

# Accounting Ethics in Unfriendly Environments: The Educational Challenge

Guillermina Tormo-Carbó · Elies Seguí-Mas ·  
Victor Oltra

Received: 19 November 2013 / Accepted: 29 October 2014 / Published online: 25 November 2014  
© Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2014

**Abstract** In recent years, and in close connection with a number of well-known financial malpractice cases, public debate on business ethics has intensified worldwide, and particularly in ethics-unfriendly environments, such as Spain, with many recent fraud and corruption scandals. In the context of growing consensus on the need of balancing social prosperity and business profits, concern is increasing for introducing business (and particularly accounting) ethics in higher education curricula. The purpose is to improve ethical behaviour of future business people, and of accounting professionals in particular. In this study, from a sample of 551 business students at a Spanish university, the importance of accounting ethics is investigated. The aim of this paper is twofold. First, we attempt to examine students' overall perceptions of business ethics in unfriendly environments and, specifically, their views on the importance and goals of accounting ethics education. Second, we intend to investigate whether potential differences in such perceptions depend on previous business ethics courses taken, gender, and age of students. Our results show that those students who have previously taken an ethics course are especially prone

to considering that accounting education should include ethical considerations, and show greater interest in further introducing this subject in their curricula. These facts should encourage universities offering business degrees in ethics-unfriendly environments to extend the implementation of ethics courses in their curricula. Besides, significant differences in students' perceptions on the importance of accounting ethics are found depending on their gender and age. In line with previous research findings, female and older students show more ethical inclinations than, respectively, male and younger students. Thus, ethics-unfriendly environments can be treated as contexts where general trends on students' ethical attitudes are also clearly visible. This fact, together with the evidenced impact of ethics courses on students' ethical inclinations, places ethics-unfriendly environments as crucial research settings for further inquiring into the nuances that help explain students' attitudes towards accounting ethics and the role of ethics courses in business degree curricula.

**Keywords** Accounting ethics · Business ethics · Higher education · Ethics-unfriendly environments

## Abbreviations

BBA	Bachelor in Business Administration
CPI	Corruption Perceptions Index
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

---

G. Tormo-Carbó (✉) · E. Seguí-Mas  
CEGEA, Centre for Research in Business Management,  
Universitat Politècnica de València, Camí de Vera, s/n,  
46022 Valencia, Spain  
e-mail: gtormo@omp.upv.es

E. Seguí-Mas  
e-mail: esegui@cegea.upv.es

V. Oltra  
Department of Business Management, Facultat d'Economia,  
University of Valencia, Av. Tarongers, s/n, 46022 Valencia,  
Spain  
e-mail: victor.oltra@uv.es

## Introduction

Despite the growing relevance that accounting ethics education is receiving (Dellaportas 2006; Gaa and Thorne 2004;

Mayhew and Murphy 2009), academic literature on this topic is small (Bampton and Cowton 2013), so this is an emergent research field (Uysal 2010). Interestingly, the inclusion of ethical awareness among employability skills can bring huge long-term benefits to country economies, provided it reduces the likelihood of financial malpractice (Graham 2012), especially in a business context where ethical reporting is increasingly relevant (Gallego-Alvarez 2008).

During the past decade, several financial scandals have evidenced cases of malpractice in the Spanish banking sector (The New York Times 2013; El País 2014). According to Transparency International (2014a), Spain has been ranking between 20th (in 2000 and 2002) and 40th (in 2013) in the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)—which included 177 countries in the latest (2013) edition. The country in the first CPI position is the least corrupted (tie between Denmark and New Zealand in 2013), whereas the one in the last position is the most corrupted (tie among Afghanistan, North Korea and Somalia in 2013). It is worthwhile emphasizing that the 40th position (i.e. the worst position of Spain in the whole CPI history since its first edition in 1995) has been just achieved in the latest CPI ranking corresponding to 2013 (Transparency International 2014b). This position pushes Spain into the poor-performing tier among advanced democracies in terms of corruption. Indeed, in addition to financial sector malpractice cases, other political corruption and tax fraud scandals were discovered, often related to the (former) boom of the Spanish real-estate sector, involving numerous cases of urban development corruption, principally in coastal towns (Cardona 2014).

The kind of context described above can be, therefore, regarded as an *ethics-unfriendly environment*. Focusing on the implications for accounting ethics as a particular facet of business ethics, our understanding of the concept and meaning of ethics-unfriendly environments combines social and political (general) aspects of unethical behaviour (Coicaud and Warner 2001) with (more specific) aspects of failure to meet decent standards of workplace ethics (Lafer 2005). An ethical work climate can be identified by a prevailing perception that the typical organizational practices and procedures observe ethical behaviour in the workplace (Victor and Cullen 1988). Accordingly, an ethics-unfriendly environment can be defined as the widespread perception in a particular society that ethics is not relevant as a social value, given the impunity that often follows fraud, corruption and malpractice observed in the behaviours of managers and public officials, especially when occurring at the top business or government levels. Hence, a key underlying social assumption in ethics-unfriendly environments is that ethical behaviour is not worthwhile, since it does not help achieve success, and its inobservance is not likely to be fairly punished.

Assessing Spain as an ethics-unfriendly environment should contribute to reinforcing the relevance of business ethics contents in university curricula. In particular, degrees related to business administration should be especially affected, given the widespread perception that training in professional ethical values is insufficient (Baetz and Sharp 2004). In Spain, the Bachelor's degree in Business Administration (BBA) is among the most preferred by companies when recruiting job candidates, representing a substantial amount of the total job offer in this country (Infoempleo 2011). Importantly, many of the Spanish universities' former BBA students will become members of management teams who will often face ethical dilemmas, so BBA degrees may crucially influence future accounting professionals' ethical behaviour. These ideas are consistent with the emphasis being recently made on the relevance of ethics education (Lau 2010). In this sense, future business leaders (i.e. current students) can help strengthen an ethical context by acting as good ethical models and articulating highly ethical corporate values (Hannah et al. 2011; Mayer et al. 2012). Accordingly, co-workers influence each other and constantly (re)shape standards for ethical behaviour through their action or inaction (Moore and Gino 2013; Treviño et al. 2014). However, business students tend to cheat more than non-business students (Carauna and Ewing 2000; Simkin and McLeod 2010), and links between unethical workplace behaviour and prior college cheating have been also evidenced (Lawson 2004). Hence, Spanish business students seem to be particularly interesting targets for our study.

The aim of this paper is twofold. First, we attempt to examine business students' overall perceptions of business ethics in unfriendly environments and, specifically, their views on the importance and goals of accounting ethics education. Second, we intend to investigate whether differences in such perceptions depend on previous business ethics courses taken, gender, and age of students. Accordingly, we formulate the following research questions: What are BBA students' overall perceptions of business ethics in unfriendly environments? What are BBA students' views on the importance and goals of accounting ethics education? Are there significant differences in BBA students' perceptions of business ethics, and also in their views on the importance and goals of accounting ethics education, depending on students' previous enrolment in business ethics courses, gender and age?

In order to test our hypotheses, survey data were collected from 551 BBA students at the Technical University of Valencia (Spain). A number of descriptive statistics, multivariate analyses based on linear regressions, and other quantitative analyses were developed.

This article is organized as follows. The next section provides an overview of prior research on accounting

ethics in higher education. The third section deepens into our target variables and presents the research model and hypotheses. Subsequently, the fourth section describes the empirical study sample and methods, and the fifth section explains the study results. A “Discussion” section follows and closes the paper.

### Ethics and Accounting in Higher Education

Accounting ethics education (Gaa and Thorne 2004) is gaining relevance, and significant inquiry has been conducted on ethics teaching methodologies and their impact on business degree curricula (Adkins and Radtke 2004). Scholars, accounting professionals, and students, are the three key groups involved whose points of view need to be considered in accounting ethics learning (Bampton and MacLagan 2005). Importantly, in contrast with the emphasis put on educators’ perceptions of ethics pedagogy and its effectiveness, it is important to investigate students’ perspectives, so far under-researched (Duff 2004).

