

Why Students Take Elective Business Ethics Courses: Applying the Theory of Planned Behavior

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ABSTRACT. Despite the prevalence of elective business ethics courses, little research has sought to explain and predict why some students enroll in these courses and while others do not. Using the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen and Madden, 1986) as a theoretical foundation, 178 graduate students in Ireland were surveyed about their intention to sign up for an elective ethics class. Their behavior was measured two months later. The results reveal the power of the theory of planned behavior to explain and predict who takes elective ethics classes.

For a number of years, business educators have recognized the need to incorporate a discussion of ethical issues into the curriculum. One of the most recent surveys of accredited business schools in the United States, conducted by the Ethics Resource Center (Paine, 1988), revealed that 90% of business schools who responded included a discussion of ethics in their curricula (Wynd and Mager, 1989).

Such statistics reflect a growing realization that a discussion of ethics is a desirable and perhaps essential component of business education. Yet, there still remains considerable disagreement about how, where, and when ethics instruction should occur. In particular, one key debate centers on whether students should be given a choice about exposure to ethical issues (through the mechanism of an elective

course) or whether ethical analysis should be required (through a mandatory ethics course or coverage of ethical issues within a required course).

One could persuasively argue in favor of elective status for the course: business schools are already overloaded with required courses; students should be given flexibility in selecting courses; sufficient and qualified faculty in business schools are not available to teach an ethics course; and, faculty teaching such courses would enjoy the class more if students interested in the subject matter self-select into the class.

On the other hand, an elective ethics course has a number of drawbacks. By virtue of having ethics designated an elective course, students (and faculty) may be predisposed to view the subject matter as "interesting," but not essential. A required course symbolically conveys the importance of a subject matter to students and others. Students may not realize the future value of an ethics course. As Mahoney (1990: 35) concluded, "where ethics is an optional subject the student response is so low that if educators are serious about teaching ethics to students, they must include it in required components of the curriculum."

Despite these drawbacks to elective status, it appears that a substantial number of business schools in the United States and Canada are offering business ethics as an elective. A survey of Canadian schools (Singh, 1989) revealed that 25 business ethics courses offered by the 23 responding institutions. Of the courses offered, 80% (20) were elective. Similarly, a survey by the Ethics Resource Center (Paine, 1988) revealed that 20% of the responding U.S. schools required a separate ethics course for undergraduates, and only 7% required a separate business ethics course for MBAs. (However, some schools did require courses in which ethics were discussed to a varying extent.) Such statistics justify concern about

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the lack of ethics in the current business curriculum (e.g., Borkowski and Ugras, 1992).

Considering the preference for elective status and the relatively small number of students choosing to enroll in business ethics courses, it is important to explore why some students take elective ethics courses and others do not. Those interested in business ethics education have speculated that students may not enroll in elective ethics courses for a variety of reasons: due to a lack of interest on the part of students (Singh, 1989), the students are too idealistic (Mahoney, 1990), the material is vague and frustrating, the topic of business ethics lacks relevance, ethics instruction can have no impact on individual decision making, and business ethics is bad for business (Ciulla, 1985).

Further, as those who enroll in such courses may already value ethical analysis, elective ethics courses may simply be “preaching to the converted.” As Mahoney (1990: 31) has suggested, “A reasonable supposition is that those who are most in need of the course — students who think that business ethics doesn’t exist, or that it cannot be relevant to actual business practice — will not sign up for an elective.”

At present, which reasons, if any, explain enrollment in elective business ethics courses is unknown. While a number of empirical studies have sought to document the impact of ethics instruction on students once enrolled (e.g., Arlow and Ulrich, 1980, 1983, 1985; Boyd, 1981–82; Budner, 1987; Glenn, 1992; Hildebeitel and Jones, 1992; Martin, 1981; Penn and Collier, 1985; Stead and Miller, 1988; Wynd and Mager, 1989), surprisingly little research has been directed toward understanding and predicting enrollment in elective ethics courses. If business educators are seeking to make informed decisions about elective vs. required status of ethics courses and would like to encourage students to engage in ethical analysis, it is important to explore the student decision-making process.

The theory of planned behavior (Ajzen and Madden, 1986) provides a very useful theoretical framework for understanding and predicting enrollment in business ethics courses. The theory is described in more detail below.

