



THE ROLE OF ETHICS IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE EDUCATION: PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THE MORAL CHALLENGES OF LAW ENFORCEMENT

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Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36713/epra29062>

DOI No: 10.36713/epra29062

ABSTRACT

Ethics is essential to developing competent, accountable, and professional criminal justice practitioners. This qualitative phenomenological study explored how ethics is understood, integrated, and experienced in the Bachelor of Science in Criminology program of Visayas State University–Tolosa. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with 27 participants (15 students, 10 faculty members, and 2 administrative staff) and supported by document analysis of the CRIM 104 syllabus and program description. Thematic analysis identified four key concerns: conceptual ambiguity between ethics, morality, and values; the influence of personal and cultural beliefs over professional ethical standards; fragmented ethics instruction with limited reinforcement beyond a single course; and greater emphasis on theoretical knowledge than ethical application. Although ethics is embedded in the curriculum through the Professional Regulation Commission Oath, Republic Act No. 6713, and the Law Enforcement Code of Ethics, participants recognized the need for more practice-oriented learning. These findings informed the development of Ethics in Action: A Research-Based Guide for Criminology Practice to strengthen ethics education and professional preparation in criminal justice programs.

KEYWORDS: Ethics Education, Criminology Curriculum, Criminal Justice Education, Professional Conduct, Stakeholder Perspectives, Qualitative Phenomenology

1. INTRODUCTION

Ethics plays a fundamental role in shaping the integrity, professionalism, and accountability of criminal justice practitioners. However, despite its centrality to law enforcement practice, ethics education is frequently marginalized in criminology curricula globally and within the Philippines. Internationally, scholars have underscored the constrained time allocated to ethics training (Cohen, 2021). In the domestic context, Philippine criminology programs are increasingly critiqued for prioritizing licensure examination performance over robust ethical instruction (Orbigo & Gonzales, 2024). Given the complex law enforcement challenges facing the country, fortifying the moral foundations of future practitioners is indispensable (Caitor et al., 2021).

This study is anchored in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, which advocates for accountable and inclusive institutions grounded in integrity and the rule of law. Beyond graduating technically proficient individuals, criminology education bears an institutional responsibility to cultivate ethical judgment and public accountability. Strengthening ethics education is therefore not merely a curricular enhancement, but a systemic imperative to build public trust and uphold a justice system rooted in responsible public service.

In the Philippines, the ethical obligations of criminal justice professionals are codified through legal and institutional mandates, including the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) Oath, the Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards for Public Officials and Employees (Republic Act No. 6713), and

the Law Enforcement Code of Ethics. Nevertheless, the degree to which these codes are integrated into academic curricula and internalized by key stakeholders remains understudied.

While extant literature addresses moral foundations (Caitor et al., 2021), gender awareness (Aguillon & Donato, 2021), and cultural dynamics in criminology (Zhang & Liu, 2023), empirical research rarely examines the intersection of formal ethical instruction, professional codes, and the lived experiences of students, faculty, and administrators. Furthermore, because much of the current scholarship originates from Western contexts, there is a critical need for empirical work grounded in the local sociocultural and institutional realities of the Philippines.

To bridge these gaps, this study examines the Bachelor of Science in Criminology program at Visayas State University–Tolosa. Specifically, it assesses how professional ethical codes are embedded in the curriculum and explores stakeholder perspectives on the practical utility of ethics courses for career readiness. Ultimately, the findings serve as the empirical foundation for a context-specific ethics guidebook designed for criminology practice.

2. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design. Qualitative inquiry focuses on interpreting the meanings individuals assign to their experiences and social realities within their natural settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Rather than relying on quantitative metrics, this



paradigm seeks to explore participants' nuanced perceptions, values, and contextual lived experiences.

A phenomenological approach was selected as the most appropriate design because the study investigated how students, faculty members, and administrative staff at Visayas State University perceive ethics, morality, professionalism, and human relations within criminal justice education. Because ethical awareness and moral preparedness are socially constructed and deeply shaped by personal experiences, they are best understood through participants lived realities rather than standardized objective measurements (Barnsley, 2020). Ultimately, this design enabled the researcher to capture how stakeholders interpret ethical principles, navigate moral dilemmas, and evaluate their preparation for the ethical demands of law enforcement practice.

Research Methods

To operationalize the phenomenological design, this study combined semi-structured interviews with document analysis. Semi-structured interviews provided participants with the flexibility to articulate their experiences in their own words while enabling the researcher to probe emerging themes in depth (Naz et al., 2022). Document analysis complemented the interview data by providing contextual verification through relevant institutional records and curricular frameworks.

Data collection involved semi-structured interviews with 27 purposively selected participants (15 students, 10 faculty members, and 2 administrative staff). The interview protocol was aligned directly with the study's Statement of the Problem to address each specific research objective. Upon securing informed consent, all interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and prepared for analysis.

To achieve data triangulation, document analysis was conducted on the CRIM 104 syllabus and the BS Criminology program description. This phase evaluated the extent to which key mandates—namely the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) Oath, Republic Act No. 6713, and the Law

Enforcement Code of Ethics—are integrated into the curriculum. Both primary interview transcripts and secondary document data were processed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework, allowing key patterns and shared meanings to emerge from the participants lived experiences and institutional contexts.

Data Collection Instrument

To generate qualitative insights, this study utilized a semi-structured interview guide, which combined predetermined research-aligned questions with flexible probing to gather rich, complex data from participants (Naz et al., 2022). Tailored specifically for students, faculty, and staff, the instrument was structured into distinct parts to systematically address the study's main objectives: capturing demographic profiles, identifying barriers to applying ethics, examining the implementation of professional ethical codes (e.g., PRC Oath, RA 6713), evaluating academic integrity practices, exploring perceptions of professional conduct, and gathering recommendations for an encyclopedic manual on human relations and ethics. To ensure the instrument's trustworthiness, content validity, and clarity, the researcher subjected the guide to expert review by three criminology education specialists and subsequently pilot-tested it with five students, five faculty members, and one staff member outside the actual study sample, incorporating their feedback to refine the final questions (Inan, 2024).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Summary of Formulated Themes

The following table presents an overview of the themes that emerged from the data analysis. Each Statement of the Problem (SOP) is restated with its key focus to aid reader orientation, followed by the corresponding themes discussed in detail in subsequent sections.

Table 1: Summary of Formulated Themes per SOP

SOP	Formulated Themes
SOP 1 <i>Key challenges in understanding & applying ethics, morality, values, social norms</i>	▪ Conceptual Ambiguity ▪ Personal and Cultural Conditioning ▪ Professional Development and Institutional Initiatives ▪ Application in Practicum, Immersion, and Simulation Activities ▪ Gaps and Limitations in Ethical Integration
SOP 2 <i>Integration of PRC Oath, RA 6713, and Law Enforcement Code of Ethics into curriculum & professional development</i>	▪ Formal and Explicit Instruction of Ethical Standards ▪ Predominantly Theoretical Ethics Orientation
SOP 3 <i>Current practices & challenges in promoting academic ethics, integrity, decorum, etiquette (gov't & private sector dealings)</i>	▪ Existing Practices in Promoting Academic Ethics and Integrity ▪ Practices Related to Decorum and Etiquette in Government and Private Sector Transactions ▪ Challenges in Promoting Academic Ethics and Integrity ▪ Challenges in Maintaining Proper Decorum and Etiquette
SOP 4 <i>Perspectives & experiences on relevance of human relations, professional conduct, etiquette for career preparation</i>	▪ Relevance of Human Relations ▪ Professional Conduct, and ▪ Etiquette in Career Preparation
SOP 5 <i>Synthesis of findings into a comprehensive book on ethics, professionalism, human relations tailored for VSU</i>	▪ Part I: Laying the Ethical Foundation ▪ Part II: The Professional's Toolkit: From Code to Conduct ▪ Part III: Performing with Integrity: Skills for the Field ▪ Part IV: Upholding Integrity: Systems & Self



For SOP 1, which focused on the key challenges in understanding and applying ethics-related concepts, five overarching themes were identified: (1) Conceptual Ambiguity, (2) Personal and Cultural Conditioning, (3) Practical Application Challenges, (4) Institutional Gaps, and (5) Digital and Social Media Behavior.

With respect to SOP 2, which examined the integration of formal ethical codes (PRC Oath, RA 6713, Law Enforcement Code of Ethics) into the curriculum, two themes emerged: (1) *Formal and Explicit Instruction of Ethical Standards*, which confirms that a dedicated ethics course (CRIM 104) exists, that ethical competencies are aligned with program outcomes, and that legal texts are explicitly covered; and (2) *Predominantly Theoretical Ethics Orientation*, which indicates that integration remains centralized within a single course, where assessments heavily favor memorization and recitation over practical, scenario-based evaluations.

In relation to SOP 3, which investigated current practices and challenges in promoting academic ethics, integrity, decorum, and etiquette, four themes were formulated: (1) Existing Practices in Promoting Academic Ethics and Integrity, (2) Practices Related to Decorum and Etiquette in Government and Private Sector Transactions, (3) Challenges in Promoting Academic Ethics and Integrity, and (4) Challenges in Maintaining Proper Decorum and Etiquette.

