



Hands-On Ethics Education

GEORGETOWN OFFERS COURSES TO STUDENTS—
AND TRAINING TO TEACHERS **BY MICHAEL DOUMA**

GOOD PEOPLE, PLACED IN DIFFICULT SITUATIONS, can act unethically. That's why a grounding in ethics is so important for today's business students. At Georgetown University's McDonough School of Business in Washington, D.C., we not only have developed an ethics program that helps students work through difficult dilemmas, we have designed a workshop where we teach the basics of our program to professors at other schools who want to revamp their own courses.

Our approach includes traditional business case studies, which can be easy to understand but light on theory, and supports them with

philosophical and theoretical underpinning. We use experiential learning such as interactive exercises, role-playing scenarios, and semesterlong projects—to make business ethics personal, memorable, and easy to understand.

For instance, in one course project, students form groups and create a hypothetical company, a product, a campaign, and a statement of corporate social responsibility. The group then persuades the rest of the class to join in the company and support its ethical mission. Students discover that ideas that at first seem to be both profitable and ethical may turn out to be neither. This experience gives them real preparation for becoming ethical leaders.

For another interactive classroom exercise, we use an exercise that is a staple of economics courses, but we add an ethical twist. In the standard economics class exercise, every student receives a paper bag with a random selection of candy and prizes inside, and all students measure their happiness on a scale of one to ten. After a round of trading, students report their happiness for a second time. They learn that mutually agreed-upon trade leads to higher satisfaction all around.

In our version, we ask students to first compare their candy collection with everyone else's before the round of trading. When students consider what they have compared to what others have, they report lower happiness; but again, after a round of trade, their happiness increases. This exercise sparks discussions of how to maximize well-being while considering justice and the welfare of others. It also raises the ethical question of whether trading is the best way to lead to higher satisfaction. Perhaps instead we should create a bureaucratic office that measures happiness and redistributes candy.

In another course, we offer real financial support to fund student groups

projects. Students who take institutional money must explain how the costs of the project, including their own labor, justify the benefits. These projects naturally teach students about bureaucratic roadblocks, tax laws, and institutional restrictions. Many students have gone on to make a real difference. For instance, one group created a business that allows teenage girls in Gambia to support themselves and their families.

Because values and experiences are diverse, no two courses are ever the same, and the subject remains fresh and interesting for both students and faculty.

Teaching the Teachers

We think our ethics approach works so well that we have begun to share it with others. In May 2016, the school's Georgetown Institute for the Study of Markets and Ethics (GISME) hosted 16 assistant professors from colleges and universities across the country for a

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two-day workshop in teaching business ethics. Participants incurred no cost for attending the workshop, as GISME covered travel and lodging and provided participants a \$500 honorarium.

Most of the professors hailed from business schools, and many were preparing to teach business ethics for the first time. Those new to ethics said they understood the philosophy, but were lacking real-world examples to share with their students. Participants who already had taught ethics courses were looking for ways to revitalize their curricula.

During the workshop, three McDonough faculty presented six sessions. Topics included how to use interactive exercises and role-playing

in the classroom, how to structure a semesterlong group project that teaches students to resolve business dilemmas, how to give courses real-world relevance by taking students outside of the classroom, and how to incorporate moral psychology into an ethics course.

The workshop draws on work from philosophers, moral psychologists, law professors, and business faculty. This multidisciplinary mix indicates how critical it is that ethics be integrated into the curriculum.

Apparently, many other educators agree, because we've had an excellent response to the workshop. We were expecting only a handful of participants for the first one, but we received 25 applications. We plan to bring in 15 new professors for a second workshop in spring 2017. We also plan to build an online toolkit so instructors anywhere in the world can access our information.

At the end of the day, teaching ethics isn't about identifying "good guys" or "bad guys," and it's not about telling people "do this" or "don't do that." It's about preparing our graduates to make tough everyday decisions when they encounter ethical dilemmas

in their careers. In the end, teaching ethics is not about making better people; it's about increasing awareness so all of us, whatever our motivations, can make ethical choices.

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■ For more details about Georgetown's workshop for ethics faculty, visit gisme.georgetown.edu/content/workshop-teaching-professional-ethics-through-experiential-learning-georgetown-approach.



INTEREST IN PINTEREST

When Pinterest first launched in 2010, users primarily used the website to collect and share their favorite images, quotations, recipes, and other inspirational content on digital "scrapboards." But Pinterest also can be an effective educational tool in a business-based classroom, according to Beverly Amer, a principal lecturer of accounting and information systems at Northern Arizona University's Franke College of Business in Flagstaff.

A non-tenure-track professor at the Franke College for the last 22 years, Amer uses Pinterest to boost student engagement in the university's introductory course in computer information systems, which enrolls about 1,000 freshmen from all disciplines. Amer coordinates the liberal studies course, required of all business majors, and teaches sections along with six other instructors. Throughout the semester, students learn the basics of Microsoft Word, Excel, Access, and PowerPoint. They also work in teams of four to share notes, take group quizzes, and discuss topics that range from Pokémon Go! to driverless cars.

Last year, Amer introduced a new assignment in her sections of the course: Each student had to create a Pinterest board with