Theory of planned behavior

The theory of planned behavior is an extension of the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). Figure 1 identifies, by number, the major linkages in the model. As reflected in Figure 1, the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1985) posits that a person’s intention to perform a behavior is the immediate determinant of the action (# 1). Behavioral intention is a function of three basic determinants: attitude toward performing the behavior (# 2), subjective norms regarding the behavior (# 3), and perceived behavioral control (# 4).

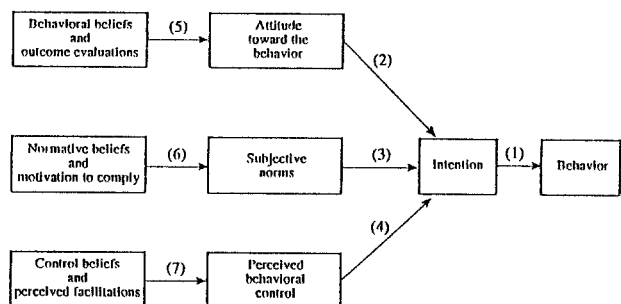


Fig. 1. Model of the theory of planned behavior.

Attitude toward performing the behavior is a person’s judgment that performing the behavior is good or bad, that she or he is in favor or against performing the behavior. It is a function of beliefs that performing the behavior will lead to certain consequences and the person’s evaluation of those consequences (# 5).

The social component of Ajzen’s model, the subjective norm, is a person’s perception of whether most people who are important to the person think that he or she should perform the behavior in question. Subjective norms are a function of whether significant others think he or she should perform the behavior, weighted by the person’s motivation to comply with those significant others (# 6).

Perceived behavioral control reflects the individual’s perception of personal control over the behavior of interest. It is a function of the individual’s control beliefs as to how easy or difficult it will be to perform the behavior and the perception of both opportunities and resources to perform the behavior (# 7).

The simplicity and parsimony of the model

derives from its assumption that all other sources of influence on behavior are mediated by the three predictor variables. Thus, one could accurately predict whether or not a student enrolls in an elective business ethics course simply through knowledge of that student's intent. One could predict intent through knowledge of that individual's attitude towards enrolling in the course, the subjective norm the student holds, and how much control the student believes he or she has over enrolling in the course. According to the theory, other variables, such as demographics, attitudes toward people or institutions, or personality traits, are not important in the explanation of behavior (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980).

In sum, using the theory of planned behavior, the present study seeks to predict and explain why students take elective ethics courses. The methods used to explore these questions are described below.

Methods

The study was conducted in a field setting using survey methodology. The survey instrument used standard measures of the components of the theory of planned behavior (as developed by Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Ajzen and Madden, 1986). Details on the data site and subjects, questionnaire design, measurement of variables, and questionnaire implementation are set forth below.

Data site and subjects

Due to the perceived importance of the topic of business ethics, the Michael Smurfit Graduate Business School at the University College-Dublin (UCD), Ireland, developed and taught the first elective business ethics course in Ireland in 1991. The business ethics course was offered as an elective to one stream of graduate students . . . the MBS's (Master of Business Studies Degree). The Master of Business Studies is a specialist graduate degree covering the major management functions and areas of management of particular importance in the current business context. The academic year for an MBS consists of one year of full-time study or two years of part-time study. The elective ethics course, designed to develop analytical skills and to increase

the awareness of the ethical implications of individual and corporate decision making, is offered in the spring term of the academic year.

The author developed and administered a questionnaire to MBS students during the term preceding the second offering of the course. The questionnaire was administered two months before the beginning of the term. Students were told that the purpose of the survey was as follows: "In this survey, we are interested in how students in the MBS program perceive certain newly developed courses and why or why not they choose to take those courses."

Questionnaire design

To identify major beliefs influencing students to take a course in business ethics, a pilot test of 28 graduate students completing an MBA at the same institution was conducted. (Due to program requirements, the MBAs were not permitted to take the business ethics elective). Students were asked, using an open-ended format, to list all advantages and disadvantages of taking a business ethics course (i.e., behavioral beliefs) and to identify all those people who would approve/disapprove of the student taking the course (i.e., significant others). The most frequently mentioned behavioral beliefs and significant others were incorporated into the final version of the questionnaire administered to MBS students.

Measurement of variables

The final version of the questionnaire measured the following constructs:

Intention. Three questions measuring intention were included in the survey: "How likely is it that you will take the Business Ethics course offered next term?" (to be answered on a 7-point, fully-anchored scale from 1 = extremely unlikely to 7 = extremely likely); "I intend to take the course in Business Ethics offered next term" (to be answered on a 7-point, fully anchored scale from 1 = strongly agree to 7 = strongly disagree); and, "I very much would like to take the Business Ethics course offered next term" (to be answered on a 7-point, fully anchored scale from 1 = strongly agree to 7 = strongly disagree).

