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# Ethical Orientation of Future Business Leaders

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## **Ethical Orientation of Future Business Leaders**

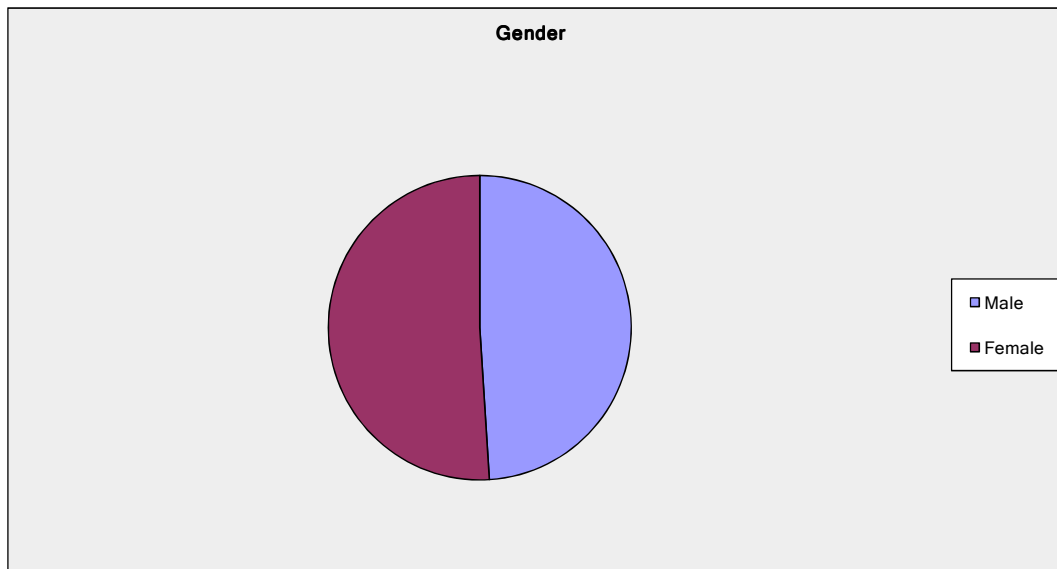
**By: John Rooney**

Ethical behavior is expected and necessary from business leaders. Over the past decade, America has been plagued with people acting unethically. From Enron, WorldCom and Wall Street to professional sports and politics, unethical behavior has occurred regularly over the past decade. However, it is especially important for business leaders to act ethically. When business leaders do not act ethically, massive damage and devastation could occur. Ethics are a moral code of conduct that comes from the standards of society. Ethics are what helps determine what is right and what is wrong. Ethical behavior is the action of choosing what is correct and doing best thing to do.

“Ethical behavior is important in the workplace, whether it's an office, a factory, a boardroom, or a construction site. Everywhere business is conducted, ethics matters. (The Business of Ethical Behavior 1)” Ethics will influence how an organization treats its customers, employees, shareholders, and much more.

