**Ethics in Academia**

By Shannon Warren  
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Most of today’s young graduates were in grade school when Sarbanes Oxley was passed a decade ago. Back then, the magic of Harry Potter held a greater fascination than the devious deeds of Enron’s Jeffrey Skilling or the corporate scandals that gave rise to SOX. Lest history repeat itself, we must ask: Are Oklahoma students being prepared to handle the ethical issues they will inevitably face in the workplace?

That begs another question: can ethics be effectively taught in the classroom? Not an easy task in light of the wide diversity of religious values, socioeconomic backgrounds, and the gamut of emotions attached to our beliefs. Fortunately, there are educators in Oklahoma up to the challenge. In fact, I would venture to guess that, with twelve Oklahoma campuses having either an OK Ethics Student Chapter or a related initiative, we probably rival other states in these endeavors. That is thanks largely to professors like OU’s Dr. Steve Ellis, who donates a considerable amount of personal time toward helping their students develop solid ethical decision-making skills.

For the past two years, student teams from the University of Oklahoma have won the coveted Regional Student Ethics Bowl in San Antonio. Serving as their advisor and coach, Dr. Ellis reminds his students that ethical behavior is essential in having a flourishing life. More than memorizing and regurgitating philosophies, he encourages his students “to be *ethically minded*, i.e., to keep ethical principles and priorities part of their everyday thought processes.”

Southern Nazarene University also has a strong commitment to helping students build their ethical muscles. Because it is a Christian university, Biblical principles are an essential component of the SNU curriculum, but it goes well beyond that. As SNU’s Jeff Seyfert puts it, “The school recognizes that not everyone ascribes to a Christian perspective and we want our students to be able to understand a wide variety of perspectives on ethical issues so they are able to work with people across a broad spectrum of belief systems. “

Oklahoma employers are fortunate to have leaders on our campuses who realize that Socrates was right: ethics can and must be taught. Moral lessons are as essential as reading, writing and arithmetic.

*Shannon Warren is the founder of the Oklahoma Business Ethics Consortium, a non-profit organization that hosts monthly forums on business ethics in Oklahoma City and Tulsa. For more information, go to* [*www.okethics.org*](http://www.okethics.org/)*.*