

## **Mission-driven Business School Education at a Catholic University: The Role of Ethics and Sustainability in Curriculum Development, Faculty Recruitment and Extracurricular Activities**

**Drs. James Weber and Virginia Gerde, Duquesne University**

Just as business organizations rely on their mission statement and the values embodied in senior leadership, so do universities rest on the institution's mission statement and basic values (Procario-Foley & Bean, 2002). The Duquesne University undergraduate and graduate schools of business are fortunate to have a strong religious tradition grounded in moral and ethical values that result in a focus on ethics and sustainability.

*“Duquesne University serves God by serving students through commitment to excellence in liberal and professional education, through profound concern for moral and spiritual values, through the maintenance of an ecumenical atmosphere open to diversity, and through service to the Church, the community, the nation and the world”* (Duquesne University mission statement).

Supporting this mission is the University's strategic plan, developed in 2003, which espouses: *“to weave the mission ... throughout the fabric of the university to assure that the values expressed in the mission are given prominence in all the goals of the strategic plan.”* To this end, the strategic plan further mandates that *“members of the Duquesne University community will pursue the moral and ethical truth through an ecumenical dialog ... [and] ... establish activities, programs and courses where discipline-specific issues are discussed in the context of their moral, ethical and spiritual context.”* The business schools at Duquesne University have understood this strong message contained in the University's mission statement as a reinforcement of its own focus on ethics and sustainability.

The A.J. Palumbo (undergraduate) School of Business Administration seeks to *“espouse ethics as a winning characteristic of organizations that are successful over the long term and promote a commitment to high standards and values among the A.J. Palumbo School of Business Administration community”* (Duquesne University Undergraduate Catalog, 2002-2003: 114). This commitment is echoed in the graduate business school's catalog as well. *“Since its founding in 1878, Duquesne University has been steadfast in developing an ethical perspective within student's professional and private lives”* (John F. Donahue Graduate School of Business Brochure, A Distinctive Experience: 9) and, more recently, notes that *“Our MBA Sustainability degree equips you to make better use of all forms of capital (human, natural and financial), all within ethical, profitable and sustainable frameworks”* (mba.sustainability.duq.edu website).

### **Degrees and Courses**

From these foundations, a number of courses and degrees in both business ethics and sustainability emerged and their critical roles in the overall Duquesne's business school curricula are discussed.

Duquesne's business schools boast of two degreed programs in the fields of ethics and

sustainability: the Master of Science in Leadership and Business Ethics (MSLBE) and Masters of Business Administration (MBA) Sustainability. The Master of Science in Leadership and Business Ethics was developed in 2001 in response to feedback from employers and managers who indicated a strong demand for these skills in today's complex global marketplace. At the completion of the degree, students have developed a vision of leadership, sensitivity to ethical challenges that arise in the workplace, and the skills and knowledge to translate the leadership vision and ethical commitment into reality. The MSLBE is a result of the combined efforts of Duquesne University's School of Leadership and Professional Advancement and the John F. Donahue Graduate School of Business. This program is the recent winner of the Distinguished Credit Program Award, a national recognition from the Association for Continuing Higher Education ([www.leadership.duq.edu](http://www.leadership.duq.edu)). Students in the MSLBE program are required to complete a five-course "ethics core" consisting of courses in Business Ethics, Information Ethics, Organizational Ethics, Global Ethics, and an ethics elective course, which recently has included a course entitled Leadership in Sustainability and Business.

Duquesne's MBA Sustainability offers a transformative graduate experience: a mix of innovative program design and unmatched "integrated sustainability" content. Graduates are prepared to lead organizations that value prosperity today, without compromising resources for tomorrow. The program foundations are a blend of the ethical social, economic and environmental pillars that characterize leading business organizations worldwide ([mba.sustainability.duq.edu](http://mba.sustainability.duq.edu)). Within the MBA Sustainability program there are required course modules addressing applied ethics, environmental responsibility and management, and cross-discipline sessions where ethics and sustainability are integrated with other business functional courses.

Supporting these graduate degree programs are additional courses that continue the reinforcement of ethics and sustainability in all our business degree programs. All undergraduate business students are required to complete a core course, Business Ethics, which discusses the relevance of social needs in developing a sense of ethics, the need for personal ethics in making business decisions, and the importance of a shared sense of values in developing productive work communities. The emphasis throughout this course is on practical issues facing people in business. Several sections of the Business Ethics core course consist of a service learning component to provide students an opportunity to work with community groups and reflect on theory, practice, and the role of business.

