

# A Survey of Business Ethics in Universities

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**Abstract**—University students are considered the next generation of high level managers that can affect the goals and aims of organizations and society. In recent decades one of the most important issues in organizations and society is ethics. Academic ethics and business ethic have a direct relation with each other. This research tries to investigate unethical issues in universities. In order to achieve this goal a survey conducted among 440 students of management and accounting in local universities in Tehran, the capital of Iran. The calculated data was analyzed by SPSS software and popularity of each unethical behavior and attitude of students about them were analyzed.

**Index Terms**—Business ethics, academic ethics, unethical behaviors, students of management.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Ethics is about “the moral principles that govern a person’s behavior or the way in which the activity is conducted” [1]. Ethics is concerned with moral obligation, responsibility, and social justice [2]. Business ethics has been and it will continue to be a hot topic for some years in the future. Business ethics is a range of criteria whereby human actions are judged to include such things as societal expectations; fair competition; the aesthetics of advertising and the use of public relations; the meaning of social responsibilities; reconciling corporate behavior at home with behavior abroad; the extent of consumer sovereignty; the relevance of corporate size; the handling of communications, and the like [1]. The ethics boom first started in the 1960’s [2] and in the 1980’s it was mentioned as a factor of political and social development [3]. Henceforth, Business ethics has been a major concern of researchers in business [2] [4]. As a matter of fact unethical behaviors are not built all of a sudden but grow steadily over the years. From this point of view as management students are considered to be the next generation of managers, the education system has its role in the unethical actions of the managers [5] [6]. Hence in the recent years more ethics courses has been added to the courses at universities and schools [7] and ethics courses have become arbitrary in lots of management schools. Statistics shows that just in the year 1993 more than 500 ethics seminars was held in united stated and more than 90% of the universities had ethics course in their programs [8]. Since there is not a significant difference between students and graduates in the case of ethical orientation, studying the ethical orientation

of management students helps better understanding of next generation of managers’ ethical orientation [9].

The desire to get a high mark in the exam as well as low risk of getting caught and not studying well are mentioned to be the main reasons of cheating [10]. The high stress level of students and improper regulations of university are among the other reasons of cheating [9]-[11]. Some researches indicate that cheating as unethical behaviors in the reverse.

In different works the effects of different factors on occurrence of unethical behaviors have been investigated. Generally these factors are categorized in two groups, individual characteristics and the environmental effects [12]. The individual characteristics that have been concerned in previous works are age, sex, education and locus of control where the environmental factors are culture, religion orientation and ethical orientation of other people around the person.

In some other works the teachers and staff have been the subject of researches on academic ethics. Some subjects such as “accepting gifts or money to give higher marks,” “sexual harassment” and plagiarism have been investigated [13]. Another research indicated that the majority of unethical behaviors among the marketing professors are bribing, sexual harassment, plagiarism and participating in forging of academic certifications [5]. A recent work that was conducted on 2008 indicates that 83% of students believe that the most common unethical behavior among teachers is giving lower marks to students that have personal problems with them. These problems include simple ones such as arguments about a subject in the class. The second common unethical behavior is disclosure of personal information of students to others. 80% of students were for this [14]. The opinions of management students on the intensity and importance of ethics matters in organizations have been investigated also [10]-[16]. Some researches indicate that women are more committed to the business ethics than men [17]-[18].

## II. METHODOLOGY

### A. Sample Size

Number of samples was calculated by this formula:

$$n = \frac{z_{\alpha/2}^2 p(1-P)}{e^2}$$

For qualitative features variance is between 0 and 0.25 then we chose highest variance to calculated sample. On the other hand accepted error was 5% then size of sample was:

$$n = \frac{1/96^2 0/25}{(0/05)^2} = 348$$

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To reach the aims of this study 854 questionnaire was distributed between management and accounting students in universities located in Iran capital city, Tehran. The number of questionnaire that were completed correctly and therefore could be used in the research was 409. For this study according to sample size 348 was used in analyzing. The questionnaire has three parts. The first part is about personal information. The demographic information of respondents is shown in the table 1. Another part of this questionnaire is about the unethical behaviors in the universities that is based on the work of Pratt and McLaughlin(1988) that has fourteen questions. To adapt the questionnaire to the local culture of Iran, the questions were modified using opinions of experts and five more questions were added to make it more thorough. Every question consider an unethical behavior of students at universities. The questions can be seen in the appendix. In the questionnaire the respondents were asked to rank the mentioned unethical behavior in any question between 1 to 5 which 1 indicates a completely unethical behavior and 5 is ethical action. This part is was designed to investigate the ethics orientation of students.

TABLE I: DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Percentage	Frequency	Age	Percentage	Frequency	
%21	74	Under 20	%2	7	Freshmen
%65	226	21-25	%10	34	Second-year
%14	48	Upper 26	%77	269	Last year
%100	348	Total	%11	38	MS & PhD
Percentage	Frequency	Accommodation	%100	348	Total
%47	162	With family	Percentage	Frequency	Sex
%13	46	Nearby cities	%53	184	Male
%40	140	dormitory	%47	164	Female
%100	348	Total	%100	348	Total

The questions were designed in a way that students would be able to answer them without bias. For this reason instead of asking students to answer the questions about themselves they were asked to tell their opinions in general about the question. It was shown in the work of Stevens and also Tyson that students think they are more committed to the ethics than others.