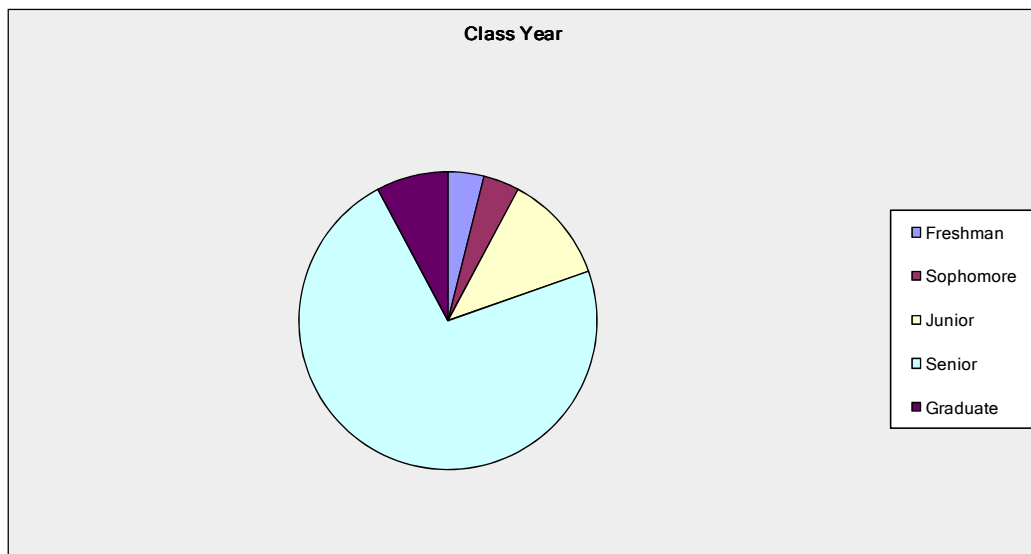
The most recent unethical behavior on Wall Street has profoundly impacted the lives of millions of people. Some Americans had their lives ruined by loosing their entire life savings. Since then, many people have wondered if something could have been done to prevent such unethical behavior. Many people have criticized business schools for not providing enough education on ethics. They have gathered this notion because the people who made the unethical decisions on Wall Street are the ones who had the MBAs.

The following are the results of a survey conducted of the University of Rhode Island's- College of Business Administration students that polled their ethical orientation. The results are based off the answers from 102 respondents.



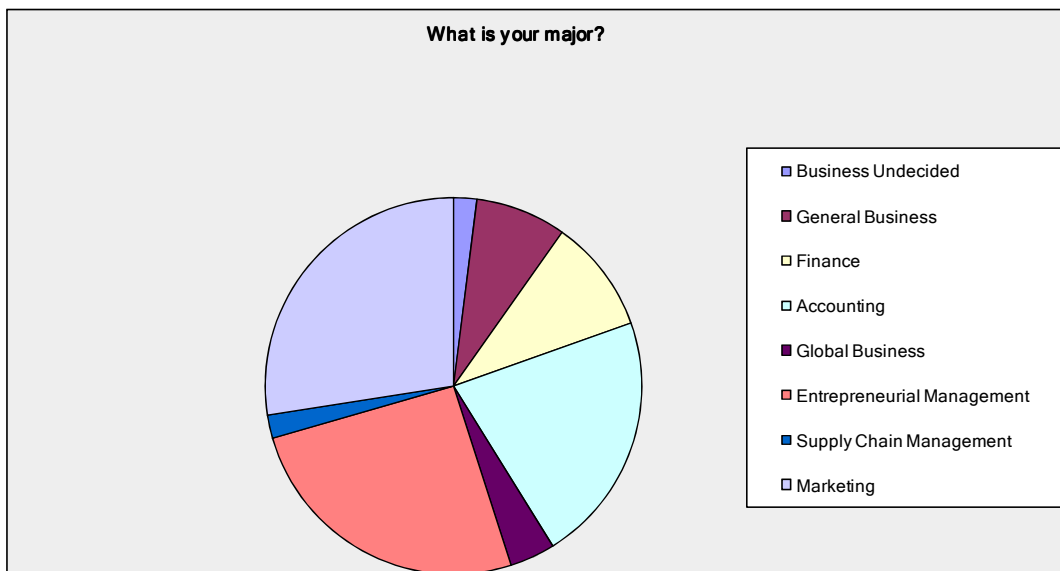
<b>Gender</b>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Male	49.0%	50
Female	51.0%	52
<b><i>answered question</i></b>		<b>102</b>

Of the 102 respondents, the gender was almost split even. 50 of the students were male while 52 were female.



