

Curtis C. Verschoor, CMA, Editor

Who Is Responsible for College Students Cheating?

Ever since details emerged regarding how much the ethical climate at Enron contributed to the frauds that its employees perpetrated, business schools and their accreditation agency, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), have struggled with

the issue of what higher education can do to prevent future generations of business executives from following in the footsteps of Enron's senior management. This includes issues such as whether or not a professor can "teach" ethics and whether embedding the coverage of ethical applications into every business course is preferable to offering one or more required stand-alone ethics courses.

University teachers of ethics are understandably upset that society seems to be giving them a major responsibility for avoiding business scandals involving ethics. Some of their comments include:

◆ "Ethics courses in B-schools are not a 'quick fix' for a lifetime of questionable training, cultural differences in how cooperation is viewed, and/or sociopathic behavior. Nor are they a palliative for entire curricula that are devoted to short-

term profitability at any cost."—
Donna J. Wood, University of Northern Iowa

◆ "We can't make people morally better than they were before they took a session or course on ethics, but it's pretty clear that a steady diet of egoism in one form or another can have the opposite effect of at least reinforcing antisocial and unethical attitudes and behavior."—
James Gaa, University of Alberta

◆ "There are so many classes where students are taught or even encouraged to use cutthroat techniques, that the winner takes it all, and that the only thing that counts is the bottom line. Aren't people in our society smart enough to realize that students are being socialized with far more deviant ideologies that are then generalized to domains like the classroom?"—*Robert Giacalone, Temple University*

Adding fire to this discussion is the experience of Duke University's Fuqua School of Business, where 34 members of a first-year class (nearly 10%) were found guilty of cheating on a take-home final exam for a required course. This occurred despite the school's emphasis on ethical behavior. For example, a statement released by Douglas Breeden, the school's dean, describes how the preamble to the school's honor code, which sets forth the principles for scholars and students to follow—honesty, trustworthiness, fairness, and respect for others—is placed prominently in each classroom.

A possible motivation for students at any educational level to cheat is the seemingly ever-increasing focus on grades and class standing. The Duke (Fuqua) program was ranked ninth in *BusinessWeek's* "The Best B-Schools of 2006," up from 11th in 2004. The competition to be accepted to a "top 10" business school is intense, but it's matched by the competition to graduate with distinction in order to qualify for the most desirable positions. According to *BusinessWeek*, the median salary for graduates of the Fuqua program was \$95,000, compared to a median

salary of \$64,000 prior to earning the degree. This increase, representing the financial value of earning the MBA, was second highest among the top 10 schools.

BusinessWeek's brief comments about the Duke program describe how "students on 'Team Fuqua' enjoy the collaborative learning experience. Good for the hand-holding types, but some would like more debate and conflict." It appears that the Duke program's intentional emphasis on learning the soft skills of cooperation may have put its ethical stance at risk. Alternatively, the school might be having difficulty sending a coherent message to its students that adequately differentiates between allowable collaboration and unallowable cheating as specifi-

cally defined in its honor code.

Deliberations by Fuqua's Judicial Board were held in accordance with judicial proceedings set forth in the Fuqua School of Business Honor Code. The Board's convictions resulted in assessing "severe" penalties on 24 of the 34 students, including nine who were expelled from the school and 15 who were suspended for one year. The average age of the accused was 29 years, which means they had business experience and weren't fresh from an undergraduate degree, and both domestic and international students were involved.

The Fuqua School of Business Honor Code is quite comprehensive and specific. It states that violations consist of specific definitions of lying, cheating, stealing, and failure

to report (violations by others):

◆ *Lying* includes communicating untruths in order to gain an unfair academic or employment advantage.

◆ *Cheating* includes using unauthorized materials to complete an assignment; copying the work of another person; unauthorized providing of material or information (e.g., proprietary course information) to another person; using the work of another without giving proper credit (e.g., plagiarism); and working on course material outside of the time constraints imposed by the instructor.

◆ *Stealing* includes taking the property of another member of the Fuqua community without permission, defacing or vandalizing school property, or the misuse of school resources.

◆ *Failure to Report* means that any party that has knowledge of an honor code violation and doesn't report it will be considered an accessory to the violation and subject to penalty if found guilty.

This event has triggered an interesting discussion regarding whether the use of output based on teamwork rather than on individual effort is indeed academic fraud. Perhaps the most difficult issue to address is the collegiate trend toward using teams rather than individuals to solve exercises and present term projects. In a break with the past, business school graduates are expected to know how to work in teams because that quality is deemed much more important to long-term success in the business world than is mere technical ability. As with other universities, Duke syllabi note specific requirements for working in groups of two to six, depending on the course, but it seems to be getting

continued on page 61

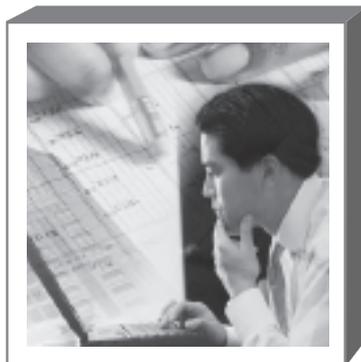
Cash Forecasts & Budgets and Business Plans

PFP Provides The Flexibility, Power and Presentation
Quality Needed To Tame Your Toughest Projects

pf *The financial
forecasting model*
**pro-formas for
professionals**

"A real winner"
— The Bottom Line

Pro-Formas for Professionals is a flexible, fully-integrated, easy-to-use model, designed to help you prepare complete financial forecasts, budgets, and business plans within a very short timeframe.



Runs in Microsoft Excel.

Standard \$599.

Plus \$899.—\$1,499.

Modula \$1,599.—\$2,199.

pendock mallorn ltd. 800-567-4500 www.pendock.com

[ETHICS] *cont'd from p. 16*

harder to differentiate between acceptable and unacceptable teamwork at the university level.

The message learned in the real business world, usually well before a student even applies to a graduate business school, is that cutthroat competition is absolutely required to obtain competitive advantage. In business, the ability to utilize (i.e., steal) someone else's intellectual property by whatever means is welcomed and rewarded. The most confusing example of individual student assessment (i.e., grading) in a collegiate world of collaboration was provided by Stanford University Design School Professor Robert I. Sutton: "If you found somebody to help you write a group project, in our view that's a sign of an inventive team member who gets stuff done. If you found someone to do work for free who was committed to open source, we'd say, 'Wow, that was smart.'"

Question for Readers

Is it really part of the mandate of the educational system to prepare students to behave ethically in the business world? If so, where should this outcome be required: elementary school, middle school, high school, undergraduate, or graduate? ■

Note: Please share your thoughts with me at my e-mail address below.

Curtis C. Verschoor is the Ledger & Quill Research Professor, School of Accountancy and MIS, and Wicklander Research Fellow in the Institute for Business and Professional Ethics, both at DePaul University in Chicago. He is also a Research Scholar in the Center for Business Ethics at Bentley College in Waltham, Mass. His e-mail address is curtisverschoor@sbcglobal.net.