6-1-2008

Academic ethics

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Teaching and Learning

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Organization
Management
Journal

Abstract
With an increased emphasis on the topic of ethics in business, more attention has been focused on the college campus and how students are introduced to ethical issues. The question often asked is how ethics is being taught in business school classrooms and whether students are receptive to these messages. Are faculty members considered ''more ethical'' and, therefore, able to teach students to be ethical citizens? Alternatively, is it the experience and broad knowledge rather than the individual's behavior that qualifies a professor? Students, in turn, are influenced by the opinions their professors express in classroom discussions. This paper recognizes the concept that students and faculty members may have different views of what constitutes ethics by considering ethical behavior on the part of the professors. Findings indicate that students have a differing core of ethical beliefs than faculty concerning situations involving professors in the classroom. Understanding these differences presents a reexamination of how students and faculty members interact in the study of ethical issues and the context in which learning occurs.
Organization Management Journal (2008) **5,** 57–64. doi:10.1057/omj.2008.7

Keywords: pedagogy; ethics; behavior; values

Literature

Recent corporate scandals have caused a renewed interest in the topic of ethics. In Harris Interactive's 2006 Annual Corporation Reputation Survey (2007), 69% say corporate America's reputation is ''not good/terrible.'' Public outcry and legislative mandate have forced many disciplines within business to create their own codes of ethical behavior (AICPA Code of Professional Conduct, 2006; Academy of Management Code of Ethical Conduct, 2006; American Marketing Association Ethical Norms and Values for Marketers, 2007). The general public, however, has drawn the attention of these scandals away from industry and is spotlighting higher education as a solution to this professional conduct dilemma. The spotlight specifically is focused on university business schools. Even satirist Gary Trudeau in his cartoon, Doonesbury, raises the issue of ethics with his college student characters who appear to be business majors (2004).

The public solution is for universities to educate students to act responsibly when faced with future ethical issues in the workplace. In turn, business school faculty have tried to answer the call with extensive discussions around the topic of ethical concepts and how these concepts should be taught to business school students (Dunfee and Robertson, 1988; Anderson 1997; Baxter and Rarick, 1997; Cragg, 1997; Wolfe and Fritzsche, 1998; McCabe and Pavela, 2004).

Business programs have initiated curricular revisions resulting in a confusing array of teaching methods: integrating ethics issues into classes across the business curriculum, devoting separate courses to the topic of ethics, requiring general education courses in philosophy and religion, using case-study integration across key courses, and incorporating professionalism and ethics into capstone courses. Although the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB)-International requires ''ethical understanding and reasoning ability'' as an assurance of learning standard, the accrediting requirements leave delivery systems to the discretion of individual programs (AACSB-International, 2007).

If society is asking academicians to prepare ethical managers and leaders, faculty members must look at themselves as well as their students and understand the ethical perceptions of both groups. In much the same way a physician should ''heal thyself,'' business school faculty members should consider their own ethical beliefs before becoming the healer of corporate catastrophes. Faculty ethics have long been of major concern on college campuses and many research studies have focused on ethics in higher education (Robinson and Mouton, 1985; Alexander, 1986; Finn, 1989; Braxton, 1994; Knight and Auster, 1999; Pe Symaco and Marcelo, 2003; Sirgy et al., 2006). Faculty members are often considered independent contractors and development of standardized expectations for conduct encounter strong resistance. Tenure tends to limit administrative influence and academic departments usually have immense autonomy (Whicker and Kronenfeld, 1994). The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) does provide a ''Statement of Professional Ethics,'' but the document shifts responsibility for enforcement to the academic institution and is, itself, not binding on members of the academy (AAUP, 1987). Generally, faculty members are asked to regulate themselves.

A faculty member's responsibility is to ''lead students to master appropriate subject matter, arousing appreciation for it while neither misrepresenting nor diluting it'' (Cahn, 1994: 11). Students are, however, necessarily dependent upon the faculty for their instruction and faculty members to be ethical leaders, must respect the rights of all parties and inflict no harm (Gini, 1998; Mallory and Thomas, 2003). In a discussion of influence, Kerr (1994), indicates a relationship between faculty values and student values. Rupert and

Holmes have added that ''university and college faculty face complex professional and ethical issues in their ongoing interactions and involvement with students'' (1997, p. 660).