For SOP 4, which explored stakeholder perspectives on the relevance of human relations, professional conduct, and etiquette for career preparation, a single overarching theme emerged with multiple supporting facets. Participants unanimously affirmed that human relations are crucial for engaging with diverse populations and navigating interpersonal dynamics in law enforcement. Professional conduct was seen as foundational for building credibility, respect, and trust in public service. Etiquette was understood as a structural framework that orients students toward institutional hierarchies and expectations. However, key challenges included difficulties in transferring skills from informal campus settings to formal professional environments, anxiety when interacting with high-ranking officials, and the burden of balancing etiquette instruction within a demanding academic load.

Regarding SOP 5, which aimed to synthesize the findings into an applied institutional resource, the themes correspond directly to the four-part structure of the proposed handbook, *Ethics in Action: A Research-Based Guide for Criminology Practice*. Part I: *Laying the Ethical Foundation* addresses conceptual ambiguity and personal-cultural conditioning. Part II: *The Professional's Toolkit: From Code to Conduct* responds to the need for practical operationalization, reframing static codes as active decision-making tools. Part III: *Performing with Integrity: Skills for the Field* tackles decorum, etiquette, and professional communication challenges identified under SOPs 3 and 4. Finally, Part IV: *Upholding Integrity: Systems & Self* addresses institutional gaps, inconsistent policy enforcement, and complex ethical dilemmas, providing a durable framework for sustaining an ethical culture.

3.1 Key Challenges in Understanding and Applying Ethical Concepts

What are the key challenges encountered by students, faculty, and staff of Visayas State University in understanding and applying concepts related to ethics, morality, standard behavior, values, and social norms?

Based on qualitative interviews with students, faculty, and staff at VSU, five overarching themes emerged regarding the challenges experienced in understanding and applying ethics-related concepts within the university: (1) Conceptual Ambiguity, (2) Personal and Cultural Conditioning, (3) Practical Application Challenges, (4) Institutional Gaps, and (5) Digital and Social Media Behavior.

3.1.1 Theme 1: Conceptual Ambiguity

The first major challenge that emerged from the data is Conceptual Ambiguity, characterized herein as the persistent confusion among criminology students regarding the boundaries separating ethics, morality, values, and social norms. As one student (S10) confessed, "*I know ethics is important in law enforcement, pero minsan nalilito ako kung ano ang moral issue at ano ang ethical issue.*" [I know ethics is important in law enforcement, but sometimes I get confused about what a moral issue is versus an ethical issue.] Faculty perspectives revealed a deeper layer of concern, with one instructor (F1) emphasizing, "*They treat ethics like a simple 'right vs. wrong,' but policing requires deeper reasoning.*" This highlights how students often miss the complex moral reasoning required in law enforcement, where competing values and situational pressures frequently collide. This finding is consistent with prior scholarship documenting that students in criminal justice disciplines commonly experience difficulty differentiating foundational ethical categories, impairing their ability to analyze complex dilemmas and distinguish personal moral beliefs from professional ethical codes (Lehmann, 2022; Souryal & Whitehead, 2019). To fully unpack this theme, two sub-themes are discussed below: (1) Unclear Differentiation of Ethical Concepts, and (2) Limited Prior Exposure to Ethical Frameworks.

3.1.1.2 Sub-theme 2: Limited Prior Exposure to Ethical Frameworks

Criminology students, including those at VSU–Tolosa and globally, frequently enter professional coursework with limited prior grounding in formal ethical frameworks. Evaluated through Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development, this foundational gap leaves students operating predominantly at the conventional level, relying on external rules and social approval rather than principled, post-conventional ethical judgment. From a deontological perspective, blending personal beliefs with duty-based professional codes poses a significant risk, as students may incorrectly prioritize personal or cultural loyalties (such as *utang na loob*) over professional impartiality. This deficit is further reinforced by curricular and structural factors. In courses like CRIM 104, distinct concepts are bundled into single outcomes or modules without dedicated pedagogical strategies to contrast them. Furthermore, an overemphasis on memorizing codes, oaths, and laws encourages a simplistic, binary "right versus wrong" mindset rather than cultivating deep ethical reasoning. Faculty note that novice learners frequently rely on intuitive or emotional



responses in simulations rather than structured analytical frameworks. Consequently, addressing this issue requires structural curriculum updates to separate these core topics into distinct modules, targeted faculty development to emphasize ethical reasoning and character formation (incorporating Virtue Ethics), and practical, dilemma-based assessments that teach students how to navigate competing professional and personal obligations.

3.1.2 Theme 2: Personal and Cultural Conditioning

Personal and cultural conditioning—shaped by family upbringing, inherited values, and culturally embedded norms—serves as a primary influence on students' ethical decision-making, often taking precedence over formal professional standards. As evidenced by student and faculty accounts, learners frequently rely on early-socialized values such as *utang na loob* [debt of gratitude] and respect for elders before internalizing institutional rules. This reveals that the core difficulty is not merely an absence of professional knowledge, but a complex negotiation between deeply rooted moral dispositions and expected professional duties. Consequently, criminology education must address this gap between personal moral continuity and institutional transition, helping students evaluate when inherited values are appropriate and when professional roles demand impartial conduct.

3.1.2.1 Influence of Upbringing on Ethical Judgment

This sub-theme highlights how students frequently rely on familial upbringing, cultural norms, and religious values—such as *utang na loob* and *pakikisama* [getting along]—to navigate ethical dilemmas, often prioritizing personal loyalty over professional standards. Viewed through Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development, this reliance reflects conventional-level moral reasoning, where decisions are driven by social approval and interpersonal relationships rather than post-conventional autonomy and abstract ethical principles. From a deontological perspective, this reliance exposes a pedagogical gap where the curriculum has yet to fully equip students to prioritize universal, duty-based rules over personal debts of gratitude. Faculty and administrative staff reinforce these observations, noting that pre-existing cultural beliefs repeatedly conflict with rule-based discipline and formal codes of conduct. To address this tension without completely dismissing local cultural identities, criminology programs must integrate reflective case studies and ethics instruction that explicitly guide students to balance cultural values with professional impartiality and human rights obligations.

3.1.2.2 Resistance to Evolving Norms in Law Enforcement Behavior

This sub-theme details the challenges participants face when adapting to modern ethical expectations in policing, particularly regarding human rights, gender sensitivity, and inclusive practices. Faculty and staff accounts demonstrate that long-standing language and behavior rooted in traditional police culture are difficult to unlearn, reflecting Kohlberg's conventional level of moral reasoning where individuals remain tethered to established group norms rather than post-conventional, universal human rights principles. This resistance is further reinforced by authoritarian police subcultures and

hypermasculine media portrayals, leading learners to view human rights guidelines—despite their inclusion in the CRIM 104 syllabus—as operational hindrances rather than categorical duties under a deontological framework. To bridge this gap between abstract policy and practical culture, criminology instruction must move beyond theoretical coverage of human rights standards toward immersive, scenario-based applications that facilitate genuine cultural reform.

3.1.3 Theme 3: Professional Development and Institutional Initiatives

The third major theme, Professional Development and Institutional Initiatives, captures university efforts to strengthen ethical learning through orientations, seminars, workshops, and agency partnerships. Staff member ST1 noted, *"Every start of the year merong orientation about conduct and values, including RA 6713, but students forget these because walang follow-through."* [Every start of the year there is an orientation about conduct and values, including RA 6713, but students forget these because there is no follow-through.] Student S6 added, *"We attended a seminar on ethical leadership for future law enforcers, pero bihira lang ang ganitong activity."* [We attended a seminar on ethical leadership for future law enforcers, but activities like this are rare.] These accounts suggest that institutional efforts are present but episodic, echoing findings by Cohen (2021) and Orbigo and Gonzales (2024). Two sub-themes are evaluated: (1) Seminars, Workshops, and Orientation Activities, and (2) Collaboration with Law Enforcement Agencies.

3.1.3.1 Seminars, Workshops, and Orientation Activities

Seminars and orientation activities at VSU-Tolosa serve as key mechanisms for introducing ethical frameworks like the PRC Oath, RA 6713, and the Law Enforcement Code of Ethics. However, student and staff feedback indicates that these sessions suffer from limited frequency and poor retention.

Under Kohlberg's theory (Kohlberg, 1981, as cited in McLeod, 2025), sporadic training is insufficient for moral growth, which requires sustained engagement with complex dilemmas. While orientation sessions establish an initial baseline, meaningful ethical formation requires repetition and contextualization (Villaflor, 2020). Faculty noted that while orientation activities help introduce foundational concepts, they should complement, rather than substitute for, structured classroom-based instruction.

Triangulating student, faculty, and syllabus data reveals an ethics training model that is intention-driven but inconsistently sustained. This mirrors global and local patterns where ethics training in criminal justice programs is often compressed into isolated modules (Cohen, 2021; Sumad-on, 2022). To increase impact, institutional initiatives must be integrated into a multi-level training framework that links campus orientations directly with course curricula.

3.1.3.2 Collaboration with Law Enforcement Agencies

VSU-Tolosa actively collaborates with law enforcement entities, maintaining formal partnerships (MOAs) with agencies including the PNP, BFP, BJMP, LTO, and PDEA. These partnerships facilitate guest lectures, seminars, and field experiences that complement classroom instruction.



