

# **PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS AND BUSINESS SCHOOL UNDERGRADUATES' INDEPENDENT PROJECTS: ONLINE RESOURCES FOR BUSINESS PROFESSORS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The 2020 Covid-19 pandemic drove innumerable higher education courses online. Professors teaching business law, accounting, finance, or other courses found a new way to teach ethics online. Consistent with the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business International's 2020 Guiding Principles and Standards for Business Accreditation, business professors can assess voluntary, independent projects available online. This paper describes three online projects that can be used within a variety of business classes. Through the National Association of State Boards of Accountancy's Center for the Public Trust's Ethical Leadership Certification Program, undergraduates can earn the Ethical Leadership Certification online at no cost. Thanks to the Mortgage Bankers Association, undergraduates passing its Introduction to Mortgage Banking webinar course earn their coursework Certificate of Completion. Also, the American Bankers Association provides an online Ethical Issues for Bankers course. Therein, undergraduates can earn the American Bankers Association's Ethical Issues for Bankers' coursework Certificate of Completion.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The spring 2020 Covid-19 pandemic swept the United States and drove countless undergraduate courses online, abruptly. That shift to distance learning proved sharply unsettling to some. Institutions, in only weeks, moved courses from on-campus to online by the hundreds of thousands. By May, schools including Harvard University, were considering a 2020 autumn semester completely online contingent upon whether the Covid-19 menace endured. For as early as April, colleges in America less flush than Harvard already had their backs to the wall (Belkin, 2020; Korn, Belkin, and Chung, 2020).

In this physical and financial context, the spirit as well as the letter of the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) International's 2020 *Guiding Principles and Standards for Business Accreditation* proves of some importance to business schools' professors of business law, finance, and accounting. AACSB International calls for business curricula to reflect the needs of organizations employing graduates. Truly, colleges of business constitute an interface of pragmatic business and academics. Within this context, many business schools' lawyer-professors teach one or more among the Legal Environment of Business, Business Law, and Business, Ethics and Social Responsibility courses

which must include an element of ethics. This is a direct reflection of the AACSB 2020 Business Standards which state:

Societal impact as an expectation of all accredited schools reflects AACSB's vision that business education is a force for good in society and makes a positive contribution to society, as identified in the school's mission and strategic plan. This includes an expectation that the school explicates its intended strategies to effect a positive impact on society, that the school's curriculum contains some components relating to societal impact, that the school's intellectual contributions portfolio contains some contributions focused on societal impact, and that the school is fostering and promoting curriculum and/or curricular activities that seek to make a positive societal impact. (AACSB 2020 Guiding Principles and Standards, p .15)

This paper invites online business faculty to investigate a potential trio of voluntary, independent projects for their students. Each project proves topically relevant to several business courses. The National Association of State Boards of Accountancy (NASBA) makes possible student participation in the Ethical Leadership Certification Program. Their website provides an online program which allows participants to acquire background in ethics. On passing tests over the content presented, a student earns the Ethical Leadership Certification from the NASBA Center for the Public Trust. The Mortgage Bankers Association (MBA) offers a series of webinar courses. Its *Introduction to Mortgage Banking* course examines, inter alia, regulatory compliance. Therein the student mastering an online final examination earns an MBA Certificate of Completion. Finally, the American Bankers Association (ABA) provides an Ethical Issues for Bankers Course online where the student can earn the ABA's Ethical Issues for Bankers' coursework Certificate of Completion. In many classes including ethics education, college students' extra credit activities are a common sight. Extra credit can prove awardable for attendance at an on-campus ethics speaker's presentation. Similarly, extra credit can be amassed for keeping a character journal or writing about ethical issues found in newspaper articles. We do not know of any other paper that recommends the use of these certifications for extra credit in business courses.

However, for 2021, the more critical actor involving accreditation of many business schools is not the NASBA nor the MBA nor the ABA. Rather, it remains the AACSB International and its new requirements for accreditation renewal. In 2004, the AACSB published "Ethics Education in Business Schools" saying, "At issue is no less than the future of the free market system, which depends on honest and open enterprise to survive and flourish... the threat of corporate malfeasance ... continues to weigh on investors' trust of the marketplace" (AACSB International, 2004, p. 7). That being the case, awarding extra credit today for successful completion of a NASBA project (in conjunction with learning about compliance or business ethics) appears strikingly fitting.

