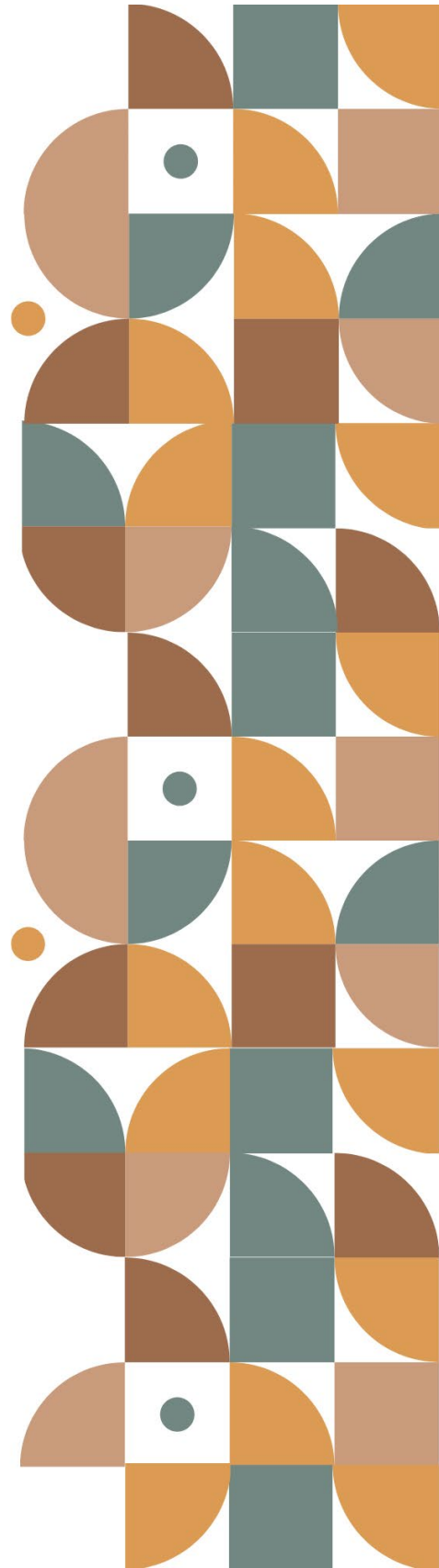


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2024 ETHICAL DILEMMAS ROUNDTABLE SYMPOSIUM

REPORT

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Introduction

On November 22, 2024, students in the graduate education course *Ethical Issues in Higher Education Leadership* hosted the Ethical Dilemmas Roundtable Symposium at Thompson Rivers University (TRU) in Kamloops, BC. The symposium provided an opportunity for members of the TRU community to critically explore real-world ethical dilemmas in higher education.

While writing the open textbook *Ethical Educational Leadership* (<https://leadershipethics.pressbooks.tru.ca/>), the authors recognized that a key goal of the course was to introduce students to different ethical lenses. They believed that to fully understand these lenses, students needed to apply them to real-world ethical dilemmas. This inspired the creation of a space where diverse interest-holders could come together to share their perspectives and collectively wrestle with shared challenges. The symposium was designed as a platform for practicing difficult conversations amongst people with differing opinions, encouraging participants to open their minds to new ways of understanding the issues that confront us all.

We invited students, faculty, and academic administrators to share in the space — to learn from experts, observe students modelling how to navigate and discuss ethical dilemmas, and practice and reflect on the process. By bringing together voices from different roles and levels within higher education, the symposium was an opportunity to learn from one another and contributed to shaping a more ethical and inclusive learning environment.

Student-Led Process

One of the highlights of the symposium was that it was entirely student-led. The event was planned and executed by students, providing leadership opportunities for all those involved in organizing it. Thirteen graduate students contributed in various capacities under the guidance of Dr. Alana Hoare, assistant teaching professor.

Approximately eight months prior to the start of classes, Dr. Hoare worked with two graduate research assistants, Bukky and Rumana, to co-design the course, co-author the open textbook, and envision the symposium.

On the first day of class, students were introduced to the idea of the symposium. Over the 13-week course, symposium planning was gradually integrated into lesson activities, course readings, and assignments. It started with short, 10- to 15-minute discussions, where students explored the symposium's purpose, objectives, format, participants, ethical dilemmas, catering, and room layout.