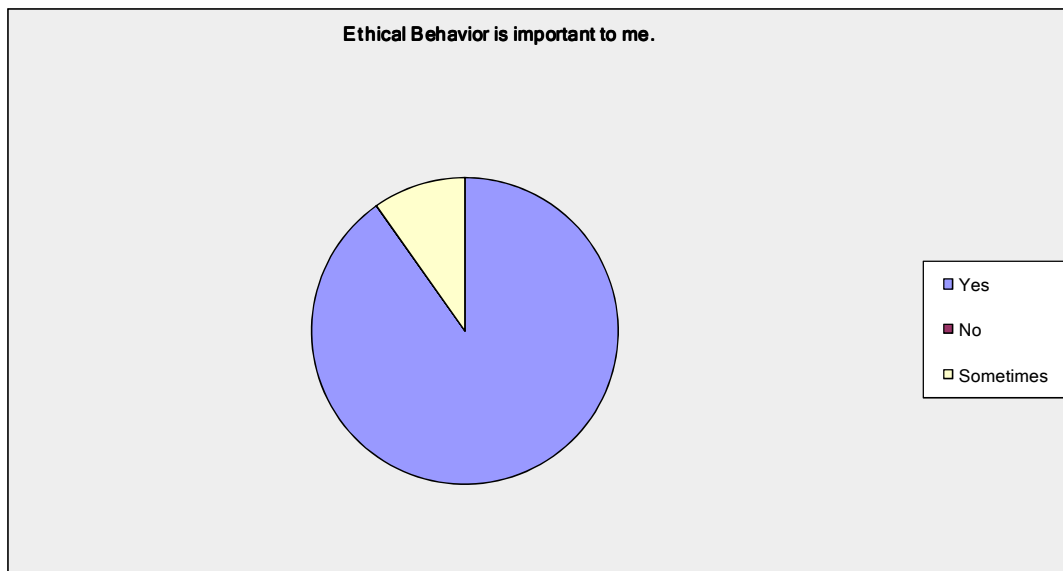
<b>Class Year</b>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Freshman	3.9%	4
Sophomore	3.9%	4
Junior	11.8%	12
Senior	72.5%	74
Graduate	7.8%	8
<b><i>answered question</i></b>		<b>102</b>

Next, it was important to gather the respondents' class year. This was important because students who have been in the College of Business Administration would have the best feeling of whether they were ethically prepared for their future. They would know best if the CBA had prepared them to be an ethical business leader. Of the respondents, 7.8% were graduates, 72.5% seniors, and 11.8% juniors. The remaining 7.8% were freshman and sophomores. The fact that most of the respondents were seniors was very pleasing because they are the ones graduating and have just experienced the entire curriculum.



What is your major?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Business Undecided	2.0%	2
General Business	7.8%	4
Finance	9.8%	10
Accounting	21.6%	22
Global Business	3.9%	4
Entrepreneurial Management	25.5%	26
Supply Chain Management	2.0%	2
Marketing	27.5%	28
<i>answered question</i>		<b>102</b>