The questions were combined to form a single measure of intention (Cronbach coefficient $\alpha = 0.80$).

Asking students if they intend to take a particular course may create an artificial interest in that course. Thus, a second measure of intention was gathered independently from the survey. Upon entering the MBS program, all students were asked to indicate what courses they planned on taking for the fall and spring terms and to return this sheet to the administrative office over the course of the first term. Of the MBS students enrolled in the fall term, 14 expressed an intent to take the ethics course in the spring term by specifically listing the course on the administrative form. Of these fourteen students, 10 also completed the survey administered by the researcher. Both measures of intent, the first referred to hereafter as survey-assessed intent and the second as administrative intent, were analyzed in the present study.

Attitude toward the behavior. Attitude toward enrolling in an elective ethics course was assessed by five items. Using 7-point, fully anchored scales, respondents were asked whether they believed that taking a business ethics course next term would be good/bad, foolish/wise, worthwhile/worthless, irrelevant/relevant, and interesting/dull. To compute attitude toward enrolling in an elective ethics course, responses to the five measures were summed to create a single score (Cronbach $\alpha = 0.80$).

Attitude toward performing a behavior can alternatively be assessed as a function of behavioral beliefs and outcome evaluations. To measure behavioral beliefs, respondents were asked how likely or unlikely it is that a particular outcome will occur as a result of enrolling in an ethics course. Ten behavioral beliefs were assessed (e.g., "My taking a Business Ethics course next term would put me into an easy, "soft" course") using a 7-point, fully anchored scale with 1 = extremely unlikely and 7 = extremely likely.) Corresponding to each behavioral belief was an outcome evaluation (e.g., the respondent was asked how good or bad it is to be "taking an easy, 'soft' course") using a 7-point, fully anchored scale with 1 = extremely good and 7 = extremely bad. A measure of attitude toward taking the ethics course was then computed by multiplying together each pair of behavioral beliefs and outcome evaluations and summing the results.

Subjective norm. The respondent's subjective norm toward performing the behavior was assessed following an established procedure by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975). Two questions were asked: First, "Most people who are important to me would probably think I should take a business ethics course" (using 7-point, fully anchored scale); and second, "Generally speaking, I want to do what most people who are important to me think I should do" (using a 7-point, fully anchored scale). Responses to the two questions were multiplied together to arrive at a general measure of subjective norm.

An alternative measure of subjective norm can be computed as a function of normative beliefs with respect to specific referents and the motivation to comply with those referents (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). Normative beliefs were assessed by asking the respondent what each six significant others (peers, parents, instructors, friends, spouse/boyfriend/girlfriend, and future employers) would probably think he or she should do. For example, respondents were asked to express their agreement/disagreement with the following statement: "Instructors at UCD would probably think I should take a Business Ethics course next term" (using a 7-point fully anchored scale from 1 = strongly agree to 7 = strongly disagree). Motivation to comply was assessed by asking the respondents to rate their desire to comply with each of the six referent others. The question format was: "Generally speaking, I want to do what instructors at UCD think I should do" (on a 7-point, fully anchored scale with 1 = strongly agree to 7 = strongly disagree). A measure of subjective norms was then computed by multiplying together each pair of normative beliefs and motivation to comply items and summing the results.

Perceived behavioral control. Students were asked how much control they perceived themselves to have over whether or not they took the elective ethics course. While ostensibly the course was an elective for all MBS students, three other courses were offered at the same time and, for those students with an emphasis in finance, one of these competing courses was "required." Students were aware of the class offerings and times when they completed the survey instrument.

To assess perceived behavioral control, respondents were asked: (1) "How much personal control do

you feel you have over whether or not you take the Business Ethics course next term?" (using a 7-point, fully anchored scale ranges from 1 = complete control to 7 = no control), (2) "If I wanted to, I could take the Business Ethics course next term" (using 7-point, fully anchored scales ranging from 1 = strongly agree to 7 = strongly disagree), and (3) "It would be mostly up to me whether or not I take the Business Ethics course next term" (with the same response categories as the second question). The three items were summed to arrive at a measure of perceived behavioral control (Cronbach $\alpha = 0.93$). Consistent with past operationalizations of the theory, perceived behavioral control was not indirectly measured through specific control beliefs and perceived facilitations.