Notes from these discussions were documented and revisited in subsequent classes, ensuring that student perspectives continued to shape the event. These discussions were student-led, with the professor guiding decisions to align with the original intent and course learning outcomes, while ensuring all opinions were heard and considered. During the first six weeks, students focused on defining the symposium's aim and objectives and understanding the value it would create for both students and participants. The last four weeks of the course were dedicated to assigning roles and responsibilities and creating an actionable plan. This included:

- Preparing the opening presentation.
- Developing moderators' and note-takers' guides to facilitate discussions.
- Selecting and finalizing panel demonstration members.
- Sending reminders to participants.
- Creating a timed agenda for the symposium.



- Assigning moderators and note-takers for each discussion table.

Invitations to key academic administrators, including the President, Provost, and Deans, were sent out within the first few weeks of the course, followed by invitations to the broader TRU community, which were posted on public channels and distribution lists.

A key aspect that enhanced the symposium experience for all attendees was the selection of ethical dilemmas that resonated with a broad audience. The class carefully selected dilemmas, ensuring they were relevant, diverse, and current. This started with a large number of possible dilemmas, which were later narrowed down to three. The dilemmas were then approved by the professor to ensure they addressed different issues in education and were not overly concentrated on a single topic.

To ensure the smooth execution of the symposium, all students participated in a virtual rehearsal the evening before the event. This final preparation helped refine logistics, clarify roles, and ensure a seamless experience for all attendees. It also provided a quick run-through to shake off any nervous jitters!

The Symposium

Forty-nine people attended the symposium. It began with a brief lecture by Dr. Alana Hoare followed by a student panel demonstration. During the demonstration, students modelled a discussion of an ethical dilemma while representing different ethical viewpoints. This helped set expectations for participants and provided a framework for their own discussions. After the panel, participants were divided into six groups for the roundtable discussions. Each table had a moderator and a note-taker to ensure discussions stayed on topic, adhered to the timelines, and provide all participants with an equal opportunity to share their perspectives. Each group was given three ethical dilemmas: one common dilemma that all groups discussed, and a choice of two dilemmas from which they selected one to discuss.

Following the roundtable discussions, participants reconvened for a large group sharing and critique session. Table moderators quickly synthesized the roundtable conversations and shared key themes that arose with the larger group. This was followed by a broader conversation about both the dilemmas and, importantly, about the process of engaging in ethical dialogue.

Summary of Roundtable Discussions

During the roundtable discussions, table moderators and note-takers carefully documented the multiple viewpoints and ideas shared by participants. These notes were then analysed to identify prominent themes. To make the insights more accessible and actionable, the perspectives were organized into thematic categories under each dilemma. This approach highlights key ideas and common threads, making it easier to understand the diverse viewpoints presented. While tables had the option to select from three ethical dilemmas, only two were chosen: 1) Academic Integrity and 2) Academic Pressure and Burnout. None of the tables selected the third option: Intellectual Property and Authorship.

Dilemma 1: Academic Integrity

Below is a summary of the six themes that emerged during the roundtable discussion.



