

A NEW SENSE OF URGENCY: TEACHING MARKETING ETHICS

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Recent opinion polls document that trust in business is plummeting (USA Today 2002). Just 16% of Americans say they have a great deal of confidence in major companies, down from a pre-Enron high of 28%. Within the business community, marketing practitioners rank near the bottom among professionals in honesty and ethical standards. Only 9% of people polled by the Gallup Organization rated marketing professionals' ethics as "very high" or "high", slightly ahead only of car salesmen's 6% and telemarketers' 5% (Advertising Age 2002). Triggered by the latest scandals and the ensuing public perception of marketers, ethics has become an increasingly important issue in the field of marketing (Nussbaum 2002; Roth 2002). Even before the time of Enron and the likes was in the headlines, marketers have often been criticized for ethical misconduct. That is, the high visibility of marketing activities and managers' efforts to administer their firms' relationships with customers continue to keep ethics among the most compelling issues for marketing managers and educators.

While the primary responsibility for instilling moral values and ensuring ethically acceptable behaviour in our daily life as well as in business rests with parents and lawmakers, business and marketing educators cannot deny their role in this mission (Yoo and Donthu 2002; Kidwell 2001). In fact, business schools accredited by the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) have been required to include ethical issues in their curricula since 1979. The majority of business students feel that ethics is an important topic for discussion in business and marketing classes and they expect that more coverage of this topic could improve ethical behaviour in practice (Shannon and Berl 1997). Despite these efforts, business schools still have to take their share of blame for the lack of ethical behavior. A steady stream of research has found that business students are more likely to act unethically than majors from other areas of learning (Salter, Guffey, and McMillan, 2001).

This special session was designed to provide faculty members with current information pertaining

to ethics training in marketing and business classes and to instigate a fruitful discussion about the subject. Specific topics will include:

- 1 Who is responsible for instilling moral values in marketing students and marketing managers?
- 2 Can ethics be taught in marketing classes?
- 3 How should ethics be taught in marketing classes?
- 4 What are the factors driving ethical decision making of marketing students and managers?
- 5 Are business and marketing students really less ethical than other students?
- 6 What are the alternatives to ethical training?

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