

INTEGRATING ETHICS AND INTERNATIONAL ISSUES INTO THE COLLEGE OF BUSINESS CURRICULUM: A THREE STEP APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the development of a procedure used by the College of Business Administration at Northern Arizona University to integrate ethics and an international perspective into the business school curriculum. A three step approach was utilized including using existing liberal studies courses, business core curriculum courses and business major courses. The procedure has been effective in many ways. First, the curriculum has been strengthened without adding required semester hours. Second, faculty have realized that they must develop a teaching capability in one or both of these areas. And third, students are now being instructed in ethics and international issues in an integrated manner.

INTRODUCTION

The strong encouragement from business leaders and other experts to include ethics and international issues into the curriculums of colleges of business has been ongoing for at least ten years. In some cases, this encouragement has been in the form of knowledgeable experts publicly stating the need and in other cases by the efforts of the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (hereafter referred to as AACSB) requiring or strongly suggesting that these topics be included within the curriculum. These curriculum issues are now regularly evaluated by AACSB visitation teams as schools participate in the accreditation process.

During 1984, the faculty of the College of Business Administration at Northern Arizona University were involved in various discussions in preparation for the college's self-study year prior to a reaccreditation visit by representatives of the AACSB. One focus of the discussions was on how to more formally include both an ethics dimension and an international dimension into the business curriculum. The result of these efforts was the

development of a three step approach to including both topics. This approach has now been in place for almost eight years and it has worked rather effectively. Presented below is the history and rationale leading to the development of the three step approach, an explanation of the three step approach and an assessment of the effectiveness of the approach.

THE ISSUES

Much of the debate about ethics and international business dealt with the question of who would teach the subjects. Many faculty at that time (1984), felt that they were not qualified to teach either topic. Their comments usually stressed that in graduate school they had studied finance, economics, statistics etc. but not ethics or the international aspects of their own disciplines. Many faculty at that time believed that specialists should be hired to teach both of these subjects.

Another aspect of the debate usually resulted in a conclusion that conflicted with the specialist idea. The central question was: Where and how to include the two topics in the curriculum? The natural reply was that two new courses should be instituted, *International Business* and *Business Ethics*. However, all involved realized that there was no room for either of the classes. Many of the majors were already bumping up against the maximum 60 percent business course limit as directed by the AACSB at that time (the limit was lowered towards 50 percent when AACSB accreditation standards were last substantially revised in 1991).

Consequently, the faculty committees dealing with these issues recognized that neither the faculty resources were available nor was there room in the curriculum for the new courses. But, the problem would not go away. A more creative solution was needed.

Before presenting the process that was followed and the solution that was developed, a brief description of the resources available to help faculty deal with these issues will be presented. In the mid 1980's, few basic marketing, management or finance texts included chapters on ethics and international issues. Moreover, faculty workshops on integrating ethics and international issues into business core and discipline courses were just beginning to be offered. Understandably, many faculty believed that they were not prepared to teach these subjects and they felt that there were few resources available to help them.

THE GUIDING PHILOSOPHY

As informal faculty and formal committee debate continued, the faculty began to assess the resources available within the university and not just within the college. Ethics was being taught in the Department of Philosophy and a closely related course was being taught in the Department of Humanities. Moreover, many departments within the university dealt with various international topics although not in a specific business sense. With this realization came the understanding that ethics and international issues needed to be considered within the greater context of the university and not just within the business curriculum.

Debate and discussion eventually resulted in a consensus that both topics represented a unifying theme within the business curriculum much in the same way as does the idea of a free market economy. Therefore, both international and ethics issues were considered as themes tying together the curriculum within the business school and linking the business curriculum to the liberal studies curriculum.

Gradually, the realization grew that (1) ethics and international issues had to be dealt with at appropriate times and places in many courses for the effort to have an impact, and (2) plans were needed to prepare faculty to address these issues. The last two parts of this paper recount how much of this has taken place.