At the graduate level Duquesne MBA students are required to complete a course in ethics, Applied Business Ethics, and a course which emphasizes sustainability, Public Affairs Management. Similar to the undergraduate ethics course, the graduate Applied Business Ethics course introduces students to the Code of Ethical Conduct and provides students with the basic ethical decision-making skills necessary to recognize, evaluate and resolve ethical conflicts. Emphasis is on common ethical challenges facing graduate students in the classroom and at work. The course provides an analytical framework for students to use when grappling with course-specific, ethical dilemmas in subsequent core and elective courses in the graduate program and in their professional business careers.

The Public Affairs Management course empowers students to identify and evaluate key external and internal organizational forces (stakeholders) and environments impacting the organization.

Public affairs management skills addressed in this course include stakeholder analysis, public issue and crisis management, social responsibility and corporate citizenship evaluation, regulatory and public policy strategies, environmental responsibility and the impact of technology ([www.business.duq.edu](http://www.business.duq.edu)). As the business community has embraced sustainability as a strategic advantage and emphasis in business practice, the Public Affairs Management course has likewise increased its attention to this emerging business focus.

In addition to the required courses, four graduate-level electives are also offered and ethics is integrated into several MBA core courses. Global Ethics and Organizational Ethics are adapted for the MBA students from the similar MSLBE courses, an independent study course provides for field work or in-depth research, and an elective in sustainability is currently being offered as an MBA elective. The Aspen Institute recognized two MBA concentration courses, Global Marketing Management and Strategic Supply Chain Management, as integrating social and environmental issues in the course. Related to coursework, a Duquesne MBA team won three of five awards for which they were eligible in 2007 including the top ethics awards at an international MBA case competition sponsored by Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles.

## **Faculty**

Due to the curricula emphasis on ethics and sustainability, Duquesne business schools emphasized faculty recruitment in these fields and have taken steps to attract, nurture and retain faculty who are experts in these fields. The business school faculty is one of the few in the country that has three full-time faculty members with doctorates, active research agendas and full-time teaching loads in the business ethics / business and society fields. The three full-time business ethics / business and society faculty members include: Dr. Virginia Gerde, Associate Professor; Dr. David Wasieleski, Assistant Professor; and Dr. James Weber, Professor. Each business ethics faculty is actively involved in the teaching of the required business ethics courses in the undergraduate and graduate levels, as well as conducting applied research to support the delivery of these courses.

Similarly, the Duquesne graduate business school is assembling a comparable faculty group with research agendas and teaching responsibilities exclusively in the sustainability area. Dr. Robert Sroufe recently was hired as the Murrin Chair of Global Competitiveness to spearhead the launching of the MBA sustainability program and Dr. David Saiia will be joining the business school faculty in the fall of 2008 with his extensive background in sustainability, social entrepreneurship, and micro-enterprise initiatives, including his multi-year project of economic and community development in Ecuador, complimenting Dr. Sroufe's expertise in sustainable supply chain and operations management. In addition, faculty from across all of the business school disciplines have revised courses throughout the MBA Sustainability program that integrates sustainability into strategy, accounting, economics, finance, information systems, organizational behavior, marketing, supply chain, value chain and operations management, and environmental science.

## **Extracurricular Activities**

Finally, supplementing the courses and faculty development, extracurricular activities were created to foster the emphasis begun in the areas of business ethics and sustainability. Through the creation of the Beard Center for Leadership and Ethics, for example, a semi-annual ethics speakers program was launched to expose students to business and community leaders speaking on the importance of ethical behavior and ethical leadership. The business ethics faculty gained access to ethics and compliance officers in the region through the creation of the Pittsburgh Ethics and Business Conduct Network. In addition, this “network” provided the business school with an educated and willing cadre of potential guest presenters in the undergraduate and graduate ethics classes. With support of the ethics center, several luncheon forums are presented each year in the Pittsburgh downtown area, enabling business school faculty an opportunity to interact with local and national people on areas such as diversity in management and ethical leadership.

Last fall the business school launched its inaugural annual sustainability symposium, where Georg Kell, Executive Director of the United Nations Global Compact, was joined by various local business CEOs and an investment panel of financial experts to speak to Duquesne students and the regional business community. This event provided faculty and students with an additional series of contacts for future interactions as possible guest speakers, expert resources and potential employers.

Across the curriculum, students engage in projects that incorporate nearby businesses and organizations into their learning experience. The MBA Sustainability students are involved in three projects over the course of the program where the students meet with businesses and non-profit organizations to address topics such as developing a system to standardize carbon footprint analysis, market sustainable options for grocery bags, evaluation of retrofitting options for a ‘green’ building, and evaluate carbon credit legislation. The students provide their analyses and recommendations to firms in an interactive and timely manner, so both the students and the organizations benefit.