Faculty can have a powerful impact on students. The ''faculty role'' is multifaceted and faculty members are asked to take on complex relationships with students including those of instructor, mentor, advisor, research supervisor, and curriculum planner (Brown and Krager, 1985). The increased importance of faculty involvement with students (Jacobi, 1991; Astin, 1993) has encouraged a strengthening in faculty connections with their students. These relationships have also fostered the development of students and are seen as having a positive impact.

If faculty members influence what students learn in the classroom (Rask and Bailey, 2002) and business schools are producing future corporate leaders who will impact corporate culture as well as the ethics of their employees, the perceptions of what business faculty members view as ethical behavior is very important. Previous studies have focused on faculty perceptions of student academic behavior (Smith et al., 1998; Pulvers and Diekhoff, 1999; Pe Symaco and Marcelo, 2003) with a few studies looking at the relationship of business school faculty and student ethics (Johns and Strand, 2000; Holtschneider, 2001; Robie and Kidwell, 2003; Cook, 2003). Even fewer studies have focused on the question of how business school students perceive the ethics of their business school professors (Crane, 2004).

Although this leads to the question of whether faculty values impact what is being taught in the classroom (Appleby, 1990; Tabachnick et al., 1991; Perlman and McCann, 1998; Murray, 2000; Morgan and Korschgen, 2001), there are few studies of whether faculty ethical values are similar to or different from those of the students in their classrooms. Understanding the similarities and differences provides the context in which learning occurs.

Robie and Kidwell (2003) specifically focused on the ethical perceptions of faculty members in a business school environment. Faculty from 89 AACSB International accredited business schools gave their perceptions of what constitutes ethical behavior of faculty members in management education. The survey consisted of 55 behavioral statements which came, in part, from the works of Tabachnick et al. (1991) and Birch et al. (1999). Respondents were asked to ''rate their ethical

acceptability''(Robie and Kidwell, 2003: 157) across a topology of ethical issues related to behavior, research, teaching evaluations, course content, respect, educational atmosphere, financial interactions, and social and sexual relationships. Robie and Kidwell also indicated ''the views of undergraduate students towards ethics can be influenced not only by listening to what their professors say about the subject but also by watching what they do'' (Robie and Kidwell, 2003: 171). Their study, however, explicitly assumes that faculty members are more ethical than their students and that students are influenced by that positive role modeling.

The present study examines ethical behavior of faculty and students' perceptions of ethical behavior of faculty members using faculty data, as reported by Robie and Kidwell (2003) and data from students collected for this study. The ethical perception themes include: course content, evaluation of students, educational environment, disrespectful behavior, research and publication issued financial material transactions, social relationships with students, and sexual relationships with students and other faculty.

Method
Using the survey instrument as developed by Robie and Kidwell (2003) to capture faculty member's perceptions of ethical behavior in the classroom, the questionnaire was refocused to ask students how ethical they perceived their professors to be if these faculty members were to take on the characteristics of the survey statements (Appendix A). Robie and Kidwell gathered survey results from 830 faculty teaching in AACSB International accredited business program.

In the present study, 543 students who attended AACSB International accredited business programs at two major, public universities in two states were surveyed. Students at the two universities were all enrolled in business classes at the time of the survey. Students were asked to participate but could make the decision not to participate. Participants were predominately female (56.7%) with the average age of 22.1 years. This deviates from the Robie and Kidwell (2003) study whose participants were predominately male (71.3%) and predominately middle-aged with 66.6% in the 40–59 age range.

