



FACULTY OF
BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC

ACCG 848
Business and Professional Ethics

Semester 2, 2010

Department of Accounting and Finance

**MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY
ACCG 848 UNIT OUTLINE**

Year and Semester: Semester 2, 2010

Unit convenor: James Hazelton

Credit points: 4

Students in this unit should read this unit outline carefully at the start of semester. It contains important information about the unit. If anything in it is unclear, please consult one of the teaching staff in the unit.

ABOUT THIS UNIT

The principal aim of ACCG 848 is to provide students with an introduction to some of the main ethical issues raised by the activities of the business and corporate sphere.

Students initially consider the role of ethical principles and ethical reasoning in business, focusing on the differences between ethical reasoning and self-interest and between ethical obligations and legal requirements. Students then focus on broader issues concerning the role and function of corporations in society in relation to communities and the environment. Finally the unit considers cases of employee responsibilities and discrimination and the increasingly pertinent concept of 'fair trade'.

The content of the unit is informed by contemporary research in the area of corporate reporting, including recent publications by the teaching staff.

There are no prerequisites for the unit. However students are expected to have at least a basic understanding of business operations (including accounting and the legal environment). The emphasis of the unit is applying the principles to real-world situations, so students will be expected to regularly provide actual business examples drawn either from the media or their own experience.

TEACHING STAFF

The teaching staff members responsible for the delivery and administration of this unit are:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Room</u>	<u>Email</u>	<u>Telephone</u>	<u>Consultation</u>
James Hazelton (Unit Convenor)	E4A 239	james.hazelton@mq.edu.au	9850-8486	Monday 2-4

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CONSULTATION TIMES

You are encouraged to seek help at a time that is convenient to you from a staff member teaching on this unit during their regular consultation hours. In special circumstances, an appointment may be made outside regular consultation hours. Staff will not conduct any consultations by e-mail. You may, however, phone staff during their consultation hours. Details of times that staff are available for consultation will be posted on the unit webpage.

In order to gain access to staff located at levels 1, 2 and 3 of building E4A during their consultation hours please ring the staff member from the phones available in the lobby (phone numbers of relevant staff members will be provided on Blackboard and are available next to the phones).

Students experiencing significant difficulties with any topic in the unit are strongly must seek assistance immediately.

CLASSES

ACCG 848 requires that students attend a weekly seminar of three hours duration. A short break of 10-15 minutes will usually be taken during these seminars.

Timetable information is available at:

<http://www.timetables.mq.edu.au>

Attendance requirement: As much of the learning takes place through class discussion, missing more than two seminars is grounds for a fail grade. Students who miss classes should discuss this matter promptly with the Unit Convenor.

REQUIRED AND RECOMMENDED TEXTS AND/OR MATERIALS

The prescribed text for this unit is:

Joseph DesJardins *An Introduction to Business Ethics* (3rd Edition), (McGraw-Hill, New York, 2009)

The following text may also be helpful to students that wish to deepen their understanding of business and professional ethics:

Grace, D. & Cohen, S., *Business Ethics* (4th edition), (Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 2010).

TECHNOLOGY USED AND REQUIRED

The unit web page can be accessed from www.learn.mq.edu.au. Please note that student activity on the unit web page is logged, and may be utilised by the Unit.

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Convenor and other University staff in resolving student disputes regarding such issues as assignment submission. Instructions for obtaining help with accessing the unit web page can also be found at the above URL.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this unit, students will have obtained:

1. A good general knowledge of the major issues in contemporary business and professional ethics.
2. A sound understanding of the major ethical theories that inform the literature.
3. An ability to analyse and critically evaluate moral theories and arguments.
4. An ability to relate ethical theories to relevant case studies and current events.
5. The ability to develop one's own view or perspective, through consideration and analysis of the views and arguments presented in the unit, and the ability to present views with clarity and rigour.

GRADUATE CAPABILITIES

In addition to the discipline-based learning objectives, all academic programs at Macquarie seek to develop the capabilities the University's graduates will need to develop to address the challenges, and to be effective, engaged participants in their world. This unit contributes to this by developing the following graduate capabilities:

- 1 Discipline Specific Knowledge and Skills
 - a) Knowledge of the major issues in contemporary business and professional ethics
 - b) Understanding of the major ethical theories that inform the literature
 - c) Ability to relate ethical theories to relevant case studies and current events
 - d) Ability to develop and articulate an individual ethical perspective
- 2 Critical, Analytical and Integrative Thinking
- 3 Problem Solving and Research Capability
- 4 Creative and Innovative
- 5 Effective Communication
- 6 Engaged and Ethical Local and Global citizens
- 7 Socially and Environmentally Active and Responsible
- 8 Capable of Professional and Personal Judgement and Initiative
- 9 Commitment to Continuous Learning

TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGY

Overview

This unit involves one three-hour seminar per week. The unit relies heavily on assignment-based learning and the participation of seminar participants. Each seminar is divided into two parts.