Therefore, we propose 1.) to connect students (however tenuously) to real professional organizations; 2.) to have their knowledge (however modest) validated by real professional organizations; and 3.) to put professional organizations' names on our students' resumes. These three aims are modest. These three extra credit projects are modest. Those three certifying bodies are NOT.

The following section will present the literature review and the names of three organizations that offer online certifications that would aid in business courses. As would be expected, the material proves somewhat broad. However, with much more specificity, this discussion does address assurance of learning as well as successful evaluation techniques. It will be followed by a discussion of specific online resources, suggestions for the future, and concluding comments.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Standard 8 of the AACSB International's 2020 Standards for AACSB Business Accreditation, states: "Curriculum management captures input from key business school stakeholders and is influenced by

assurance of learning results, new developments in business practices and issues, and revision of mission and strategy that relate to new areas of instruction” and “Competencies and curriculum management processes reflect currency of knowledge and expectations of stakeholders, including but not limited to organizations employing graduates, ...” (AACSB, Standard 5). The Philosophy of AACSB Accreditation states: “The business school, through the articulation and execution of its mission, should make a difference in business and society as well as in the global community of business schools” (AACSB, Standard 4). As this Philosophy more specifically pronounces: “Society is increasingly demanding that companies become more accountable for their actions, exhibit a greater sense of social responsibility, and embrace more sustainable practices” (AACSB, Philosophy, p. 9).

The AACSB Philosophy anticipates reconciling the business college’s sensitivity to its environment’s profit orientation with an indispensably qualitative social perspective. “Accreditation should encourage an appropriate intersection of academic and professional engagement that is consistent with quality in the context of a school’s mission” (AACSB, Philosophy, p. 9). Such explanation helps clarify AACSB International's standard of the requisite teaching performance in undergraduate business schools to aid programs in preparing for their next AACSB review. Based on AACSB requirements, we believe several business courses could potentially be reinforced by online certifications.

### Business, Ethics and Social Responsibility

The very philosophy of AACSB Accreditation declares awareness of mounting public clamor for companies to display a deepening disposition toward “social responsibility” and “more sustainable practices” (AACSB, Standard 5, p. 8). Meanwhile, the Educational Testing Service's Major Field Test (2016) for the bachelor’s degree in Business encompasses a section on business's Legal and Social Environment. The Legal and Social Environment *Subsection D* is Ethics and Social Responsibility. The confluence of morals, of markets, and of the law is undeniable. The meshing of moral philosophy, of economic analysis, and of public policy proves correspondingly unmistakable (Coleman, 2002; Hausman et. al., 2016).

*Subsection D* encompasses a divisible pair of constituents, Ethics and Social Responsibility. As subsection D's bifurcation implies, in teaching and research the bachelor's degree programs of many business colleges distinguish ethics problems from social responsibility problems. Ethical decision-making in business typically is envisioned as an individual-level exercise. Morality and profits are far from mutually exclusive. Simultaneously, an ethical corporate culture as an enterprise’s competitive advantage defines a long-standing notion (Siedel and Haapio, 2010; Siedel and Haapio, 2011). Social responsibility (SR), corporate citizenship, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) have been three labels for an identical phenomenon (Barber, 2013). CSR, after all, inherently is keyed to social impact. In contrast to ethical decision-making as just observed, corporate social responsibility decision-making stems from the organizational level. Inconsistencies between aims and practice concerning corporate social responsibility have encouraged schools of business to offer instruction addressing CSR. Notwithstanding student interest, schools of business have found absorbing ethics (Weber, 2010) and corporate social responsibility into their curricula a somewhat painful challenge (Deer and Zarestky, 2017). Still, 2021 marks a year when “social responsibility” and “more sustainable practices” (both dear to the Philosophy underlying AACSB Accreditation) can cry for business school nurturance more than previously. For, during coronavirus-cursed 2020, sustainability marked the first item jettisoned by frenzied business-crews defending market capitalization and profits (Stoll, 2020). The movement for Corporate Social Responsibility won welcomes from executives through the prosperity abruptly closed by Covid-19, but companies sharply discounted CSR for the hard times into 2021.

## Business Law

Upon the assessment of hundreds of course descriptions in undergraduate college bulletins Miller and Crain (2011) produced a composite description for a Business Law model course, knowing that “Fiduciary duties”, by definition, must include the study of ethics.

