Jim Anderson guided the participants through a decision process resulting in a prioritized list of factors. These factors were then ranked by the participants. The results of the meeting and the process are summarized in this report.

#### **Identifying Factors**

What have been the most significant factors shaping your moral growth and your ability to make moral decisions?

*Family Role Models* - parents or other family members

*Other Role Models* - educators, coaches, friends, leaders

*Community* - faith community, neighborhood, or any other community

*Commitment to Personal Accountability*- mutual close friendships in which accountability is a key factor

*Experiences interacting with acknowledge moral leaders*

*Learning from moral failures* of self (this requires honesty with self), of others

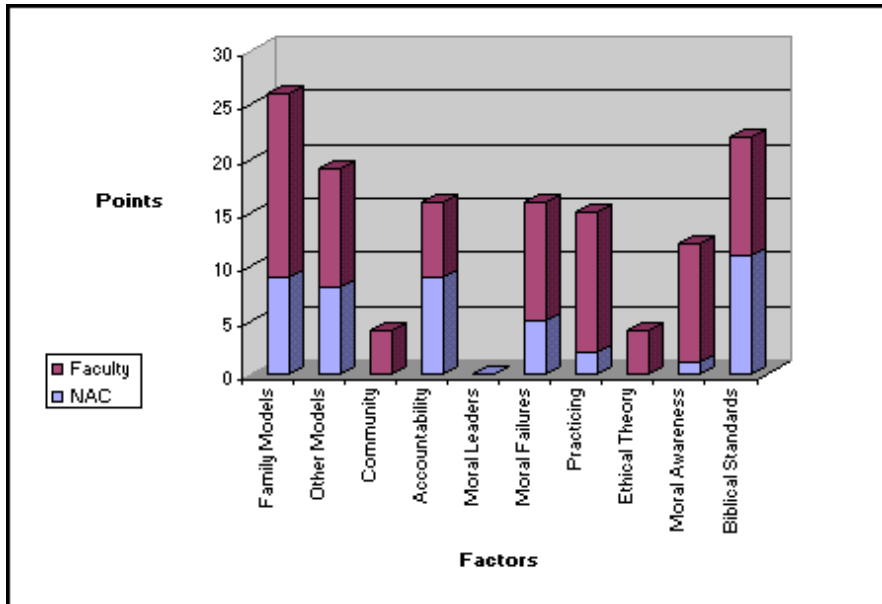
*Practicing moral judgment and action* - facing tough challenges, meeting the expectations of others

*Cultivation of moral insight through direct instruction in ethical theory*

*Heightening of moral awareness* - through film, literature, or experiences such as mission trips in the developing world (or other interaction) with the impoverished

*Commitment to Biblical standards* - this leads to a "moral compass"

## Graph Clarification



For the purpose of this graph, each vote represents a certain number of points; a vote of "5" (most important) is granted 5 points on the graph, a vote of "4", 4 points, etc. Each respondent voted for his or her top five factors and ranked them in order of importance.

### Reflections on the Data

By Kyle MacKenney, Office Associate

Shaping the factors into two distinct categories can help us interpret these results. By describing the first five factors as interpersonal, and the last five factors as intrapersonal, two insights appear from the data.

Direct mentoring is a key to moral formation. This role modeling can occur in the family or from an outside source, such as the school or the church. Community itself is not enough, as evidenced by the low score on our survey. One can get lost in the shuffle of any community, regardless of size. We find the true moral development occurring in the one-on-one relationships spoken about by Proverbs 27.17: "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another" (NIV). Personal accountability, whether to a mentor or to a peer, is also necessary. We cannot underestimate the impact that accountability has on our lives and must continue to place ourselves in relationships that foster this.

A lifestyle of analysis and determined action is necessary for moral growth. This analysis can take many forms, from self-analysis to reflection upon moral failures in the news. Heightening of moral awareness through film, literature, and personal experiences also provides material from which to learn. The analysis must lead to implementation. Although this is often difficult, it is the daily routine of rising to the challenge, as well as meeting the expectations of others, that ingrains the learning into our lives.