Demographic variables. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) claimed that little information is to be gained by consideration of demographic variables. However, for purposes of generalizability, basic demographic data were gathered (e.g., gender, age, years of full-time work experience, formal instruction in ethics, area of primary (undergraduate) degree and granting institution, and current area of specialization).

Behavior. Respondents were asked to write down their student identification number on the front page of the survey instrument. Using this number, survey responses were matched with the names of those students who actually attended the first day of the elective ethics course.

Questionnaire implementation

All 221 students in the MBS program were administered the questionnaire during a required research methods class two months prior to the start of the new term. The class was divided into three sections. All sections were administered the questionnaire on the same day. The students were instructed that completing the instrument was totally voluntary. 178 usable surveys were completed; 43 students were not in attendance.

Due to time constraints, page limitations, and a desire for prediction over explanation, many researchers using Fishbein and Ajzen models have developed survey instruments using only the general

measures of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Questions about the antecedents to these variables are dropped. In the present study, due to time constraints, questions about antecedents were dropped in one section ($n = 66$). In the two other sections ($n = 111$), the longer, more detailed questionnaire was used. The only difference between the two versions was the omission of questions regarding the antecedents of attitudes and subjective norms on the short version.

Computational procedures

The relationships between components of the theory of planned behavior were examined using hierarchical regression. Survey-assessed intention was regressed on attitude toward enrolling in an elective ethics course, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control. As recommended by Beck and Ajzen (1991), attitude and subjective norm were entered in the first stage, followed by perceived behavioral control. To predict attitude toward signing up for an ethics course, attitude was regressed on all behavioral belief and outcome evaluation pairs. To predict subjective norm, subjective norm was regressed upon all normative belief and motivation to comply pairs. A listwise deletion procedure was used to handle missing values for all analyses.

Evans (1991) criticized the majority of research articles applying the theory of reasoned action for understated correlations due to scaling effects. He argued that when multiplying strength and importance items together, the composite should be treated as an interaction term. He recommended that researchers overcome this problem by changing the responses (not the question format) from a +1 to +7 scale to a -3 to +3 scale. Following Evans' recommendations, respondents' answers were recoded from +1 to +7 to -3 to +3 for analytic purposes.

A difference of means test was calculated to assess the relationship between intention (both administrative intent and survey-assessed intent) and the actual behavior of taking the ethics class.

Findings

Descriptive statistics

The sample was composed of 56% men and 43% women, with an average age of 23.9. Over one-half (52%) of the students had no full-time work experience, and 82% of the students had no formal instruction in ethics. Approximately 64% of all students in the program had business as an undergraduate minor, and 71% of the sample secured their business degree at UCD. (A series of t-tests and crosstabs revealed that none of these demographic variables were significantly related to intent to enroll in an ethics course or to actual enrollment in the course.)

Prediction of behavior (# 1)

Twenty-five students attended the business ethics class the first day of the term. Of the 25, 16 had completed the survey instrument in the previous term. A difference of means test revealed that those students who attended the class had a higher level of survey-assessed intent to take the ethics class than those students who did not attend class ($F = 29.0$, $p < 0.0001$, $\eta^2 = 0.38$). A difference of means test also revealed that those students enrolling in the class had expressed a higher level of administrative intent (on the independent form submitted to the

administrative office) to take the course than those students who did not attend class ($F = 13.2$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.26$).

Correlates of survey-assessed intent (# 2, # 3, and # 4)

Hierarchical regression analyses were performed to test the hypothesized relationships between constructs in the theory of planned behavior. A correlation matrix, depicted in Table I, reflects the relationships between key constructs. Results of the regression analysis, shown in Table II, reveal that the multiple correlation coefficient between I and ATT, SN, and PBC was 0.61. The regression analyses revealed that, of the three correlates of intent, attitude toward enrolling in the course had the strongest relationship ($\beta = 0.61$, $p < 0.0001$), perceived behavioral control had a weaker relationship ($\beta = 0.19$, $p < 0.01$), and subjective norm had no significant relationship ($\beta = 0.05$, $p = 0.45$).

