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Ethics Unwrapped Takes an Animated Approach to Business Ethics

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Robert Prentice explains why the visual approach was taken for the Ethics Unwrapped series and why it's critically important to reach students on the subject of ethics.

Ethikos

["An Animated Approach to Business Ethics"](#) [1]

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Sketch from an Ethics Unwrapped Video

McCombs' new Ethics Unwrapped video series, released in November 2012, has received attention for its unorthodox approach to teaching ethics, including the presentation of behavioral ethics concepts in a series of short animated videos. Robert Prentice, a professor in the Business, Government & Society department, discussed the series and its unique approach with *Ethikos* magazine.

The magazine ran an excerpt from the interview online in December and will publish the full interview with Prentice in an upcoming print edition. Here's a selection from the online excerpt:

Why behavioral ethics? "Well, I think it's because we know so much more about people today," says Prentice. He cites Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky's work in the 1980s into the anatomy of how people come to

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decisions as a forerunner to understanding why employees might make the wrong decisions in business today.

It's important, especially as greater access to visual media means that young business students confront these scandals on a more human level than ever before. "They see these people. They see these white-collared criminals doing the perp walk. And then they see these interviews with their neighbors, their friends, their families, talking about: 'Oh, what a nice guy he was!' and students then wonder how someone like that could have wound up in prison."

It's not just students who ask these questions. Businesses have also found the Ethics Unwrapped videos useful, providing an easy-to-digest supplement to their training programs.

The videos have drawn interest beyond the business ethics and compliance community. Prentice recalls a conversation with one of his colleagues, a professor of finance, after showing his students the Abramoff documentary. "She ran into me in the hall and said 'Oh, that's relevant, I'll show my students.'" She showed the documentary to her students — which inspired an 'animated' discussion on Abramoff, ethics, and wrongdoing.

Will more students get the opportunity to watch Ethics Unwrapped videos?

Absolutely, yes a lot more. And we expect a lot more professors, not just here at McCombs but across the campus, will start using the videos. Because if you're tasked to integrate [teaching ethics] into your curriculum and you're not an ethics expert, you may not have the time or the expertise necessarily to teach ethics. But if you can have material that's easily inserted in your existing curriculum and some supporting material, classroom questions for discussion that sort of stuff, it makes it a lot more feasible to fold ethics into an existing course. That's what our program does, actually allows a professor to do that.

Ethics Unwrapped offers a vehicle for those professors to start incorporating ethics into their existing courses.

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What's your experience been like working with the McCombs students who appear in Ethics Unwrapped videos?

I love working with the students from McCombs. All the students have been enthusiastic to speak with us. I find it's a really nice range of students: We worked with MBA students this time, as well as undergraduate students. We interviewed students from all over the world and who had a whole range of different work experiences, which was really helpful. We mostly interviewed MBA students for the "Giving Voice to Values" series because we felt that it was important to exemplify some of the things that Mary Gentile

talks about. You had to have some kind of work experience to do that, so that's why we put MBA students in the interviews for those videos primarily. But there were some undergraduates, too, in the GVV videos. All of the students we interviewed are articulate and engaged and honestly want to make the world a better place and believe that they can. It's inspiring for me to work with them.

What's the next phase of Ethics Unwrapped?

Currently in production, we have another six "Concepts Unwrapped" [videos] focused on behavioral ethics.

We're going to be working on a documentary. We're actually looking at a few ideas. It will be focused on the business ethics of a particular sector. Healthcare is one sector that we're looking at right now.

It will be a three-part documentary with extensive teaching notes, not like anything we've done so far.

Will McCombs faculty and students be involved in that as well?

I'm not really sure what it's going to look like yet, that's part of the fun of documentary. You don't know until you start it.

For experts, we'll definitely reach out nationally, and we'll tap whatever resources we have at McCombs, absolutely. We'll be interviewing more

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McCombs student this fall for the additional six shorts that we're doing, so we'll be working with students in the fall. I'm not sure to what extent we'll be involving students in the documentary; I don't know yet. We'll be looking primarily for local examples. If we can find examples here in Austin and work with students and faculty here, that will be our first choice, of course.