

Chapter 24

Management Education for Integrity: Raising Ethical Standards in Online Management Classes

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ABSTRACT

Tools and resources for raising ethical standards in online management courses are essential for maintaining integrity in management education. Perceived integrity of the educational institution, accrediting bodies, future employers, and students influence the value of a degree that students receive. The academic integrity in online education impacts each of these stakeholders as well as the ethics of the businesses employing graduates. A key role in promoting academic integrity in online courses is played by instructors in the design and conduct of their courses. Management education can teach business ethics by making it imperative that students continually practice being ethical while studying. Case studies, scenarios and simulations are often used to reveal insights and teach concepts. However, it is also essential to create an ethical climate in which students participate. “Train as you fight” is a popular army saying that is fitting for this concept. Students who consistently participate in and help to create ethical course climates may be more successful in the business sector in spreading and supporting an ethical climate there. Establishing best practices for creating ethical course climates becomes increasingly essential as online management education programs grow.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-61350-510-6.ch024

INTRODUCTION

Cheating in higher education has been a concern of educators since the early twentieth century when academic dishonesty was looked upon as an honorable transgression. The problem continues to grow as students place more emphasis on competition for grades rather than academic integrity (Nuss, 1984; McCabe, 1992; McCabe, 2001; Center for Academic Integrity, 2002). Adding to the erosion of integrity is the much written about decline in ethical standards among leaders in both the public and private sectors. While the Enron debacle (2001) is heralded as the epitome of ethical malfeasance, the deterioration of an ethical society continues. Recent high profile cases such as the thirty year investment fraud perpetrated by Bernard Madoff, support the position of Robbins, et al. 2005 that “In the United States, many believe we are currently suffering from an ethics crisis. Behaviors that were once thought unacceptable – lying, cheating, misrepresenting, and covering up mistakes – have become in many people’s eyes acceptable or necessary practices. Managers profit from illegal use of insider stock information and members of Congress write hundreds of bad checks”. College students cheating more often include business students that are future business leaders (Hulsart & McCarthy, 2009).

In their 1994 report, Gehring and Pavela defined academic dishonesty as “an intentional act of fraud, in which a student seeks to claim credit for the work or efforts of another without authorization, or uses unauthorized materials or fabricated information in any academic exercise. We also consider academic dishonesty to include forgery of academic documents, intentionally impeding or damaging the academic work of others, or assisting other students in acts of dishonesty” (p. 5). LaBeff, Clark, Haines, and Diekhoff (1990) suggest students employ the concept of situational ethics to rationalize cheating. The authors conclude “that students hold qualified guidelines for behavior which are situationally determined. As

such, the concept of situational ethics might well describe, college cheating [as] rules for behavior may not be considered rigid but depend on the circumstances involved” (p.191).

Stokes and Newstead (1995) state that while plagiarism and similar actions are universally accepted as cheating, such actions as neglecting to properly attribute sources in written work can be viewed from more than one perspective. Taking into account that students come from various cultural and educational backgrounds further blurs the definition of cheating. Students, both those who cheat and those who do not, perceive the lack of a tangible definition and the ethical and social implications of cheating as reasons why the practice has become a social norm, even if it is a social norm that is perceived by a faculty to be deceitful (Kerkvliet & Sigmund, 1999).

When questioned, students and faculty provide varying definitions of student cheating. The most important definition of cheating is the one that students themselves hold. Students are likely to sympathize with their classmates who cheat, particularly if cheating is prevalent, thereby rendering the traditional definition of cheating anachronistic. Students could respect the industriousness or cunning of classmates who cheat and may envy them as well. Modern cheating is far more tedious to define than cheating traditionally has been if, for no other reason, than the ease created by advancements in technology. A cautionary word to faculty: to define student cheating is to put a transitory label on a process that is as ever changing and evolutionary as education itself. Rigid definitions of student cheating may, in fact, hinder the detection and the ongoing effort to detect and eliminate the possibility of cheating in the academic setting. In fact, one can be seen to be drawing attention to boundaries that make those very boundaries enticing to cross.

According to Sclafani (2004), many parents believe that growing up in today’s environment presents more complicated challenges for adolescents than in the past. Peterson and Seligman

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