

Kelly Edwards, PhD Bioethicist

BIOETHICIST

KELLY EDWARDS, PH. D.

Place of Employment:
University of Washington

Specialties and Interests:
Community-based research practices,
environmental justice, and
integrating ethics into training
programs and public policy.



"Genetics researchers often work with distinct communities. To take moral account of how their research affects these communities, they need a richer conception of justice and they need to make those communities equal participants in decision-making about how the research is conducted and what is produced and published out of it."

CAREERS IN THE SPOTLIGHT: BIOETHICIST

What do they do?

Bioethicists study the ethical controversies that arise from advances in biology and medicine. They advise patients, researchers, public policy makers, and/or medical doctors about a wide range of ethical issues, from genetic testing and medical treatment to medical privacy and stem cell research.

What kind of training is involved?

Training varies widely from a certificate program completed during or after a Bachelor's degree in another subject to Doctoral (PhD) programs specifically in Bioethics.

What is a typical salary for a Bioethicist?

Depending upon training, anywhere from \$50,000/year (\$24/hour) to over \$100,000/year (\$48/hour).

1. Where did you grow up?

I grew up in Federal Way, Washington. My family is fourth generation Washington State, and we would spend summers visiting our family cabin in the Blue Mountains outside of Walla Walla or my family's property up the Teanaway River Valley outside of Cle Elum. I love this state!

2. What do you (i.e., what career or field are you in, what is the title of your position)?

I am on faculty in the Bioethics Department in the School of Medicine and also the School of Public Health. I am in a grant-funded faculty position, which means I am involved with a number of research projects and teaching efforts which makes for a really interesting mix of issues in ethics of medicine and science.

3. How did you choose your career? When did you first know this is the career you wanted?

It really surprised me. I went to Occidental College in Los Angeles and they emphasized building writing and critical thinking skills. They asked us to sign up for "freshman writing seminars" by choosing from a list of topics the faculty there were passionate about teaching. Not knowing anything, I selected "Personal Identity, Immortality, and the Meaning of Life." It turned out to be taught by a philosophy professor and was all about death and dying. This was 1985 and I had never heard of "bioethics" – it was hardly yet a field – but some major landmark cases were going on in that decade that were pushing the issues of when should we withdraw or withhold life-sustaining treatment from someone. Medicine and technology had progressed to the point where we had to ask not just can we do this, but should we. I was captivated by these questions, as it was the first time I had been faced with questions where there was no clear right answer. That hooked me. I ended up majoring in philosophy (which my dad said would only set me up for being a bartender 😊), but did not realize bioethics could actually be a career to pursue until four years after college, when I was encouraged to look at the MA in Bioethics program at the University of Washington.

4. Did your family support your decision to pursue your career?

Absolutely. Despite the funny remark from my dad above, they have always supported me and my sister in pursuing our passions and interests, as long as we find our own way to make a contribution to the world. (My sister is in environmental education and ecotourism in Alaska.)

5. What is the highest level of education you have?

PhD in Philosophy of Education.

6. What is the highest level of education reached by other members of your family?

My Dad has a MBA, and my mom had a BA until she went back for her BSN in her 40s. Her father was a general surgeon. My family has always valued education and appreciated there were a variety of ways to contribute to the world.

7. What is the salary range for a person in your position?

It depends on the university and geographic region, and your seniority and experience. Starting salary for a junior faculty in bioethics can be \$60,000-\$80,000 [\$29-\$38/hour] and our more senior faculty at UW (who are PhDs but not MDs) are in the range of \$90,000-120,000 [\$43-\$58/hour].

8. What do you like most about your job?

I feel very lucky for my job and I like a number of things about it. One is the flexibility to work on a number of different projects and issues. The work is always evolving and emerging along with issues in science and medicine so we are always learning. I also love the people that I work with – all my work occurs in interdisciplinary teams.

9. What do you like least about your job?

It can be stressful to be a grant-funded faculty member, as you have to be constantly on the lookout for the next funding opportunity. In the current funding climate, federal funds are very competitive. This means you can spend a lot of your time writing grants with no guarantee of being successful. Our group has been very lucky and I've been fully funded for the ten years I have been in this position. Because the work never ends, you have to be willing and able to draw boundaries to make sure you are still taking care of yourself and making time for exercise, friends, and family.