- **Theme 1: Importance of Academic Integrity:** Many participants noted that academic integrity serves as the foundation of educational institutions, reflecting a commitment to ethical responsibility and shaping moral citizens. They expressed that these institutions do not exist in isolation but are integral to broader societal values, meaning their credibility depends on maintaining integrity. Graduates who uphold ethical principles carry them into their professional and personal lives, while the reputation and value of a degree are directly tied to the honesty of its stakeholders.
- **Theme 2: Challenges to Academic Integrity:** Many roundtable discussions centred around the challenges of maintaining academic integrity, which is becoming increasingly difficult due to external pressures. Several students who attended the symposium explained that students, particularly in high-expectation cultures, experience immense pressure to excel, sometimes at the cost of ethical behaviour. Fear of failure drives some to compromise their integrity, while an overemphasis on achieving perfect results rather than learning fosters dishonest practices, such as falsifying data. Some students admitted that the rise of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) tools like ChatGPT further complicates the issue, as they may be used as shortcuts, prioritizing immediate results and task completion over learning.
- **Theme 3: The Role of GenAI in Academic Integrity:** Many students argued against banning GenAI, arguing that academic institutions must integrate it responsibly into the curriculum. They acknowledged that GenAI will be essential in the workforce, so students should be taught how to use it ethically. Both students and faculty suggested that assignments should emphasize skills like critical thinking and creativity to reduce overreliance on GenAI. Additionally, institutions should highlight how academic tasks contribute to students' professional development. Participants recommended that educators encourage students to use AI as a supplementary tool rather than a replacement for effort to ensure a balance between originality and technological assistance.
- **Theme 4: Shared Responsibility:** Most participants agreed that academic integrity is a shared responsibility that extends beyond students to faculty and administration. Students must submit original work and navigate ethical dilemmas, faculty should uphold fairness in grading and assignments, and administrators must maintain ethical standards in policies and admissions. Some participants suggested that transparent policies help create a culture of accountability where everyone is held to the same ethical standards.
- **Theme 5: Ethical and Systemic Impact:** Some participants expressed concerns that when integrity is compromised, degrees are devalued, alienating students who adhere to ethical standards while diminishing the credibility of institutions. While academic standards must be maintained, originality and creativity should also be encouraged. Ethical concerns surrounding GenAI — including its limitations and potential misuse — must be addressed through transparency in education, ensuring clear communication of expectations and evaluation criteria. Furthermore, participants raised concerns about faculty integrity, questioning whether educators maintain ethical standards in lecture materials, grading, and their own use of GenAI.



- **Theme 6: Ethical Concerns in Faculty Practices:** Students raised concerns about the need for faculty to uphold the same standards of integrity that they expect from students, such as transparency in lecture materials or grading practices. Questions arose about whether faculty use GenAI to develop materials and whether this aligns with institutional standards of academic integrity.

Dilemma 2: Academic Pressure and Burnout

Below is a summary of the seven themes that emerged during the roundtable discussion.

- **Theme 1: Causes of Burnout:** Participants noted that academic pressure is a major contributor to burnout among both students and faculty. Students often struggle under the weight of high parental expectations, financial burdens, and immigration-related stress, while faculty juggle excessive workloads that include teaching, grading, concern and support for students, and research obligations. It was noted that course design and the overall learning environment play a crucial role in mitigating stress. Many students argued that its essential to create inclusive spaces that acknowledge student diversity and support both academic rigor and personal growth.
- **Theme 2: Course Design and Classroom Atmosphere:** Several conversations spoke to the design of courses and the learning environment which can significantly impact stress levels and well-being. Acknowledging diversity in classrooms and creating inclusive learning spaces were highlighted as important considerations for reducing burnout. Participants emphasized the need to balance academic rigor with holistic student development and growth.
- **Theme 3: Balancing Autonomy and Expectations:** Participants wrestled with the key challenge of balancing autonomy between students and faculty. It was acknowledged that while students should have some control over their learning experiences, faculty must also be empowered to design courses based on their expertise and pedagogical goals.
- **Theme 4: Strategies for Mitigating Burnout:** Participants identified several strategies to combat burnout including redefining what it means to be a "good student," moving beyond a sole focus on grades, and encouraging holistic growth by promoting social engagement and self-care.
- **Theme 5: Ethics of Care vs. Self-Care:** Some participants highlighted the ethical dilemma educators face in providing care for students while maintaining their own well-being. They argued that academic systems need to be redesigned to support all stakeholders, ensuring that students, faculty, and administrators do not suffer from unsustainable workloads.
- **Theme 6: Role of Technology:** Many participants raised concerns that technology has exacerbated burnout by making it difficult to separate academic and personal life, creating a need for better and clearer boundaries.



- **Theme 7: The Value of Academic Pressure:** While academic pressure is necessary for motivation and achievement, institutions must find ways to apply it in a manner that encourages growth rather than overwhelming students and faculty.

Dilemmas for Future Dialogues

During the symposium, participants suggested several ethical dilemmas for future discussions, including dilemmas related to academic integrity, academic pressure and burnout, and broader cross-cutting dilemmas.

Academic Integrity

One major challenge is balancing originality with standardization. Institutions must find a way to encourage creativity and independent thought while still adhering to academic requirements that ensure fairness and consistency. The ethical dilemma takes the following shape: How can this balance be achieved without stifling innovation or compromising academic rigor?