MBA students also may take advantage of study abroad programs during the summer for up to three months either taking courses at another university or as part of a student group visiting businesses. Key to the MBA Sustainability program is the two integrated study abroad experiences in Germany and Japan. In Germany, students interact with multinational and local businesses, universities, non-profit organizations, and international governmental organizations such as the United Nations. For the Japan trip, students study at a partner university for an intensive week and engage in corporate visits. The opportunity to compare the relationships among business, government, and society in addressing business ethics and sustainability issues is invaluable, and the students develop an appreciation for the complexity of business issues and sustainable development.

A Duquesne student chapter of a national organization concerned with the broad issue of responsible business, Net Impact, started with support from the Beard Center for Leadership in Ethics and has become a focal point for extracurricular activities for the MBA Sustainability program. This program has its own annual breakfast speaker series that allows faculty and students to interact more intimately with leaders in sustainable business. The Net Impact chapter has participated in the national annual conference and worked with similar organizations across

the Pittsburgh area to raise awareness of social and environmental issues.

### **Institutional Support**

While the mission and basic values are the foundation for Duquesne University's focus on ethics and sustainability, continued institutional support is critical to build on that foundation. From the strategic plan to the operational activities, Duquesne University incorporates ethics and sustainability. From the President's support of an ethics hotline, to environmental initiatives across campus, there is emphasis on responsible and sustainable development. The curriculum discussed previously and the Beard Center for Leadership in Ethics were the primary reasons the graduate business school was ranked eighth worldwide, and first among small schools, by the Aspen Institute for leadership in integrating social and environmental issues into its MBA program.

Support from the administration, alumni, and local businesses complement the mission-driven environment. The business school students developed a Code of Ethical Behavior that was written and maintained by students and supported by the school and university administrations. The Duquesne business schools signed onto the United Nations Global Impact, for which an annual progress report is required and currently uses several student-initiated performance metrics. As mentioned with the network members, alumni and businesspeople support the curriculum by being guest lecturers, providing internships, or participating in corporate projects. Businesses also support research through acquisition of databases such as the KLD Socrates<sup>TM</sup> database on corporate social performance.

### **Institutional Learning**

The institutional learning that highlighted the benefits gained and pitfalls to avoid from the Duquesne business schools' venture into the areas of ethics and sustainability, driven by the University's mission, are numerous. For example, valuable lessons were learned from an initial failed attempt at creating a successful ethics advisory board. The Beard Center's advisory board was initially formed without any designated goals or tasks and was populated by good-intentioned business managers and business faculty. After a few years of unproductive meetings, the advisory board was disbanded, until 2005 when the purpose for the board became evident. Armed with a clear focus – to support the Beard Center through financial guidance and programmatic advice – the advisory board re-emerged comprised of numerous financial leaders from the regional business community. In order to address a lack of diversity, new members representing the non-profit foundation community and the Latino business community and having greater demographic variation than the original board members were included and a more dynamic decision-making process was evident almost immediately.

The initial program design for the MBA Sustainability integrated the MBA courses throughout an 11-month period. The original idea was to break down the barriers between courses and functional areas; however the university credit and accounting systems required some separation of the coursework into course credits. To counteract the boundaries of each course and the appearance of students taking six to eight courses at any one time, the classroom sessions were redesigned as modules, faculty are encouraged to have joint sessions, and integration of course

material is stressed in projects and extracurricular activities.

The impact of stand-alone ethics and sustainability courses is geometrically greater with the integration of these concepts across the curriculum. For the integration of ethics in the business school curriculum, targeted faculty workshops were helpful to provide faculty with the tools to integrate ethics in their particular area. Sample cases, discussion questions and student assignments were provided.

The continued growth and success of ethics and sustainability in the Duquesne business schools is the result of reinforcement at several levels: the students, the curriculum, faculty, and the administration, as well as the local business community. Within the curriculum level, degree programs, required and elective courses, and a variety of extracurricular activities complement and enhance the student experience. Each level supports the other, and the solid commitment to follow the mission provides common purpose and values. At the same time, adaptation and excellence is encouraged to be responsive to the needs of the students and business community.

Palumbo Donahue Schools of Business, Duquesne University, website and related pages, available at [www.business.duq.edu](http://www.business.duq.edu). Accessed February-April 2008.

Procario-Foley, E. & Bean, D. F. 2002. Institutions of Higher Education: Cornerstones in Building Ethical Organizations. *Teaching Business Ethics* 6: 101-116.

School for Leadership and Professional Advancement, Duquesne University, website and related pages, available at [www.leadership.duq.edu](http://www.leadership.duq.edu). Accessed February-April 2008.