Business organizations are examined in terms of differentiating the structure, legal requirements, liability risks, and agency rights & duties. Fiduciary duties are discussed, including their relationship with selected security regulations. Rules related to contracts are studied, along with Uniform Commercial Code requirements as they apply to sale of goods, negotiable instruments, secured transactions. Application of these rules and concepts to business situations is emphasized (Miller and Crain, 2011, p. 203).

## Legal Environment of Business

Miller and Crain (2011) also presented the following composite description for a Legal Environment model course with the understanding that “Social responsibility” is related to ethics.

This course explores legal and ethical issues to assist businesspersons in recognizing, preventing, and managing related risks in the domestic and international regulatory environment in which businesses function. Students are introduced to the U.S. court system, and alternative means of resolving legal disputes. Sustainability of business practices, social responsibility, and rights & duties are explored through discussion of environmental law, employment discrimination, deceptive advertising, products liability, torts, and agency principles, along with related constitutional law issues. The course also examines how contract rules and practices impact businesses, customers, and other constituents (Miller and Crain, 2011, p. 203).

The AACSB’s 2020 Guiding Principles and Standards for Business Accreditation declare: “Normally, business degree programs at the bachelor’s level include learning experiences that address core competencies characteristic of a successful business graduate of an AACSB-accredited school, as well as content from business disciplines, such as accounting, economics, finance, management, management information systems, marketing, and quantitative methods” (AACSB, Standard 4). The absence of Business Law from this offhand roster is conspicuous. Nevertheless, the same instrument salutes the LL.M. and J.D. as widely accepted terminal degrees in business. The degrees are broadly accepted for teachers of “courses or modules related to law or aspects related to the legal environment of business (e.g., ethics, sustainability, etc.)” (AACSB, Standard 4, 2020).

Each course’s take on topics like the “social responsibility” of business (Business, Ethics and Social Responsibility), “fiduciary duties” (Business Law), or “legal and ethical issues” (Legal Environment of Business) comports with the new decade’s demands. Nowadays participants in, e.g., strategic finance, wrestle with clawback provisions for executive compensation (Guo and Pippin, 2020) and with increasing their whistleblowing IQ (Butcher, 2020). If only some off-the-shelf instruments for business law professors lay at the ready to enrich teaching these courses! After all, America’s 2020 business media reported that nonacademic bodies served the growing professional training market with numerous credentials along the lines of online-course certificates and digital badges (Weber, 2020).

## **VOLUNTARY INDEPENDENT PROJECT: THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE BOARDS OF ACCOUNTANCY: ETHICAL LEADERSHIP CERTIFICATION PROGRAM**

The National Association of State Boards of Accountancy (NASBA) and its Center for the Public Trust (CPT) “provide a platform for corporate America and the accounting profession to explore, promote and advance ethical practices in organizations ...Through support and guidance from the NASBA Center for the Public Trust, events and experiences are offered for students....Student CPT Membership is offered

across all disciplines and provides a unique forum for ethics education" (NASBA, July 3, 2020). The need for ethical leadership society-wide seems to be expanding. Even inside the organization called the university, ethical leadership duties so impinge upon professors that the professoriate consults its own ethics handbook to light the way. Fortunately for those professors' students, the NASBA CPT offers The Ethical Leadership Certification Program. It is "an online tool that helps college students...enhance their ethical decision-making abilities. This program also helps students build their resumes and communicate their values to future employers" (<https://learning.thecpt.org/>). The certification program encompasses six modules. Students are tested on its content, passing upon accurately answering at least 80 percent of the questions. The examination costs \$39 per attempt.

To pursue NASBA CPT's Ethical Leadership Certification Program: 1.) one need *not* be a Student Center for the Public Trust member; and 2.) one need *not* have any accountancy background. It seems fair to award coursework extra credit to, e.g., Business, Ethics and Social Responsibility students, upon their voluntary attainment of Ethical Leadership Certification. Note that the CPT affords a platform whereby the accountancy profession and America's corporations promote "ethical practices in organizations." Recall that Social Responsibility (SR) is a name for the studies of decision-making at the organizational level. Therefore, NASBA's "certification" belongs on business school undergraduates' resumes. For, as just mentioned, NASBA's Ethical Leadership Certification Program "helps students build their resumes" (<https://learning.thecpt.org/>).