THE POLICY PROCESS AND THE RESULT

While informal discussion took place among the faculty about how to deal with the problem, the

Curriculum Committee within the College of Business Administration was given the responsibility to develop a plan to better include ethics and international issues in the curriculum. As with any academic issue addressed by faculty committees, many viewpoints were shared and proposals discussed. Slowly, some principles began to emerge.

Use Liberal Studies Courses

The first principle was that the liberal studies program of the university would be utilized to build a foundation in both topics. With regard to ethics, specialists already existed within the university who were formally trained in the area. To ignore this capability seemed both arrogant and short sighted. With regard to international issues, many faculty within the university taught about other cultures, countries, languages and human conditions and practices. However, non-business university faculty did not teach about foreign business practices.

Business Faculty Must Be Involved

The second principle to evolve was that for ethics and international issues to be considered important by business students, the students would have to experience business school faculty addressing these topics within a normal classroom context. Slowly, the realization sunk in that all of the faculty would have to get involved.

Commitment

The committee members attempted to assess how serious the faculty's commitment to ethics and international issues should be. A one time exposure might get the college through an AACSB accreditation review but would it have any effect on the students and their thinking and behavior? The committee's answer was: No!

The result of these deliberations was that two policies, the *International Dimension Policy* and the *Ethics Dimension Policy* were eventually drafted, modified and sent to the faculty for their approval. The faculty voted their acceptance January 1985, and the necessary steps were initiated at the university level to gain approval for inclusion in the university catalog. Both the ethics and international policies are shown in the Appendix of this paper.

THE THREE STEP APPROACH

Each of the policies indicate a three step approach to integrate ethics and international issues into the curriculum. First, existing liberal studies courses would be used to introduce students to ethical and international topics. Second, selected courses within the business core curriculum were identified as classes in which students would be introduced to basic ethics and international issues as they relate to business in general. Third, the faculty in each major academic discipline would select at least one major course (a course completed by every student majoring in that discipline) where specific and detailed ethical and international issues relating to the discipline (i.e. marketing) would be addressed.

With regard to requiring students to take specific liberal studies courses, much precedent already existed within the university for this practice. Therefore, the problem facing the college was to determine which liberal studies courses were acceptable and whether to require specific courses or to allow students to choose from a list of acceptable courses. Several meetings were held with the philosophy department faculty. Although they were willing to offer and staff a business ethics course, their preference was to continue to teach their existing ethics courses. Their strong opinion was that students would be better served by traditional ethics and philosophy courses that already contained ethical content. Ultimately, the academic vice president made the decision that no special courses would be developed.

With regard to international courses, the underlying philosophy articulated by the curriculum committee was a simple one. The courses should help students realize that other cultures differ from the culture that they have grown up in and that these cultures have both positive and negative aspects about them with regard to social and business issues. Because of this philosophy, many liberal studies courses dealing with such issues as government, art, history and economic geography were deemed acceptable.

After the implementation of the two policies was approved, the business curriculum committee, in consultation with faculty from various liberal arts departments, identified a list of acceptable ethics and international oriented courses. This list is updated regularly and distributed widely to students.

Both policies required that several business core courses be identified that were well suited to dealing with both ethics and international issues. In some cases, the courses were a natural fit such as ethics being discussed in the business law class. In other cases, the fit was somewhat less obvious. For example, discussing ethics in a Management Information Systems class seemed like a difficult stretch. However, with today's hindsight, it was a good choice for addressing such things as computer fraud, privacy, etc. which cross national boundaries. The final step in the process was charging the faculty in each of the academic disciplines to identify a course or two in which more detailed and specific aspects of ethics and international business as related to these disciplines would be addressed. Both policy statements require that a week's worth of classes be devoted to each of these topics. As an example, the marketing faculty identified the senior level marketing management class as the course to deal with both issues. Other discipline faculties elected to deal with the subjects in two different courses.