Correlates of administrative intent (# 2, # 3, and # 4)

A difference of means test indicated that an administrative intent to take the ethics course was associated with a more positive attitude toward the course ($F = 5.7$, $p < 0.05$, one-tailed). However, an administrative intent to take the course was not associated with

TABLE I
Correlation matrix: major constructs in the model

	Mean (SD)/n	ATT	PBC	SN	INTENT
Attitude	4.8 (0.99) 172	1.00			
PBC	5.7 (1.78) 177	-0.14	1.00		
Subjective norm	1.1 (3.47) 178	-0.18*	0.06	1.00	
Intent ^a	3.2 (1.60) 177	0.59**	0.09	-0.06	1.00

^a survey-assessed intent

* $p < 0.05$

** $p < 0.01$

TABLE II
Hierarchical regression in prediction of survey-assessed intent

	Beta	T
Attitude toward performing behavior	0.6143	9.75***
Subjective norm	0.0474	0.76
Perceived behavioral control	0.1898	3.07**
	Multiple R	0.61
	R square	0.37
	Adjust R sq	0.36

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

the subjective norm ($F = 0.002$, $p = 0.99$, one-tailed), nor with perceived behavioral control ($F = 0.93$, $p = 0.68$, one-tailed). As to be expected, an administrative intent to take the course was strongly associated with survey-assessed intention ($F = 42.9$, $p < 0.0001$, one-tailed).

outcome pairs explained 39% ($R = 0.62$) of the variance in attitude toward enrolling in an ethics course (see Table III). Yet, of the ten behavioral outcome pairs, only one significantly predicted attitude toward enrolling in an ethics course: "Taking a Business Ethics course next term would waste my time" ($beta = 0.46$, $p < 0.0001$).

Correlates of attitude towards performing the behavior (# 5)

Correlates of subjective norms (# 6)

Consideration of the behavioral belief/evaluation

Similarly, consideration of the normative belief/

TABLE III
Prediction of attitude toward taking an elective ethics course by behavioral belief/ outcome evaluation pairs

	Beta	T
My taking a Business Ethics course next term would . . .		
1. Prevent me from taking a more useful class	0.16	1.78
2. Waste my time	0.46	4.90***
3. Put me into an unstructured class	-0.03	-0.32
4. Increase my awareness of ethical issues	-0.18	-1.74
5. Put me into an easy, "soft" course	-0.03	-0.35
6. Help me make the right decisions as a manager	-0.04	-0.39
7. Put me into a course that cannot be graded objectively	0.13	1.42
8. Put me into a challenging course	0.08	0.83
9. Help make me aware of the implications of my actions as a manager	0.10	0.94
10. Help me make better decisions as a manager	-0.20	-1.71
	Multiple R	0.62
	R square	0.39
	Adjust R sq	0.32

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

TABLE IV
Prediction of subjective norm toward taking an elective ethics course by normative belief/
motivation to comply pairs

	Beta	T
1. Future employers	0.26	2.92***
2. My parents	0.16	1.78
3. Peers at UCD	-0.14	-1.50
4. Instructors at UCD	0.26	2.94**
5. Spouse/boyfriend/girlfriend	0.06	0.61
6. My friends	0.36	3.19**
	Multiple R	0.63
	R square	0.39
	Adjust R sq	0.36

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

motivation to comply pairs explained 39% ($R = 0.63$) of the variance in subjective norms (see Table IV). Of the six normative belief/motivation to comply pairs, only three were significant: "My instructors at UCD would probably think I should take a Business Ethics course next term" ($beta = 0.26$, $p < 0.01$), "My friends would probably think I should take a Business Ethics course next term" ($beta = 0.36$, $p < 0.01$), and "Future employers would probably think I should take a Business Ethics course next term" ($beta = 0.26$, $p < 0.01$).

Discussion

The paper sought to explore why students sign up for an elective ethics course. The findings revealed that the theory of planned behavior provided a useful theoretic foundation to help understand student choices. A combination of attitude toward enrolling in the ethics course, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control could explain approximately 37% of the variance in intent to enroll in the class and 14% of the variance in attendance could be explained by intention.

The power of the model in predicting intention clearly derives from the attitude toward enrolling in the class and, to a lesser extent, perceived behavioral control. Surprisingly, only one attitude was significantly correlated with student intention: the more students felt that wasting their time was bad and

believed that they would be wasting their time in an ethics course, the lower the intention to take such a course ($r = -0.32$, $p < 0.01$). In addition, despite the "elective" nature of the course, students were well-aware that they did not have total control over course selection and this understanding was reflected in their stated intention to take ethics course.

