

## **Using Course-Embedded Assessment: Defining and Assessing Ethical Reasoning Skills of Mis Students**

**Nabil Alghalith  
Truman State University**

*The paper focuses on using a rubric for the assessment of ethical reasoning skills, which is mainly used for assurance of learning. The objectives are (1) to define skill set formed a basis for common expectations related to ethical reasoning skills. (2) to use the ethical reasoning rubric to measure student progress toward achieving these skills, (3) to help refine the instrument and the assessment process, (4) to identify areas of concern in ethical reasoning, and (5) to enhance the culture of assessment in the School of Business.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The School of Business will spread the business ethics competencies throughout the curriculum (in specified courses) rather than in one course. Our students are always encouraged to take an ethics course in the Liberal Studies Program.

Laudon defined ethics as the principles of right and wrong that can be used by individuals acting as free moral agents to make choices to guide their behavior (Laudon, 2017). Ethics relates to actions taken by persons, groups, or organizations and judges the actions (from a society-wide or global basis) through the concepts of right and wrong, values (good and bad), and virtues. Ethics balances the interests of individuals or groups with the interests of others. Business ethics applies ethical principles to the context of business situations and thus balances the interests of persons or organizations with the interests of others (including shareholders, customers, employees, and other members of society).

The business ethics component in the Business Administration and Accounting majors starts with several assumptions. First, while there may be legitimate disagreements relating to certain controversial topics, the area is not purely subjective: ethical decision making in business and in other areas is not purely a matter of individual, subjective opinion. Second, it is assumed that important business decisions may be limited both by legal and ethical restraints and that society does believe, and has the right to believe, that business leaders will be subject to those restraints.

The purpose of our ethical educational experiences is not necessarily to ensure that students who later become business leaders and employees will always act ethically, but to ensure that students know that ethics is relevant to business decision making and to provide students with ethical frameworks to make those decisions. Knowledge of the relevance of ethics and the frameworks makes it more likely that ethical considerations will enter into current and future decisions and behavior.

### **School of Business Mission**

The School of Business graduates ethically-aware prospective business and civic leaders who are articulate communicators, effective team members, and skilled critical thinkers and problem solvers.

### **The School of Business cultivates a community of learners by emphasizing:**

- A rigorous, liberal arts and sciences educational foundation;
- Highly selective admission of students;
- Civic engagement;
- Leadership development; and,
- Experiential and applied learning activities to enhance student learning.

### **School of Business Objectives**

In support of the School of Business's mission, the objectives of the business programs naturally involve students, curriculum, faculty and resources. Assessing the outcomes of objectives is necessary for accountability and continuous improvement.

Students are the focus of our educational institution. The student objectives of the business degree programs are:

- to attract and retain students with superior academic qualifications and demographic diversity comparable to the university's student population;
- to prepare students for business and professional positions in the public and private sectors;
- to graduate students qualified for admission to select professional or graduate programs;
- to prepare students for future leadership and service opportunities; and
- to assist in making career and educational decisions.

A curriculum provides the framework for educating young women and men to contribute to a global society in which diversity, changing technology and difficult ethical decisions are prevalent. The curriculum objectives of the business degree programs are:

- to offer business degrees that build upon a liberal arts and sciences foundation including calculus, statistics and foreign language. Specifically, the business programs will further develop written and oral communication, computer, quantitative, and critical thinking skills;
- to develop fundamental business knowledge in the areas of accounting, legal environment of business, organizational behavior, finance, marketing, production, information systems, economics and statistics which are integrated with the completion of a senior capstone course;
- to increase study abroad and other institutional opportunities for business and accounting students.

### **School of Business Code of Conduct**

To promote the highest standards of citizenship and scholarship, students, faculty, administrators, and staff of the School of Business are expected to take full responsibility for their conduct and integrity in all their interactions both academic and social.

Information and procedures about specific guidelines and policies are enumerated in the Truman State University Student Conduct Code, Student Handbook, Faculty Handbook, and the official document on University policies titled By-Laws and Policies of the Board of Governors. These policies preserve the rights of individuals and define obligations to the community that establish the high standards necessary to fulfill Truman's mission as an institution of higher learning.