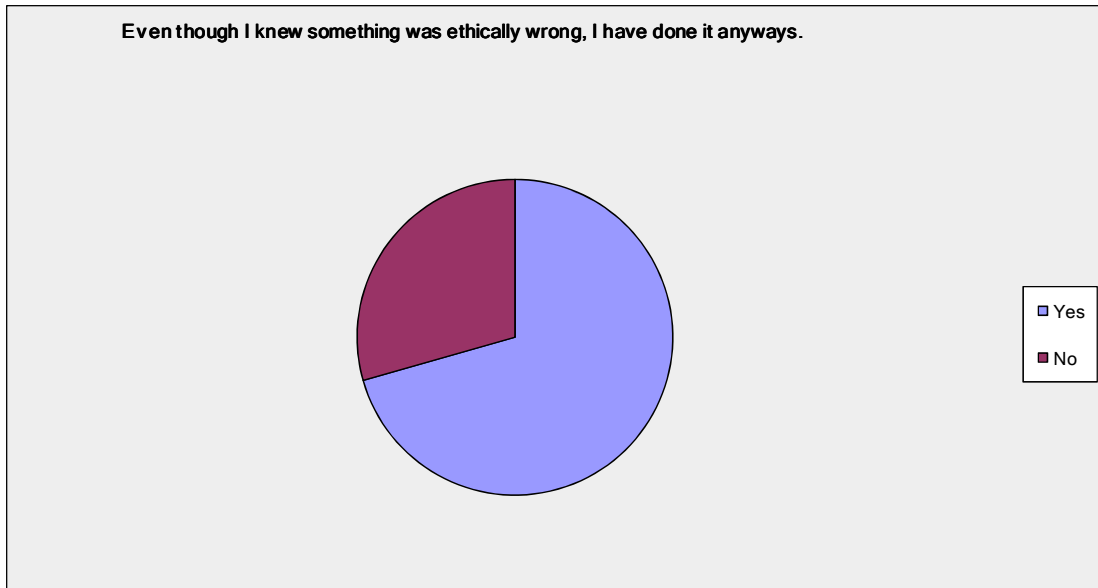
Next, the survey polled the respondents on their major. Ethics can have unique influence on each major. For example, marketing majors might be considered how they are marketing a product. Are they ethically marketing the product? Are they not telling the consumer everything about the product? Are they trying to market a “great product” when they really know it is a piece of junk? Each of the different majors have their own specific questions regarding ethics. Of the respondents of this survey: 2.0% Undecided Business, 7.8% General Business, 9.8% Finance, 21.6% Accounting, 3.9% Global Business, 25.5% Entrepreneurial Management, 2.0% Supply Chain Management, and 27.5% Marketing.



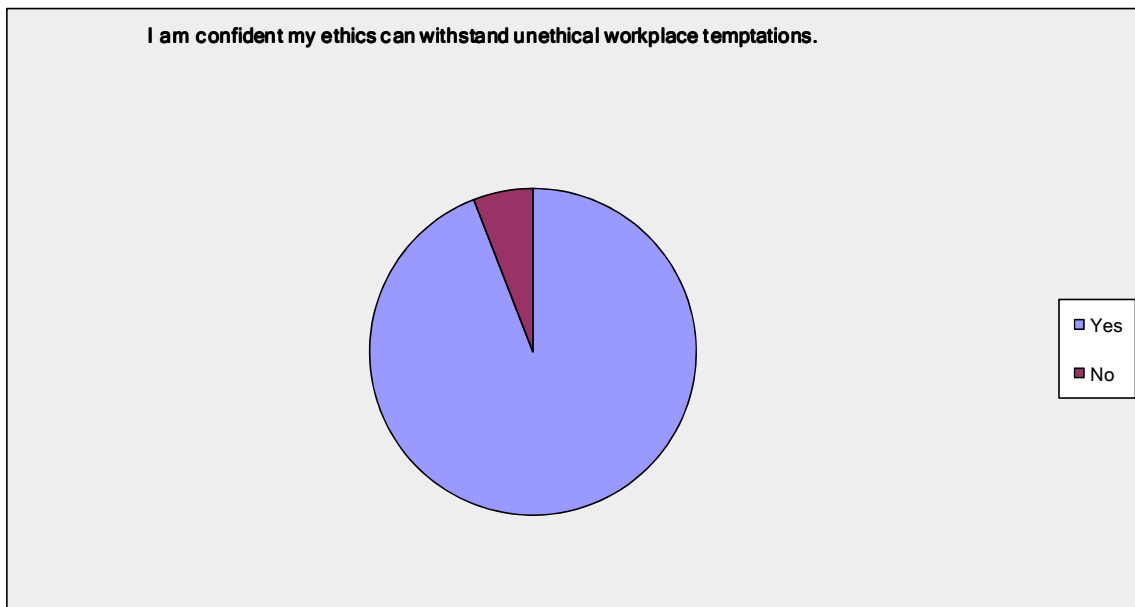
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	90.2%	92
No	0.0%	0
Sometimes	9.8%	10
<b><i>answered question</i></b>		<b>102</b>

The first question on the survey had students respond to the statement “Ethical behavior is important to me.” Out of the 102 responses, 92 indicated that ethical behavior

is important. The remaining 10 responses indicated that ethical behavior is only *sometimes* important. None of the respondents indicated that ethical behavior was not important.