Interestingly, the subjective norm did not have a significant impact on intent to enroll in the elective ethics course. Three groups of people (instructors, friends, and future employers) were identified as generally approving of students taking an ethics course and students indicated that they were generally motivated to comply with these people. However, intent to take an elective ethics course did not appear to be significantly influenced by these people. Ultimately, it appears that a student's decision to enroll in an elective ethics course is largely a function of the attitude he or she holds towards taking that course, and this intention is slightly tempered by how much control the student feels he or she has about taking the course.

The theory of planned behavior set forth that there is little to be gained by consideration of demographic or personality variables. This study confirmed that individual difference variables were largely captured by the determinants of intent, and that demographic or personality variables have no direct effect on the intention-behavior relationship. Whether or not a student had previous ethics instruction, gender, age, specialization in school, and

years of full-time work experience were not significantly related either to intention to enroll in an elective ethics course or to actual enrollment in the course.

Implications

Research implications

Before practical implications are drawn from the study, the issue of generalizability deserves consideration. The field study was restricted to one stream of graduate students at the largest university in Ireland. Whether or not these findings can be generalized beyond the students surveyed is unknown. At present, the concern with business ethics in continental Europe and the United Kingdom is not as high as in the United States (Mahoney, 1990). It is possible that, with the rapidly growing interest in business ethics in Ireland and greater media coverage, student attitudes toward business ethics electives will change, as will the influence of the student's significant others over course selection.

In addition to culture limiting the generalizability of the findings, student attitudes could also have been influenced by more mundane factors such as the format of the course or perceptions of the instructor who developed and offered the course. To more fully understand student decisions to take elective ethics courses, it is desirable to expand the study to other schools offering undergraduate and graduate programs, different cultures, business and nonbusiness students, different course formats, different instructors, and over time.

Practical implications

With caveats regarding generalizability in mind, educators who are debating the merits of elective versus required status of an ethics course will find the results of this study useful. The finding that intention to enroll in an elective ethics course is primarily a function of attitudes and, to a lesser extent, perceived behavioral control is important for those desiring to influence the intentions and eventual behavior of students.

With limited resources and time, educators may

want to first direct their efforts to changing students' attitudes towards elective ethics courses. Specifically, findings from the present study would encourage educators to focus on students' beliefs about elective ethics courses (particularly, the belief that an ethics course is a waste of time). These beliefs, in turn, will influence student behavior. Second, due to the influence of perceived behavioral control, educators may want to ensure that "competing" courses are not offered at the same time as an elective ethics course and student programs provide sufficient flexibility in course selection to ensure that students can include an ethics course in their studies.

Of course, educators can exert the greatest control over students by simply mandating business ethics as a required course or as a component of a previously existing, required course. However, due to political, financial, and staffing constraints discussed earlier, this may not be possible for many institutions. Hence, in deciding upon elective or required status for ethics courses, it is critical for business educators to identify the goal or purpose of ethical instruction and, armed with empirical findings about why students opt for elective courses, decide where ethics instruction should occur.

Limitations

In addition to cautions about generalizability, the study contains certain limitations. First, due to problems presented by nonattendance of several students when the survey was administered and the admission of new MBS students after the survey instrument had been administered, it was not possible to match each survey to each student taking the business ethics class. As a consequence, the number of usable responses for analyzing the intent-behavior relationship was reduced.

Second, the theory of planned behavior could not fully explain variation in who intends to sign up for elective ethics courses and who actually attends. For instance, administrative intent (measured over the course of the preceding term) could only explain 7% of the variance in attendance in the elective ethics class, while survey-assessed intent (measured two months before the class started) explained 14% of the variance in attendance.

The failure to explain a large portion of variance

in intent and behavior may be due to a violation of the temporal proximity boundary condition of the theoretic model. Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) set forth that intention should not change during the time interval between the measurement of intention and the performance of the behavior. The closer in time the intent is measured to the actual behavior, the greater the explained variation in behavior. In the present study, intention was assessed two months before the behavior was measured. Yet, students may have changed their mind after completing the survey instrument which assessed intention. Indeed, many students may not have gathered information about course offerings, formed beliefs about the course offerings, or assessed how much control they actually had about taking courses until immediately before they were forced to make decisions about course selection. While intention measured immediately before enrollment would clearly have higher predictive ability, such information would clearly have less practical utility. Further research on factors which influence student selection of ethics courses is clearly desirable.

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