Ethics can be construed as the system of beliefs that supports a particular form of morality (Stedham et al. 2007). One of the most used frameworks, proposed by Rest (1986), includes a multi-stage model composed by four main elements: moral awareness, moral judgment, moral intention, and behaviour. Later on, Thorne (1999) integrated these four elements into two: the first two components (moral awareness and judgment), are of a cognitive nature, whereas the latter two (moral intention and behaviour) are a function of individual personality and morality, thus implying actions instead of cognition.

Accordingly, Hunt and Vitell (1986) argued that, subject to the influence of situational factors, moral judgment will lead to intention, which will in turn trigger behaviour. These authors also suggest that the actual consequences of behaviour will influence future ethical decision-making, and their theory takes into account both individual and situational factors. Similarly, influenced by Kohlberg’s (1969) work, Trevino (1986) pinpointed that an ethical dilemma will engender ethical decision-making under the influence of one’s stage of cognitive moral development. Interestingly, Jones (1991) outlined the basic stage-model seen in all of the aforementioned theories: moral awareness leads to moral judgement, which leads to intent, in turn leading to behaviour.

Regarding the role of education in professional ethical behaviour, students’ future ethical behaviour can be enhanced through formal courses by increasing their awareness of the consequences of their decisions and actions. Formal courses provide the necessary skills and abilities (Ajzen and Madden 1986) that may enhance future accountants’ intentions to engage in ethically-driven

behaviour (Madden et al. 1992). Ethics education provides language and conceptual tools appropriate to define ethical actions, evaluate alternatives and enhance reflection (Hooker 2004). Consistent with these ideas, Clarkeburn (2002) found that short discussion groups on ethics increased the recognition of moral issues, Cohen et al. (2001) found that professional accountants viewed some actions as less ethical than graduate students did, and Swenson-Lepper (2005) observed that ethical sensitivity was higher among those with greater general education.

Research evidence shows that accounting and business students regard ethics teaching as important (Adkins and Radtke 2004; Crane 2004; Graham 2012). In particular, Crane (2004) found that students seem to be receptive to information and learning on business ethics. Besides, Adkins and Radtke (2004) uncovered that students valued the teaching of ethics, and discussed the presence of an ‘expectation gap’ between students and academics, arising from the perceived differences in importance, values and goals of accounting ethics. In this sense, Graham (2012) considers students’ opinions to assess the goals and effectiveness of ethics teaching in undergraduate accounting programmes. Indeed, we believe that Graham’s (2012) focus on students who already attended ethics courses is very interesting: such students’ views, influenced by how ethics had been previously taught, can provide a realistic opinion based on their own experience, and an accurate assessment of the effectiveness of ethics courses in terms of their goals and methodologies.

Within the context of the changes wrought by the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the Spanish higher education accreditation authority considered ethics as a relevant subject in BBA degree curricula (ANECA 2005). Ethics courses help develop cross-curricular competences of a personal nature, and most Spanish universities have introduced them as elective modules. Indeed, ethics courses have steadily increased their presence in EHEA-accredited Spanish BBA degrees: the 27 % rate of degrees that included business ethics courses in the 2008/2009 year increased to 35 % in 2010/2011 (Fernández Fernández and Bajo Sanjuán 2011). Beyond the Spanish context, the above trends can be also found in other countries, reinforcing the growing importance of business (and particularly accounting) ethics education in university curricula (e.g. MacFarlane and Ottewill 2004; Ghaffari et al. 2008).

### Students’ Perceptions on Accounting Ethics: Influence of Group, Gender and Age

Actual ethical behaviour is more complex to study than ethical reasoning or intentions (Dalton and Ortegren 2011).

This is a reason why previous studies have focused on intentions instead of behaviours (O'Fallon and Butterfield 2005). These studies have tended to accept the theoretical assumption that an individual's intention (e.g. student's willingness to enrol into an ethics course) will directly determine their actual behaviour (e.g. taking the course). This assumption has been widely criticised as an oversimplification of the complex transition from intentions into action (Gollwitzer and Sheeran 2006). As Ajzen et al. (2004, p. 1119) have said, 'investigations that rely on an intention as a proxy for actual behaviour must be interpreted with caution'. Besides, these models ignore the influences from the external environment and surrounding situations. During the transition between intention (willingness to enrol) and actual behaviour (following the course), the individual interacts with a physical and social environment (Phillips and Bradshaw 1993), such as a student's interplay with fellow students or professors. Such interactions with environment factors influence students' decision-making processes.

Importantly, the scarcity of ethics studies that measure and observe actual behaviour, as opposed to stated intentions, is a significant methodological limitation that leaves research open to the influence of social desirability bias (Auger and Devinney 2007; Chung and Monroe 2003). When investigating ethical issues in general, and attitudes and intentions in particular, people tend to respond with answers they believe to be socially acceptable, overstating the importance of ethical considerations in their behaviour (Carrigan and Attalla 2001). In order to overcome this limitation to a reasonable extent, and given the low number of studies that focus on behaviours instead of intentions, our investigation centres an important part of the analysis on those students who have already taken an ethics course (i.e. those students who not only had the intention of taking the course but actually took it).

Consistent with the above considerations, Adkins and Radtke's (2004) investigation has been especially influential in the way in which we have built our study and refined aspects of our hypotheses. Adkins and Radtke (2004) studied students' and lecturers' perceptions on the importance of ethics in business education in general and accounting education in particular. Having in mind the already validated contents of their questionnaire, the variables *general aspects of ethics* (GE) and *objectives of accounting ethics education* (OE) are, respectively, the dependent variables in sub-hypotheses 'a' and 'b' of each of the main hypotheses. Besides, *group (ethics course vs. non-ethics course students)*, *gender* and *age* are, respectively, the independent variables of our three hypotheses.

#### Group: Prior Courses Taken on Business Ethics

This study is based on behaviours, assuming that those students who have freely chosen to take a course on ethics (since our target university offers it as an elective module), have done it because in this way they show their explicit interest in that subject. Besides, it is easier for people to say that they would engage into desirable behaviours than actually fulfilling them (Mayhew and Murphy 2009). Hence, and with the purpose of avoiding biases linked to potential social desirability, in this study we focus on investigating the differences in perceptions between the students who have already taken an ethics course and those who have not. Accordingly, our first hypothesis is:

- H1. Students who have previously taken an ethics course consider accounting ethics more important than students who have not taken such a course. Specifically:
  - H1a. Students who have previously taken an ethics course consider general aspects of ethics more important than students who have not taken such a course.
  - H1b. Students who have previously taken an ethics course consider objectives of accounting ethics education more important than students who have not taken such a course.

#### Gender of Students

One of the variables most frequently studied in the business ethics literature is students' gender (O'Fallon and Butterfield 2005). Eagly's (1987) social role theory of sex differences and similarities in social behaviour supports the idea that men and women behave according to socially expected stereotypes, and reflect current occupational and societal trends. Social role theory reveals that the existence of gender differences in occupational roles generates gender stereotyping of attributes. Thus, gender role stereotypes are more rigid for males than for females. Nonetheless, gender role stereotypes are dynamic and malleable because they emerge from role-bound activities and characteristics. Furthermore, gender socialization theory holds that women are socialized in more communitarian principles (altruism) so they are generally more concerned about others' well-being. In this sense, the distribution of homemaker versus provider roles to, respectively, women versus men, might account for the stereotypic belief that women are more community-minded than men. Men are expected to be highly socialized in principles associated to competitive success and personal growth, thus being more prone to unethical behaviour than women (Loo 2003). Thus, Eagly and Steffen (1984) argued that, as most people's activities

are determined by their different social roles, society's attitudes and beliefs regarding groups of people should reflect the social roles attributed to these groups.

