

What Drives Ethics Education in Business Schools?

Studying Influences on Ethics in the MBA Curriculum

Abstract

This paper discusses the impact of four key issues on ethics education in MBA programs: (1) the geographic location of business schools, (2) a school's ranking in the *Financial Times* list, (3) the length of the MBA program, and (4) a school's participation in the *Principles for Responsible Management Education* (PRME). Our discussion is based on detailed coursework data underlying the 2009 *Beyond Grey Pinstripes* survey of full-time, in-person MBA programs. We find that the four discussed issues influence whether ethics education is delivered through core or elective courses. Further, we find that the four issues also impact whether schools teach ethics through standalone courses or integrate relevant content into other disciplines. However, our results also indicate that the four issues do not significantly influence in which disciplines ethics-related content is infused.

Keywords: management education, ethics education, MBA programs, integration of ethics, business school rankings

INTRODUCTION

Management education in general and teaching MBA students in particular is subject to scrutiny and many researchers and practitioners continue to debate in what ways teaching has to change (Bennis & O'Toole, 2005). In light of the global economic downturn and the financial crisis many business schools were criticized for graduating MBAs lacking professionalism, leadership, and integrity (Skapinker, 2010). While we see the economy in disarray, and cases of fraud and corruption prevail, critics are wondering if business schools and MBA programs may have contributed to such developments. Critics not only challenge the neglect of ethics but also how it is taught in a world where profit-maximization still is predominant (Christensen, Peirce, Hartmann, Hoffmann & Carrier 2007; Ghoshal, 2005; Giacalone & Thompson, 2006; Wagner Weick, 2008). The core of the problem seems to be that “instead of being viewed as long-term economic stewards, [...] managers came to be seen mainly as the agents of the owners – the shareholders – and responsible for maximizing shareholder wealth” (Holland, 2009).

Such fundamental critique puts a question mark behind the current status of ethics education in MBA programs. In line with existing research, we use the umbrella term “ethics education” as a descriptor for courses covering social, environmental, and/or ethical topics (see also Evans, Treviño & Weaver, 2006; Swanson & Fisher, 2008, 2011). While it is widely acknowledged that most business schools address such topics (Alsop, 2006; Nicholson & DeMoss, 2009), we have only limited empirical insights into the status quo of ethics education in MBA programs. Only a small number of empirical studies review ethics education in business schools in general (Cornelius, Wallace & Tassabehji, 2007; Wu,

Huang, Kuo & Wu, 2010) and in MBA programs in particular (Evans et al., 2006; Navarro, 2008; Christensen et al., 2007). Viewed against this background, this paper extends the literature on ethics education in MBA programs.

The main objective of this paper is to identify relevant factors that influence ethics in the MBA curriculum. We attempt to uncover a selection of factors that are likely to determine how ethics-related debates are delivered within the MBA curriculum. Our analysis includes reflections on four key issues: First, we ask whether the *geographic location* of a school influences the way ethics is anchored in MBA programs. While there is much research and debate on ethics education in US-based MBA programs (Cornelius et al., 2007; Navarro, 2008) and, to a more limited extent, also on European institutions (Matten & Moon, 2004), a comparative analysis between these two regions is missing (for a recent exception see Wu et al., 2010 with a focus on sustainability courses in undergraduate and graduate programs).

Second, we study the influence of a *school's position in a ranking* on ethics education. Our analysis looks at differences between globally ranked top schools (according to the 2009 *Financial Times* Global MBA Top 100 ranking) and non-ranked institutions in the way they approach ethics education. Third, we study the effects of *program length* on how ethics-related debates are delivered. We analyze differences in ethics education between short (up to 18 months) and longer (over 18 months) MBA programs to examine whether program duration has an impact on the availability of relevant courses. Finally, we explore the effects of participation in the UN-backed *Principles for Responsible Management Education* (PRME) on ethics education. Studying

such effects can provide answers to questions about the efficacy of schools' public self-commitments in the context of ethics education.

We address these four topics through an analysis of the data underlying the Aspen Institute's *Beyond Grey Pinstripes* (BGP) survey. This data is particularly useful in the context of our research, as it contains information on standalone as well as discipline-specific courses. Furthermore, the BGP data reflects a broad participant base (n=139 schools for 2009) blending top-ranked as well as non-ranked schools from different geographical regions. This allows us to reach beyond existing assessments of ethics education in MBA programs, which predominantly focus on top-ranked schools (e.g., Navarro's 2008 analysis rests on the 50 top-ranked schools in the U.S., while Christensen et al., 2007 base their analysis on the 50 top-ranked global schools).

Our analysis of the BGP data discusses whether and in which ways the four identified issues affect the availability of ethics-related content within business schools' MBA programs. We contribute to the debate by considering the cross-disciplinary nature of ethics education. Whereas earlier studies have limited their analysis to the availability of standalone courses (i.e. courses entirely devoted to the discussion of ethics-related content; see e.g. Evans et al., 2006), our discussion also considers all those courses from other disciplines that integrate ethics-related debates. As schools are increasingly moving towards a blended approach considering standalone *and* discipline-specific courses (Godemann, Herzig, Moon & Powell, 2011), our findings allow for a more comprehensive assessment of what drives ethics education in MBA programs.

Our argument is organized as follows: We start by reviewing the literature on the research topics outlined above and specify relevant research gaps. Next, we explain the underlying dataset and methodology of our analysis. The following section presents the main results and discusses the findings in the context of the existing literature. The final section points to the main implications of our study for ethics education in MBA programs and outlines some avenues for further research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Only a few empirical studies explicitly or implicitly aim at identifying drivers of ethics education in the context of MBA programs (see e.g., Evans et al., 2006; Wu et al., 2010). This is a surprising omission as the scholarly debate has highlighted that ethics education in general is likely to be influenced by a variety of factors (including schools' geographic location and prestige; Swanson & Fisher, 2008, 2011). In line with our research objective, we review studies discussing the influence of a school's geographic location, position in a ranking, program length, and participation in the PRME initiative on ethics education.

