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Teaching & Learning

Introduction to teaching & learning: Social responsibility in the management classroom

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In this issue, the papers in the Teaching and Learning section have the theme of social responsibility in common. The first explores service learning and the role of the university in the larger world. The second provides case studies for teaching ethical issues in workplace dilemmas.

Corporate social responsibility is a broad concept. One of the main ways in which it is discussed within business schools is at a macro level and the interaction between corporations and society. Numerous highly visible corporate scandals over the past decade, for example, Enron, WorldCom, Parmalat, have drawn attention to the evil that corporations can do. However, while it is easy to consider their actions anthropomorphically, these abuses are commissioned by people in corporations making decisions. This is reflected upon in the film, *The Corporation* (2003, Mark Achbar and Jennifer Abbott, directors), in which oil company executives talk about how much they as individuals genuinely want to do green things, but somehow the corporation stills finds itself in the dock accused of environmental abuses. Management schools have been keen to explore their involvement in creating executives who seem to lack a moral compass and the papers in this section are in this stream of work. Specifically, both papers promote a critical reflection by individuals of their own moral principles and the implications of these for their work.

Most *OMJ* readers will be familiar with the concept of service learning. This model has been in wide use on campus for at least 20 years and builds on the idea of experiential education as the route to engaged learning. One common definition is that “Service-Learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities” (The National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2009).

It is in the spirit of enriched learning that Mike Gent of Canisius College writes about his innovation in creating an on campus service-learning experience with a clear bias for social awareness as well as service. By using the “education for liberation” philosophy of Brazilian Paulo Freire, this model for learning puts issues of economic and other forms of oppression at the forefront of the educational experience. In a powerful and straightforward way, the author asks students to engage in critical thinking regarding the roots and system of life in their own college community. Far



too often, our picture of the university is as an island apart from our larger world. By looking more deeply into our shared learning enterprise, students and their instructors get a chance to bring their experiential learning into sharp (and occasionally uncomfortable) focus.

We think *OMJ* readers will be interested and challenged by this paper. It is an opportunity to think about learning without the emotional distance of most studies and classroom discussions and we hope this provokes both heat and light when shared with colleagues.

The second paper in this section is written by Valerie Christian and Angela Gumbus from Sacred Heart University. The focus of their attention is the teaching of ethics, a subject near the top of most management educators' lists of concerns, given events in the corporate world. But rather than considering ethical matters at an organizational level, which dominates ethics teaching, the authors look at ethics at the micro-level and the everyday

dilemmas that people experience at work. For example, how should an HR manager balance the needs of individuals and the organization when dealing with a sexual harassment case? Or should an accountant reveal a mistake during an important takeover when there are powerful personal implications? The authors supply five case studies, each one based in a different subject area: international business, management, accounting, finance and marketing.

If these were just micro-level teaching case studies, they would have limited appeal. But they are different. For each case, the authors have supplied both relevant Professional Codes of Practice and two expert opinions. The Codes of Practice give students grounding in appropriate behavior as suggested by "the authorities," whereas the expert opinions provide practical advice reflecting the contradictions and realities in each of the dilemmas. These expert opinions also provide students with the closure that is so often missing with case studies.

Reference

The National Service-Learning Clearinghouse (2009). What is Service-Learning? <http://www.servicelearning.org/what-service-learning>, retrieved 12 August 2009 from Learn and Serve America.