Students viewed these collaborations as authentic opportunities to see ethics in action. Student S7 noted, *"When PNP resource speakers come in, that's where we hear the Law Enforcement Code of Ethics used in actual fieldwork."* Faculty member F8 added, *"Partnerships with police units help us expose students to ethical decision-making in real practice."*

These practitioner-led engagements align with Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, where learning occurs through cycles of experience, reflection, conceptualization, and application (Morris, 2020). Observing active officers provides a bridge between abstract codes and field practice, facilitating Kohlbergian progression toward post-conventional reasoning. Faculty view these partnerships as pedagogical extensions of syllabus outcomes (Bauzon et al., 2023). However, scholars caution that field exposures require structured faculty mediation and debriefing to prevent the reinforcement of problematic field norms (Castillo & Tumitit, 2024; Mazo, 2025).

3.1.4 Theme 4: Application in Practicum, Immersion, and Simulation Activities

The fourth major theme, Application in Practicum, Immersion, and Simulation Activities, captures the transition of ethical learning from theoretical study to applied practice. In these settings, ethical codes serve as active decision-making standards during field practice and simulations. Student S5 recalled, *"Sa OJT ko, talagang pina-memorize sa amin ang Code of Ethics and we had to explain how it applies pag may conflict situations."* [During my OJT, they really made us memorize the Code of Ethics and we had to explain how it applies when there are conflict situations.] Faculty member F10 explained, *"In simulation exercises, we always ask—ethical ba itong decision? Does this violate the Code of Conduct?"*

Practicum and simulation environments operate as ethical laboratories where students test judgment, exercise restraint, and translate abstract duties into professional behavior. This aligns with Virtue Ethics (Hursthouse & Pettigrove, 2022), which asserts that moral virtues are forged through repeated practice, and supports Morris's (2020) work on experiential moral learning. Two sub-themes further examine this domain: (1) Use of Ethical Codes During Field Practice, and (2) Simulations and Mock Scenarios.

3.1.4.1 Use of Ethical Codes During Field Practice

During their 540-hour Criminology Internship (Practicum), students transition from theoretical learning to lived practice, using ethical codes as active behavioral guides in real-world scenarios like arrests, documentation, and evidence processing. Viewed through Virtue Ethics, this field experience acts as a process of habituation, allowing students to cultivate virtues like integrity, impartiality, and courage through repetition. While global literature highlights that hands-on immersion develops deeper ethical sensitivity than classroom teaching alone, scholars note the risk of students adopting unethical behaviors if exposed to bad modeling by supervisors. Although VSU-Tolosa students reported no such misconduct—attributing strong support to agency supervisors enforcing the PRC Oath—the researcher acknowledges that student positionality and fear of authority may lead to underreporting. Ultimately, while experiential fieldwork

significantly enhances moral reasoning and reduces unethical tendencies, the long-term success of the internship depends on strong supervision, continuous monitoring of field sites, and structured reflection sessions to help students critically process real-world ethical dilemmas.

3.1.4.2 Simulations and Mock Scenarios

Beyond field practice, classroom-based simulations, mock scenarios, and role-playing activities serve as essential "ethical laboratories" where Criminology students actively apply professional standards to realistic law enforcement situations. Grounded in Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development, these exercises foster moral growth by forcing students to navigate ambiguous dilemmas, reason aloud, and transition from conventional rule-following to post-conventional, principled decision-making. Syllabus analysis for CRIM 104 demonstrates that simulations operationalize Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) design, providing a performative space to observe and evaluate core competencies that lectures alone cannot validate. From a deontological perspective, repeated questioning during scenarios instills a habit of evaluating choices against binding duties; simultaneously, Virtue Ethics frames this process as moral habituation, where virtues like restraint, courage, and fairness are developed through repeated, safe practice and feedback. At VSU-Tolosa, simulations also equalize learning for students with limited prior exposure to law enforcement by grounding scenarios in local context. Supported by literature on scenario-based training, these classroom exercises effectively bridge theoretical concepts with unpredictable fieldwork, ensuring ethical competence is cultivated through deliberate practice rather than passive code memorization.

3.1.5 Theme 5: Gaps and Limitations in Ethical Integration

The fifth major theme that emerged from the data was Gaps and Limitations in Ethical Integration, referring to weaknesses in sustaining ethics education across the criminology program. Participants described ethics as something addressed in particular subjects and then *"nawawala na"* [eventually fades away]. One student (S3) observed, *"We only really talk about RA 6713 and the Law Enforcement Code during certain subjects. After that, nawawala na."* A faculty member (F4) similarly noted, *"There is integration, but it's not sustained. Parang every year bago ulit."* [It's like starting over again every year.] These accounts pointed to an uneven pattern in which ethical principles were introduced but not consistently reinforced across courses and academic levels.

This pattern reflected concerns raised by Stout (2020), Prenzler (2020), and Pollock (2019), who argued that ethics became less meaningful when confined to isolated courses rather than integrated across the curriculum. At VSU-Tolosa, the problem therefore appeared less to be the absence of ethics instruction than its lack of continuity. Three sub-themes further examined this concern: (1) Limited Reinforcement and Follow-Through, (2) Need for Clearer Operationalization in the Curriculum, and (3) Overemphasis on Theoretical Knowledge.

3.1.5.1 Limited Reinforcement and Follow-Through

The interview transcripts reveal that while ethical standards are introduced across multiple subjects at VSU—



Tolosa, they are not consistently reinforced throughout the criminology program, leading to a fragmented "*nawawala na*" [fading away] educational experience. Faculty and student remarks confirm that ethical instruction occurs in isolated segments rather than as a continuous thread. Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development identifies this pattern as developmentally inadequate, as moral growth requires sustained, scaffolded exposure to complex dilemmas to transition learners from basic rule-following to post-conventional, principled judgment. This episodic approach mirrors broader academic critiques by Cohen (2021) and local scholars Orbigo and Gonzales (2024), who argue that criminology programs globally suffer from limited ethics training and a tendency in the Philippines to prioritize board exam performance over deep moral education. Literature highlights the severe repercussions of this inconsistency; Thurgood (2020) and Bautista (2018) observe that non-continuous instruction leads to improved code memorization but leaves actual field behavior unchanged, as students memorize RA 6713 and the PNP Code of Conduct but struggle to apply them. To address this deeper systemic weakness where ethical knowledge remains easier to recall than to practice, the narrative advocates for a "spiral ethics integration" model—supported by Cummings (2021) and the PNP Training Service—which weaves ethical reasoning into every procedural, progressive course and field experience to ensure long-term internalization and active professional judgment.

3.1.5.2 Need for Clearer Operationalization in the Curriculum

A major structural challenge in VSU–Tolosa's BS Criminology program is the lack of standardized operational guidelines for teaching, integrating, and assessing ethics across courses. While institutional frameworks like RA 6713, the PRC Oath, and CHED CMO No. 5 (2018) formally mandate ethical standards, faculty members note that instruction relies heavily on individual instructor discretion rather than a unified framework. This issue is compounded by the isolation of ethics within a single subject—CRIM 104 (Professional Conduct and Ethical Standards)—without clear cross-course scaffolding across upper-level procedural or technical subjects. Viewed through Virtue Ethics (Hursthouse & Pettigrove, 2022), compartmentalizing ethics prevents the continuous habituation required to build a cohesive professional character. Global literature (Stout, 2020; Prenzler, 2020; Pollock, 2019) supports these findings, demonstrating that implicit exposure and fragmented curricula lead students to treat ethical reasoning as an add-on rather than a core professional competency. Ultimately, the study underscores that formal policy acknowledgment is insufficient; bridging this gap requires an operationalized, program-wide framework that horizontally and vertically infuses ethics across all subjects, assessments, and fieldwork.

3.1.5.3 Overemphasis on Theoretical Knowledge

The thematic analysis reveals a persistent overemphasis on theoretical knowledge over applied ethical reasoning within the VSU–Tolosa Criminology program, reducing professional standards to abstract content to be memorized rather than actively practiced. While students

perceive ethics instruction as heavily academic due to a lack of community role models, faculty members cite time constraints and uneven comfort with facilitating dilemma-driven ethics, and support staff note that applied learning is isolated to external engagements. This focus on "code memorization without moral reasoning" aligns with global critiques by Roberson and McLaughlin (2020) and Schafer (2018), and as Stout (2020) notes, even existing experiential simulations lose transformative power when they lack systematic, program-wide scaffolding. The researcher attributes this gap to a national institutional tendency to prioritize board-exam-oriented recall over depth, leaving faculty within pedagogical comfort zones focused on technical and legal subjects rather than ethics. Consolidating the program's five core themes—Conceptual Ambiguity, Personal and Cultural Conditioning, Professional Development, Application in Practicum, and Gaps in Integration—the findings show that the recurring "*nawawala na*" [fading away] phenomenon stems from systemic curricular weaknesses where familial or cultural loyalties clash with unreinforced professional duties. Ultimately, the data underscores an urgent need to transition from text-based recall to a continuous, scaffolded curriculum that treats ethical reasoning as a lived commitment, which is vital for public accountability and the legitimacy of the justice system.

3.2 Programmatic Integration of Formal Ethical Codes

How are the principles outlined in the Professional Regulation Commission Oath, the Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards for Government Officials and Employees, and the Law Enforcement Code of Ethics integrated into the academic curriculum and professional development at Visayas State University?

Document analysis served as the primary method for answering this research question. The researcher reviewed the CRIM 104 course syllabus and the BS Criminology program description.