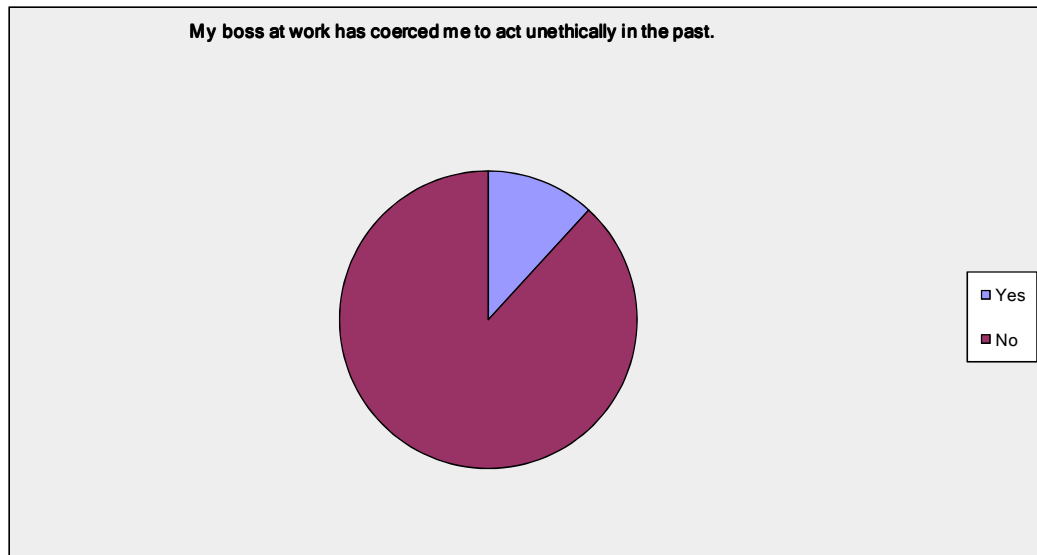


Question 2: Students responded to the statement “Even though I knew something was ethically wrong, I have done it anyways.” 70.6% of the respondents indicated YES to this question while the remaining 29.4% indicated NO.



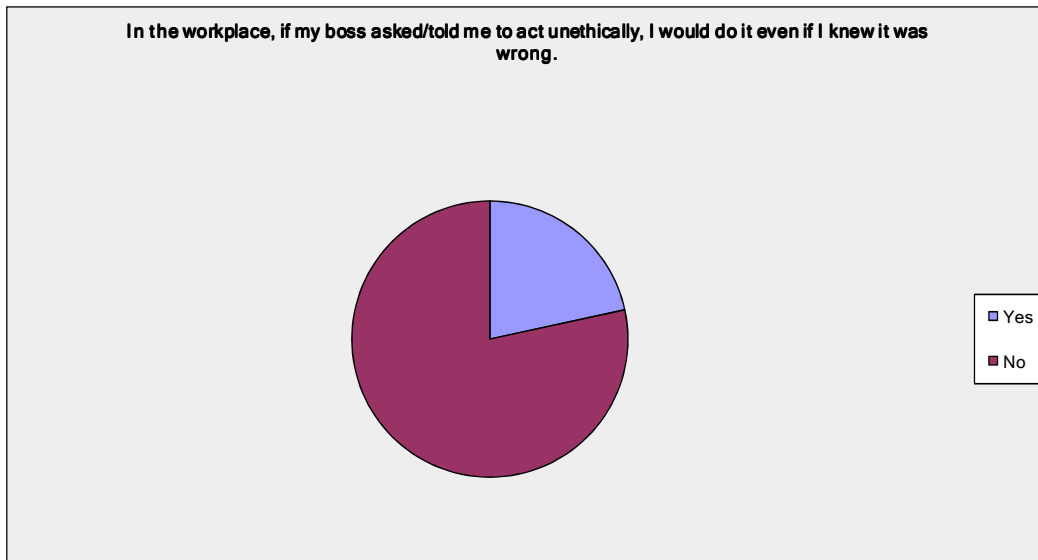
I am confident my ethics can withstand unethical workplace temptations.		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	94.1%	96
No	5.9%	6
<b>answered question</b>		<b>102</b>