Results
An analysis of independent t test was conducted to determine if there were any significant differences between faculty and student perceptions regarding ethical values and beliefs in classroom scenarios. One of the limitations of this methodology is that it may not identify confounding influences such as differences in samples or shifts over time. Of the 55 survey behaviors, 38 were significant at the 0.001 level in a statistical analysis comparing the student study means with the Robie and Kidwell (2003) data. An analysis of overall experiment-wide variation does indicate at the 95% confidence level that the two samples are different. Table 1 indicates that the student mean was lower in 25 of the behaviors significant at the 0.001 level, and Table 2 indicates that the faculty mean was lower in 13 of the 55 behaviors compared to the student mean.

Faculty and students shared many of the top behaviors they considered to be most unethical. Behavior 1, ''Gives lower grades to undergraduate students who strongly oppose their views'' was thought be the most unethical scenario for both groups. The top five behaviors considered to be most unethical for each group follow:

Top five behaviors faculty considered to be more unethical

1. B1 – Gives lower grades to undergraduate students who strongly oppose their views.
2. B45 – Becomes sexually involved with an undergraduate student in one of their classes.
3. B15 – Lowers course demands for undergraduate student athletes.
4. B3 – Fails to acknowledge significant undergraduate student participation in research or publication.
5. B2 – Gives easy grades to avoid negative evaluations from undergraduate students.

Top five behaviors students considered to be more unethical

1. B1 – Gives lower grades to undergraduate students who strongly oppose their views.
2. B7 – Shares with colleagues confidential disclosures told to him/her by an undergraduate student.
3. B15 – Lowers course demands for undergraduate student athletes.
4. B45 – Becomes sexually involved with an undergraduate student in one of their classes.
5. B51 – Lowers course demands for undergraduate minority students.

Although these two lists are similar, faculty members appear to be much more concerned with the ethics of having a sexual relationship with a student in their class while students are more

Table 1 Behaviors students find more unethical than faculty (significant at 0.001)

Behaviors	Student mean (SD)	Faculty mean* (SD)	t (sig)
7. Shares with colleagues confidential disclosures told to him/her by an undergraduate student.	**1.40** **(0.787)**	1.59 (0.808)	−4.411 (0.000)
4. Belittles undergraduate students' comments in class.	**1.65** **(0.877)**	1.87 (1.060)	−4.167 (0.000)
12. Ridicules an undergraduate student in a faculty-only discussion.	**1.80** **(0.906)**	2.38 (1.26)	−10.407 (0.000)
20. Discusses your personal problems with an undergraduate student.	**1.81** **(1.078)**	2.56 (1.162)	−12.260 (0.000)
11. Ignores a colleague's unethical behavior.	**1.91** **(0.945)**	2.10 (0.900)	−3.635 (0.000)
23. Gives priority to one's research interest over the undergraduate students educational experience.	**2.22** **(0.988)**	2.87 (1.184)	−10.970 (0.000)
32. Teaches undergraduate course material that he/she had not yet mastered.	**2.29** **(1.082)**	3.12 (1.092)	−13.714 (0.000)
13. Fails to present views different from their own in undergraduate teaching.	**2.30** **(1.089)**	2.63 (1.127)	−5.329 (0.000)
21. Avoids academic committee work.	**2.42** **(0.922)**	3.17 (1.138)	−13.300 (0.000)
30. Teaches in classes so crowded that their ability to teach undergraduate courses effectively is impaired.	**2.43** **(1.011)**	3.00 (1.070)	−9.871 (0.000)
31. Goes to a bar with undergraduate students after class.	**2.45** **(1.244)**	3.02 (1.238)	−8.203 (0.000)
55. Asks for small favors (e.g., a ride home) from undergraduate students.	**2.47** **(1.124)**	2.71 (1.158)	−3.792 (0.000)
28. Uses school resources to create a 'popular' trade book.	**2.58** **(0.975)**	3.04 (1.134)	−7.673 (0.000)
29. Gives academic credit instead of salary for undergraduate student assistants.	**2.58** **(1.116)**	2.90 (1.224)	−4.983 (0.000)
53. Brings up certain class-related topics that are sexually or racially charged.	**2.63** **(1.252)**	3.29 (1.302)	−9.256 (0.000)
10. Fails to keep up-to-date on recent research findings in one's field of academic expertise.	**2.64** **(0.903)**	3.16 (1.090)	−9.549 (0.000)
49. Shows controversial media to undergraduates in class (e.g., union-organizing activities of exotic dancers).	**2.65** **(1.140)**	3.18 (1.190)	−7.518 (0.000)
26. Grades undergraduates on a strict curve regardless of class performance level.	**2.66** **(1.087)**	3.04 (1.171)	−6.028 (0.000)
42. Engages in a sexual relationship with another faculty member within their department who is of a higher academic rank.	**2.74** **(1.225)**	3.23 (1.346)	−6.913 (0.000)
27. Gives priority to one's teaching interests over the professional responsibility to publish scholarly material in academic outlets.	**2.82** **(1.055)**	3.63 (0.996)	−14.731 (0.000)
39. Accepts an undergraduate student's invitation to a party.	**2.84** **(1.145)**	3.36 (1.120)	−8.325 (0.000)
22. Returns graded papers from undergraduate courses without comment.	**2.93** **(1.016)**	3.17 (1.099)	−4.014 (0.000)
40. Engages in a sexual relationship with another faculty member within their department who is the same academic rank.	**2.96** **(1.299)**	3.63 (1.316)	−9.164 (0.000)
36. Uses the same lecture notes for an undergraduate course from last term without updating them.	**3.16** **(1.042)**	3.80 (1.023)	−11.214 (0.000)
35. Gives the same test you used in an undergraduate course in previous semesters.	**3.35** **(1.019)**	3.85 (1.067)	−8.534 (0.000)