Another dilemma involves integrity across all interest holders. There is an ongoing debate about whether faculty and administration should be held to the same standards of academic integrity as students. Ensuring transparency and fairness across all levels of an institution is crucial, yet implementing these standards consistently remains a challenge.

The devaluation of degrees due to academic dishonesty is another pressing issue. When some students submit original work while others misuse GenAI or resort to unethical practices, institutions must find ways to address this disparity to uphold the credibility of academic qualifications.

Grade inflation presents ethical concerns, particularly when faculty members face pressures to grade leniently to avoid negative student evaluations. Ensuring fairness in grading while protecting faculty from external pressures requires a nuanced approach that maintains academic standards without undermining educators.

A related issue is the perceived value of assignments. Many students do not see a clear connection between their coursework and future skills, which can lead to disengagement or academic dishonesty. Institutions need to design assignments that focus on learning outcomes rather than just results, ensuring that students recognize their long-term value.

Academic integrity in group projects poses additional challenges, especially with the increasing use of GenAI tools. When contributions vary significantly among team members, institutions must implement measures that ensure fairness and accountability in collaborative assignments.

Academic Pressure and Burnout

Redefining the concept of a "good student" is a significant issue in academia. Traditionally, academic success has been measured by grades, but there is growing recognition that a more holistic approach may be necessary. Institutions must consider whether alternative evaluations, such as skill development and personal growth, should be incorporated into academic assessments.

Balancing autonomy in education is another challenge. While students should have the freedom to shape their learning experiences, faculty must also retain control over course design



to maintain educational quality. Finding a middle ground where both students and educators feel empowered is essential to creating a sustainable academic environment.

Faculty members also face the dilemma of prioritizing student well-being while managing their own self-care. Their responsibility to support students often conflicts with the need to maintain their own mental and emotional health. This raises the question of whether institutions should implement systemic changes to reduce burnout for both students and faculty.

Technology has blurred the boundaries between academic and personal life, making it difficult for students and educators to disconnect. The always-connected culture exacerbates stress and burnout, prompting the need for strategies that mitigate its negative effects while maintaining accessibility and efficiency in learning.

Cross-Cutting Dilemmas

Institutional responsibility for student and faculty well-being is a broader concern that intersects with both academic integrity and academic pressure. Institutions must explore ways to redesign academic systems that reduce burnout while maintaining high academic standards. This requires structural changes that prioritize both performance and well-being.

Regular feedback loops play a crucial role in shaping academic policies. Gathering consistent input from students, faculty, and parents can help institutions refine their practices to create a more effective and supportive learning environment. However, determining the best ways to collect and implement this feedback remains a challenge.

Lastly, academic pressure, when managed correctly, can be a positive force for motivation and achievement. The difficulty lies in ensuring that pressure does not become overwhelming or detrimental to students' mental health. Institutions must strike a balance between fostering resilience and preventing burnout, ensuring that academic challenges inspire growth rather than cause harm.

Key Takeaways from the Symposium

The inaugural Ethical Dilemmas Roundtable Symposium was a student-led initiative that highlighted the importance of leadership, diverse perspectives, ethical decision-making, and the opportunity to practice open dialogue within shared educational spaces.

One of the most significant takeaways was the power of student leadership. The symposium was entirely planned and executed by students, providing them with valuable experience in event coordination, dialogue facilitation, and modelling the application of ethical theories to real-world dilemmas. This hands-on approach helped students develop confidence in their ability to lead and engage in complex ethical conversations, demonstrating that, when given the opportunity, students can take ownership of academic discourse in meaningful and impactful ways.

The symposium also emphasized the value of listening to different perspectives. Ethical dilemmas are rarely clear-cut, and finding solutions requires thoughtful engagement with diverse viewpoints. Participants recognized that active listening fosters critical thinking, challenges personal biases, and allows for more inclusive decision-making. Ethical leadership is not about imposing personal beliefs but about understanding different experiences and making informed, balanced decisions that serve the collective good.

Another key takeaway was that ethical leadership requires multiple perspectives to be effective. Leaders in education must consider the needs of students, faculty, administrators, and



community members before making decisions. The symposium reinforced that ethical dilemmas often involve competing values, such as justice, care, and institutional responsibility. By embracing diverse viewpoints, leaders can ensure that their decisions are fair, inclusive, and well-informed.