Question 3: Students responded to the statement “I am confident that my ethics can withstand workplace temptations.” Of the responses, 94.1% said YES and 5.9% indicated NO. This is an indication that the College of Business could offer more ethics so that students would feel better prepared for the work environment.



Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	11.8%	12
No	88.2%	90
<i>answered question</i>		<b>102</b>

Question 4: Students responded to the statement “My boss at work has coerced me to act unethically in the past.” Of the responses, 11.8% indicated YES, while 88.2% said NO. This number is shockingly high and scary. America has been plagued with unethical because people just follow the their boss tells them. A goal of the College of Business could be to educate the students on more historical cases and outcomes of people following their boss’ unethical advice so that they would have an idea of what could happen by following unethical orders.



Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	21.6%	22
No	78.4%	80
<b>answered question</b>		<b>102</b>

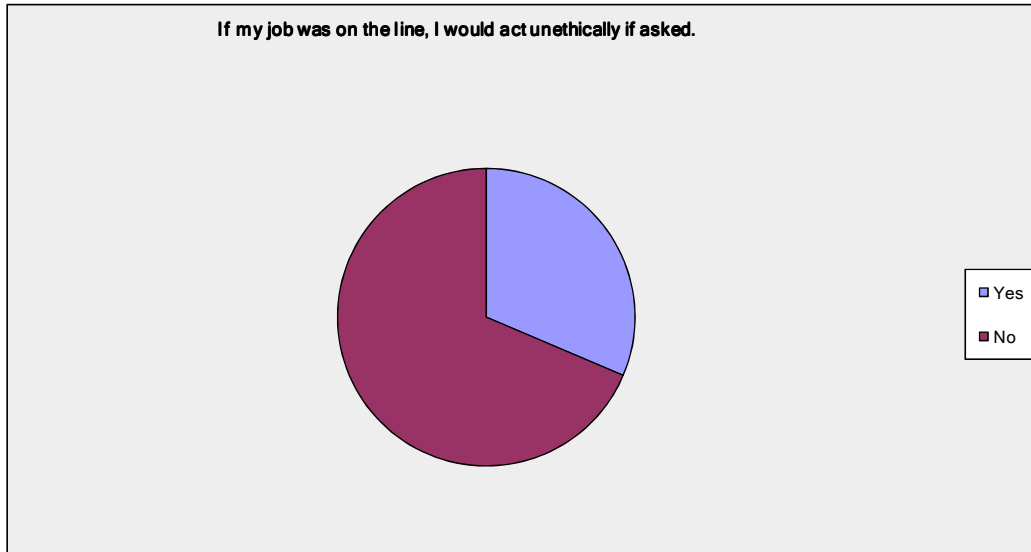
Question 5: Students responded to the statement “In the workplace, if my boss asked me to act unethically, I would do it even though I knew it was wrong.” For the responses, 21.6% indicated YES, and 78.4% indicated NO. This statistic is a cause for concern because if you look back at the Enron case, employees in the company knew what they were doing was wrong but continued to do it because their boss had told them to do it.



Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	45.1%	26
No	54.9%	56
<b>answered question</b>		<b>102</b>

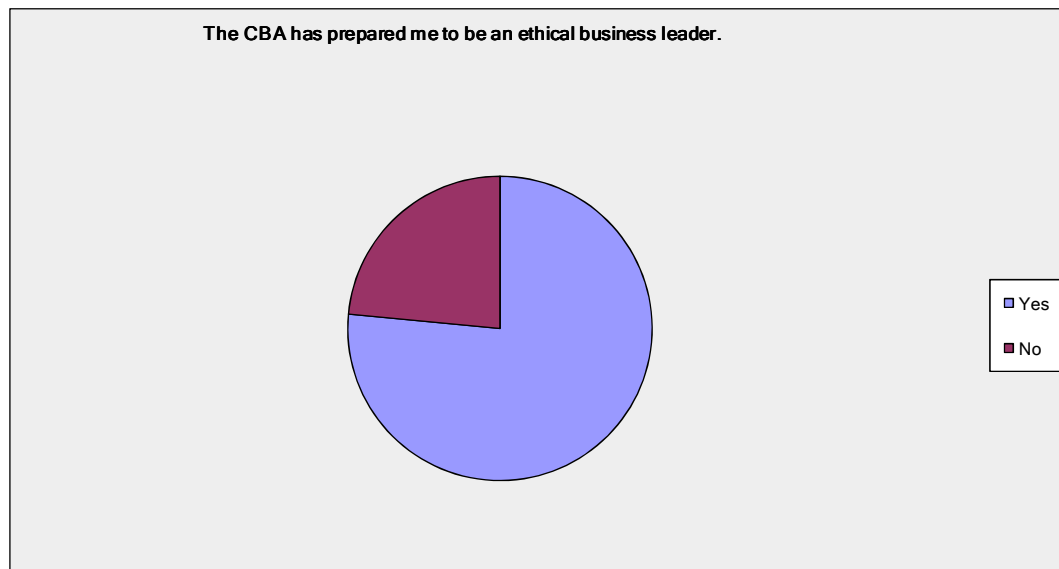


Question 6: Students responded to the statement “I only cheat, lie, and act unethically if I am likely to get away with it.” 45.1% of respondents indicated YES and 54.9% indicated NO.



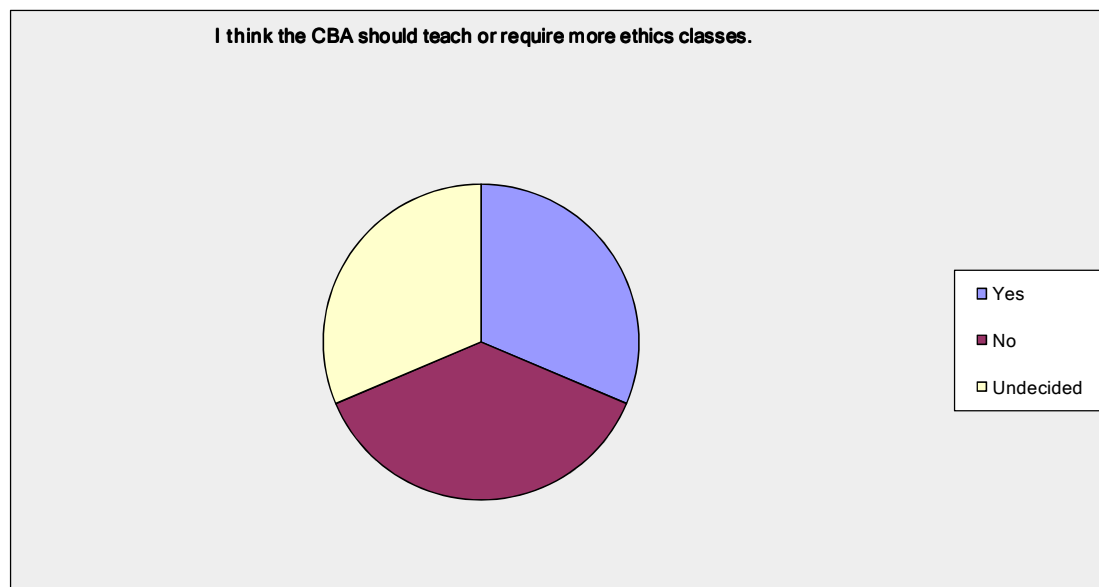
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	31.4%	32
No	68.6%	70
<i>answered question</i>		<b>102</b>