It appears that in the spirit of the AACSB International's philosophy, the Ethical Leadership Program certification of undergraduate students helps signify their academic institutions' curricular dedication to engaging with emerging corporate social responsibility topics. This certification evidences a direct connection of student-certificates to NASBA's Center for the Public Trust. The latter *itself* interfaces with erupting frontline developments in business behaviors and controversies. Ethical Leadership Certification attests to a learning experience reinforcing ethical reasoning and spotting of ethical problems for resolution through socially responsible methods. The Center's project empowers students toward applying academic theory in a professional context.

### **THE MORTGAGE BANKERS ASSOCIATION: INTRODUCTION TO MORTGAGE BANKING COURSEWORK CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION**

It is appropriate to extend extra credit coursework to Legal Environment of Business students upon voluntary completion of this Mortgage Bankers Association's (MBA) webinar-series course: Introduction to Mortgage Banking because one component is "Regulatory Compliance." Students cover Regulatory compliance, Quality assurance and Technology, as well as other roles in the industry. The subject-matter self-evidently squares with a school of business's Legal Environment of Business course-focus. Recall that Miller and Crain's model Legal Environment course opened: "This course explores legal and ethical issues to assist businesspeople in recognizing, preventing and managing related risks in the domestic and international regulatory environment in which businesses function" (emphasis added) (Miller and Crain, 2011, p. 203).

America's mortgage bankers are wide-awake to business ethics as an imperative. The lead article of the April 2020 issue of The Mortgage Bankers Magazine reflected on a global life-and-death menace: *Coronavirus: The Pandemic's Threat Against Mortgage Banking*. But other articles attended to more homely, less melodramatic matter in the context of the Dodd-Frank Act and the Consumer Financial Protection Board: Unfair, Deceptive, or Abusive Acts and Practices (Idziak and Green, 2020). Please note: *Unfair, Regulatory compliance*.

The MBA's website provides a four-page *Introduction to Mortgage Banking Student* brochure entitled *Jump Start Your Future!* relating: "Mortgage Banking Bound is an exciting new online educational series

developed by the Mortgage Bankers Association (MBA), the national association representing the entire real estate finance industry." And *Jump Start Your Future!* promises Mortgage Banking Bound graduates will earn an "MBA Certificate of Completion and official seal of approval." The sample Introduction to Mortgage Banking Outline indeed affirms: "Students who pass the online final exam obtain a certificate of completion for their records." *Jump Start Your Future!* assures (a trifle enthusiastically, perhaps) that: "MBA's seal of approval is highly recognized within the industry, making you an ideal candidate with future employers. Your certified skills and qualifications will give you a competitive edge within the industry workforce. An industry that currently employs over 280,000 and with an earnings potential ranging from \$59,000-\$118,000 annually." The site adds that Mortgage Banking Bound enrollment embraces access to MBA's "Extensive industry job board" ([www.mba.org](http://www.mba.org)).

The MBA declares of the Introduction to Mortgage Banking course: "Full-time college students not currently interning with or employed by an MBA member company are eligible to take this course for free." One Introduction to Mortgage Banking program was scheduled to run from September 8 to September 22, 2020. Students "learn about the various career paths available through each function (Loan Officer, Servicer, Title Agent, etc.)" ([www.mba.org](http://www.mba.org)).

The Mortgage Banking Association's "Certificate of Completion" belongs on a business school undergraduate-awardee's resume. It marks a "business field" credential. To be sure, it is not a "professional-level" credential such as the CPA nor an academic credential like higher education's own certificates earnable in countless fields. Simultaneously, the MBA's Certificate of Completion and official seal of approval do (at a minimum) comport with even much more ambitious efforts along the lines of, e.g., Uniform Commercial Code study as undergraduates' business career-certification preparation for the Certified Commercial Contracts Manager credential (Swan, 2017). That CCCM credential is awarded by the National Contract Management Association.

In the spirit of the AACSB International's philosophy, professors' utilization of the MBA's Introduction to Mortgage Banking course helps signify a business college's curricular commitment to grappling with emergent corporate social responsibility challenges. For this Introduction to Mortgage Banking course evinces a firsthand teaming of current students with the MBA, *itself* an enterprise necessarily wrestling with an ongoing evolution of business problems and practices. The MBA's Certificate of Completion of its Introduction to Mortgage Banking course facilitates confirmation of students' comprehension of and reasoning about, e.g., ethical dilemmas, to be dealt with by socially responsible (in any case, regulatorily compliant) means. And an Introduction to Mortgage Banking course-completion indicates students' enhanced capacity to connect their academic experiences to a professional (such as mortgage banking) setting.