10. What's an abbreviated day in the life of your job?

Every day is really different (hence the variety I like), but here's an example: Get up at 6:00 am and respond to email for about an hour or two. Bike to my first meeting, which could be in one of three research buildings around the city. Have a series of meetings with research teams, or some of our clinical teachers at the medical school about teaching approaches for ethics and professionalism with the medical students, or with hospital staff and leadership about if and how we should use clinical data for research purposes. I might give a guest lecture on ethics to one of several graduate seminars or medical

groups, then bike home, sometimes via the yoga studio. Often my days are filled with meetings so I need to do my own writing in the evenings. And then get up and see what's on the calendar for the next day!

11. In one to two sentences, how would you say you use bioinformatics in your work? If you don't use bioinformatics directly in your work, how has bioinformatics impacted your career field?

I collaborate actively with colleagues in our Biomedical Health Informatics Core within our Institute for Translational Health Sciences. We are interested in the use of health information in research, how to do data sharing effectively and ethically, and how technical systems can help support ethical biobanking practices. For example, using computer interfaces to manage participant preferences and information flow in a research project.

12. Do you have any recommendations for students who are interested in entering your field?

Be creative and curious. All fields have ethical dimensions to their work, so you can have a subspecialty in ethics even if you are focusing on a different area of work. As an emerging field, you can create your own path in bioethics (there is not a set career path). We come from many different core disciplines: philosophy, theology, health services, anthropology, sociology, biology, public health, law, etc.

13. What are your favorite hobbies?

I love being outside in any form. I love backpacking in our Cascade Mountains and skiing or snowshoeing in the winter. My sister is teaching me how to telemark ski so I can get into the backcountry. I also enjoy finding interesting urban spaces for picnics and listening to live music.

Resources:

In the **field of bioethics**, there are many different types of jobs available, depending upon what type of education and experience you have. For more information about different types of jobs in this field, including what you can do with different degrees (two year Associate's degree, four year Bachelor's degree, graduate, or professional degrees), visit NWABR's Student Career Center at: <http://www.nwabr.org/students/student-resource-center/career-center>.

The site also includes descriptions of and links to different types of degree programs, various career paths, resources on writing a resume and cover letter and evaluating online resources, and tips for successful job interviews.

All of the links below can also be accessed from NWABR's Student Career Center.

Find information on careers in bioethics and genomics at the National Human Genome Research Institute, including **career outlooks**, **working conditions**, and **salary information**. Scroll through the career listings until you reach "Bioethicist Using Genomics" on page 1:
<http://www.genome.gov/GenomicCareers/careers.cfm>.

To learn about **careers in bioethics**, visit:
<http://bioethics.virginia.edu/careers.html>.

For more information about reliable bioethics career resources visit “Bioethics Resources of the Web” at: <http://bioethics.od.nih.gov/careers.html>.

Dr. Kelly Edwards’s homepage:
http://depts.washington.edu/bhdept/facres/kfe_bio.html.

Some of the Resources above may also be used to research other careers that may be of interest to you in the future, including the Bureau of Labor and Statistics and the National Human Genome Research Institute.

Job Posting: Bioethics Summer Internship

The Bioethics Group at Seattle Research University, under the leadership of Dr. MaryEllin Sundberg, is seeking motivated individuals interested in bioethical and policy issues related to direct-to-consumer (DTC) genetic testing. Direct-to-consumer genetic testing refers to genetic tests that are marketed directly to consumers, such as through the internet, without involving a doctor or insurance company. While advocates claim that this allows consumers greater access to their own genetic information, critics are concerned that the public is not fully educated about the risks such information can bring, or the clinical validity of DTC genetic testing results. The Bioethics Group will be hosting focus groups with community groups on issues related to DTC genetic testing, and will develop a report summarizing our findings, which will be submitted to the United States Congress to inform future public policy debates. Prior lab experience is not necessary, but an understanding of molecular biology, including the role of DNA in encoding physical traits, is required. Applicants familiar with genetic testing, DTC genetic testing, and bioinformatics tools used to detect mutations are encouraged to apply. Additional computer skills, including Microsoft Office (Word®, Excel®, PowerPoint®), is preferred. Interest in bioethics and familiarity with bioethical principles is required. Demonstrated ability to communicate well with others, listen to the needs of others, and explain complex topics in an easy-to-understand way is particularly valuable. Applicants must be hard-working, responsible, and able to work in a team environment. Address all inquiries to Dr. MaryEllin Sundberg, Seattle Research University, Bioethics Group, Suite 600, Seattle, WA.