### **School of Business Student Code of Ethics**

We, the students of Truman State University School of Business, are a proud community with a long tradition. We pledge to honor that tradition and ourselves by academic and professional conduct that conforms to the highest standards of integrity.

## **PROJECT OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of the project are:

1. To define a skill set formed basis for common expectations related to ethical reasoning and problem-solving skills.
2. To use the Ethical Reasoning Rubric to measure student progress toward achieving these skills (see appendix 1).
3. To help refine the instrument and the assessment process.
4. To identify areas of concern in ethical reasoning.
5. To enhance the culture of assessment in the School of Business.

### **Ethical Reasoning Competencies**

Quite often, a program's mission and learning objectives are so broad and lack so much precision that they are difficult to assess. For example, our school of business adopted a mission statement that included graduating problem solvers as one of its goals. To make the goal assessable, the competencies that ethical leaders demonstrate had to be identified and described in measurable levels of performance. We identified five broad ethical reasoning competencies (see appendix 1):

1. Identifies important ethical issues
2. Considers alternative actions.
3. Identification of consequences.
4. Identifications of values and principles that can be applied to the situation.
5. Resolution with reason.

### **Limitations of Course-Embedded Assessments**

If the course-embedded assessments come from courses taught by a small number of faculty members, these instructors may perceive that their teaching effectiveness is being evaluated. Such a perception may lead to resistance to the use of course-embedded methods. Recall that the literature suggests that direct assessment of ethical reasoning should occur in a context specific situation like a class assignment. However, it is also possible that the assignments used for the course-embedded assessments may not prompt students to demonstrate each of the ethical reasoning competencies. This has certainly been an issue with the research competency at the authors' institution.

The results from the course-embedded ethical reasoning assessment can certainly provide a broad-brush perspective about the achievement of learning goals related to ethical reasoning. Qualitative assessments may be viewed as less precise or informative. Although the assessment results may signal the need for curricular or pedagogical changes, the information does not explicitly tell the faculty which changes to make or how to make needed changes to the curriculum. While responding to the signals from the assessment outcomes, faculty members draw upon professional experiences, the scholarship of teaching and learning, and other sources to develop and revise the curriculum and pedagogical approaches

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Business graduates must possess and demonstrate ethical reasoning, proficient problem solving and critical thinking skills, therefore, it is important that business schools take student learning seriously and be held accountable for developing of skills assessment plan.

The rubric should be fully explained and expectations should be communicated with students before the assignment of projects. Identify assessable learning objectives.

Close the loop, collecting data from a course-embedded assessment method is not sufficient. The data must be converted to information that can guide decision-making and lead to action.

Prior to using the course-embedded assessment rubrics, faculty members must be trained to appropriately rate student ethical reasoning.

Select assessment points. Many factors play into the decision about where and when to assess student ethical reasoning and critical thinking.

## REFERENCES

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## APPENDIX 1: ETHICAL REASONING RUBRIC

1. Identifies important ethical issues within case (if applicable)

1	1.5	2	2.5	3
Largely misses the important ethical issues present in the case.		Identifies the important issues.		Identifies all of the important ethical issues with clarity and precision.

2. *Considers* alternative actions

1	1.5	2	2.5	3
Does little or no consideration of alternative actions.		Considers most of the plausible alternative actions.		Considers all of the viable alternatives with some that are innovative.

3. Identification of consequences-long term and short term-for company, for others (stakeholders-owners, employees, customers, community)

1	1.5	2	2.5	3
Fails to consider most of the consequences for alternative actions.		Considers most of the important consequences but may miss a few somewhat important consequences.		Identifies the important consequences for alternative actions that indicate a clear perceptive understanding of the underlying facts.

4. Identifications of the values/principles that can be applied to situation

1	1.5	2	2.5	3
Does not consider an appropriate set of values and principles that can be applied to help resolve the issues.		Identifies a set of values and principles that can help resolve issues.		Identifies an appropriate set of values and principles with clarity and precision.

5. Resolution with reasons

1	1.5	2	2.5	3
Does not reach a conclusion with sufficient reasons and correct application of principles of values.		Reaches conclusions with some good reasons but perhaps could have built a slightly better case for the conclusion.		Reaches a conclusion with well-reasoned, convincing, and sufficient argument with a correct application of principles or values.