## **THE AMERICAN BANKERS ASSOCIATION: ETHICAL ISSUES FOR BANKERS COURSEWORK CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION**

### Ethical Issues for Bankers

Students in, e.g., a Business Law or Finance course, could earn course credit contingent upon award of the American Bankers Association's (ABA) online Ethical Issues for Bankers coursework Certificate of Completion. There is a fee of \$75 for this program. These students can e-mail their ABA coursework-certification to their professor. This ABA Ethical Issues in Banking course is designed "For Onboarding Bank personnel at all levels (sic)" (<https://aba.com>, 2020). That universe embraces employees hired who command a formal measure of business training matched by many business college undergraduates.

This ABA website advertises its certification as "... an in-depth exploration of the ethical standards expected of financial service professionals" and suggests students can "master best practices for observing

a bank's code of conduct and adhering to federal laws” (<https://aba.com>, 2020.) It thereby squares with the "legal compliance" aspect of any law and business course. “Develop a sound ethical framework to handle commonly experienced ethical dilemmas. Learn how to make ethically appropriate decisions” (<https://aba.com/training>, 2020). Award of extra course credit to Business Law students upon voluntary completion of the ABA's Ethical issues for Bankers course proves fitting. Recall that the Miller and Crain (2011) composite model for a Business Law course included a discussion of fiduciary duties.

The ABA website appropriately distinguishes between 1.) certificates awarded for mastering a course (Ethical Issues for Bankers); and 2.) its facially rigorous occupational certification programs addressing specialized banking-callings. Therefore, note that this narrower Ethical Issues for Bankers coursework proves part of one or another among *ten* broader ABA certification programs. Ethics certainly marks a feature of any sound vocational grounding. That includes training for banking specialization-callings easily perusable by students consulting the ABA website for the Ethical Issues for Bankers course information. This rather homely lesson discernable in the ABA-specific context concretely exemplifies a recurrent, major idea broadly applicable to any of the three student projects assessed herein.

### Ethical Issues for Everyone

The entirety of one’s existence in a neoliberal environment can be characterized as revolving around capital management (Griffore, 2019). Labor force participants contribute their human capital, for it is that resource rendering them valuable inside the productive machine that harnesses the people. Human capital resembles physical capital such as an assembly line, insofar as it means one’s training/education reinforces the extraction, from a particular effort investment, of a larger profit (Posner and Weyl, 2018). One of a business school’s fundamental roles is that of builder of human capital (given the indispensability of human capital concepts to estimating industrial or social winners and losers) (Gioffre, 2019). Yet, the noninterchangability of the varieties of human capital means particularized know-how and certifications are profitable in specialized worksites only.

Nonetheless, such energized ethical thinking exemplifies a prospective hire’s merit. In 2018, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) issued its Guidelines for Internal and External Human Capital Reporting. The foremost-listed among the ISO’s core Human resource management---Guidelines for internal and external human capital reporting categories was “Compliance and ethics” (ISO, 30414: Section 1). Respecting ethics, its newly minted human capital reporting standard ISO 30414:2018(E) erected a framework for human capital data reporting concerning the proportion of employees completing compliance and ethics training. Further: “This document is applicable to all organizations, regardless of the type, size, nature or complexity of the business, whether in the public, private or voluntary sector, or a not-for-profit organization” (ISO 30414: 2018, Section 1). Thereby, the standard’s announced applicability emphatically reached beyond specialized worksites alone. By mid-2020, the buzz in America’s strategic finance field had been about the chance the Securities and Exchange Commission would impose new disclosure requirements addressing an enterprise’s human capital (Dzinkowski, 2020).

Meanwhile, any business school’s go-getter undergraduate student spontaneously can reach an inspiring realization. It would seem that a student’s successful ethical issues for banker’s coursework can constitute the first step towards a far more substantial professional certification-credential (or towards more than one such credential). Thereby, an entirely voluntary ABA extra credit-option in a Business Law course might, to some extent, encourage a student's subsequent accession into a grander study-undertaking. This would nourish a fruitful, banking workforce-future.