Data Analysis

Data from the transcriptions and curricular documents were evaluated using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework to analyze semi-structured interview data from 27 participants within the VSU–Tolosa Criminology program, including 15 students, 10 faculty, and 2 staff members who were coded to protect confidentiality. The inductive process began with deep familiarization and verbatim transcription, leading to the manual extraction of 86 initial codes that reflected real-world participant friction. These codes were iteratively clustered into candidate themes based on shared meaning, which were then rigorously reviewed and refined for internal coherence and external distinctness, merging overlapping categories where necessary. After formally defining and naming the themes in clear, accessible language, the final report synthesized the data by weaving direct participant quotes with documentary evidence and theoretical frameworks. This holistic presentation ultimately preserved the unique institutional positionality of the students, faculty, and staff to uncover the deep-seated cultural and structural challenges embedded within their experiences.



3.2.1 Theme 1: Formal and Explicit Instruction of Ethical Standards

The first major theme emerging from the document analysis was Formal and Explicit Instruction of Ethical Standards, referring to the deliberate inclusion of ethical principles, legal codes, and professional oaths in the curriculum. The documents showed that CRIM 104, Professional Conduct and Ethical Standards, served as a dedicated ethics course, with Modules 1–4 covering the PRC Oath, RA 6713, and the Law Enforcement Code of Ethics. The program documents likewise expressed an institutional commitment to producing graduates “imbued with good moral values” and capable of professional conduct across law enforcement settings.

This explicit curricular presence established ethics as a formal professional requirement, consistent with Deontological Ethics (Samway et al., 2025). Yet, as Stout (2020) and Roberson and McLaughlin (2020) noted, formal inclusion alone did not ensure ethical development. Ethical principles needed to be reinforced through sustained, program-wide learning experiences rather than confined to stated outcomes and a single course. Three sub-themes were examined: (1) Dedicated Ethics Course, (2) Alignment of Program Outcomes, and (3) Structured Coverage of Ethical Legal Texts.

3.2.1.1 Dedicated Ethics Course

Document analysis reveals that while the VSU–Tolosa Criminology program exhibits a clear, formal commitment to ethical standards on paper, this institutional intent remains heavily centralized within a single course rather than being integrated program-wide. On a formal level, CRIM 104: Professional Conduct and Ethical Standards establishes a strong deontological foundation by explicitly mapping its course outcomes (CO1–CO4) to binding professional duties, including the PRC Oath, RA 6713, and the Law Enforcement Code of Ethics. However, this heavy concentration within a single semester allows the formal curriculum to function as an aspirational baseline rather than a lived, formative experience. Grounded in Kohlberg’s Theory of Moral Development, this isolated approach is structurally insufficient for sustained moral growth, as transitioning students from conventional rule-following to post-conventional principled reasoning requires progressive, scaffolded exposure to complex dilemmas across their entire educational journey. The current arrangement mirrors warnings from scholars like Stout (2020) and Roberson and McLaughlin (2020), who caution that instructional optimism fails to yield durable habit formation when ethics depends on instructor discretion and a standalone course rather than spiral, program-wide learning. To prevent students from shelving and forgetting these critical frameworks once the semester ends, CRIM 104 must serve as an initial foundation, while technical subjects like Crime Investigation, Law Enforcement Administration, and Criminalistics actively weave in discipline-specific ethical dimensions to build a continuous, resilient thread of professional moral development.

3.2.1.2 Alignment of Program Outcomes

The results also show a commendable but fragile structural coherence within the VSU–Tolosa Criminology curriculum, as the formal alignment between program

outcomes (POs) and CRIM 104 course outcomes (COs) remains largely declarative rather than operational. From a deontological ethics perspective, explicitly embedding the PRC Oath, RA 6713, and human rights standards into CO1–CO4 signals that ethical duties are binding, central institutional priorities rather than mere regulatory afterthoughts. However, this alignment is fragile because it lacks execution mechanisms—such as standardized moral reasoning rubrics, cross-course scaffolds, or explicit assessments of moral deliberation during practicum. Grounded in Kohlberg’s Theory of Moral Development, this missing operational layer traps students at a conventional level of moral compliance; they are taught which rules to follow but are denied the staged, progressive exposure to ambiguity required to develop post-conventional, principled professional judgment. This systemic gap mirrors warnings from criminology scholars like Prenzler (2020) and Schafer (2018), who caution that alignment driven by regulatory compliance often achieves symbolic accreditation success while failing to equip learners with the interpretive skills needed for unpredictable field scenarios. Ultimately, while the curriculum articulates clear ethical promises, the lack of shared assessment tools and program-level pedagogical guidance creates an environment where students are highly prepared to recite their professional duties but unequipped to live them out when those duties become difficult to reconcile.

3.2.1.3 Structured Coverage of Ethical Legal Texts

A final review of the CRIM 104 syllabus confirms that while it ensures structured coverage of legal and professional texts, its heavy reliance on a cognitive, memory-based approach restricts students to rote compliance rather than situated ethical judgment. The course utilizes quizzes, oral recitations, and long examinations to evaluate mastery over the Law Enforcement Code of Ethics, the Police Officers’ Creed, the PRC Oath, and RA 6713. While this promotes legal literacy necessary for board exam success, Pollock (2019) and Roberson and McLaughlin (2020) warn that “code memorization without moral reasoning” leaves students underprepared for the real-world ambiguity, power disparities, and conflicting obligations routine in policing. Diagnosed under Kohlberg’s Theory of Moral Development, this focus on reciting rules to authority figures traps the curriculum at a conventional level, failing to foster the post-conventional judgment needed to navigate complex moral dilemmas. Furthermore, while the syllabus incorporates interactive elements—such as group reporting, video presentations, human rights seminars, and a 540-hour practicum—these applied opportunities operate as episodic exposures rather than a systematic, program-wide ethical spiral. Viewed through Virtue Ethics, these activities offer excellent potential sites for the habituation of integrity, courage, and fairness, yet without structured reflection, shared rubrics, and deliberate coaching, they remain vulnerable to instructor discretion and risk reinforcing baseline compliance. Ultimately, because explicit ethics content remains strictly siloed within CRIM 104 and is not horizontally or vertically integrated into core technical courses like Crime Investigation, Law Enforcement Administration, or Criminalistics, ethical reasoning remains knowable as a text but unperformable as a durable professional identity.



3.2.2 Theme 2: Predominantly Theoretical Ethics Orientation

The second major theme emerging from the document analysis was Predominantly Theoretical Ethics Orientation, marked by an emphasis on memorization, recitation, and quizzes rather than applied ethical reasoning. The CRIM 104 syllabus repeatedly required students to recite the Law Enforcement Code of Ethics, the Police Officers' Creed and pledge, and complete short quizzes. These tasks demonstrated knowledge of ethical standards but provided limited evidence of students' ability to reason through difficult situations.

Participant accounts reinforced this pattern. One student (S1) observed, *"We memorize the Code of Ethics, but we rarely discuss how to handle real dilemmas."* A faculty member (F2) similarly noted, *"They can recite the PRC Oath but translating it into professional conduct is the harder part."* The gap was therefore between knowing the code and knowing what to do with it. This echoed Pollock (2019) and Roberson and McLaughlin (2020), who cautioned that ethics education can produce declarative knowledge without developing the practical judgment required in professional settings. Two sub-themes were examined: (1) Memorization of Codes and Standards and (2) Limited Practice-Oriented Assessment.

3.2.2.1 Memorization of Codes and Standards

An analysis of the CRIM 104 assessment design reveals that it primarily privileges factual recall and verbal performance over applied ethical reasoning, reducing professional standards to a form of administratively convenient legal literacy. The syllabus allocates a heavy percentage of grading to quizzes, oral recitations, and long examinations focused on reproducing the verbatim text of the Law Enforcement Code of Ethics, the Police Officers' Creed, and statutory pledges. Driven by institutional and board exam pressures, this framework secures verifiable metrics but narrows the space needed to develop moral imagination and judgment under uncertainty. Grounded in Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development, this approach traps students at a conventional level of moral reasoning by measuring competence through rule recitation to authority figures, failing to push them toward post-conventional judgment where they must weigh conflicting principles in ambiguous field contexts. Furthermore, while this cognitive method builds declarative ethical knowledge, it leaves students short of the procedural and dispositional competencies highlighted by virtue ethics; virtues like integrity and practical wisdom are formed through practicing difficult choices, meaning an assessment system focused strictly on recall risks producing rule-reciting technicians rather than virtuous practitioners. This dynamic mirrors critiques by Pollock, Roberson, and McLaughlin regarding "codified competence without moral reasoning," as well as local scholarship from Orbigo and Gonzales (2024) noting that Philippine criminology programs routinely prioritize licensure performance over deep moral education. Ultimately, because knowing a code is not equivalent to knowing how to act, the curriculum must transition from measuring what students can remember to evaluating how they deliberate, justify, and defend decisions when professional duties, organizational pressures, and community norms collide.

3.2.2.2 Limited Practice-Oriented Assessment

This passage highlights a critical gap in the criminology curriculum, where ethical instruction relies heavily on recall-based assessments—such as quizzes and recitations—rather than practice-oriented learning like case analyses, dilemma reflections, or graded simulations. Grounded in Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development, this dependence on rote learning risks trapping students at the conventional level of rule reproduction rather than fostering autonomous, post-conventional ethical judgment. These assessment limitations stem from institutional constraints, including tight timeframes for heavy legal content and a lack of faculty training in designing applied ethics evaluations. While faculty occasionally conduct classroom simulations, these remain informal and unassessed, shifting the burden of practical ethics training onto field internships. However, without standardized evaluative criteria or structured debriefing protocols during placements, students receive an uneven apprenticeship. Aligning with competency-based ethics literature, the findings conclude that while the curriculum successfully establishes declarative knowledge of ethical codes, it remains weak in operationalization, necessitating a shift toward a spiral, practice-embedded model that systematically assesses ethical reasoning across coursework and fieldwork.