Previous studies that have analysed the influence of gender in ethical decisions have sometimes reached inconclusive results (Loe et al. 2000). Nevertheless, when significant differences have been found, the usual outcome has been to get more ethical answers from women compared to men (Cohen et al. 2001; O'Fallon and Butterfield 2005). Indeed, relevant studies indicate that women have more ethical intentions (Stedham et al. 2007) and behaviours (Dalton and Ortegren 2011; Ross and Robertson 2003) than men. Interestingly, empirical evidence in research based on business students shows that women behave more ethically than men (Adkins and Radtke 2004). Therefore, due to the fact that most prior studies found evidence that women are more ethical than men, our second hypothesis is:

- H2. Among university students, women consider accounting ethics more important than men. Specifically:
  - H2a. Among university students, women consider general aspects of ethics more important than men do.
  - H2b. Among university students, women consider objectives of accounting ethics education more important than men do.

#### Age of Students

Another variable of interest for business ethics researchers has traditionally been the age of individuals. Kohlberg (1969) pinpointed that, as people get older, they increase their awareness of ethical issues. Likewise, Bernardi and Bean (2010) or Trevino (1992) found that ethical reasoning increased with age. Regarding research on business students, previous studies found that older students make more ethical decisions than younger ones (Adkins and Radtke 2004; Borkowski and Ugras 1992; Ruegger and King 1992). Thus, our third hypothesis is:

- H3. Older students consider accounting ethics more important than younger students. Specifically:
  - H3a. Older students consider general aspects of ethics more important than younger students do.
  - H3b. Older students consider objectives of accounting ethics education more important than younger students do.

#### Sample and Measures

The study population included all 1,825 undergraduate students officially registered in the BBA (5-year degree) of

the Technical University of Valencia during the 2010/2011 academic year. Students were targeted for questionnaire completion during regular class time. Classes at different courses were visited, so as to collect as many questionnaires as possible. Survey respondents included students who had taken the (elective) business ethics course of the BBA curriculum, and also students who had not taken that course. 551 questionnaires were returned properly completed, resulting in a response rate of 30.2 %. The sample complies with similar features as the target population: sampling error of 4.81 % with a confidence interval of 95 % and  $p/q = 50/50$ . Table 1 shows the sample characteristics.

The questionnaire was administered to students during regular class time and took around 15 min to complete. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. The questionnaire consisted of three sections (see Appendix).

In the first section, students answered questions related to *ethics courses* (EC) at their university. This section was especially influenced by Adkins and Radtke's (2004) questionnaire, in turn adapted from Cohen and Pant (1989). Responses to questions in this first section were dichotomic, i.e. either 'yes' or 'no', also including a 'not sure' option. Within this first section of the questionnaire, question EC1 ('Have you had an ethics course in college?') provides information on the *group* variable, which is dichotomic (1 = students who have previously taken an ethics course; 2 = students who do not have previously taken an ethics course). The *group* variable is the independent variable in hypothesis 1.

The second section of the questionnaire included two parts. In the first part, students assessed their perceived importance of ethics in a number of *general ethics* (GE) areas: business community, business courses, personal decisions, and workplace decisions. In the second part of

**Table 1** Sample characteristics

	<i>n</i> = 551
Gender	
Female	339
Male	209
No response	3
Nationality	
Spanish	479
Other	72
Year	
First year	143
Second year	119
Third year	88
Fourth year	106
Fifth year	80
No response	15

the second section, students were asked to rate the importance of seven possible objectives of accounting ethics education (*objectives of education*, OE). The whole second section of the questionnaire was adapted from Adkins and Radtke's (2004) questionnaire. A seven-point Likert-type scale was used in the second part of the questionnaire, whereby a rating of 1 meant 'important' and a rating of 7 meant 'unimportant'. Following Adkins and Radtke's (2004) approach and aims, these questions regarding the perceived importance of ethics were intended to be quite general in order to be easily understood by the student sample. Besides, although participants' interpretations could differ on some questions, respondents were expected to provide their general and accurate impressions on the different issues. It is also important to point out that, given the potential social desirability bias, the responses are relative measures to each other, mostly appropriate for comparison purposes (they are not absolute measures that can be generalized).

Finally, the third section of the questionnaire measured students' demographic data. Among these data, gender and age stand out as key variables for hypotheses testing, being the independent variables in, respectively, hypotheses 2 and 3. *Gender* is a dichotomic variable (1 = male; 2 = female), and *age* is a continuous variable.

## Results

In this section, a number of descriptive analyses are first carried out. Then, the three hypotheses are tested.

### Descriptive Analyses

In this subsection, a number of descriptive analyses are conducted, having a two-fold purpose in mind. More broadly, we inquire into business students' overall perception of business ethics and, particularly, their views on the importance and goals of accounting ethics. More

specifically, we investigate whether differences exist between the perceptions from students who have previously taken business ethics courses and those from students who have not taken these courses. In the two subsections that follow, we respectively deepen into the above issues with a focus on, first, the importance of ethics courses (first section of the questionnaire) and, second, the importance of GE issues and the OE (second section of the questionnaire).

### Importance of Ethics Courses

Descriptive statistics and  $\chi^2$  tests were used to analyse data derived from the first section of the questionnaire, where students answered questions on ethics courses at their university (see Table 2).

As shown on Table 2, among the total of 551 students who responded the survey, 116 have *taken an ethics course*, which is slightly over a fifth of the sample (21.1 %). Among them, 78.1 % think that the course was *well designed and effective*, a result that shows a reasonable degree of success in the achievement of the course's goals, at least in terms of students' assessment of it. Among the whole sample of 551 students, 223 of them said that had the *willingness to enrol* in an ethics course (40.9 %), a figure which is higher than the 116 students who had actually taken the course (21.1 %). This fact can be interpreted as that, in addition to those students who have proven through action their interest in business ethics (i.e. taking the ethics course), there are also students who have not taken the course but show favourable intentions towards business ethics (i.e. they would like to take the course).

A contingency analysis of the combined results of questions EC1 and EC5 ( $\chi^2(2) = 50.30, p < .01, \Phi = .314$ ) is helpful to reveal the fine details of the above findings. On the one hand, intention became action in 36.3 % of the cases: among the 223 students who showed intention to enrol into a business ethics course, 81 of them eventually did it. On the other hand, among the 116 students who had actually taken the ethics course, 81 (69.8 %) did that

**Table 2** Responses to questions on ethics courses

Questions	Responses		
	Yes	No	Not sure
EC1: Previous ethics course ( $n = 551$ )	116 (21.1 %)	399 (72.4 %)	36 (6.5 %)
EC2: Course well designed and effective ( $n = 114$ )	89 (78.1 %)	25 (21.9 %)	0 (0 %)
EC3: Ethics courses offered ( $n = 521$ )	337 (64.7 %)	83 (15.9 %)	101 (19.4 %)
EC4: Need of ethics course in curriculum ( $n = 442$ )	126 (28.5 %)	235 (53.2 %)	81 (18.3 %)
EC5: Willingness to enrol in ethics course ( $n = 545$ )	223 (40.9 %)	141 (25.9 %)	181 (33.2 %)
EC6: Convenience of offering ethics courses ( $n = 547$ )	356 (65.1 %)	89 (16.3 %)	102 (18.6 %)
EC7: Utility for solving business ethical issues ( $n = 548$ )	293 (53.5 %)	105 (19.2 %)	150 (27.3 %)

consistent with their willingness to take the course, whereas 11 (9.5 % of 116) said that they did not want to take it, and 24 (20.7 % of 116) were unsure about taking the course but finally did it. In view of these figures, we can state that, in a substantial majority of cases (81 out of 116, i.e. 69.8 %), students who took the ethics course did it as the result of transforming ethical intentions (willingness to take the course) into actions (actually taking it). Conversely, a minority of those students who did take the course (11 out of 116, i.e. 9.5 %) showed an apparently inconsistent behaviour of taking the course while at the same time not wanting to take it. This result may be explained by the fact that some students might not have been really motivated towards business ethics (e.g. took the course because of class schedules or randomly to complete credits).