Is it possible that in the spirit of the AACSB International’s philosophy, the ABA's Ethical Issues for Bankers Certificate of Completion might be seen as a business college curriculum's adherence to engaging with contemporary, and nascent, corporate social responsibility issues? The Ethical Issues for Bankers’

coursework and Certificate of Completion manifest a student-examinee's one-to-one teamwork with the ABA. The American Bankers Association *in turn* remains immediately exposed to challenges surrounding corporate social responsibility. Certification of a student's completion of the Ethical Issues for Bankers course signals the successful learning experience deepening ethical reasoning abilities, and sharpening sensitivity to ethical difficulties (summoning socially responsible remedies). Via the Ethical Issues for Bankers course, a student might more robustly carry academic theory into professional context decision-making.

## THE AACSB INTERNATIONAL AND ASSURANCE OF LEARNING: ASSESSING THE BENEFITS

During each of the past four semesters, the lead author used one or more of these certificate programs. The advantage of these programs being online was particularly highlighted during the COVID-19, Spring 2020, stay at home semester. That semester, the students were enthusiastic and over 58% of his students earned one of these certificates. In the Legal Environment classes, 42 of 85 students (49.4%) chose to complete the NASBA certification process. In the Business Ethics class, 32 of 42 students (76.2%) chose to earn the ABA's Ethical Issues for Bankers certificate. Some of the students commented on the professional level of the body administering one or another of these certifications. In other semesters, the professor was also pleased with the results from the MBA's certification program.

The AACSB International's 2020 Guiding Principles and Standards for Business Accreditation's Standard 5: Assurance of Learning, via section 5.1, requires: "The school uses well-documented assurance of learning (AoL) processes that include direct and indirect measures for ensuring the quality of all degree programs that are deemed in scope for accreditation purposes" (AACSB, Standard 5.1). By the Association's definition, this Standard 5.1 "*Indirect measures of learning* refer to evidence attained from third-party input. Examples of indirect assessments include...external outcome measures..." (AACSB, Standard 5.1).

Moreover, the Association's 2020 Guiding Principles and Standards for Business Accreditation's Standard 7: Teaching Effectiveness and Impact, via section 7.4, requires: "The school demonstrates teaching impact through learner success, learner satisfaction, and other affirmations of teaching expertise" (AACSB, Standard 7.4). These certifications appear to fulfill this requirement. But the standard also asks for "exemplars of learner success either with respect to the school's current learners or alumni" (AACSB, Standard 7.4).

So, what is an exemplar? It long since has been defined as: "1. One who or that which serves as a model or pattern; esp., an ideal model; archetype" (Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 1948, p. 349). If the projects discussed are utilized by professors as advocated herein, then each professional credential earned warrants (by definition) learners' successful mastery of material relevant to the professors' own course. Also, each such professional body's warranty arrives independently of professors or institutions being biased by accreditation considerations. Regarding Standard 7, we believe each certificate clearly affords an example of learner success on the part of the school's current learners such that the business college can share duplicates of its students' certificates with the AACSB.

Saint John's University's Prof. Herb Chain includes NASBA's Ethical Leadership project at the graduate level.

"I have required my students to complete the NASBA Center for the Public Trust's Ethical Leadership Certification Program as part of our graduate accounting degree capstone course, Accounting Ethics and Professionalism. I have found it to be a valuable supplement to our class discussions and required preparation materials, and recommend its incorporation into other, similar courses" (Chain, 2019).



The Anderson School of Management at the University of New Mexico includes the Anderson Student Center for the Public Trust. Its students were encouraged to sign-up for the student Ethical Leadership Certification Program and email their certificate to the professor upon completion. “Professors have complimented its ease of use, content and student engagement after taking the course” (mgt.unm.edu, 2020). Ferrell, Fraedrich, and Ferrell have been on the record for years as discussing Ethical Leadership Certification by the NASBA Center for the Public Trust: “As business ethics increases in importance, such certification can give your students an edge in the workplace” (Ferrell et al., p. xv, 2017).