TABLE II: RELIABILITY STATISTICS

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
0.874	0.886	19

Reliability for each question:

The statistics shows that all questions are reliable enough since their reliability factor is above 0.8.

According to table Cranach's  $\alpha$  for collection of questions is (91.6) excellent and for every questions separately is upper than 90% which means very good.

B. Validity

Validity is a term that shows to a test that created for achieving specific goal. According to reach acceptable reliability experts, lecturers and students were asked to help preparing the questionnaire.

C. One Sample Test

In this part according to guide table, the questions that give score 4 or 5 are in a good condition. In the other words, when an unethical behavior happens rarely in a community we can say this community is in a good condition

TABLE III: ITEM-TOTAL STATISTICS

Item-Total Statistics	Scale Mean if Deleted	Scale Variance if Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
a1b11	45.4503	146.640	.645	.457	.910
a2b6	45.0497	149.184	.523	.357	.913
a3b12	45.3377	146.537	.636	.486	.910
a4b2	45.5993	145.430	.638	.562	.910
a5b3	46.1192	152.238	.505	.430	.913
a6b4	45.6192	149.459	.562	.429	.912
a7b1	44.5298	148.695	.492	.311	.914
a8b7	45.0927	148.051	.512	.416	.913
a9b8	43.8642	155.148	.312	.222	.917
a10b9	46.0033	145.326	.739	.638	.908
a11b10	46.2219	151.495	.431	.295	.915
a12b5	45.0331	144.491	.678	.581	.909
a13b17	46.1126	145.961	.708	.661	.908
a14b16	45.4106	146.070	.625	.556	.910
a15b15	45.5099	143.613	.703	.592	.908
a16b14	45.2086	145.428	.597	.481	.911
a17b13	44.9570	148.015	.516	.421	.913
a18b18	46.0199	147.501	.659	.542	.910
a19b19	44.4768	149.798	.512	.366	.913

TABLE IV. GUIDE TABLE OF QUESTIONNAIRE

5	4	3	2	1
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always

For achieving this goal and finding popularity of unethical behaviors following hypothesis test was used. In this hypothesis  $\mu$  was 3 which means if interviewee selects a number less than 3 it could show popularity of unethical business behaviors and If selects a number more than 3 it could show society is in good condition.

$$H_0: x \neq \mu$$

$$H_1: x = \mu$$

Following table includes data about the test of  $\mu=3$ . Responses show in 2 different colors. Then the analyses about them were found.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Questions b4, b14, b16

These questions they are not in good condition or very bad condition. We cannot say that this question never happened at universities. Sometimes they happened.

Questions b9, b10, b11, b15, b17, b18

These unethical behaviors rarely happened by students. We can say students are in a good condition to avoid from these unethical behaviors. As it mentioned in this study score of 4 or 5 is accepted then it shows these unethical behaviors rarely or never happened.

TABLE V: ONE-SAMPLE TEST

One-Sample Test						
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
					Test Value = 3	
b1	-11.547	345	.000	-.61272	-.7171	-.5083
b2	-9.368	344	.000	-.52174	-.6313	-.4122
b3	-2.296	343	.022	-.13081	-.2429	-.0187
b4	-.216	337	.829	-.01183	-.1196	.0959
b5	-8.102	339	.000	-.45294	-.5629	-.3430
b6	-5.800	342	.000	-.39942	-.5349	-.2640
b7	-3.271	343	.001	-.34593	-.5540	-.1379
b8	10.367	344	.000	-.56522	-.6725	-.4580
b9	8.390	343	.000	.52035	.3984	.6423
b10	12.307	338	.000	.69027	.5799	.8006
b11	2.433	339	.015	.13235	.0254	.2393
b12	10.499	344	.000	-.57681	-.6849	-.4688
b13	-3.145	342	.002	-.17201	-.2796	-.0644
b14	-.889	342	.375	-.05539	-.1780	.0672
b15	4.038	343	.000	.24419	.1252	.3631
b16	-1.732	343	.084	-.11047	-.2359	.0150
b17	19.053	342	.000	1.05539	.9464	1.1643
b18	21.686	341	.000	1.16082	1.0555	1.2661
b19	-4.120	344	.000	-.22029	-.3255	-.1151

Other questions: b1, b2, b3, b5, b6, b7, b8, b12, b13, b19

These unethical behaviors were in a bad condition which means they happened always at universities. In the

following you can find most frequently committed unethical behaviors among students.

Using other students notes instead of their own notes in the class

Cheating in the exams

In group assignments try not to work as hard as others

Help their friends by cheating

After exams try to find lecturer and talk with him/her to give them higher marks.

Try to find questions for last semester and study them for exam.

Copying their assignments instead of do them by themselves.

Writing in exam papers about their problems and try to deceive lecturer give higher mark .

Doing individual assignments in group.

Comparison of questions from two point of view: occurrence and attitude

As it was mentioned in the first part, questions b1, b8, b13, b19 were not unethical in students attitudes and part two of questionnaire shows these unethical behaviors were not popular.

According to descriptive statistics, students in last year of studying do unethical behaviors, like cheating in exams, more than others, especially students whose study are longer than normal.

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