3.3 Practices and Challenges in Promoting Academic Ethics, Integrity, Decorum, and Etiquette

What are the current practices and challenges in promoting academic ethics, integrity, proper decorum, and etiquette in both government and private sector dealings among the university's students and personnel?

Through a systematic thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with 27 students, faculty, and staff following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, the researcher identified four distinct thematic clusters concerning everyday ethical and professional practices at VSU-Tolosa: academic ethics and integrity practices, decorum and etiquette practices, challenges in maintaining academic honesty, and challenges in adapting to professional conduct norms. By progressing through the rigorous stages of familiarization, manual coding (generating 73 unique codes), and thematic grouping, the analysis revealed a notable contrast between the university's stated ethical commitments and its uneven everyday implementation. The resulting themes capture both positive institutional strategies—such as formal plagiarism reminders, incident reporting protocols, OJT briefings, and targeted socialization efforts—and persistent, systemic vulnerabilities, including time-pressured student cheating, inconsistent faculty monitoring, student shyness, and a tendency toward casual over-familiarity in formal settings. Ultimately, these four refined and internally coherent themes establish a narrative foundation that allows the researcher to interpret the lived, everyday realities of the campus through the theoretical lenses of deontological ethics, virtue ethics, Kohlberg's moral development, and ethical relativism.

3.3.1 Theme 1: Practices in Promoting Academic Ethics and Integrity

The first major theme emerging from the data was Existing Practices in Promoting Academic Ethics and Integrity,



referring to the routine ways the VSU–Tolosa Criminology program reinforced honest academic conduct. Faculty and staff regularly reminded students about plagiarism, proper citation, cheating, and examination protocols. As one faculty member (F3) noted, *"Every start of the semester, we remind students about plagiarism and proper referencing."* Students likewise understood these reminders as part of their professional formation. One student (S10) explained, *"Lagi kaming pinapaalalahanan not to cheat kasi future law enforcers kami."* [We are always reminded not to cheat because we are future law enforcers.]

These practices suggested that academic integrity was framed as more than compliance with school rules. It was presented as an early expression of the honesty and accountability expected in law enforcement. This emphasis was consistent with deontological ethics, where ethical conduct is grounded in duty and obligation (Samway et al., 2025). It also reflected findings that clear and consistently reinforced standards contribute to stronger cultures of integrity (Girra & Jaeck, 2019; Rocha, 2024). Two sub-themes are discussed below: (1) Regular Reinforcement of Guidelines on Academic Honesty and (2) Integration of Ethics in Classroom Tasks.

3.3.1.1 Regular Reinforcement of Guidelines on Academic Honesty

Interview and document data reveal that regular reminders on academic honesty, citation, and examination protocols at VSU–Tolosa do more than restate rules; they frame integrity as an essential, deontological duty tied to the early professional formation of future law enforcers. Faculty regularly scaffold these foundational standards for a student body largely drawn from rural Eastern Visayas public-school systems, while administrative staff enforce accountability by strictly filing incident reports for examination violations. This stakeholder coherence is structurally mirrored in the CRIM 104 syllabus and the university's Student Code of Conduct, which explicitly mandate moral values and integrity as core competencies that must be introduced, reinforced, and demonstrated. While these visible norms align with findings by Girra and Jaeck (2019) and Rocha (2024)—which link lower misconduct rates to clearly articulated institutional standards—the researcher notes that continuous repetition primarily achieves external compliance rather than deep ethical internalization. Ultimately, the narrative demonstrates that while these regular reminders establish a vital shared ethical vocabulary, the program's deeper challenge lies in moving students beyond rule-following toward an internal conviction where honesty is practiced for its own sake rather than to avoid administrative infractions.

3.3.1.2 Integration of Ethics in Classroom Tasks

The integration of case-based guide questions and reflective writing into classroom tasks at VSU–Tolosa actively transitions ethical learning from passive code memorization to applied moral reasoning. Faculty frequently prompt students to evaluate real-world scenarios by asking *"ethical ba ang ginawa?"* [was the action ethical?], which is systematically paired with student requirements for written reflection papers. Grounded in Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development, this pedagogical approach invites active justification rather than

mere rule recitation, effectively providing the necessary conditions to move learners from conventional compliance toward post-conventional, principled judgment. This localized mechanism strongly mirrors global insights by Souryal and Whitehead (2019), who argue that ethical competence develops most effectively when situated within the concrete, ambiguous dilemmas of professional life. Furthermore, by incorporating emotional processing and moral self-examination through reflective writing, the program allows students to deeply confront their own values, assumptions, and intuitions before entering the field. Ultimately, while these tasks successfully transform the classroom into a space for practicing judgment, the researcher emphasizes that these reflective exercises must be structurally sustained across the entire curriculum; if they remain isolated or dependent on individual instructors, they risk becoming occasional activities rather than a durable, program-wide professional habit.

3.3.2 Theme 2: Practices Related to Decorum and Etiquette in Government and Private Sector Transactions

The second major theme, Practices Related to Decorum and Etiquette in Government and Private Sector Transactions, draws attention to something easily overlooked in ethics education: professionalism is communicated not only through formal rules but also through everyday ways of speaking, addressing people, and conducting oneself within institutions. At VSU–Tolosa, students are introduced to these expectations through orientations, guided exposure, and correction of inappropriate communication. As one student (S6) recalled, *"Before OJT, may briefing kami on how to talk to officials professionally,"* [Before OJT, we had a briefing on how to talk to officials professionally,] while a faculty member (F9) noted, *"We teach them how to address officers formally."* Such practices indicate that students are being prepared not merely to enter an occupation but to participate in institutional relationships where language, courtesy, and protocol carry social meaning.

The importance of these practices becomes clearer in the context of the institutions with which students interact. Through formal arrangements with agencies such as the PNP, BFP, BJMP, LTO, and PDEA, students encounter settings where authority is structured and professional boundaries are clearly defined. Learning how to address an officer, observe protocol, or adjust one's tone is therefore part of learning how institutions work. It reflects a form of ethical socialization in which respect is expressed through conduct. This is consistent with Deontological Ethics (Samway et al., 2025), which regards appropriate action as grounded in duties and obligations, and with studies emphasizing the role of explicit communication norms and early institutional exposure in developing professionalism among future law enforcement practitioners (Bautista, 2021; Malbuyo et al., 2024).

The theme is further examined through three sub-themes: (1) Orientation on Proper Conduct During Inter-Agency Dealings, (2) Guided Exposure During OJT, Campus Events, and Immersion, and (3) Emphasis on Respectful Communication.



3.3.2.1 Orientation on Proper Conduct During Inter-Agency Dealings

Pre-internship orientations and briefings on proper professional conduct at VSU-Tolosa serve as a deliberate pedagogical mechanism to prepare Criminology students for the rigorous communicative and interpersonal demands of bureaucratic law enforcement systems. Faculty and student narratives indicate that these orientations explicitly teach students formal address protocols and institutional hierarchies. From a deontological ethics perspective, this focus frames professional decorum and protocol not as mere social niceties, but as binding professional duties and expressions of respect for institutional order. This instructional approach is structurally supported by the program's official infrastructure; the department maintains formal Memoranda of Agreement (MOAs) with key law enforcement bodies—including the PNP, BFP, BJMP, LTO, and PDEA—and mandates a comprehensive 540-hour community-based practicum. These formal pathways align with findings by Bautista (2021) and Malbuayo et al. (2024), which demonstrate that explicit instruction in hierarchical communication norms and early exposure to institutional protocols predict stronger operational adjustment during internships. Ultimately, while these structured orientations provide students with the foundational confidence to navigate professional partnerships, the researcher highlights that their long-term effectiveness hinges on integrating these communication protocols consistently throughout the entire curriculum rather than treating them as isolated, pre-OJT events.

3.3.2.2 Guided Exposure During OJT, Campus Events, and Immersion

As expressed in the interviews, one of the strongest mechanisms for promoting professional decorum among criminology students at VSU-Tolosa is their guided exposure to formal communication environments through internship, campus events, and structured immersion activities. This is also indicated in the program description, where the internship is structured as a "supervised internship" in which faculty do not simply place students in agencies, but actively guide them through the process of integrating into external institutions. This intent is affirmed in interview responses where students and staff described the process as highly supervised and corrective, noting: "*Sa OJT, supervisors check kung marunong kami makipag-usap sa civilians and officers*" (S7) [During OJT, supervisors check if we know how to talk to civilians and officers], and "*Campus events teach them how to behave in formal settings*" (ST2). Grounded in Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory and Virtue Ethics, this continuous, supervised immersion allows students to transition from theoretical understanding to behavioral habituation, turning abstract rules of etiquette into naturalized professional habits.