In this sense, actual individual behaviour and choice are generally determined by individual ethical values (Bardi and Schwartz 2003; Crossan et al. 2013; Fritzsche and Oz 2007). However, the prioritization of ethical values above other considerations, which in turn triggers ethical intent (Cohen and Martinov Bennie 2006; Martinov-Bennie and Mladenovic 2013) (i.e. in our study the ethical motivation to take the course), appears not to be the underlying cause for taking the ethics course in a minority of our sample. These paradoxical situations of (apparently) ethical behaviours not being motivated by ethical values (but instead by personal gain motives) stimulate researchers' reflection and may grant (beyond the scope of our study) further inquiry.

Moreover, the majority of students (64.7 %) report *knowing that ethics courses are offered at their university*. A combined students' unawareness and uncertainty figure of 35.3 % regarding the existence of the ethics course is indeed noteworthy. However, the business ethics course is an elective module, among many others offered. Students' awareness of the available elective course offer depends on their personal interests and curricular preferences. Given the ethics-unfriendly character of the environment in which we have framed our study, and the fact that this course is more recent than most other elective courses, the 64.7 % awareness figure can be considered relatively positive.

In any case, further  $\chi^2$  tests had to be used to evaluate if there were significant differences between responses from students who had taken ethics courses (*ethics course* students) and responses from students who had not (*non-ethics course* students). Table 3 shows the results of such  $\chi^2$  tests.

Regarding the *willingness to enrol in an ethics course*, our data show a 69.8 % for this claim among *ethics course* students (81 out of 116) versus a 32.8 % support from *non-ethics course* students (131 out of 399), and these differences are statistically significant (EC5,  $\chi^2(4) = 51.77$ ,  $p = .000$ ,  $\Phi = .314$ ). Consistent with prior studies (Hurt and Thomas 2008), accounting students regard as positive having specific ethics courses, and in general they even

**Table 3**  $\chi^2$  tests for the questions on ethics courses

Questions	$\chi^2$ (df)	$p$ value	$\Phi$
EC4: Need of ethics course in curriculum ( $n = 442$ )	24.02 (2)	.000*	.239
EC5: Willingness to enrol in ethics course ( $n = 545$ )	51.77 (2)	.000*	.314
EC6: Convenience of offering ethics courses ( $n = 547$ )	48.80 (2)	.000*	.308
EC7: Utility for solving business ethical issues ( $n = 548$ )	5.76 (2)	.117	.106

\*  $p < .01$

consider that just one course is not enough. Consistent with our results, this fact would help explain the willingness of students who have already taken ethics courses of taking further courses on ethics. Besides, the *belief that an ethics course is necessary for the degree curriculum* also shows significant differences [EC4,  $\chi^2(4) = 24.016$ ,  $p = .000$ ,  $\Phi = .239$ ]: 44.2 % of *ethics course* students support such a belief, versus 22.9 % who do so among *non-ethics course* students. Finally, the *belief on the convenience that ethics courses are offered in the business school* also shows significant differences [EC6,  $\chi^2(4) = 48.8$ ,  $p = .000$ ,  $\Phi = .308$ ]: 89.7 % of *ethics course* students versus 58.8 % of *non-ethics course* students support that belief. These results may indicate that the business ethics course in the target university is quite effective. First, a majority of students consider that offering an ethics course is convenient (65 % of all students surveyed, EC6, see Table 2) regardless of the fact that they have taken the course or not. Second, according to our results, the significance in the differences according to the *group* variable mean that the students who have taken the course are more aware of the importance of the ethics course, compared to the students who have not taken the course (i.e. the course has had a significant impact on the ethical values and attitudes of the students who have taken it).

Nevertheless, there are no statistically significant differences regarding question EC7, 'Do you think that having an ethics course in college would help you solve moral and ethics issues facing the accounting profession and the business community in general?' ( $\chi^2(2) = 5.758$ ,  $p > .05$ ,  $\Phi = .106$ ). Indeed, just slightly more than half of the students surveyed (53.5 %) believe that university ethics education will be effective for facing future business ethics challenges (see Table 2). This result can be, to some extent, attributed to students' sceptical views on how the harsh (Spanish) reality of business can actually meet ethical demands.

In any case, as shown in Table 2, almost two thirds of all students considered that ethics courses are convenient in the business school (65.1 % for EC6), and nearly four fifths

**Table 4** Results for general aspects of ethics (GE) and for objectives of accounting ethics education (OE)

	Mean	SE	Ethics course ( $n = 116$ )		Non-ethics course ( $n = 399$ )	
			Mean	SE	Mean	SE
GE1: Ethics in the business community	2.57	1.40	2.41	1.43	2.61	1.39
GE2: Ethics in business courses	2.50	1.30	2.27	1.35	2.56	1.28
GE3: Ethics in personal decisions	2.08	1.20	1.94	0.99	2.11	1.25
GE4: Ethics in workplace decisions	2.37	1.27	2.07	1.07	2.44	1.31
OE1: Relating moral issues	3.33	1.44	3.10	1.33	2.40	1.46
OE2: Recognizing ethical implications	3.05	1.33	2.87	1.91	3.09	1.36
OE3: Developing moral obligation	2.59	1.31	2.47	1.25	2.62	1.32
OE4: Developing conflict-tackling abilities	2.52	1.30	2.36	1.33	2.57	1.30
OE5: Learning to deal with uncertainties	2.52	1.23	2.53	1.20	2.52	1.24
OE6: Fostering change in ethical behaviour	2.99	1.28	2.68	1.17	3.07	1.30
OE7: Understanding ethical aspects	3.37	1.40	3.36	1.41	3.37	1.40

of students who had taken such courses thought they were effective (78.1 % for EC2). These rather encouraging findings support the results of those researchers who found that students regard ethics teaching as an important part of business education (Graham 2012; Adkins and Radtke 2004; Crane 2004).

#### *Importance of GE Issues and the Objectives of Accounting Ethics Education*

In the second section of the questionnaire, students assessed their perceived importance of ethics in four general areas (business community, business courses, personal decisions, workplace decisions), and also regarding seven OE (moral issues, ethical implications, moral obligation, tackling dilemmas, tackling uncertainties, behaviour change, understanding aspects). The exploratory data analysis of the second section of questionnaire identified the presence of severe non-normality in the distribution of all variables. Thus, we decided to use non-parametric statistical techniques for testing group differences. To test the differences between *ethics course* students' perceptions versus those of *non-ethics course* students, we used Mann–Whitney  $U$  tests.

The responses (*mean and standard error*) for the questions related to the importance of GE and for the OE are reported in Table 4. Generally speaking, students in our sample believe that GE are important, and also agree on the importance of the seven accounting ethics education goals proposed by Adkins and Radtke (2004). Besides, means are, in the vast majority of aspects, lower (i.e. ethics is regarded as more important) for *ethics course* students compared with *non-ethics course* students.

Table 5 shows the results of Mann–Whitney  $U$  tests applied for assessing the significance of differences in the responses between *ethics course* students and *non-*

**Table 5** Mann–Whitney  $U$  test for general aspects of ethics (GE)

Questions	$U$ test	$p$ value
GE1: Ethics in the business community	20,423.5	.047*
GE2: Ethics in business courses	19,220.5	.049*
GE3: Ethics in personal decisions	22,046.6	.413
GE4: Ethics in workplace decisions	17,942.5	.006**

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$

**Table 6** Mann–Whitney  $U$  test for objectives of accounting ethics education (OE)

Questions	$U$ test	$p$ value
OE1: Relating moral issues	20,076.5	.035*
OE2: Recognizing ethical implications	20,542	.063
OE3: Developing moral obligation	21,397	.202
OE4: Developing conflict-tackling abilities	20,419.5	.051
OE5: Learning to deal with uncertainties	22,688.5	.804
OE6: Fostering change in ethical behaviour	19,333.5	.008**
OE7: Understanding ethical aspects	22,319	.648

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$

*ethics course* students regarding GE. On a relative basis, the most important aspect for both groups of students is *ethics in personal decisions* (see Table 4, GE3, mean = 2.08) and differences in responses are not significant (see Table 5,  $p = .43$ ). Nonetheless, there are significant differences regarding *ethics in the business community* (GE1,  $p = .047$ ), *ethics in business courses* (GE2,  $p = .049$ ), and *ethics in workplace decisions* (GE4,  $p = .006$ ) (see Table 5), so *ethics course* students regard these issues as more important than *non-ethics course* students.