NASBA’s program is invoked by Western Kentucky University’s Gordon Ford College of Business as a component of their Assurance of Learning. On March 26, 2019, the Assurance of Learning committee Agenda called for addressing “Ethics certificate and AOL.” Among their undergraduate Learning Objectives lay “Goal 2: Legal and Ethical Awareness.” But: “It is very difficult to identify where students are consistently exposed to ethical considerations in the core.” However, they cite the Ethical Leadership certification program offered by the National Association of State Boards of Accounting [sic: Accountancy] Center for the Public Trust....” (Western Kentucky University, Assurance of Learning Committee Agenda, 2019). Dr. Thrasher, chair of the committee and AACSB Coordinator of Continuous Improvement wrote, “Discussion began with having every department administer this particular test. This could lead to overlap for students, but the committee was in favor [of] having an ethical certification for virtually every GFCB student. Interests [arose] in certifications offered by external, industry recognized sources” (www.wku.edu/).

## **A PATH FORWARD**

Middlesex University’s Sian Stephens perceives a peril “...to those involved in teaching Business Ethics, where the risk of ‘preaching’ rather than ‘teaching’ is great” (Stephens, 2019, p. 642). That classroom’s business law professor appropriately would hearken to an oft-cited contribution of Dartmouth Professor Aine Donovan (2009) who asks, “Is it the responsibility of schools to teach ethics? I think it is--but only if it is done in the right way...[students] need a simple values toolkit that they can understand and have at the ready, not an impression that all ethics are relative, or just intellectual chewing gum”.

A business law professor, using one or another of the online resources discussed herein, still might lack any basic and portable toolkit to offer students. The toolkit should be one students definitely can grasp while still undergraduates, thereby enabling them to employ it throughout their careers. That professor could consult the textbook by Halbert and Ingulli, *Law and Ethics in the Business Environment* (2018). This “simple tool kit” introduces students to: the free market ethics identified with the 1976 Nobel Laureate in Economics, the late Milton Friedman (Pearce, 1996); utilitarianism as conceived by Jeremy Bentham; deontological duties and rights as identified with the categorical imperative of Immanuel Kant; virtue ethics deriving from Aristotle; and the ethic of care identified with psychologist Carol Gilligan.

Halbert and Ingulli, exactly like lawyers, champion their toolkit:

Ideally, familiarity with these theories will support you in at least two ways as you face business dilemmas in the future. First, the models for analysis can spark creative thinking as you brainstorm ways of handling the ethical questions that will confront you. Second, they offer you a means of explaining your thinking to others, and of advocating for new ideas. Knowing the theoretical basis for ethical decision making can help you understand your own position, and help you articulate it to your superiors, your coworkers, and those who report to you in the company. There is a familiar “language” in the business world for most decision making: cost-benefit analysis. Ethical theory offers you another language, making you “bilingual” in complex situations (Halbert and Ingulli, 2018, p. 31).

Consider whether an undergraduate school of business's capably captained course in Business, Ethics and Social Responsibility ideally will: 1.) harness Halbert and Ingulli's ethical decision-reaching toolkit; plus 2.) incentivize students (with the bait of extra credit) toward an investment of time and energy into a project resembling the National Association of State Boards of Accountancy's Ethical Leadership Certification.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In May 2020, the American Council on Education President, Ted Mitchell, guesstimated an on-campus student population-shrinkage of 15 percent due to the Covid-19 virus (Belkin and Korn, 2020). Almost all colleges and universities have moved more classes online. We offer aid for professors trained to teach face-to-face by suggesting three online opportunities that could enhance their students understanding of business and ethics. Each of these programs is offered by a professional organization.

The preceding discussion has attended to the spirit as well as the letter of various pronouncements found in the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business International's 2020 Guiding Principles and Standards for Business Accreditation. It then related that business schools' faculty are familiar with awarding extra credit in business courses, including those in Ethics. It suggested that business professors might consider assigning these certification programs as extra credit options for students. If regulatory bodies' or business-profession fields institutionally constructed online projects (such as address compliance) open optional avenues whereby students can earn extra credit in business college courses, then those online resources authoritatively can complement the business law professor's classroom efforts. Their very externality to the campus constitutes a virtue. For each exposes the student to its own, implicit outlook, which is distinguishable from that of the classroom-instructor. Thereby, each such enterprise's oblique engagement in a course can help suppress one or another peril.

We have not formally assessed student knowledge acquired through these programs. We understand there are costs in two programs that may present financial barriers for some students. There is also no assurance that each student completed all work independently. We encourage faculty to share their experiences with these certificate programs and any other online programs that can benefit our students.

*Res ipsa loquitur.*

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