The first part of each seminar involves working through the assignment-based learning materials that have been distributed in the prior week. When working through these materials it is expected that seminar participants will contribute discussion and raise particular issues or problems that they have had with the assignment questions.

The second part of each seminar will comprise a mini-lecture that covers the key concepts of a topic area often using a worked example. The purpose of this mini-lecture is to prepare seminar participants so that they may attempt the relevant assignment questions and problems that have been set for the topic area.

On average the unit will require students to complete between 6 to 8 hours of private study per week.

Group work and dialogue

ACCG 848 is a course in applied ethics. Many eminent philosophers, from the ancient Greek Socrates to the modern social and ethical theorist Jürgen Habermas, have emphasised the need to engage in dialogue in order to address ethical issues. For many such philosophers, ethics cannot be learned by oneself in a darkened room, poring over hallowed books. It is rather a matter of sharing one's ethical views and being challenged by (and challenging) the ethical views of others. It is through this dialogue that a richer appreciation of one's own ethical stance and moral theory itself is gained.

In ACCG 848 this ethical dialogue is incorporated in two main forms. First, in the seminar discussions we aim to have an inclusive but robust discussion around the topics set as assignment questions. Second, a component of the ethical case study requires the production of a group report. This process requires the discussion within small groups of the particular ethical issue in question. Feedback from prior students has suggested that this is a particularly valuable experience as other group members often present radically different perspectives which both challenge and deepen ethical understandings.

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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ASSESSMENT AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

In ACCG 848 you must demonstrate that you have satisfied the learning objectives of the unit.

To demonstrate that your understanding of the unit learning objectives is satisfactory or better you must score a mark of at least 50% in the final exam and the overall assessment.

Attendance requirement: As much of the learning takes place through class discussion, missing more than two seminars is grounds for a fail grade. Students who miss classes should discuss this matter promptly with the Unit Convenor.

The final assessment in ACCG 848 is based on raw scores calculated as follows:

	<u>%</u>
Weekly assignments 1-3	15
Weekly assignments 4-11	15
Ethical case study	25
Final exam	<u>45</u>
	<u>100</u>

A summary of these assessment components is provided in the following table. Further details are provided below.

	Weekly Assignments	Ethical case study	Final Exam
Due date	Weekly (see below)	18 th October	Examination period
% Weighting	30% (Assignments 1-3: 15%; Assignments 4-11: 15%)	25% (Joint report 15%; individual letter 10%)	45%
Grading method	Refer below	Refer below	All topics are examinable.
Submission method	In-class, following tutorial	Online. Details will be provided on unit webpage.	As per usual examination procedure.
Feedback	Individual and group feedback will be provided as appropriate in the week following tutorial submission.	Individual and group feedback will be provided as appropriate within three weeks of submission.	N/A
Estimated student workload (hours)	6 per week	20	
Learning outcomes			

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	Weekly Assignments	Ethical case study	Final Exam
assessed			
1	X		
2	X		
3	X		X
4		X	
5		X	X
Graduate capabilities assessed			
1a	X		
1b	X		
1c	X		X
1d		X	
1e		X	X
2	X		
3		X	
4		X	
5	X	X	
6	X	X	X
7	X		
8		X	X
9		X	

a) Weekly assignments (30%)

Independent work on assignment exercises and problems is fundamental to satisfying the learning objectives of this unit. You are not expected to always have the right answers from your independent work but you are expected to make a significant attempt to assignment questions before each seminar. It is expected that, in addition to attendance at the weekly seminars, you will need to spend at least six hours per week working on assignments and preparing for the next seminar. Assignment length will depend on the particular week's questions, but as a guide they will average 3-4 typed pages.

Each week students will be required to submit written answers to the assignment questions for the topic area. Late assignments will not be accepted without a medical certificate.

It is expected that the written work you submit for the weekly assignments will be completed before the seminar rather than during the seminar. If it is noticed that an assignment is being prepared during the seminar then it will not be considered satisfactory.

On the front page of each weekly assignment that you submit please include the following:

- your student name

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- your student number
- the following statement: “This assignment is my own work”

Students submitting the same or similar tutorial assignments to others in the unit risk disciplinary action. Students must also ensure that they do not inadvertently plagiarise material from textbooks or other readings. Copying material from the textbook or readings is also a form of plagiarism and will be awarded nil marks. Plagiarism is discussed in more detail below.