Furthermore, the results of the Mann–Whitney  $U$  tests regarding the OE are illustrated in Table 6. There are two goals for which differences between both groups of students are statistically significant: *relating accounting education to moral issues* (OE1,  $p = .035$ ) and *fostering change in ethical behaviour* (OE6,  $p = .008$ ). *Ethics course* students regard these issues as more important than *non-ethics course* students.

### Hypotheses Testing

Table 7 presents correlations between all the variables included in our hypotheses. Multivariate analysis has been applied to test hypotheses. Specifically, linear regressions have been conducted for each of the 11 questions regarding the importance of accounting ethics (see Tables 8 and 9). The explanatory variables included have been *group* (students who have taken a previous business ethics course vs. those who have not), *gender*, and *age* (see Figs. 1 and 2).

### General Aspects of Ethics

The sub-model related to the GE is shown in Fig. 1. Each of the independent variables (group, gender, and age) is related to the dependent variable *importance of GE*, thus building the ‘a’ sub-hypothesis of each of the three hypotheses.

The regression results on GE are shown in Table 8.

As for the *group* independent variable, significant differences can only be found regarding the importance of ethics in business courses (GE2). In other words, students who have previously taken a business ethics course hold a stronger belief in the importance of ethics business courses, compared to the opinion of students who have not taken any ethics course. This means that Hypothesis H1a can only be accepted for one of the four GE.

Conversely, hypothesis H2a (influence of *gender*) is fulfilled in all four cases: highly significant ( $p < .01$ ) differences can be seen between men and women, with all general ethical issues being more important for women.

In turn, hypothesis H3, dealing with the role of *age*, is partially supported. Two out of the four relationships building hypothesis H3a are significant, implying that the older the students, the higher the perception of the importance of ethics in business courses (GE2) and in the workplace (GE4).

### Objectives of Accounting Ethics Education

The sub-model on the OE is shown in Fig. 2. Each of the independent variables (group, gender, and age) is related to the dependent variable *importance of the OE*, thus building the ‘b’ sub-hypothesis of each of the three hypotheses.

The regression results on the OE are shown in Table 9.

First, it can be stated that hypothesis H1b, which includes the *group* as an independent variable, can only be accepted regarding the goal of fostering change in ethical behaviour (OE6). In other words, students who have already taken an ethics course hold a stronger belief in the importance that the OE are oriented towards behaviour change, compared to the opinion of students who have not taken any ethics course.

Second, hypothesis H2b (role of *gender*) is fully accepted, since there are significant relationships regarding all seven OE (and six out of seven are highly significant, i.e.  $p < .01$ ). In this sense, women hold a stronger belief in the importance of the OE, compared to the opinion of men.

Finally, hypothesis H3b (influence of *age*) is almost fully supported. Six out of the seven relationships are significant, implying that, the older the students, the higher the perception of importance of the OE.

### Discussion

According to our results, students in our sample seem to be highly receptive to ethics teaching. These results support previous studies’ findings (Graham 2012; Adkins and Radtke 2004; Crane 2004), which include different types of students (schools, degrees and levels) and countries (mainly USA and UK). Besides, students in our sample also indicated the importance of learning about ethics in their degrees, with the aim of preparing themselves professionally to be able to effectively tackle ethical decision-making in the workplace. Hence, pedagogy and learning methodologies regarding accounting ethics education should be adapted accordingly.

Broadly speaking, students in our sample generally consider that teaching accounting ethics is important for their university education, having in mind the high value that students give to business ethics as a subject. Students share this belief, regardless of whether they have previously taken an ethics course or not. Moreover, students who have previously taken an ethics course consider that such a course was well designed and that it was useful for them. Therefore, universities should offer ethics courses and include them officially in their degree curricula. Furthermore, the fact that, at the target university, the ethics course is an elective, probably enhances students’ interest, motivation and commitment towards the module.

Besides, interesting outcomes emerge from our study regarding the differences between students’ perceptions, depending on whether they have actually taken business ethics courses or not. Particularly, there are significant differences regarding *ethics in the business community*, *ethics in business courses*, and *ethics in workplace*

Table 7 Pearson's  $\chi^2$  correlation matrix

	GE1	GE2	GE3	GE4	OE1	OE2	OE3	OE4	OE5	OE6	OE7	Group	Gender	Age
GE1: Ethics in the business community														
GE2: Ethics in business courses	.762**													
GE3: Ethics in personal decisions	.513**	.535**												
GE4: Ethics in workplace decisions	.517**	.580**	.683**											
OE1: Relating moral issues	.295**	.357**	.257**	.307**										
OE2: Recognizing ethical implications	.333**	.422**	.309**	.360**	.660**									
OE3: Developing a 'sense of moral obligation'	.371**	.443**	.440**	.470**	.503**	.556**								
OE4: Developing conflict-tackling abilities	.401**	.468**	.439**	.436**	.431**	.631**	.631**							
OE5: Learning to deal with uncertainties	.346**	.413**	.422**	.364**	.329**	.507**	.609**	.609**						
OE6: Fostering change in ethical behaviour	.383**	.469**	.367**	.450**	.476**	.538**	.572**	.471**	.471**					
OE7: Understanding ethical aspects	.320**	.367**	.285**	.327**	.471**	.438**	.441**	.440**	.353**	.584**				
Group	.070	.103*	.062	.122**	.096*	.082	.055	.074	-.004	.129**	.014			
Gender	-.162**	-.160**	-.155**	-.203**	-.089*	-.147**	-.139**	-.172**	-.142**	-.237**	-.157**	-.026		
Age	-.065	-.106*	-.090*	-.138**	-.156**	-.165**	-.113*	-.097*	-.056	-.199**	-.104*	-.188**	-.095*	

\*  $p \leq .05$ ; \*\*  $p \leq .01$ ;  $n = 551$ 

Gender: 1 = male; 2 = female. Group: 1 = students who have previously taken a business ethics course; 2 = students who do not have previously taken a business ethics course. Age: continuous variable. Dependent sub-variables (GE1-GE4 and OE1-OE7): Likert-type scale (1. Important ... 7. Unimportant)

**Table 8** Multiple regression for general aspects of ethics

Questions	Constant	Group	Gender	Age
GE1: Ethics in business community ( $n = 474$ , $R^2 = .032$ , ** $p < .01$ ; * $p < .05$ )				
<i>B</i>	3.861	.194	-.403	-.032
SBE	.663	.156	.135	.020
$\beta$		.058	-.139**	-.074
GE2: Ethics in business courses ( $n = 473$ , $R^2 = .053$ , ** $p < .01$ ; * $p < .05$ )				
<i>B</i>	3.901	.308	-.418	-.047
SBE	.610	.144	.124	.019
$\beta$		.099*	-.155**	-.116*
GE3: Ethics in personal decisions ( $n = 474$ , $R^2 = .038$ , ** $p < .01$ ; * $p < .05$ )				
<i>B</i>	3.558	.108	-.371	-.033
SBE	.571	.138	.116	.018
$\beta$		.038	-.148**	-.088
GE4: Ethics in workplace decisions ( $n = 462$ , $R^2 = .073$ , ** $p < .01$ ; * $p < .05$ )				
<i>B</i>	4.309	.209	-.434	-.048
SBE	.575	.137	.117	.018
$\beta$		.072	-.171**	-.127**

Gender: 1 = male; 2 = female. Group: 1 = students who have previously taken a business ethics course; 2 = students who do not have previously taken a business ethics course. Age: continuous variable. Dependent sub-variables (GE1–GE4): Likert-type scale (1. Important ... 7. Unimportant)

decisions, so *ethics course* students regard these issues as more important than *non-ethics course* students. These results may be indicative that students who have taken ethics courses, and precisely as a consequence of having gained some knowledge and awareness on business ethics, feel that they need to deepen further into these issues, so that ethical considerations can effectively influence their future decisions in the workplace and their overall professional responsibilities. Revisiting the literature introduced earlier in this article, these findings support ideas put forward by previous contributions. We refer here to the reinforcement of an ongoing (virtuous) cycle of cause-effect relations between ethical values, moral judgements, intentions and behaviours, eventually impacting again on ethical values and re-initiating the cycle (Hunt and Vitell 1986; Jones 1991; Trevino 1986).