Question 7: Students responded to the statement: “If my job was on the line, I would act unethically if asked.” Of the responses, 31.4% stated that they would act unethically if their job was on the line while 68.6% said they would not. The high number of YES responses could be a function of the current economy. People are afraid to loose their job because they might not get another one.



Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	76.5%	78
No	23.5%	24
<b><i>answered question</i></b>		<b>102</b>

Question 8: Students responded to the statement “The CBA has prepared me to be an ethical business leader.” Of the responses, only 76.5% said YES while 23.5% said NO, the CBA has not prepared them to be an ethical business leader. This is another indication that CBA has the potential to offer more ethics courses. With almost of quarter of students not feeling prepared to be an ethical business leader, the CBA should highly consider making it a goal to reduce this number.



Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	31.4%	32
No	37.3%	38
Undecided	31.4%	32
<b><i>answered question</i></b>		<b>102</b>

Question 9: Students responded to the statement “I think the CBA should teach or require more ethics courses.” Of these responses, only 37.3% said NO. Other responses included 31.4% YES and 31.4 were UNDECIDED. This is an important statistic for the CBA to consider because this shows there is a desire by students to have more ethics courses.

Overall, this survey revealed quite a bit about how the CBA is doing to prepare future ethical business leaders. With ethics being evermore important, students need better prepared on how to handle ethical dilemmas that they might face. To prepare their students better, many business schools are changing. “Many schools have responded by re-examining their priorities, and giving ethics more classroom time, either in modules of its own or incorporated into key classes like strategy, finance and accounting. (Gardiner 1)” It is suggested that business schools should boost their ethics course offerings to stay with current educational trends. From the data above, one can see that this national trend of more ethics courses would be highly supported by URI students. In the survey, only 37.3% of students responded with NO when asked if URI should have more ethics courses. However, this new trend of business ethics courses is not just happening in the West after Enron and WorldCom, it is a world wide phenomenon. The East has long studied ethics. Chinese students are highly concerned with social responsibility and most recently, sustainability (Gardner 2-3). For a business school to remain competitive in today’s times, ethics must be discussed and taught in classes.

Unfortunately, as much as business schools try to prepare ethical business leaders, society is still going to base success on wealth and fame. Current corporations and companies have organizational structures that promote unethical behavior on peoples’

journeys to make money and get to the top. This “journey” to get to the top and make the money is the root of most unethical behavior. Many people fall victim to the “slippery slope” of unethical behavior. A person might make a small unethical decision to get ahead of the others and before they know it they are being forced to make more unethical decisions to cover up the first unethical decision. People have found themselves in major dilemmas and disasters because of their unethical behavior. But, as much as people will be motivated by money and fame to be “successful”, an increased ethics education could help some people from acting unethical.

In conclusion, it is clear the College of Business Administration should consider revising its curriculum to include more ethics. Options include adding a business specific ethics course required of all students. The current curriculum has the potential for students to get very little to no ethics education while at URI. This would ensure all students are receiving a standardized ethics course while at URI. Another option is to build more ethics into existing classes. Universities across the country have done this through incorporating case studies throughout the semester on an ethical dilemma that relates to the course topic, while other universities have built more current events into the classes for discussion. Whatever path URI chooses to go, a decision must be made. If URI does not act and incorporate more ethics, it could find itself in the unethical business of producing unethical business leaders.

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