*Robie, C. and Kidwell, R. E. (2003)

Table 2 Behaviors faculty find more unethical than students (significant at 0.001)

Behaviors	Student mean (SD)	Faculty mean* (SD)	t (sig)
1. Gives lower grades to undergraduate students who strongly oppose their views.	1.28 (0.668)	**1.10** **(0.413)**	5.702 (0.000)
45. Becomes sexually involved with an undergraduate student in one of their classes.	1.58 (0.946)	**1.12** **(0.491)**	10.265 (0.000)
15. Lowers course demands for undergraduate student athletes.	1.49 (0.828)	**1.33** **(0.651)**	3.713 (0.000)
3. Fails to acknowledge significant undergraduate student participation in research or publication.	1.96 (0.947)	**1.34** **(.725)**	12.822 (0.000)
2. Gives easy grades to avoid negative evaluations from undergraduate students.	1.78 (0.885)	**1.42** **(.700)**	7.967 (0.000)
51. Lowers course demands for undergraduate minority students.	1.67 (0.886)	**1.55** **(0.762)**	2.705 (0.009)
5. Allows an undergraduate student's likeability to influence their grading.	1.77 (0.912)	**1.59** **(0.801)**	3.808 (0.000)
46. Uses films to fill class time when teaching undergraduate courses without regard for their educational value.	2.21 (1.024)	**1.68** **(0.849)**	9.968 (0.000)
6. Relaxes rules (e.g., late papers, attendance) so undergraduates will like him/her.	2.15 (1.026)	**1.84** **(0.959)**	5.699 (0.000)
47. Takes advantage of an undergraduate student's offer such as wholesale prices at parent's store.	2.57 (1.137)	**2.09** **(1.021)**	7.838 (0.000)
33. Sells goods (e.g., your car, insurance and books) to one of their undergraduate students.	3.06 (1.150)	**2.68** **(1.223)**	5.763 (0.000)
50. Maintains a full-time consulting practice outside of their academic duties.	3.64 (1.053)	**2.93** **(1.296)**	11.086 (0.000)
34. Hugs undergraduate students.	3.19 (1.113)	**3.02** **(1.121)**	2.825 (0.005)

*Robie, C. and Kidwell, R. E. (2003)

concerned with having faculty gossip about them. Many of the significant differences are not a clash of ethics, with one party saying behavior is ethical while the other disagrees. Rather, they represent a difference in the importance or severity of a perceived ethical breach.

