

August, 1997 - Joyce Henson, Management/Marketing

In the fall of 1996, Fr. McKenna and I taught a Business Ethics course in the Honors Program. Among other things, a course of this nature has two problems facing it. As an Honors course, the problem is how to get students to work to their full potential; as an ethics course, how to get them to see ethical problems, in this case, those of business, as real, as opposed to academic, problems. What follows indicates that our course was less than satisfactory in both these regards. The particular problems were those of: one, getting the students to take the text seriously, that is, read it; and, two, treating cheating on the part of their peers as an issue that should be dealt with.

Reading the text was such an important part of the course that we gave a quiz at the beginning of each class to make sure that the students were reading (one chapter a week). The text, *Moral Issues in Business*, 6th edition by Shaw and Barry (Wadsworth) 1995, is 574 pages long, but except for chapters 2 and 3 (theory), is very practical. We chose this text because it deals with the kinds of problems that students can expect to find in the workplace today, and in addition, it is well written and organized ("user friendly").

The students' responses on the quizzes revealed the extent to which they were doing the reading of the chapters. It became clear that some of the students were simply not doing the reading at all, some were reading but not understanding what they read, and some seemed to be relying on the chapter summaries for their reading (Cliff-Notes approach). Various questions came to mind. Can our students read? If they do read, are they able to read critically so that they can relate the reading to real world contexts? If they are not reading, how can we get students to read? When asked about their reading habits, only a few reported regularly reading a newspaper or business magazine. In addition, they rarely read novels. True, many students work to pay for college (and car), so the time available for reading is limited. But, for many, reading is simply low on their list of priorities.

We have no solution to the reading problem other than to try in the future to make quiz questions address an understanding of issues that cannot be gleaned from chapter summaries.

The issue of cheating on exams, quizzes and tests arose within the context of discussing business fraud. A lively discussion ensued when I described my own experiences at various colleges and universities, the cheating I had observed, and how I had dealt with it. While the students' discussion relied heavily on anecdotal evidence, it would appear that cheating is common. Most of the students had seen other students cheat on tests either while in high school and/or in college. As they discussed their experiences, I was surprised at the attitude of the students. The early lessons of "not being a snitch," or a "tattle-tail" had been well learned and were alive in the class. "Don't get involved," "they're

the ones who will suffer - in the long-run," "I have studied and know the material," "sure I get annoyed, but they have to live with themselves," "I could never TELL on another student" and so forth, were the most common responses. Only one student did not chime in with the others. His remark, "It's just wrong, cheating is wrong, and no one should condone it," reduced the class to silence.

I asked the students why they didn't get mad, why they didn't demand a "level playing field"? After all, their grades might be affected by someone else's cheating. The students replied that in fact those who cheat are only cheating themselves and usually are desperate, so they felt sorry for them. The students did not seem to be aware of the link between what they did in class, their own performance, and the performance of their peers in the same class; and the fact that there are comparisons made by the instructor. They didn't see how cheating could affect their grades. And they did not seem to understand who was responsible (besides the offending student). It was not until late in the discussion that some students pointed out that cheating is also the responsibility of the instructor. If that person reads a newspaper while an exam is going on and does not pay attention to what is happening in the class, then that makes cheating possible.

What to do? That is the question that never got answered. I am sad that students don't demand fair treatment by the teaching professionals. I don't know how widespread the practice is at SPC. I certainly know that "professional" research papers are easily obtained for the money, but that is another topic. In the meantime, I hope that all of us consider the issue of cheating. Maintaining standards is important, but it requires constant vigilance.