Moreover, students generally believe that all goals of accounting ethics education are important, sharing strong and positive expectations about these goals. Nevertheless, those students who have previously attended an ethics course give a special importance to the goals of *relating accounting education to moral issues* and *fostering change in ethical behaviour*. That is, *ethics course* students regard these issues as more important than *non-ethics course*

students. It seems that these two goals are relatively close to the specific contents and explicit aims of the business ethics courses received by the students at the target university of our study, so these courses do make a difference in students' perceptions. However, the other goals of accounting education (for which no statistically significant differences were found according to group of students) seem to refer to issues which are more abstract and/or more distant from the specific contents and explicit aims of the business ethics courses. Such accounting education goals, for which significant differences were not found according to group of students, are *recognizing issues in accounting that have ethical implications*, *developing 'a sense of moral obligation' or responsibility*, *developing the abilities needed to deal with ethical conflicts or dilemmas*, *learning to deal with the uncertainties of the accounting profession*, and *appreciating and understand the history and composition of all aspects of accounting ethics and their relationship to the general field of ethics*.

Regarding our hypotheses, the *group* variable (i.e. students who took an ethics course vs. those who did not) shows relatively weak results, since only one aspect of each of the sets of GE (H1a) and the objectives of accounting education (H1b) offered significant relationships (respectively, *ethics in business courses*, and *fostering change in ethical behaviour*). In any case, the (few) significant relationships found offer, if anything, partial support for hypothesis 1, and are consistent with the results of our descriptive analyses, according to which *ethics-course* students show more ethical inclinations than *non-ethics course* students.

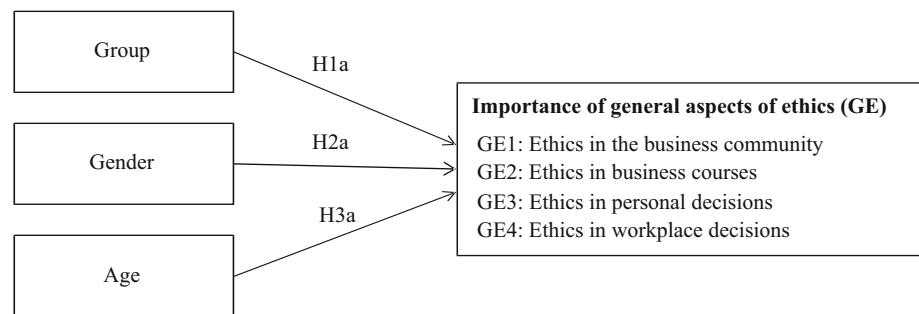
In turn, *gender* is an independent variable that fulfils all our predictions, implying full acceptance of hypothesis H2. Significant differences were found between male and female students regarding their perceived importance of the whole sets of GE (H2a) and the OE (H2b). Consistent with the literature (Cohen et al. 2001; Dalton and Ortegren 2011; O'Fallon and Butterfield 2005; Stedham et al. 2007), in our study women showed stronger ethical inclinations than men. These results are in line with previous empirical research on business students' ethical attitudes and behaviours (Adkins and Radtke 2004).

As for the *age* variable, our results show significant relationships in most cases, leading to a high degree of the acceptance of hypothesis H3, implying that older students show more ethical inclinations than younger ones. Specifically, significant differences were found, depending on age, about two of the four GE (H3a), and about six out of the seven OE (H3b). These findings are also consistent with previous literature frameworks (Bernardi and Bean 2010; Kohlberg 1969; Trevino 1992), and they particularly support earlier studies on business students' ethical decision-making (Adkins and Radtke 2004; Borkowski and Ugras 1992; Ruegger and King 1992).

**Table 9** Multiple regression for the objectives of accounting ethics education

Questions	Constant	Group	Gender	Age
OE1: Relating moral issues ( $n = 472$ , $R^2 = .055$ , $** p < .01$ ; $* p < .05$ )				
<i>B</i>	5.331	.250	-.295	-.075
SBE	.656	.155	.134	.020
$\beta$		.075	-.102*	-.173**
OE2: Recognizing ethical implications ( $n = 473$ , $R^2 = .062$ , $** p < .01$ ; $* p < .05$ )				
<i>B</i>	5.381	.105	-.375	-.083
SBE	.599	.141	.122	.018
$\beta$		.034	-.141**	-.209**
OE3: Developing a 'sense of moral obligation' ( $n = 474$ , $R^2 = .037$ , $** p < .01$ ; $* p < .05$ )				
<i>B</i>	4.361	.077	-.341	-.057
SBE	.601	.141	.122	.018
$\beta$		.025	-.130**	-.144**
OE4: Developing conflict-tacking abilities ( $n = 473$ , $R^2 = .040$ , $** p < .01$ ; $* p < .05$ )				
<i>B</i>	3.863	.174	-.417	-.047
SBE	.601	.141	.122	.018
$\beta$		.057	-.158**	-.120**
OE5: Learning to deal with uncertainties ( $n = 472$ , $R^2 = .021$ , $** p < .01$ ; $* p < .05$ )				
<i>B</i>	3.743	-.035	-.344	-.028
SBE	.584	.137	.199	.018
$\beta$		-.012	-.136**	-.073
OE6: Fostering change in ethical behaviour ( $n = 463$ , $R^2 = .144$ , $** p < .01$ ; $* p < .05$ )				
<i>B</i>	5.589	.276	-.632	-.083
SBE	.574	.135	.116	.018
$\beta$		.092*	-.241**	-.212**
OE7: Understanding ethical aspects ( $n = 473$ , $R^2 = .036$ , $** p < .01$ ; $* p < .05$ )				
<i>B</i>	5.564	-.071	-.431	-.049
SBE	.648	.153	.131	.020
$\beta$		-.022	-.152**	-.115*

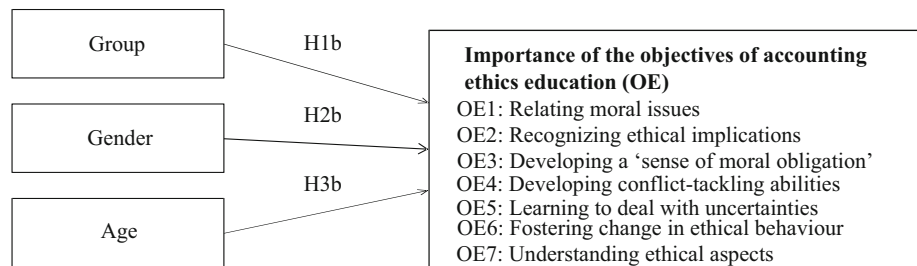
Gender: 1 = male; 2 = female. Group: 1 = students who have previously taken a business ethics course; 2 = students who do not have previously taken a business ethics course. Age: continuous variable. Dependent sub-variables (OE1–OE7): Likert-type scale (1. Important ... 7. Unimportant)

**Fig. 1** Hypotheses on general aspects of ethics

All in all, our study helps extend prior research and add value to the literature regarding inquiry on students' perceptions of accounting ethics education. Interestingly, previously validated data collection methods have been applied to ethics-unfriendly environments, and particularly

to the relatively underexplored Spanish context, also opening up interesting further inquiry opportunities. In line with previous research findings, female and older students show more ethical inclinations than, respectively, male and younger students. Thus, ethics-unfriendly environments

**Fig. 2** Hypotheses on the objectives of accounting ethics education



can be treated as contexts where general trends on students' ethical attitudes are also clearly visible. This fact, together with the evidenced impact of ethics courses on students' ethical inclinations, places ethics-unfriendly environments as crucial research settings for further inquiring into the nuances that help explain students' attitudes towards accounting ethics and the role of ethics courses in BBA curricula.