Interestingly, the most ethical scenario for faculty with a mean of 3.85 was B35 "Gives the same test you used in an undergraduate course in previous semesters." Students considered this less ethical with a mean of 3.35. The most ethical scenario for students at 3.64 was B50, "maintains a fulltime consulting practice outside their academic duties," was considered considerably less ethical by faculty at 2.93.

Conclusion

Robie and Kidwell's (2003) findings were interesting in that business faculty found only two of the 55 behavioral statements to be overwhelmingly unethical (over 90%), "giving lower grades to undergraduate students who strongly oppose your views," (93.1%) and "becoming sexually involved with an undergraduate student in one of your classes" (91.7%). Students did not appear to be as strongly motivated to consider a scenario as overwhelmingly unethical as defined above. Although students indicated that 58.2% of the scenarios were more "definitely unethical" than faculty (41.8%), students did not feel any of the scenarios were overwhelmingly unethical. Students thought "giving lower grades to undergraduate student who strongly oppose faculty member views" was the most "definitely unethical" scenario at 80.8% with the second behavior being "sharing with colleagues confidential disclosures told to him/her by an undergraduate student" at 74.6% "definitely unethical."

Something college and universities do not mention when new faculty members are entering academia is the concept of time relative to students. As faculty members grow a year older each year, students remain the same age – year after year after year. It is easy for faculty members to establish a mindset of their perception of what college

students are, not considering the vastly different experiences students bring with them to college. For example, students who entered college in 2007 were born in 1989. A recent article in the *Wall Street Journal* Alsop (2006), states that students "tend to demonstrate a strong commitment to social responsibility," and are drawn to conservative values. Their values come from generational background factors including attitudes and perceptions that are quite different from the faculty members who are standing in front of them in the classroom.

Discussion will continue throughout business and academia about whether ethics can be taught. This research demonstrates that significant differences can occur between faculty and student perceptions of ethics. As a specific pedagogical approach faculty could use an instrument such as the one included here to begin the discussion of ethics. In both business and academia, common ground must be established to start a dialogue on ethics.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix A

Please rate the following behavior by a business professor:

See Table A1

Table A1   Survey Statements

1. Gives lower grades to undergraduate students who strongly oppose their views.	5 4 3 2 1
2. Gives easy grades to avoid negative evaluations from undergraduate students.	5 4 3 2 1
3. Fails to acknowledge significant undergraduate student participation in research or publication.	5 4 3 2 1
4. Belittles undergraduate students' comments in class.	5 4 3 2 1
5. Allows an undergraduate student's likeability to influence their grading.	5 4 3 2 1
6. Relaxes rules (e.g., late papers, attendance) so undergraduates will like him/her.	5 4 3 2 1
7. Shares with colleagues confidential disclosures told to him/her by an undergraduate student.	5 4 3 2 1
8. Fails to provide negative comments on a paper or exam when these comments reflect their honest assessment of the undergraduate student's performance.	5 4 3 2 1
9. Grades on criteria not delineated on the undergraduate course syllabus.	5 4 3 2 1
10. Fails to keep up-to-date on recent research findings in one's field of academic expertise.	5 4 3 2 1
11. Ignores a colleague's unethical behavior.	5 4 3 2 1
12. Ridicules an undergraduate student in a faculty-only discussion.	5 4 3 2 1
13. Fails to present views different from their own in undergraduate teaching.	5 4 3 2 1
14. Criticizes all theoretical orientations except those you personally prefer in your undergraduate teaching.	5 4 3 2 1
15. Lowers course demands for undergraduate student athletes.	5 4 3 2 1
16. Fails to maintain regularly scheduled office hours.	5 4 3 2 1
17. Avoids negatives in writing a letter of reference for a questionable undergraduate student.	5 4 3 2 1
18. Teaches an undergraduate course in such a way as to differ significantly from the content listed on the undergraduate course syllabus.	5 4 3 2 1
19. Teaches an undergraduate class without adequate preparation for the day.	5 4 3 2 1
20. Discusses your personal problems with an undergraduate student.	5 4 3 2 1
21. Avoids academic committee work.	5 4 3 2 1
22. Returns graded papers from undergraduate courses without comment.	5 4 3 2 1
23. Gives priority to one's research interest over the undergraduate students educational experience.	5 4 3 2 1
24. Sells complimentary texts to used book buyers.	5 4 3 2 1
25. Allows undergraduate students to withdraw from a class when they are technically not eligible to do so.	5 4 3 2 1
26. Grades undergraduates on a strict curve regardless of class performance level.	5 4 3 2 1
27. Gives priority to one's teaching interests over the professional responsibility to publish scholarly material in academic outlets.	5 4 3 2 1
28. Uses school resources to create a 'popular' trade book.	5 4 3 2 1
29. Gives academic credit instead of salary for undergraduate student assistants.	5 4 3 2 1
30. Teaches in classes so crowded that their ability to teach undergraduate courses effectively is impaired.	5 4 3 2 1
31. Goes to a bar with undergraduate students after class.	5 4 3 2 1
32. Teaches undergraduate course material that he/she had not yet mastered.	5 4 3 2 1