The symposium also demonstrated the importance of creating structured spaces to practice ethical discussions in higher education. Events like this allow students, faculty, and administrators to engage in collaborative problem-solving, ensuring that ethical leadership is not just studied in theory but actively practiced.

Finally, the symposium highlighted the need for ongoing discussions on leadership ethics in education. The Ethical Dilemmas Roundtable Symposium was not just a one-time event but the beginning of a larger conversation on ethical leadership in higher education. The insights gained should continue to shape academic policies, classroom discussions, and future leadership decisions, ensuring that ethical considerations remain central to higher education's evolving landscape.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Moving forward, we encourage higher education institutions to create more opportunities for ongoing ethical discussions, and spaces to practice civil discourse. Additionally, integrating ethical considerations into academic policies and leadership practices can ensure that ethical decision-making becomes a core aspect of institutional governance. Encouraging cross-stakeholder collaboration, where students, faculty, and administrators work together to address ethical concerns, will also contribute to a more inclusive and transparent academic environment.

Given the success and impact of the inaugural Ethical Dilemmas Roundtable Symposium, it is evident that such events should become a recurring initiative. Establishing an annual Ethical Dilemmas Roundtable Symposium would provide a structured opportunity for continued discussion, reflection, and learning. A yearly event would ensure that ethical leadership remains a central focus in higher education and that new and evolving challenges can be addressed in a collaborative setting. By making the symposium a regular feature of the academic calendar, institutions can foster a culture of ethical awareness, leadership, and continuous improvement in education.

Sincerely,

Rumana Patel, MEd student and Graduate Research Assistant
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Appendix I: Ethical Dilemmas

Ethical Dilemma: 1 Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is a cornerstone of higher education, yet it is increasingly challenged by evolving academic and technological landscapes. Issues such as plagiarism, grade inflation, and accountability blur the lines of responsibility between students, professors, and institutions. With advancements like AI tools, the concept of plagiarism has become more complex. Should tools like ChatGPT be banned, regulated, or integrated into learning? Grade inflation, another facet of this dilemma, raises questions about whether educators prioritize student course completion over maintaining rigorous standards.

Students are expected to produce original work, but institutional pressures, like high-stakes exams or grades, can incentivize dishonesty. Professors are tasked with fostering a culture of integrity, but should they be solely accountable for detecting and addressing violations? Institutions, on the other hand, must establish policies that balance enforcement with fairness. The central ethical concern lies in accountability: who bears the responsibility for upholding academic integrity?

Ethical Dilemma 2: Academic Pressure and Burnout

The drive for academic excellence often leads to high levels of stress and burnout among students and faculty, posing a significant ethical dilemma. Students face heavy workloads, competitive environments, and the constant pressure to excel, often at the expense of their mental health. Faculty members, similarly, juggle multiple responsibilities, including research, teaching, administrative tasks, and mentoring, which can overwhelm even the most dedicated professionals. Institutions, while striving for academic rigor, may inadvertently normalize overwork as a necessary path to success. This raises questions about fairness and responsibility. Should institutions lower expectations to ease the pressure, or is the intensity necessary to maintain high standards?

Ethical considerations extend to the resources provided to mitigate burnout, such as mental health services and workload adjustments. This dilemma challenges the culture of higher education to evolve toward a more sustainable model. How can universities balance the need for excellence with the well-being of their community? Should success be redefined to prioritize holistic growth over traditional metrics like grades and publications? Addressing this issue requires a cultural shift that values mental health as integral to academic achievement.

Ethical Dilemma 3: Intellectual Property and Authorship

Authorship and intellectual property in academia are fraught with ethical challenges, particularly between students and faculty. In collaborative research, disputes can arise over the fair attribution of work. For instance, should a PhD supervisor demand first authorship on a paper primarily produced by their student? While supervisors provide mentorship and resources, students often contribute significantly to the intellectual content. Another contentious scenario involves professors using quotes or ideas from a student's work in their publications without proper credit. Such actions undermine the student's ownership of their intellectual contributions and highlight power imbalances in academia.

