Committed to fundamentally improving the ethical culture of work organizations, the newly-inaugurated Center for Leadership Ethics (CLE) builds on the Eller College reputation for ethics teaching and research.

Existing programs, including the High School Ethics Forum and the Collegiate Ethics Case Competition — coordinated in part by the Eller Board of Honor and Integrity, an undergraduate student organization — and the Executive Ethics Forum — coordinated in part by the Eller MBA chapter of Net Impact — aim to introduce a framework of ethical thinking from the classroom to the board room. These programs will now operate out of the CLE.

The CLE has also established industry partnerships to conduct research designed to be disseminated direct to practicing managers through media such as webinars, integrated into classroom instruction, and published traditionally in academic journals.

Stephen Gilliland, head of the Department of Management and Organizations and Arnold Lesk Chair in Leadership, is executive director of the CLE. Russell Cropanzano, the Brian Lesk Professor in Organizational Behavior, will serve the CLE as director of research. Paul Melendez, the EthicsPoint Distinguished Lecturer in Business Ethics, will serve as founding director. Melendez is director of the ethics program at the Eller College and developed the College’s existing outreach programming in ethics.

Melendez also teaches business ethics and international management courses and travels abroad with undergraduate and graduate students to study ethical and corporate social responsibility in Latin America and Asia.

The dominant framework for business ethics is based on a philosophical orientation, and serious research in the area is published in academic journals that do not reach general readers. The CLE aims to bridge this gap with a combination of research on ethical leadership and decision behavior and outreach programs focused on organizational practices and individual decision processes that promote ethical conduct.

Students encounter ethical issues from an early age, but conversations about ethics are diffuse at best. The High School Ethics Forum, sponsored by PricewaterhouseCoopers, currently serves students in Tucson, Phoenix, and Los Angeles. The Collegiate Ethics Case Competition brings undergraduate students from more than 30 top schools around the country to the Eller College to analyze, develop, and defend a position on a thorny ethical case drawn from the real world.

Merchants Information Solutions (MIS) – a Phoenix-based company that provides integrity testing, background screening, and identity theft restoration – is a founding partner of the CLE. Their support will fund programs and research over the next three years. CLE research director Cropanzano and associate professor Jerel Slaughter are developing a research program using data from a proprietary MIS integrity test. EthicsPoint, a major ethics hotline provider and another founding partner of CLE, is working with CLE on a data set that Gilliland, professor Lisa Ordóñez, and doctoral student David Welsh aim to use in developing a corporate Ethics Index to serve as an indicator of the changing ethical climate of business.