In this context of ethics-unfriendly environments, emphasis must be put on the fact that courses on ethics have only recently started to be introduced at Spanish universities. Therefore, thanks to having taken ethics courses, future accounting professionals should be more encouraged and determined to fulfil their individual ethical inclinations, instead of giving up and accepting the unethical business dynamics dictated by Spanish 'tradition'. Accordingly, offering ethics courses at Spanish universities now should contribute to, in the long run, change this ethics-unfriendly environment, through the transformative action triggered by future (senior) accounting professionals (i.e. current students).

This study is not free of limitations, such as the nature of the students' sample, drawn from undergraduate business students of a single Spanish university in Valencia. These conditions limit the generalization of results to other institutions. Besides, social desirability bias (Chung and Monroe 2003), inherent to research methods that employ self-reported behaviour, and especially pronounced in studies with ethical considerations (Podsakoff and Organ 1986), might be another limitation (i.e. students' answers could be biased towards 'expected' ethical intentions). We have adopted a two-fold strategy to reduce this bias as much as possible. On the one hand, we have focused key aspects of our study on actual behaviour (having actually taken an ethics course) rather than just on intentions (willingness to take an ethics course). On the other hand, we have emphasized differences—rather than plain results—between different types of students (regarding group, gender and age), substantially downplaying potential bias related to social desirability since the absolute figures are not as important as the differences found according to students' characteristics. Finally, the fact that the ethics course at the target university is elective may be

another limitation. However, we have at least confirmed that ethics courses are reasonably effective in fulfilling students' expectations (it might well be the opposite if courses were poorly designed so students might become disappointed and sceptical, and eventually changed their views on business ethics).

Further research opportunities can also be derived from our investigation. For instance, the relative effectiveness of different types of interventions on accounting ethics education (i.e. stand-alone courses, integrated in other courses, or a mix of both approaches) could be more thoroughly investigated, focusing on the impact of those interventions on students' ethical behaviour (Hurt and Thomas 2008). In this sense, longitudinal studies aimed at future accounting professionals (current students) would help assess the extent to which different goals have been (or not) achieved and in what way.

## Appendix: Questionnaire Items

### Section 1: Ethics Education Courses

- EC1: Have you had an ethics course in college?
- EC2: If yes, do you think this course was well designed and effective?
- EC3: Does your university offer ethics courses?
- EC4: Do you think such a course is necessary for your degree curriculum?
- EC5: If a business ethics course were offered as an elective course, would you enrol in it?
- EC6: Do you think that it is convenient that ethics courses are offered at the business school?
- EC7: Do you think that having an ethics course in college would help you solve moral and ethics issues facing the accounting profession and the business community in general?

### Section 2a: General Aspects of Ethics

- GE1: How important is ethics in the business community?

- GE2: How important is ethics in business courses?  
 GE3: How important is ethics in your personal decisions?  
 GE4: How important is ethics in your decisions in the workplace?

#### Section 2b: Objectives of Accounting Ethics Education

- OE1: Relating accounting education to moral issues.  
 OE2: Recognizing issues in accounting that have ethical implications.  
 OE3: Developing 'a sense of moral obligation' or responsibility.  
 OE4: Developing the abilities needed to deal with ethical conflicts or dilemmas.  
 OE5: Learning to deal with the uncertainties of the accounting profession.  
 OE6: Fostering change in ethical behaviour.  
 OE7: Appreciating and understand the history and composition of all aspects of accounting ethics and their relationship to the general field of ethics.

#### References

- Adkins, N., & Radtke, R. R. (2004). Students' and faculty members' perceptions of the importance of business ethics and accounting ethics education: Is there an expectations gap? *Journal of Business Ethics*, 51(3), 279–300.
- Ajzen, I., Brown, T. C., & Carvajal, F. (2004). Explaining the discrepancy between intentions and actions: The case of hypothetical bias in contingent valuation. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 30(9), 1108–1121.
- Ajzen, I., & Madden, T. J. (1986). Prediction of goal-directed behavior: Attitudes, intentions, and perceived behavioral control. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 22(5), 453–474.
- ANECA. (2005). Libro Blanco del Grado en Economía y Empresa. Last Accessed October 2, 2014, from [http://www.aneca.es/var/media/150292/libroblanco\\_economia\\_def.pdf](http://www.aneca.es/var/media/150292/libroblanco_economia_def.pdf).
- Auger, P., & Devinney, T. M. (2007). Do what consumers say matter? the misalignment of preferences with unconstrained ethical intentions. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 76(4), 361–383.
- Baetz, M. C., & Sharp, D. J. (2004). Integrating ethics content into the core business curriculum: Do core teaching materials do the job? *Journal of Business Ethics*, 51(1), 53–62.
- Bampton, R., & Cowton, C. (2013). Taking stock of accounting ethics scholarship: A review of the journal literature. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 114(3), 549–563.
- Bampton, R., & Maclagan, P. (2005). Why teach ethics to accounting students? A response to the sceptics. *Business Ethics: A European Review*, 14(3), 290–300.
- Bardi, A., & Schwartz, S. H. (2003). Values and behavior: Strength and structure of relations. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 29(10), 1207–1220.
- Bernardi, R. A., & Bean, D. F. (2010). Ranking North American accounting scholars publishing ethics research: 1986 through 2008. In C. Jeffrey (Ed.), *Research on professional responsibility and ethics in accounting* (Vol. 14, pp. 139–174). Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing.
- Borkowski, S. C., & Ugras, Y. J. (1992). The ethical attitudes of students as a function of age, sex and experience. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 11(12), 961–979.
- Carauna, A., & Ewing, M. T. (2000). The effect of anomie on academic dishonesty of university students. *The International Journal of Educational Management*, 14(1), 23–29.
- Cardona, F. (2014, March 14). Spain must combat corruption in local government. *The Guardian*. Last accessed October 2, 2014, from <http://www.theguardian.com/local-government-network/2014/mar/04/spain-corruption-local-government>.
- Carrigan, M., & Attalla, A. (2001). The myth of the ethical consumer—do ethics matter in purchase behaviour? *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 18(7), 560–578.
- Chung, J., & Monroe, G. (2003). Exploring social desirability bias. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 44(4), 291–302.
- Clarkeburn, H. (2002). A test for ethical sensitivity in science. *Journal of Moral Education*, 31(4), 439–453.
- Cohen, J. R., & Martinov Bennie, N. (2006). The applicability of a contingent factors model to accounting ethics research. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 68(1), 1–18.
- Cohen, J. R., & Pant, L. W. (1989). Accounting educators' perceptions of ethics in the curriculum. *Issues in Accounting Education*, 4(1), 70–81.
- Cohen, J. R., Pant, L. W., & Sharp, D. J. (2001). An examination of differences in ethical decision-making between Canadian business students and accounting professionals. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 30(4), 319–336.
- Coicaud, J. M., & Warner, D. (Eds.). (2001). *Ethics and international affairs: Extent and limits*. New York: United Nations University Press.
- Crane, F. G. (2004). The teaching of business ethics: An imperative at business schools. *Journal of Education for Business*, 79(3), 149–151.
- Crossan, M., Mazutis, D., & Seijts, G. (2013). In search of virtue: The role of virtues, values and character strengths in ethical decision making. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 113(4), 567–581.
- Dalton, D., & Ortegren, M. (2011). Gender differences in ethics research: The importance of controlling for the social desirability response bias. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 103(1), 73–93.
- Dellaportas, S. (2006). Making a difference with a discrete course on accounting ethics. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 65(4), 391–404.
- Duff, A. (2004). The role of cognitive learning styles in accounting education: Developing learning competencies. *Journal of Accounting Education*, 22(1), 29–52.
- Eagly, A. H. (1987). *Sex differences in social behaviour: A social-role interpretation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Eagly, A. H., & Steffen, V. J. (1984). Gender stereotypes stem from the distribution of women and men into social roles. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 46(4), 735.
- El País. (2014, May 29). Spanish court makes first conviction of bankers since start of crisis. Last accessed October 2, 2014, from [http://elpais.com/m/elpais/2014/05/29/inenglish/1401376120\\_835701.html](http://elpais.com/m/elpais/2014/05/29/inenglish/1401376120_835701.html).
- Fernández Fernández, J. L., & Bajo Sanjuán, A. (2011). The presence of business ethics and CSR in the higher education curricula for executives. *Journal of Business Ethics Education*, 7, 25–38.
- Fritzsche, D. J., & Oz, E. (2007). Personal values' influence on the ethical dimension of decision making. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 75(4), 335–343.
- Gaa, J. C., & Thorne, L. (2004). An introduction to the special issue on professionalism and ethics in accounting education. *Issues in Accounting Education*, 19(1), 1–6.