Over the course of the semester, weekly assignments will contribute to all the learning objectives listed above.

In order to provide early feedback on student progress, the weighting for the first three assignments will account for 15% of the unit assessment. These assignments will be marked in greater detail than subsequent assignments. ANY STUDENT SCORING LESS THAN 2.5/5 FOR ANY OF THESE ASSIGNMENTS SHOULD CONTACT THE UNIT CONVENOR TO ARRANGE AN APPOINTMENT as this mark indicates that you are not meeting the expectations of the unit and are at risk of not fulfilling the minimum requirements.

The total marks for tutorial assignments is comprised as follows:

	%
Weekly assignments 1-3	15
Weekly assignments 4-11	<u>15</u>
Total marks for weekly assignments	30

The assessment criteria for tutorial assignments is as follows:

0/5 – Assignment is incomplete. One or more questions have not been attempted.

1/5 – Assignment is incomplete. All questions have been attempted, but some sub-parts of questions have not been addressed.

2/5 – All questions have been attempted but some answers are incorrect and / or superficial.

3/5 – All questions have been attempted and are substantially correct.

4/5 – All questions have been attempted and the student has answered questions in detail and has included their own opinions and/or analysis where appropriate.

5/5 - All questions have been attempted and in addition to providing their own analysis the student has related appropriate questions to other materials either in the unit or in the wider context. For example the student has related the question to a previous reading referred to a current event / media article.

b) Ethical case study (25%)

You are required to complete an ethical analysis of a current ethical issue from a newspaper article selected by the group. This article must:

- Relate to a business ethics issue. An issue of moral concern (e.g. killing whales, euthanasia etc.) is not acceptable unless there is a clear link to business.

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- Have been published in the last three years.
- Be in English.
- Be approved by the unit convenor

The article may be an article that a member of your group has analysed as part of their weekly assignment (but it does not have to be). However no two groups can analyse the same article. As stated below you must have your article approved by teaching staff who will inform you if another group has already chosen the same article.

A copy of the article must be attached as an appendix to your report.

This assignment comprises two parts:

1. A joint report of no more than 1,500 words. This report should briefly explain the ethical issue and analyse it in relation to the main ethical theories covered in the unit, such as relativism, utilitarian, Kantian and virtue ethics.

Your report should refer to one **academic** paper (from academic journals such as the *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Business Ethics: A European Review* or *Business Ethics Quarterly*) that relates to the ethical issue in your newspaper article. Journals can be accessed from the Library webpage (go to Journal Finder and follow the prompts). You may also find the reference list in the Desjardins text a useful source of academic papers which relate to your topic of interest.

A copy of this paper must also be attached as an appendix to your report. Your report should identify the percentage contribution of team members and be signed by each team member. Where members did not equally contribute, marks will be apportioned accordingly.

2. An individual one-page letter which attempts to address an ethical issue identified by the report. This letter could be addressed to the corporation, a regulator, a competitor or any other party you consider relevant. (Note – you do not have to send the letter). The letter should clearly state what you believe the problem to be, why it is a problem and at least one specific action which the addressee could take to address the problem. The problem does not have to be different from those selected by other members of your group, but it must be written in our own words.

The assessment of these components is as follows:

Report (joint work)	<u>15</u>
Letter (individual work)	<u>10</u>
	<u>25</u>

The due date for the report and letter is **Monday 18th October**. The assignment is to be submitted electronically in either Microsoft Word or Adobe pdf file formats using the assignment drop box on the unit webpage. Late assignments will lose 10% per day. Extensions will only be given in exceptional circumstances.

Further tips for the case study are provided at the appendix to this Unit Outline.

c) Final exam (45%)

A final examination is included as an assessment task for this unit to provide assurance that:

- i) the product belongs to the student and
- ii) the student has attained the knowledge and skills tested in the exam.

A 2 hour final examination for this unit will be held during the University Examination period.

The University Examination period in Second Half Year 2010 is from 15 November 2010 to 3 December 2010.

You are expected to present yourself for examination at the time and place designated in the University Examination Timetable. The timetable will be available in Draft form approximately eight weeks before the commencement of the examinations and in Final form approximately four weeks before the commencement of the examinations.

<http://www.timetables.mq.edu.au/exam>

The only exception to not sitting an examination at the designated time is because of documented illness or unavoidable disruption. In these circumstances you may wish to consider applying for Special Consideration. The University's policy on special consideration process is available at

http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/special_consideration/policy.html

If a Supplementary Examination is granted as a result of the Special Consideration process the examination will be scheduled after the conclusion of the official examination period. (Individual Faculties may wish to signal when the Faculties' Supplementary Exams are normally scheduled.)

