

# How Effective is Ethics Education?

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# Limits on the Effectiveness of Ethics Instruction

- Ethical foundations have already been formed before the student takes an ethics class (by religion, parents, culture, etc.)
- Instructional time is limited, especially when compared to other influences on one's ethical perspectives
- Ethics classes are typically designed to expose students to multiple ethical frameworks (rather than teach “right” and “wrong”)
- There are strong situational pressures in the workforce that may encourage or reward unethical behavior (career prospects, financial incentives)

# Some Intended Outcomes of Ethics Education

- Knowledge – greater appreciation for a variety of ethical perspectives
- Preparation for Work – exposure to ethical dilemmas that one may encounter in the workplace
- Attitude Change – influence perceptions regarding what is ethical or unethical
- Change Specific Behaviors – make sure they don't engage in specific practices (varies by profession)
- Change General Behaviors – make them more ethical overall (in a wide variety of ways)

## Our Research:

### What Influences The Extent to Which the Business Ethics Course Changes Students' Attitudes and Behaviors

- In general, there is relatively little influence on attitudes and behaviors directly attributable to taking the business ethics course.
- However, the amount of influence does vary across students. That is, it does have an influence on some students.
- Effectiveness may vary according to:
  - Intelligence (more effective for those who are more intelligent)
  - GPA (more effective for those who have higher GPAs)
  - Religiosity (more effective for those who are less religious)
  - Machiavellianism (more effective for those who are low Machs)
- Can Teaching Ethics Actually Make People Less Ethical?
  - High Machs

# Where Do We Go From Here?

- Keep trying
- Determine which methods of instruction are most effective
- Be realistic:
  - Recognize that it will work better for some students than others
  - Understand that it will not end all undesirable behavior
  - Realize that the effect size may be relatively small