3.3.2.3 Emphasis on Respectful Communication

Data from interviews and document reviews indicate that the intentional and continuous emphasis on respectful communication at VSU-Tolosa serves as a crucial intervention to socialize Criminology students into the formal, hierarchical expectations of public safety sectors. Faculty and staff routinely correct casual speech habits—common among a student body

largely raised in informal barangay environments—by modeling and demanding proper tone, formal honorifics like "sir/ma'am," and strict adherence to communication protocols. Grounded in Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development, this continuous correction acts as an initial intervention at the conventional level to ensure alignment with institutional roles, though the goal remains the long-term internalization of respect as an absolute post-conventional principle. This localized focus aligns with global research by Medina (2020) and Kochel (2022), which proves that respectful communication directly dictates the public legitimacy and credibility of law enforcement officers. While these practices effectively leverage sociocultural modeling and feedback to bridge the gap between students lived backgrounds and professional bureaucratic settings, VSU-Tolosa relies too heavily on ad-hoc individual faculty initiative. To move past mere compliance and secure structural habituation, communication etiquette standards must be codified directly into course syllabi and formalized through standardized institutional modules.

3.3.3 Theme 3: Challenges in Promoting Academic Ethics and Integrity

The third major theme, Challenges in Promoting Academic Ethics and Integrity, reflects the difficulty of sustaining academic honesty amid time pressure, limited monitoring, and inconsistent enforcement. One student (S4) admitted, "*Naglilipatan ng answers minsan lalo na pag kulang sa time*," [Answers get passed around sometimes, especially when short on time,] while a faculty member (F10) noted, "*Hindi laging mahigpit ang monitoring kasi kulang sa personnel*." [Monitoring is not always strict because of a lack of personnel.] These accounts show the gap between institutional expectations and the conditions in which students and faculty work.

Although the criminology program promotes integrity and the Student Code of Conduct prohibits cheating and plagiarism, crowded classrooms, limited proctors, and uneven enforcement can weaken these standards. Honesty is not shaped by personal values alone; it also develops through consistent practice and supportive conditions (Hursthouse & Pettigrove, 2022). Studies similarly associate inconsistent enforcement and weak institutional support with academic misconduct (McCabe & Treviño, 2019; Bretag et al., 2019). The theme is examined through (1) Persistent Cheating and Plagiarism Tendencies and (2) Inconsistent Implementation of Academic Integrity Policies.

3.3.3.1 Persistent Cheating and Plagiarism Tendencies

Despite formal integrity mechanisms, cheating and plagiarism persist within the criminology program—not as deliberate defiance, but as improvisation under constraint. Student admissions ("*naglilipatan ng answers minsan lalo na pag kulang sa time*") and faculty feedback ("*hindi laging mahigpit ang monitoring kasi kulang sa personnel*") illustrate how everyday academic pressures regularly override codified rules. This misconduct creates a direct tension with the criminology program's explicit mandate, the CRIM 104 syllabus, and the VSU Student Code of Conduct, which aim to produce graduates imbued with integrity, accountability, and professional ethics under RA 6713 and the Law Enforcement



Code. When viewed through Virtue Ethics, moral virtues like honesty depend on supportive environments for proper habituation; however, heavy workloads, overcrowded classrooms, under-monitored exams, and socioeconomic challenges faced by rural, first-generation students (such as unstable internet and financial precarity) compromise these ideal conditions. Echoing scholarship by McCabe & Treviño and Bretag et al., misconduct flourishes when institutional enforcement is inconsistent and monitoring tools are underutilized, ultimately serving as an early warning signal of structural vulnerabilities that hinder the proper ethical formation of future law enforcement officers.

3.3.3.2 Inconsistent Implementation of Academic Integrity Policies

This sub-theme reveals that the lack of uniform enforcement of academic integrity rules is a significant and recurring challenge in the criminology program at VSU–Tolosa. The data show that while policies exist, their application varies widely among instructors, resulting in inconsistent learning experiences and uneven ethical expectations. Students noted, "*Depende sa teacher kung gaano kahigpit sa cheating*," (S9) [It depends on the teacher how strict they are with cheating,] while a faculty member echoed, "*Not all faculty use plagiarism checkers*" (F7). These quotes illustrate that the reliability of integrity enforcement depends largely on the individual discretion of faculty members rather than on a standardized institutional system. This inconsistency creates unequal academic environments where some students are more closely monitored than others. From the perspective of Deontological Ethics, this inconsistency is particularly damaging because deontology demands that duties apply universally, regardless of which instructor is teaching. When the enforcement of academic honesty depends on the teacher, the message is that ethical obligations are not absolute but contingent. This lesson directly contradicts the universalism that professional oaths require.

Within the context of VSU–Tolosa, this variation is partly influenced by the diverse academic backgrounds, teaching philosophies, workload levels, and technological familiarity of faculty members in the criminology department. Some instructors have strong backgrounds in research and actively incorporate plagiarism-detection software, while others rely heavily on manual checking or intuition. The positionality of the faculty is essential here: instructors who handle more board-exam subjects may prioritize content mastery over integrity monitoring due to time constraints. Meanwhile, new or part-time instructors may not yet be fully oriented on departmental standards. These conditions create a situation where students experience a different "ethical climate" depending on whose class they are enrolled in.

According to Eaton and Edino (2020), inconsistency in policy enforcement significantly weakens the culture of honesty, as students perceive rules as negotiable rather than institutional. This mirrors the observations at VSU–Tolosa, where students report variation in how sanctions are applied and how violations are detected. Bretag's (2020) work also emphasizes that consistent enforcement is a key predictor of reduced academic misconduct. The criminology program's experience therefore matches global research: even well-

written policies lose their power when not uniformly carried out.

The perspectives of the students further clarify how inconsistency affects attitudes and behavior. When students report that enforcement "depends on the teacher," they implicitly highlight the fairness issue: unequal expectations can lead to student frustration, leniency-seeking behaviors, or even calculated dishonesty depending on which instructor they anticipate. Faculty, meanwhile, express concern about their limited capacity to apply policies uniformly, revealing systemic rather than personal limitations. Staff, who handle documentation of violations, experience this inconsistency when incident reports fluctuate not because misconduct varies but because teacher enforcement does.

From the researcher's standpoint, this brings to the fore a gap between policy intention and classroom implementation. The criminology program is expected to serve as an early ethical training ground for future practitioners of law enforcement and public service, yet the inconsistent application of rules may inadvertently normalize selective accountability. This inconsistency is not due to negligence but to broader structural constraints such as a lack of standardized tools, absence of systematic integrity training for faculty, and limited institutional mechanisms for monitoring. Hence, the findings suggest a need for more cohesive, university-wide structures, whether in the form of standardized syllabi guidelines, mandatory integrity-checking systems, or faculty capacity-building, to ensure that ethical expectations are uniformly communicated and enforced.

3.3.4 Theme 4: Challenges in Maintaining Proper Decorum and Etiquette

The fourth major theme points to the difficulty some students face in carrying formal standards into actual interactions. One staff member (ST1) observed, "*Alam nilang bawal, pero hindi nila naiintindihan na ethical violation siya*," [They know it's prohibited, but they don't understand that it is an ethical violation,] while a student (S5) shared, "*Nahihiya ako minsan makipag-usap sa officers kasi hindi ako sanay*." [I sometimes feel shy talking to officers because I'm not used to it.] These accounts suggest a gap between knowing the rules and understanding what they require in practice. Students may remember policies yet struggle to connect honesty, respect, and professional conduct with their future roles in law enforcement.

The challenge is therefore not limited to rule compliance. It involves developing the confidence, judgment, and professional disposition needed to function in formal institutional settings. Deontological Ethics emphasizes that duties such as honesty and respect apply across contexts, while studies on cultural capital and professional preparation point to the importance of exposure and communication training in helping students navigate formal institutions (Samway et al., 2025; Jarvis, 2020; Finch & Fafinski, 2019). The theme is examined through three sub-themes: (1) Limited Student Awareness of Ethical Consequences, (2) Difficulty Adapting to Formal Settings, and (3) Over-Familiarity and Casual Behavior in Official Settings.



3.3.4.1 Limited Student Awareness of Ethical Consequences

Although criminology students at VSU–Tolosa are aware of academic honesty rules, they often struggle to grasp their underlying ethical significance, treating policy compliance as separate from professional ethics. Quotes from faculty and staff highlight that students frequently memorize guidelines without internalizing how academic dishonesty directly correlates with their future obligations as law enforcement officers. This fragmentation violates Deontological Ethics, which holds that the duty to uphold truth is universal across both academic and professional domains. Factors such as diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, transitioning learning stages, and limited prior exposure to formal integrity standards leave students viewing these rules abstractly. Global research supports this finding, demonstrating that institutional emphasis on compliance over moral reasoning creates a culture of avoiding punishment rather than upholding values. Faculty constraints and staff observations further confirm that this issue stems from structural limitations rather than simple defiance, emphasizing an urgent need for contextualized, practice-linked ethics education—such as case studies and simulations—to effectively bridge classroom behavior with professional accountability.

3.3.4.2 Students' Difficulty Adapting to Formal Settings

Difficulty in adapting to formal professional settings emerged as a key challenge among VSU–Tolosa criminology students, manifesting as hesitation in communicating with officers and an inability to compose formal emails. Faculty and staff view this not merely as shyness or a behavioral issue, but as a competence gap resulting from a lack of exposure and structured practice. This difficulty stems largely from the students' local socioeconomic and rural backgrounds in Leyte, where interactions with government officials or formal institutions are uncommon, making professional encounters intimidating due to power dynamics and language confidence. From the perspective of Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development, this reflects a dependence on familiar authority structures, highlighting that moving toward post-conventional engagement requires practical experience in navigating hierarchies—a skill the current curriculum implicitly expects rather than directly teaches. This finding aligns with scholarship on cultural capital (Jarvis, 2020) and criminology education (Finch & Fafinski, 2019), which underscores that professional communication and institutional norms must be explicitly instructed alongside academic theory. Ultimately, rather than viewing this unfamiliarity as an individual failing, the research emphasizes a structural need to bridge the gap between students lived environments and institutional expectations through deliberate, scaffolded interventions such as role-playing, mock agency engagements, and targeted instruction in formal speech and writing.