Table A1 *Continued*

33. Sells goods (e.g., your car, insurance, books) to one of their undergraduate students.	5 4 3 2 1
34. Hugs undergraduate students.	5 4 3 2 1
35. Gives the same test you used in an undergraduate course in previous semesters.	5 4 3 2 1
36. Uses the same lecture notes for an undergraduate course from last term without updating them.	5 4 3 2 1
37. Begins an ongoing friendship with an undergraduate student who is enrolled in their class.	5 4 3 2 1
38. Hires an undergraduate student to work for him/ her outside of the university (e.g., baby sit, paint their house, clean their car).	5 4 3 2 1
39. Accepts an undergraduate student's invitation to a party.	5 4 3 2 1
40. Engages in a sexual relationship with another faculty member within their department who is the same academic rank.	5 4 3 2 1
41. Becomes sexually involved with an undergraduate student only after the course is completed and the grades are filed.	5 4 3 2 1
42. Engages in a sexual relationship with another faculty member within their department who is of a higher academic rank.	5 4 3 2 1
43. Engages in a sexual relationship with another faculty member within their department who is of a lower academic rank.	5 4 3 2 1
44. Engages in a sexual relationship with a staff member in their department.	5 4 3 2 1
45. Becomes sexually involved with an undergraduate student in one of their classes.	5 4 3 2 1
46. Uses films to fill class time when teaching undergraduate courses without regard for their educational value.	5 4 3 2 1
47. Takes advantage of an undergraduate student's offer such as wholesale prices at parent's store.	5 4 3 2 1
48. Uses profanity in lectures when teaching undergraduate courses.	5 4 3 2 1
49. Shows controversial media to undergraduates in class (e.g., union-organizing activities of exotic dancers).	5 4 3 2 1
50. Maintains a full-time consulting practice outside of their academic duties.	5 4 3 2 1
51. Lowers course demands for undergraduate minority students.	5 4 3 2 1
52. Once tenured, only does the minimum amount of work to get by.	5 4 3 2 1
53. Brings up certain class-related topics that are sexually or racially charged.	5 4 3 2 1
54. Repeatedly uses an outdated textbook in teaching an undergraduate course.	5 4 3 2 1
55. Asks for small favors (e.g., a ride home) from undergraduate students.	5 4 3 2 1

Note 5 = definitely ethical; 4 = probably ethical; 3 = not sure; 2 = probably unethical; 1 = definitely unethical

About the author

Martha C. Spears is associate dean and professor of management in the College of Business Administration at Winthrop University. She received her bachelor and Ph.D. degrees from the University of South Carolina and teaches at the under- graduate and graduates levels in leadership and organizational behavior. Her intellectual agenda includes scholarship in the areas of leadership, organizational behavior, and managerial decision making. She can be reached at spearsm@ winthrop.edu.