HOW HAS IT WORKED?

The three step approach as been in effect for about eight years. In general, both the faculty and the students have adjusted to the new requirements. Many faculty, realizing that they now had to cover a subject that they were uneasy dealing with, have taken steps to overcome their deficiencies. Some have taken philosophy courses, some have learned a foreign language, and others have lived and studied in other countries. Many faculty have attended, with the Dean's support, seminars on integrating both international and ethics issues into the curriculum. Finally, faculty exchanges with foreign universities have been both encouraged and carried out. Much learning and growth, resulting from these efforts, have improved the quality of teaching within the college.

Students have also benefitted. First, many students are taking liberal studies courses that they would not have taken in the past. These courses have both broadened the students' intellectual outlook but also achieved the goal of introducing them to different cultures. Perhaps more important than this however, students are now more accepting of discussions dealing with ethical issues. Prior to this policy change, many students were resentful of any

discussion dealing with ethics and values. Their typical reaction was: "Who are you to tell me what to do?" Because of the three level exposure (liberal studies, business core courses and major course or courses) to ethical ideas and topics, students at a minimum, are at least aware that the subject is of some importance.

CONCLUSION

The environment for addressing ethical and international issues is much different today than it was in 1984. Perhaps the greatest difference is the broad range of materials and training available to help faculty to better teach these subjects. One simple example may suffice. Most principles of marketing texts today include either a chapter on international marketing or portions of each chapter addressing the subject. Ethical issues are also covered in various ways in these texts. No longer must one search for cases and materials to guide an in-class discussion.

Nevertheless, without some structure to guide education in these areas, the subjects are likely to receive inadequate attention simply because of how most business school faculty are trained. The three step approach is a successful way to formally institutionalize the teaching of ethics and international business without requiring specialized faculty and classes.

APPENDIX

International Dimension Policy, College of Business Administration, Northern Arizona University, January 1985

College of Business Administration (CBA) students will meet the "international" curriculum requirement through a three step process:

(1) CBA students will complete six hours in courses from the International List available in the CBA Dean's office. The International List will be updated on an annual basis. The courses from the list may be used to simultaneously fulfill liberal studies, major, minor or elective requirements.

(2) CBA students will be introduced to basic international concepts in the CBA core curriculum. The following courses will devote the equivalent of

at least one week of class to international topics: ECO 284, ECO 285, MGT 300 and MKT 333. Also, at least one case discussion in the BA 490 course (Business Policy) will be devoted to an international business situation.

(3) CBA students will be introduced to more detailed and specific aspects of international business in at least one "major" course that all students in the major complete. The equivalent of at least one week of course work will be devoted to international topics in the "major" course.

Finally, all CBA faculty will be encouraged to initiate discussions on international topics whenever appropriate in any CBA course.

Ethics Dimension Policy, College of Business Administration, Northern Arizona University, January 1985

College of Business Administration (CBA) students will meet the "ethics" curriculum requirement through a three step process:

(1) CBA students will complete three hours and encouraged to complete an additional three hours in courses from the Ethics List available in the CBA Dean's office. The Ethics List will be updated on an annual basis. The courses from the list may be used to simultaneously fulfill liberal studies, minor or elective requirements.

(2) CBA students will be introduced to basic ethical concepts relating to business in the following CBA core curriculum courses: BA 205, CIS 360, MGT 300, MKT 333, and BA 490. The equivalent of at least one class period in CIS 360, MKT 333 and BA 490, and at least two class periods in BA 205 and MGT 300 will be devoted to ethics in business situations.

(3) CBA students will be introduced to more detailed and specific aspects of ethics in business in at least one "major" course that all students in the major complete. The equivalent of at least one week of course work will be devoted to ethics in business situations in the "major" course.

Finally, all CBA faculty will be encouraged to initiate discussions on ethics topics whenever appropriate in any CBA course.