3.3.4.3 Over-Familiarity and Casual Behavior in Official Settings

Alongside student hesitancy, over-familiarity and casual behavior in office settings present a distinct challenge among VSU–Tolosa criminology students, as faculty and staff report students using informal expressions like "oy" or "kuya" [older brother] when addressing uniformed officers. From a

deontological ethics framework, this conduct represents a failure to fulfill the duty of respect owed to professional roles and institutional hierarchies. This tendency stems from local community norms where informal communication is standard, leading to a misalignment between students' cultural communication habits and the formal expectations of law enforcement agencies. Research by Del Villar (2019), Brown and Levinson (2020), and Tomaquín and Padernal (2019) supports this interpretation, highlighting how Filipino cultural tendencies toward warmth and low power distance can create mismatches when navigating structured professional spaces. Rather than viewing this as a behavioral flaw, the study emphasizes treating it as a cultural starting point that requires structured interventions—such as explicit modeling, role-playing, and agency workshops—to teach register shifting. Ultimately, addressing both over-familiarity and broader challenges in academic ethics requires moving away from inconsistent, periodic reminders toward a cohesive, program-wide culture that models professional decorum.

3.4 Stakeholder Perspectives on Career Preparation

What are the perspectives and experiences of stakeholders at Visayas State University regarding the relevance of topics such as human relations, professional conduct, and etiquette in preparing students for careers in public service, law enforcement, and other fields?

To capture how students, faculty, and staff understand the value of human relations, professional conduct, and etiquette for career readiness, the researcher turned again to the semi-structured interviews. The analysis yielded a single overarching theme, *Relevance of Human Relations, Professional Conduct, and Etiquette in Career Preparation*, covering four constituent sub-themes: understanding of human relations, significance of professional conduct, role of etiquette, and perceived gaps and challenges.

Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, the analysis of interview data for Question 4 proceeded systematically. The 27 transcripts were read repeatedly, yielding 55 initial codes such as "human relations crucial for diverse interactions," "faculty model punctuality," "small lapses hurt credibility," and "lack of practice leads to reversion." These codes were grouped into four candidate sub-themes—understanding of human relations, significance of professional conduct, role of etiquette, and perceived gaps—which were then organized under a single overarching theme: *Relevance of Human Relations, Professional Conduct, and Etiquette in Career Preparation*. Each sub-theme was reviewed for coherence and distinctness, then defined precisely. The narrative that follows presents each sub-theme in turn, supported by illustrative quotes and interpreted through the study's theoretical lenses and relevant literature.

3.4.1 Theme 1: Understanding of Human Relations in Professional Settings

At VSU–Tolosa, human relations are viewed by students, faculty, and staff not as a secondary soft skill, but as a core requirement essential for law enforcement and public service careers. Interview accounts reveal that interpersonal competence involves collaboration, effective communication across differences, and tension negotiation—qualities aligned



with Virtue Ethics (Hursthouse & Pettigrove, 2022) as the disposition of sociability cultivated through practical, authentic settings. Structurally embedded in the BS Criminology curriculum via CHED guidelines across courses like Criminal Sociology and Ethics, human relations prepare students to navigate bureaucratic systems and uphold dignity across diverse communities. Staff perspectives highlight the cultural nuance of *makisama* [getting along], which Ethical Relativism (Velasquez et al., 2021) frames as balancing local cultural norms with universal professional ethics. Philippine literature (Caitor et al., 2021; Torres et al., 2020; Everitt & Tefft, 2019) supports these findings, confirming that while students possess strong moral foundations, systematic institutional support, structured encounters, and faculty guidance are necessary to translate ethical awareness into professional practice. Ultimately, the study calls for embedding human relations as a measurable competency across simulations and fieldwork, ensuring graduates possess both technical expertise and the interpersonal skills needed to build trust in public service.

3.4.2 Theme 2: Significance of Professional Conduct

Interview data show that stakeholders at the institution generally understand professional conduct as a relational practice encompassing rule adherence, accountability, punctuality, and trust cultivation, which directly impacts field credibility. Faculty and staff frame professionalism as an intentional discipline, emphasizing that seemingly minor lapses—such as tardiness or disregard for protocol—severely degrade a future law enforcer's authority and community respect. Viewed through Virtue Ethics, these discrete, everyday behaviors serve as the bedrock of moral habituation, compounding over time into virtues like reliability, diligence, and integrity (Hursthouse & Pettigrove, 2022). This development is reinforced by professional socialization, as students internalize norms not through abstract instruction, but by observing faculty model ethical conduct and witnessing field officers handle real-world scenarios (Everitt & Tefft, 2019). While these informal modeling and mentorship structures are effective, they mirror findings by Agravat and Macwan (2024) highlighting that professional identity cannot be left to chance or passive exposure alone. Ultimately, the narrative concludes that while technical competence grants entry into criminal justice roles, sustained public trust relies on professional character, which the university must make more deliberate, visible, and structured through systematic assessment tools, reflective journaling, and targeted workshops.

3.4.3 Theme 3: Role of Etiquette in Formal and Informal Interactions

In the interviews at VSU–Tolosa, etiquette emerges as a crucial social framework that guides how future law enforcement officers navigate institutional hierarchies, tone, and body language across formal and informal settings. Grounded in Deontological Ethics (Samway et al., 2025), everyday practices such as using formal titles like "Sir/Ma'am" are viewed not as mere social conventions, but as non-negotiable duties that demonstrate respect for institutional roles regardless of personal familiarity. Both faculty and staff emphasize that etiquette functions as a practical tool—

intertwining with human relations and professional conduct to prevent misunderstandings, build community trust, and establish authority. Organizational communication research (Kabanda et al., 2019) supports this by showing that etiquette enhances teamwork and interpersonal effectiveness in frontline bureaucratic environments. Acting as what Zimmerman (2025) describes as part of the "hidden curriculum," etiquette helps students internalize their professional identities through guided coaching on non-verbal cues and formal introductions. Ultimately, the study advocates for transforming etiquette from an implicit expectation into an explicitly taught, practiced, and assessed competency to build students' social confidence and professional credibility.

3.4.4 Theme 4: Perceived Gaps and Challenges

Participants in the interviews identified significant challenges in bridging classroom learning with professional expectations, particularly in transitioning from an informal campus culture to formal settings. Students and faculty noted that informal daily interactions lead to over-familiarity, casual conduct, or anxiety when communicating with higher officials—a difficulty Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development views as a reliance on conventional-level reasoning shaped strictly by immediate peer environments. Socioeconomic backgrounds and limited prior exposure to professional environments exacerbate these gaps, with staff observing that inconsistent opportunities for practice cause students to revert to casual habits. Furthermore, heavy academic workloads and board exam preparation often cause ethics and etiquette instruction to be deprioritized, mirroring findings by Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) regarding the risks of unintegrated curricula. Overall, while stakeholders unanimously view human relations, professional conduct, and etiquette as essential foundations for public service, these gaps demonstrate that professionalism cannot remain an abstract concept; it requires structured, continuous reinforcement and assessed experiential practice to be fully internalized (Everitt & Tefft, 2019).

3.5 Institutional Resource Synthesis

How can the findings of the study be synthesized into a comprehensive book that provides practical guidance on ethics, professionalism, and human relations tailored for students and professionals at Visayas State University?

In addressing this research question, the researcher consolidated interview results from students, faculty, and staff alongside insights from the document review undertaken by the researcher to identify key areas of improvement in the ethics integration of VSU–Tolosa's Criminology Department. This synthesis serves as the basis for the proposed handbook titled *Ethics in Action: A Research-Based Guide for Criminology Practice*.