The ethical dilemma revolves around what constitutes fair authorship and ownership in such collaborations. Should the hierarchical nature of academia dictate authorship, or should



contributions be objectively assessed? Institutions must create policies that protect students while recognizing the role of mentorship. This dilemma raises critical questions about transparency and respect in academic relationships. How can institutions ensure that intellectual property rights are upheld? Should there be stricter guidelines to prevent misuse of student work? These discussions underscore the need for equitable practices and trust within academic collaborations.



Appendix II: Moderator's Guide

Purpose: To facilitate meaningful and productive discussions, ensuring every participant has the opportunity to share their perspectives while fostering a respectful and open dialogue.

Round 1: (25 minutes)

1. Introduce the Dilemma

- Provide a brief overview of the ethical dilemma assigned to your table.
- Ensure all participants understand the context before starting the discussion.

2. Set Ground Rules

- Remind participants of the general guidelines:
 - Respect all viewpoints.
 - Engage in open dialogue and listen actively.
 - Be mindful of time.

3. Sharing Thoughts (90 seconds – 2 minutes per participant)

- Instruction:
 - Each participant will have up to **2 minutes** to share their initial thoughts on the dilemma.
 - Encourage everyone to share without interruption.

4. Use Question Prompts to Guide Discussion

After introduction to the dilemma, use the following prompts to deepen the conversation:

- What is your initial reaction to this dilemma?
 - Encourage participants to express their immediate thoughts and emotions.Or
- How do you take or draw from your previous experiences on this dilemma?
 - Help participants connect the dilemma to their personal or professional experiences.
- What do you feel after listening to everyone on the table?
 - Foster reflection on how different perspectives shape their understanding.Or
- What suggestion do you have for a leader who is facing this dilemma?
 - Encourage actionable solutions and practical insights.

5. Summarize the Discussion

- Summarize Key Points:
 - Highlight the main insights and suggestions shared during the discussion.
 - Acknowledge any differing perspectives and common themes.
- Wrap Up:
 - Thank participants for their contributions.
 - Remind them that their insights will contribute to the broader symposium discussions.



Round 2: (Choose the dilemma that people want to discuss on your table. You can follow the same steps as the first round, or you can improvise as per your convenience.) (25 minutes)

Tips for Moderators

- Keep the discussion focused on the ethical dimensions of the dilemma.
- Encourage quieter participants to share their thoughts.
- Gently steer the conversation back if it drifts off-topic.
- Maintain a positive and respectful atmosphere throughout.



Appendix III: Note Taker's Guide

Purpose: To capture key insights, themes, and contributions from the discussion while ensuring an accurate summary for later sharing.

1. Preparation

- Have a notebook or laptop ready to record notes. (Pen and paper will be provided)
- Label your notes by **round** (Round 1 or Round 2) and **dilemma discussed** for clarity.
- Be ready to summarize key points, themes, and suggestions.

2. During the Discussion

Round 1: (25 Minutes)

- Introduction to the Dilemma:
 - Write down the dilemma assigned to your table and any initial reactions shared during the introduction.
- Participant Thoughts (90 seconds – 2 minutes each):
 - Record key points or recurring themes from each participant's input.
 - Focus on capturing:
 - Unique perspectives or emotional reactions.
 - Connections to personal or professional experiences.
- Guided Questions:
 - Write down responses to each question prompt used by the mentor:
 - Initial reactions to the dilemma.
 - Experiences participants draw from.
 - Reflections after hearing others' perspectives.
 - Suggestions for leaders addressing the dilemma.
- Summarize the Discussion:
 - Work with the mentor to document:
 - The most prominent insights or solutions shared.
 - Key areas of agreement or differing opinions.
 - Practical takeaways or suggestions for leadership.

Round 2: (25 Minutes)

- Chosen Dilemma:
 - Note the dilemma chosen by participants for the second discussion.
 - Follow the same process as Round 1: capturing participant input, guided question responses, and a final summary.

3. After the Discussion

- Clean Up Notes:
 - Organize your notes into clear sections for each round and dilemma.
 - Highlight key insights and recurring themes.

Tips for Note Takers



1. Focus on Themes:
 - Don't try to write down everything—capture the key ideas and common threads.
2. Use Keywords:
 - Use shorthand or keywords to keep up with the discussion and expand later if needed.
3. Be Objective:
 - Record contributions impartially without bias or personal interpretation.
4. Clarify When Needed:
 - If a point is unclear, politely ask the mentor or participant for clarification after the discussion.