The Editors’ Corner

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Not everyone is called to be a physician, a lawyer, a philosopher, to live in the public eye, nor has everyone outstanding gifts of natural capacity, but all of us are created for the life of social duty, all are responsible for the personal influence that goes forth from us.

—Vittorino da Feltre (Null & Ravitch, 2006, p. 453)

According to the World Economic Forum (2010), the license to operate in a global market requires that an organization become engaged in society, and recent economic, social–political, and natural disasters have all served to highlight the fragility of the global marketplace. A variety of terms have been used to describe companies and their accountability to society in response to a fragile global marketplace: ethical decision making, social responsibility, sustainable development, corporate governance, corporate citizenship, and triple bottom line. Essentially, companies worldwide are being held responsible, by a variety of stakeholders, for issues such as not harming the environment, treating employees fairly, dealing truthfully and transparently with consumers, fair pricing, ensuring responsible supply chain management, reducing climate change impact, improving education/skills in the community, listening/responding to public concerns, increasing global economic stability, helping reduce the rich–poor gap, reducing human rights abuses, supporting charities/community projects, and solving social problems (Center for Corporate Citizenship, 2008; Economist Intelligence Unit, 2008; Environmental Leader, 2009). Shareholders, in particular, recognize the relationship of good ethics to profitability. Ethisphere magazine has shown that the “World’s Most Ethical Companies” consistently outperform the Standard & Poor’s 500 (Ethisphere, 2011).

It is no longer questioned as to whether or not companies should be good corporate citizens; rather, the concern in the 21st century is how businesses can become good citizens. Unfortunately, there is little reported formalization and documentation in business education that equips students to matriculate into companies doing business in a 21st-century operating environment in which good citizenship is the norm and not the exception. Thus, the overall objective of this special issue of the Journal of Marketing Education (JME) was to bring together scholarship that addresses how ethics, business, and society are intertwined in our classrooms and among our students. To this end, we are able to provide ten educational articles that address ethics, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and/or sustainability.

The first five articles in this issue focus on macro issues related to teaching and learning in our marketing classrooms—that is, are we effectively teaching ethics, CSR, and sustainability in our graduate and undergraduate curricula and are students learning about the issues? In the first of these macro perspective articles, Professor James Weber, Duquesne University, analyzes data from the Aspen Institute’s Beyond Grey Pinstripes program and reports that there have been significant increases in the focus on ethical, social, and sustainability issues in the graduate marketing curricula. The second article then focuses specifically on business ethics from a student perspective. That is, the information presented in the article by Professors Gruber and Schlegelmilch from WU Vienna in Austria is derived from executive MBA opinions. Findings from the authors’ qualitative research indicate that exchange with others and integration within the respective business disciplines is particularly important in gaining acceptance and instilling relevance in ethics education for this target group of students. Continuing with this student-focused theme, Professors Victoria Bush and Rachel Korthage Smith (University of Mississippi) and Professor Alan Bush, University of Memphis, explore ethical dilemmas faced by undergradate college students who work while attending school. The impetus behind research within this particular target population is that there is a paucity of research on entry-level job ethics. The authors suggest that working students tend to learn behavior (ethical and/or unethical) from coworkers or supervisors on the job. This article supports the influence of organizational dimensions on employee behavior as being more important than individual factors, opportunity, or the intensity or importance of the ethical issue.

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The next two articles then explore the coverage of topics in graduate and undergraduate marketing curricula. Professors O. C. Ferrell, University of New Mexico, and Dawn Keig, Brenau University, present findings from an exploratory study examining the current implementation of a standalone marketing ethics course. Using a comparative case study method, the authors describe a variety of different approaches currently being used in the definition and delivery of stand-alone marketing ethics courses. The final article in this first half of the special issue explores the extent to which deans and marketing department heads are responding to signals by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business to offer curriculum coverage of ethics, CSR, and sustainability. More specifically, the authors examine whether the topics are being integrated into undergraduate and graduate marketing curricula. Authors Jeananne Nicholls, Slippery Rock University, Joe Hair, Kennesaw State University, Charles Ragland, University of Toledo, and Kurt Schimmel, Slippery Rock University, present findings that indicate students seem to be receiving the preparation required to meet industry’s needs as they graduate and find employment.

The articles in the second half of this special issue take a micro focus within teaching and learning. In their research, Professors Alice Kendrick, Southern Methodist University, Jami A. Fullerton, Oklahoma State University, and Ye Jung Kim, Hongik University surveyed 1,045 advertising and marketing communications students from 176 colleges and universities. In this survey, students were asked to write their own definitions of CSR. The findings of this student survey tend to reflect a possible status quo in advertising and marketing communication education today in which CSR is primarily a matter of ethics, law, and advertising messaging. The authors suggest an opportunity for educators pedagogically to involve a broader consideration of the role of advertising in society and how businesses can act on the core principle of co-creating value that contributes to the financial bottom line while also addressing social needs and issues.

Further exploring pedagogical issues, Professors Kevin Celuch and Carl Saxby (University of Southern Indiana) examine counterfactual thinking in ethical decision making. This is one of the first reported studies to include counterfactual thinking as a basis for intervention on subsequent emotions and intention to engage in unethical behavior. Continuing with classroom exercises as a means of expanding students’ horizons, authors Ganael Bascoul (Ernst & Young France), Julien Schmitt, Dina Rasolofoarison, Laura Chamberlain, and Nick Lee (Aston University) demonstrate the use of a novel business game, based on the “life cycle assessment” method, as the foundational cornerstone for the development of a broad understanding of the environmental impact of marketing decisions and actions for the entire life cycle of a product. The results of an empirical study show that the life cycle assessment approach increases students’ appreciation for, and understanding of, fundamental environmental sustainability concepts. Then, Adam Mills, Karen Robson, and Leyland Pitt, Simon Fraser University, describe their in-class, learning by doing exercise that involves exposing students to print cartoons that show, rather than tell explicitly, ethical dilemmas in business and governance.

Wrapping up this special issue is an article that addresses the problem of unauthorized duplication of books through photocopies and Internet downloads. Filling a void, the research reported here by Pedro Dionísio, Carmo Leal, Hélia Pereira, and Maria Fátima Salgueiro, ISCTE-IUL Business School in Portugal, investigated the key drivers of purchase behavior for pirated books. In doing so, the researchers identified several influences on the decision to illegally copy books.

We hope this special issue of the JME offers valuable insight into how our marketing programs are integrating ethics, CSR, and sustainability into our curriculum. As well, we hope the pedagogical ideas offered by our colleagues provide innovative ideas for teaching and learning. The number of submissions for this special issue was quite high, and we could not include many interesting projects and ideas. To that end, we know that there are many good ideas still waiting for publication. We encourage all educators to continue exploring teaching and learning in this topical area that is so critical to our field. Paraphrasing Vittorino da Feltre, we all are responsible for the personal influence that goes forth from us (via our educational scholarship).

References


