

MASTER'S DEGREE PROGRAM IN BIOETHICS

**Interview with Ioan Alexandru Beldean,
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done by Maria Aluaş**

Question 1: "From Orthodox Theology to Bioethics in American academic context: How come"?

The interest in the startling field of bioethics came as a natural extension of my previous studies in Moral Theology. After graduating the BBU MA Program in Bioethics, I received the opportunity to enroll in a slightly different program of study in Bioethics, at the Case Western Reserve University, in Cleveland, USA. This academic endeavor was supported by the Fogarty International Foundation, which as I had to find later on, was offering students from all around the world an opportunity to have a hands on approach of International, American Bioethics, through various MA programs.

Question 2: "What was the structure of your MA Program"?

What made the experience truly outstanding, is the professional training offered in just two semesters of study. The design of the program was tailored on market values and needs. Structurally speaking, the training Program had two parts. The first was following a Master's Degree in Bioethics, and the second was considering a research project meant to apply our recently gained expertise and facilitate our re-entry to the Romanian Research Ethics field.

For the Academic part, the two semesters were constructed as follows.

In the fall we studied Fundamentals in Bioethics, Ethics - Law and Health Research and the ground stone of any ethical analysis experience, Clinical Rotation. In Foundations, we learned the basics in the field, tackling topics like Approaches to Bioethics, Reproductive Ethics, Pediatrics Ethics and Death and Dying. The Research Ethics class was an introductory course in research design and in the major controversies in the field, meant to acquaint us with the particularities of the US law corpus, the interaction between these areas of study, and the general Ethical, Legal, and Social Implications of Bioethics. I would like to stress the importance of the last class, Clinical Rotation. While many theories and action plans may be

apprehended in a theoretical class, the practical experience associated with working as a clinical ethicist can only be developed through intense work in a clinical setting. After having experienced more than 80 hours of clinical rotation, which included shadowing various professionals, attending ethical analysis committee meetings, obtaining critical IRB exposure, observing transplant committee sessions, all culminated with weekly meetings with public and private policy makers, physicians and ethicists to analyze and develop the knowledge and understanding of all the elements involved in the above mentioned practices. By the start of the second semester, almost every and any novel activity seemed natural and equally important in grasping the essentials needed by a bioethicist.

In the Spring term, our focus of study was directed towards the subject of Research Ethics in its entirety. As we continued our Foundations classes, we studied Public Health Ethics, Neuroethics, Stem Cell Ethics and Research Ethics. Another class that continued the global understanding and integration of a researcher was International Health Research Ethics, which analyzed multicultural aspects within the field, such as national and international research guidelines and regulations, socially adaptive behavior, cultural context of research and international research ethics case discussions. And just as in the first semester, the applied knowledge came through a Research Practicum class, designed to allow us to conduct research or help with on-going research projects. My personal interest in this training period was genetic research regulations and the secondary use of genetic samples in research. I analyzed regulations regarding medical waste management within the 50 states and the use and regulation of bio banks and virtual biorepositories. After spending a semester on this topic, I was able to offer a properly researched ethical analysis of the phenomena and possible solutions to the problems discovered. This was not only an abstract activity, but it produced information for publishing several articles in the field. Besides this individual research activity, I accumulated more than 30 hours of behavioral IRB experience, in both reviewing protocols and handling communications and resolving the inherent rising of ethical issues.

Question 3: “Did this Program offer additional training for Fogarty students”?

On top of all the above mentioned courses, as international students we had four other classes which were meant to accelerate our knowledge in research ethics, both American and Romanian, in which we explored local and foreign topics, research procedures, and trainings in protocol writing, grant application procedures, conducting research as Principal Investigator, preparing manuscripts, coordinating Institutional Review Boards and managing all the

conflicting situations that might arise during a research project or while managing an ethical oversight system. This was part of a theoretical and practical training offered to prepare the integration in our native research ethics system.

Question 4: “What are the practical consequences of this program for you”?

Being enrolled in the *Research Ethics Track* proved to be an inspired decision from our advisor, Professor Sana Loue. It allowed us not only to learn bioethics as a profession, but also gain the know-how and professional expertise to conduct research ethics analysis and manage projects in this field.

As a consequence, my re-entry project consists of conducting a study called “A Study on Research Ethics in Babeş-Bolyai University, based on published papers, interviewed researchers and institutional orientation”. It is aimed at understanding the complexity of the local situation regarding the ethical oversight of human subject research. Based on this project, along with the Bioethics Center of BBU and the administrative support of BBU, we plan to develop instruments and actions to address the identified needs in this internationally relevant field.

Another accomplishment would be the opportunity to apply and advance my knowledge through a position of Research Associate at the Ohio State University, where I support the efforts of teaching Research Ethics under the management and guidance of Dr. Ryan Nash, Director of the Center for Bioethics and Medical Humanities, in Columbus, Ohio.