This handbook is structured into four main parts:

Part I: Laying the Ethical Foundation, Part II: The Professional's Toolkit: From Code to Conduct, Part III: Performing with Integrity: Skills for the Field, and Part IV: Upholding Integrity: Systems & Self. The table below illustrates how the book structure corresponds directly to the empirical findings of the study:



Table 2: Ethics in Action: A Research-Based Guide for Criminology Practice

Research Finding (Direct from Results)	Corresponding Book Section	How the Book Directly Addresses the Finding
RQ1, Theme 1: Conceptual Ambiguity • <i>Sub-Theme 1.1</i> : Unclear differentiation among ethics, morality, norms, and values; students report concepts " <i>blend together</i> ." • <i>Sub-Theme 1.2</i> : Limited prior exposure to frameworks like deontology; students find theoretical terms intimidating or foreign (" <i>nosebleed</i> ").	Part I: Laying the Ethical Foundation • Ch. 1: Untangling the Web: Ethics, Morality, Values & Norms • Ch. 2: Ethical Theories for the Field	Provides distinct definitions and relatable analogies to clarify overlapping concepts. Introduces ethical theories using plain language and contextualized criminology scenarios to demystify complex terms.
RQ1, Theme 2: Personal & Cultural Conditioning • <i>Sub-Theme 2.1</i> : Strong influence of personal upbringing (" <i>Kung ano 'yung aral ng pamilya ko, doon pa rin ako kumakapit</i> " [Whatever my family taught me, that is what I hold on to]). • <i>Sub-Theme 2.2</i> : Resistance to evolving norms (e.g., viewing human rights as " <i>pang-kontrabida</i> " [the villain's side], challenges with gender sensitivity).	Part I: Laying the Ethical Foundation (Cont.) • Ch. 3: The Self in Service: Bridging Personal and Professional Codes	Creates a structured framework for students to evaluate how cultural values (e.g., <i>utang na loob</i> [debt of gratitude]) interact with professional codes. Offers case studies and reflective exercises on adopting modern norms like human rights and inclusive policing.
RQ1, Theme 3 & RQ2: Practical & Curricular Gaps • <i>Sub-Theme 1.3</i> : Limited reinforcement and follow-through; ethics concepts " <i>nawawala na</i> " [fade away] after introductory courses. • <i>Sub-Theme 1.4</i> : Need for clearer operationalization; absence of uniform guidelines leads to reliance on instructor discretion (" <i>diskarte ng instructor</i> "). • <i>Sub-Theme 2.1</i> : Predominantly theoretical ethics orientation focused on memorization and recitation rather than applied moral reasoning.	Part II: The Professional's Toolkit: From Code to Conduct • Ch. 4: The Governing Codes Decoded • Ch. 5: The Spiral Curriculum: Integrating Ethics Everywhere	Serves as a uniform reference guide to ensure consistent reinforcement across all courses. Reframes professional codes as practical tools for decision-making. Provides faculty across disciplines with models for integrating ethical dilemmas into technical lessons (e.g., Criminal Investigation).
RQ2, Theme 2 & RQ1, Theme 4: Assessment & Application Limitations • <i>Sub-Theme 2.2</i> : Limited practice-oriented assessment in course syllabi. • <i>Theme 4</i> : Application during field practicum or simulations is highly valued but implemented inconsistently.	Part II (Cont.) & • Ch. 6: <i>Ethics in Action: Scenarios and Simulations</i> <i>(Informs Part III's practical skill modules)</i>	Offers a repository of practice-oriented case studies, simulation guides, and assessment rubrics for faculty adoption to move beyond traditional quizzes. Directly connects ethical theory to field situations and role-play exercises.
RQ3 & RQ4: Decorum, Etiquette & Professional Conduct • <i>Sub-Themes 3.2 & 4.3</i> : Existing positive practices like pre-OJT	Part III: Performing with Integrity: Skills for the Field • Ch. 7: The Art of	Delivers step-by-step guidance on core practical competencies: formal written communication (emails, administrative reports), professional self-introductions, and



briefings on addressing officials and demanding formal titles ("Sir/Ma'am"). • <i>Sub-Themes 3.4 & 4.4</i> : Persistent challenges: student hesitation ("Nahihya ako... hindi ako sanay" [I'm shy... I'm not used to it]), inability to write formal emails, and casual over-familiarity (using "oy" or "kuya" [older brother]).	Professional Communication • Ch. 8: Decorum & Etiquette: The Unspoken Rules	adjusting communication registers from casual to formal to mitigate shyness and over-familiarity.
RQ1, Theme 5 & RQ3: Institutional Culture & Policy Enforcement • <i>Sub-Theme 1.5</i> : Episodic seminars and institutional initiatives characterized by a lack of follow-through. • <i>Sub-Themes 3.3.1 & 3.3.2</i> : Persistent student cheating tendencies and inconsistent faculty implementation of academic integrity policies.	Part IV: Upholding Integrity: Systems & Self • Ch. 9: Building an Ethical Culture: From Classroom to Campus	Translates empirical findings into actionable institutional policy recommendations. Establishes a framework for sustained campus ethics programming beyond one-off seminars and outlines standardized mechanisms for academic policy enforcement.
RQ1, Theme 5 & Synthesis Need: Overemphasis on Theory • <i>Sub-Theme 1.5.3</i> : Disconnect between policy knowledge and practical execution; students memorize the Law Enforcement Code of Ethics but rarely practice navigating complex, real-world moral dilemmas.	Part IV: Upholding Integrity: Systems & Self (Cont.) • Ch. 10: <i>Navigating Real-World Ethical Dilemmas</i> <i>(Integrates across all chapters)</i>	Counters theoretical overemphasis through an operationalized ethical decision-making framework. Applies this model to complex, research-derived field scenarios involving peer pressure, organizational loyalty, and authority dynamics.
RQ4: Stakeholder Perspectives on Career Readiness • <i>Unanimous View</i> : Human relations, professional conduct, and etiquette are foundational for public service success and field credibility ("Kung hindi ka professional, hindi ka mairrespeto" [If you are not professional, you won't be respected]).	Core Philosophy of the Proposed Handbook <i>(Embedded throughout the entire publication)</i>	Validates the practical necessity of the handbook. Ensures that the content remains career-focused and directly addresses the applied interpersonal competencies that stakeholders identify as vital for earning public trust.

This table shows how the proposed guidebook addresses the major themes that emerged from the study. Under *Conceptual Ambiguity (RQ1, Theme 1)*, it simplifies complex ethical concepts, including deontology, by replacing technical language with clear explanations and context-specific examples drawn from criminology practice. This approach makes abstract ethical principles more accessible to students. For *Navigating Cultural Conditioning (RQ1, Theme 2)*, the guidebook provides a reflective framework that encourages students to examine how personal values, family expectations, and cultural norms, such as *utang na loob*, shape ethical decision-making. It emphasizes the importance of balancing these influences with professional responsibilities.

In *Standardizing Curricular Delivery (RQ1, Theme 3 and RQ2)*, the guidebook offers a consistent instructional framework that addresses variations in the teaching of ethics

across courses. It presents practical strategies for integrating ethical issues into criminology subjects, including criminal investigation. For *Transitioning from Rote to Applied Assessment (RQ2 and RQ1, Theme 4)*, it responds to the limited use of practice-oriented assessments by providing case studies, simulation activities, and field-readiness rubrics that promote ethical reasoning beyond the memorization of concepts. Finally, *Remediating Behavioral and Skill Deficits (RQ3 and RQ4)* addresses challenges related to workplace professionalism, communication, and interpersonal conduct. It includes practical guidance on workplace etiquette, professional correspondence, and self-introduction to help students prepare for professional practice.

Overall, the matrix demonstrates that *Ethics in Action* was developed as a practical resource grounded in the experiences of the study participants. Rather than serving as a



purely theoretical reference, it translates stakeholder insights into concrete learning strategies that support ethical practice, professional competence, and institutional integrity among future criminology professionals.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Drawing from the synthesized findings, the following conclusions are presented:

The findings reveal that challenges in ethical understanding at VSU-Tolosa are not isolated learning deficits but are embedded in the curriculum's structure and the surrounding culture. The clustered treatment of foundational concepts in CRIM 104 and the absence of deliberate contrast between ethics, morality, values, and norms leave students at a conventional level of moral reasoning. Consequently, the program does not adequately prepare students to navigate the ambiguity and value conflicts inherent in law enforcement.

Furthermore, the integration of the PRC Oath, RA 6713, and the Law Enforcement Code of Ethics into the curriculum is strong in formal declaration but weak in operationalization. Ethics is concentrated in a single, theory-heavy course assessed primarily through recall, with no spiral integration across technical subjects. This fragmentation leaves ethical formation to instructor discretion and produces graduates who can recite codes but lack the moral reasoning necessary for field judgment. Therefore, the program must shift from declaration to systematic, practice-embedded implementation.

Additionally, a fundamental disconnect exists between rule-based academic enforcement and the cultivation of an internalized ethical culture. Although mechanisms for promoting integrity and decorum exist, their inconsistent application and the persistence of misconduct reveal systemic vulnerabilities. The challenges in professional decorum also expose a mismatch between the informal campus culture and the formal expectations of the justice sector. Thus, promoting ethics requires transitioning from periodic reminders and sanctions toward a consistent, program-wide culture that models and rewards professional behavior in both academic and simulated professional settings.

The unanimous stakeholder affirmation of human relations, professional conduct, and etiquette validates a practice-oriented, skill-based approach to ethics education. Stakeholders recognize these "soft skills" as foundational for credibility and effectiveness, yet the curriculum currently treats them as secondary. This conclusion mandates a deliberate shift: from teaching professionalism as an abstract concept to providing structured, repeated, and assessed practice in communication, etiquette, and interpersonal dynamics throughout the program.

Ultimately, synthesizing these findings into a structured guide is not only feasible but necessary to bridge the identified research-practice gap. The proposed book, *Ethics in Action: A Research-Based Guide for Criminology Practice*, directly translates diagnostic evidence into a prescriptive intervention. Its four-part structure—*Laying the Ethical Foundation*, *The Professional's Toolkit*, *Performing with Integrity*, and *Upholding Integrity*—systematically addresses the conceptual ambiguity, cultural conditioning, curricular gaps, and behavioral challenges identified in the study. By

providing clear definitions, practical scenarios, skill-building exercises, and institutional recommendations, the book serves as the "uniform guideline" requested by faculty and students. Its adoption would transform fragmented ethical instruction into an integrated, competency-based curriculum, offering a concrete mechanism to standardize and enhance ethical formation across the VSU-Tolosa criminology program.

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