The Macquarie university examination policy details the principles and conduct of examinations at the University. The policy is available at:

<http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/examination/policy.htm>

GRADING

All final grades in the Department of Accounting and Finance are determined by a grading committee and are not the sole responsibility of the Unit Coordinator.

Macquarie University's Academic Senate has a set of guidelines on the distribution of grades across the range from fail to high distinction. Your final result will include one of these grades plus a Standardised Numerical Grade (SNG).

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The Standardised Numerical Grade (SNG) is not a summation of the individual assessment components.

To be awarded a specific grade, students are required to perform at an equivalent standard in the final examination and their overall assessment marks in the unit.

Please also refer to relevant pages in the Handbook of Undergraduate Studies.

Recall that, at a minimum, you must pass the final exam to achieve a passing grade in the unit.

PRIZES

A Department of Accounting and Finance Award will be conferred on a student who demonstrates outstanding academic merit in ACCG 848.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

The nature of scholarly endeavour, dependent as it is on the work of others, binds all members of the University community to abide by the principles of academic honesty. Its fundamental principle is that all staff and students act with integrity in the creation, development, application and use of ideas and information. This means that:

- all academic work claimed as original is the work of the author making the claim
- all academic collaborations are acknowledged
- academic work is not falsified in any way
- when the ideas of others are used, these ideas are acknowledged appropriately.

Further information on the academic honesty can be found in the Macquarie University Academic Honesty Policy at http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/academic_honesty/policy.html

SPECIAL CONSIDERATION

The University is committed to equity and fairness in all aspects of its learning and teaching. In stating this commitment, the University recognises that there may be circumstances where a student is prevented by unavoidable disruption from

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performing in accordance with their ability. A special consideration policy exists to support students who experience serious and unavoidable disruption such that they do not reach their usual demonstrated performance level. The policy is available at: http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/special_consideration/procedure.html

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

Macquarie University provides a range of Academic Student Support Services. Details of these services can be accessed at <http://www.student.mq.edu.au>.

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LECTURE SUMMARY

<u>Week</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Ethical issue topic</u>	<u>Ethical theory topic</u>
1	2 Aug	Introduction	Introduction
2	9 Aug	Bribery	Ethical relativism
3	16 Aug	Globalisation	Utilitarian ethics
4	23 Aug	Customers	Kantian ethics
5	30 Aug	Fair trade	Virtue ethics
6	6 Sep	Shareholder primacy	Friedman
7	13 Sep	Government influence	Discourse ethics
	20 Sep	Recess - private study	
	27 Sep	Recess - private study	
	4 Oct	Public holiday	
8	11 Oct	The environment	Environmental ethics
9	18 Oct	Employee discrimination (Case study due)	Indigenous perspectives
10	25 Oct	Employee rights	Confucian ethics
11	1 Nov	Employee responsibilities	Situationist ethics
12	8 Nov	Revision	

Appendix - ACCG 848 Ethical case study tips

Report

Assessment will be based on the quality of the ethical analysis displayed in the report. This comprises the extent to which:

- a. The key ethical issues in the case were identified;
- b. Ethical theories were considered;
- c. The theories were appropriately applied to ethical issues;
- d. The more sophisticated aspects of the theories were utilised (e.g. the Bentham vs. Mill/quantity vs. quality aspect of utilitarianism); and
- e. Overall conclusions were given and flowed logically from the analysis undertaken.

Do

- Refer to key ethical theories
- Refer to issues covered in relevant readings / tutorials
- Discuss the issue in your group. If you disagree, that's OK, just say something like: "while some of us believed that this was inconsistent with a virtue ethics perspective because of xxxx, others disagreed because of yyyy."

Don't

- Spend too much time on facts (instead of moral analysis). This includes any legal issues – just because someone contravened (or didn't contravene) a law doesn't necessarily mean that the action was unethical (or ethical).
- Just repeat the company's or reporter's point of view (it's what you think that's interesting)
- Label everything as unethical (or ethical). Few real-world issues are clear-cut.

Letter

The key criteria for assessment are:

1. Is there a clear, specific change requested?
Eg Nike sweatshops:
'Treat employees better' - too vague
'Pay employees more' - still too vague
'Pay employees at least \$1 per hour' - better, but misses the point that employees are employed by contractors, not directly
'Only purchase from suppliers that guarantee to pay their employees at least \$1 per hour, and allow NGOs to monitor compliance' - now we're talking!
2. Is it supported by a persuasive argument? (no need to be balanced here)
3. Can the person the letter is addressed to actually make the change?
4. Is it a "one page letter"?
 - a. One page means one page, not 1 ½, not one page in 6 point font etc.
 - b. A letter means a certain formatting protocol with an addressee, date etc.