- Gallego-Alvarez, I. (2008). Analysis of social information as a measure of the ethical behavior of Spanish firms. *Management Decision*, 46(4), 580–599.
- Ghaffari, F., Kyriacou, O., & Brennan, R. (2008). Exploring the implementation of ethics in UK accounting programs. *Issues in Accounting Education*, 23(2), 183–198.
- Gollwitzer, P. M., & Sheeran, P. (2006). Implementation intentions and goal achievement: A meta-analysis of effects and processes. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 38, 69–119.
- Graham, A. (2012). The teaching of ethics in undergraduate accounting programmes: The students' perspective. *Accounting Education*, 21(6), 599–613.
- Hannah, S. T., Avolio, B. J., & Walumbwa, F. O. (2011). Relationships between authentic leadership, moral courage, and ethical and pro-social behaviors. *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 21(4), 555–578.
- Hooker, J. (2004). The case against business ethics education: A study in bad arguments. *Journal of Business Ethics Education*, 1(1), 75–88.
- Hunt, S. D., & Vitell, S. (1986). A general theory of marketing ethics. *Journal of Macromarketing*, 6(1), 5–16.
- Hurttt, R. K., & Thomas, C. W. (2008). Implementing a required ethics class for students in accounting: The Texas experience. *Issues in Accounting Education*, 23(1), 31–51.
- Infoempleo. (2011). *Informe de empleo sobre oferta y demanda de empleo cualificado en España*. Madrid: Infoempleo/Adecco.
- Jones, T. M. (1991). Ethical decision-making by individuals in organizations—an issue-contingent model. *Academy of Management Review*, 16(2), 366–395.
- Kohlberg, L. (1969). Stage and sequence: The cognitive-developmental approach to socialization. In D. A. Goslin (Ed.), *Handbook of socialization theory and research* (pp. 347–480). Chicago: Rand McNally.
- Lafer, G. (2005). The critical failure of workplace ethics'. In J. W. Budd & J. G. Scoville (Eds.), *The ethics of human resources and industrial relations* (pp. 273–297). Champaign, IL: Labor and Employment Relations Association.
- Lau, C. L. (2010). A step forward: Ethics education matters! *Journal of Business Ethics*, 92(4), 565–584.
- Lawson, R. (2004). Is classroom cheating related to business students' propensity to cheat in the "real world"? *Journal of Business Ethics*, 49(2), 189–199.
- Loe, T., Ferrell, L., & Mansfield, P. (2000). A review of empirical studies assessing ethical decision making in business. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 25(3), 185–204.
- Loo, R. (2003). Are women more ethical than men? Findings from three independent studies. *Women in Management Review*, 18(4), 169–181.
- MacFarlane, B., & Ottewill, R. (2004). Business ethics in the curriculum: Assessing the evidence from UK subject review. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 54(4), 339–347.
- Madden, T. J., Ellen, P. S., & Ajzen, I. (1992). A comparison of the theory of planned behavior and the theory of reasoned action. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 18(1), 3–9.
- Martinov-Bennie, N., & Mladenovic, R. (2013). An investigation into the impact of integrated educational interventions on first year accounting students' ethical sensitivity and decision-making. In *American Accounting Association's 18th annual ethics research symposium*, Anaheim, USA, 4 August 2013.
- Mayer, D. M., Aquino, K., Greenbaum, R. L., & Kuenzi, M. (2012). Who displays ethical leadership, and why does it matter? An examination of antecedents and consequences of ethical leadership. *Academy of Management Journal*, 55(1), 151–171.
- Mayhew, B. W., & Murphy, P. R. (2009). The impact of ethics education on reporting behaviour. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 86(3), 397–416.
- Moore, C., & Gino, F. (2013). Ethically adrift: How others pull our moral compass from true North, and how we can fix it. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 33, 53–77.
- O'Fallon, M. J., & Butterfield, K. D. (2005). A review of the empirical ethical decision-making literature: 1996–2003. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 59(4), 375–413.
- Phillips, H., & Bradshaw, R. (1993). How customers actually shop: Customer interaction with the point of sale. *Journal of the Market Research Society*, 35, 51–62.
- Podsakoff, P. M., & Organ, D. W. (1986). Self-reports in organizational research: Problems and prospects. *Journal of Management*, 12(4), 531–544.
- Rest, J. (1986). *Moral development: Advances in research and theory*. New York: Praeger.
- Ross, W. T., & Robertson, D. C. (2003). A typology of situational factors: Impact on salesperson decision-making about ethical issues. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 46(3), 213–234.
- Ruegger, D., & King, E. W. (1992). A study of the effect of age and gender upon student business ethics. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 11(3), 179–186.
- Simkin, M. G., & McLeod, A. (2010). Why do college students cheat? *Journal of Business Ethics*, 94(3), 441–453.
- Stedham, Y., Yamamura, J. H., & Beekun, R. I. (2007). Gender differences in business ethics: Justice and relativist perspectives. *Business Ethics: A European Review*, 16(2), 163–174.
- Swenson-Lepper, T. (2005). Ethical sensitivity for organizational communication issues: Examining individual and organizational differences. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 59(3), 205–231.
- The New York Times. (2013, July 8). Spaniards fight to get savings back. Last accessed October 2, 2014, from [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/09/world/europe/spaniards-fight-to-get-savings-back.html?\\_r=1&](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/09/world/europe/spaniards-fight-to-get-savings-back.html?_r=1&).
- Thorne, L. (1999). An analysis of the association of demographic variables with the cognitive moral development of Canadian accounting students: An examination of the applicability of American-based findings to the Canadian context. *Journal of Accounting Education*, 17(2–3), 157–174.
- Transparency International. (2014a). Corruption Perceptions Index. Last accessed October 2, 2014, from <http://www.transparency.org/research/cpi/>.
- Transparency International. (2014b). Corruption Perceptions Index 2013. Last accessed October 2, 2014, from <http://www.transparency.org/cpi2013/results>.
- Trevino, L. K. (1986). Ethical decision-making in organizations—a person-situation interactionist model. *Academy of Management Review*, 11(3), 601–617.
- Trevino, L. K. (1992). Moral reasoning and business ethics: Implications for research, education, and management. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 11(5–6), 445–459.
- Treviño, L. K., den Nieuwenboer, N. A., & Kish-Gephart, J. J. (2014). (Un) ethical behavior in organizations. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 65, 635–660.
- Uysal, O. O. (2010). Business ethics research with an accounting focus: A bibliometric analysis from 1988 to 2007. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 93(1), 137–160.
- Victor, B., & Cullen, J. B. (1988). The organizational bases of ethical work climates. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 33(1), 101–125.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.