Regarding the geographic location of schools, most studies focus either on North American schools (Evans et al., 2006; Navarro, 2008) or European institutions (Cowton & Cummins, 2003; Macfarlane & Ottewill, 2004; Matten & Moon, 2004). Even studies addressing a sample of global schools, such as Christensen et al. (2007) or Cornelius et al. (2007), do not discuss interregional differences. A notable exception is the recent study by Wu et al. (2010) who find that American schools tend to have fewer courses per school

than their counterparts in Europe and Oceania. Mahoney's (1990) early work on comparative business ethics education reveals a mixed picture. It confirmed that US schools have broadly adopted business ethics education, whereas at the time of the survey European schools were catching up. While it is reasonable to assume that regional differences in terms of ethics education exist (Enderle, 1997), we cannot find many recent empirical insights into this phenomenon.

While scholars frequently use schools' position in rankings as a prerequisite to include an institution into a survey on ethics education (Litzky & MacLean, 2011; Navarro, 2008), very few studies address differences between ranked and non-ranked schools. Wu et al. (2010) report no observable differences in the offering of mandatory courses between ranked and non-ranked institutions. Evans et al.'s (2006) analysis of first tier, second tier and third tier schools (according to the *BusinessWeek* and *US News* rankings) shows that higher ranked schools do not necessarily devote more attention to ethics education in their MBA programs. These results are surprising insofar as it is reasonable to assume that higher ranked schools face more public attention and scrutiny regarding their ethics education, particularly after the financial crisis and global economic downturn.

Although MBA programs can differ significantly in terms of their duration – the shortest programs taking one year to graduate and the longest full-time programs requiring studies of well above two years – we only found one assessment of the impact of the overall number of credit hours on ethics education in MBA programs. Evans et al. (2006) report that longer degree programs (measured by the overall number of credit hours) positively influence the number of compulsory and elective courses on ethics-related topics.

Schools tend to integrate ethics into the curriculum when they expand their program and, hence, find some space. These results seem consistent with claims that credit hours are a scarce resource and that schools usually give first priority to “traditional” subjects like accounting and marketing (Navarro, 2008).

Last but not least, no study has yet discussed whether participants in the swiftly growing PRME initiative show a different profile than non-participants. The PRME represent a voluntary set of principles which business schools can adhere to in the interest of developing and improving ethics education throughout their programs (see www.unprme.org). Even though the PRME aspire to provide a global framework for improving ethics education, they have rarely been part of the academic debate (Rasche & Escudero, 2010; Waddock, Rasche, Werhane & Unruh, 2010). Although an assessment of participants’ mandatory Sharing Information on Progress (SIP) reports shows that PRME participants have “a tendency to integrate sustainability into postgraduate programmes” (Godemann et al., 2011: 7), it is still unclear how PRME adopters perform relative to non-participating schools. Hence, our comparative analysis provides first insights into whether this initiative is really “raising the bar” (Alcaraz & Thiruvattal, 2010: 549).

SURVEY DATA AND METHODOLOGY

For our analysis we draw on the MBA coursework data of the 2009 BGP survey. The basic population of the BGP survey consists of business schools around the world offering a full-time, in-person MBA program and hold an AACSB, EQUIS or AMBA accreditation. Additionally, also non-accredited schools that are regarded as leading institutions within

their country or region are included. For the 2009 BGP survey a total of 590 business schools were invited to fill out the online survey, while 139 schools provided responses. This leads to a response rate of 23.6% that is comparable to other studies in this field using online surveys (see e.g., Bedeian, Taylor & Miller, 2010). The responding schools are structured as follows: 64% are located in the US, while the remaining 36% span more than 20 countries, predominately in Europe. In total, participating schools reported 3752 MBA courses by submitting relevant course syllabi.

The BGP data includes information on standalone courses (i.e. courses entirely devoted to ethics education) and discipline-specific courses (i.e. courses discussing ethics-related problems in other disciplines). Courses were assigned to a total of 18 pre-defined disciplines within the MBA curriculum (e.g., accounting, strategy and marketing; see Table 2 for an overview). We adopted the original classification of disciplines from the BGP survey with one adjustment. We grouped courses on “Corporate Responsibility/Business Ethics” and “Environmental Management/Sustainability” into one category called “standalone courses.” Grouping courses in this way is valid for at least two reasons. First, Matten and Moon (2004) have shown that these two labels are the most commonly used descriptions for standalone courses. Second, this grouping is in line with the definition of standalone courses in other studies (see e.g., Christensen et al., 2007). The BGP data also provides information on whether a course is a mandatory part of the MBA curriculum. We have labeled mandatory courses as “core courses” and non-mandatory courses as “elective courses.” In addition, the BGP data includes information on how much time discipline-specific courses devote to the discussion of ethics-related topics. Schools were asked to

report the ethics coverage of each course (i.e. the time devoted to relevant discussions within a marketing course).

A variety of activities were undertaken to ensure the validity of the reported information. First, all schools needed to provide a syllabus or detailed description for each submitted course. The use of course syllabi as a source of information about course content is in line with other studies in this field (see e.g. Wu et al.'s 2010 analysis). According to Charlier, Brown and Rynes (2011: 224), syllabi provide “a comprehensive overview of most (if not all) aspects of a course.” This approach can reduce potential errors in self-reported data due to a social desirability bias (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960). Second, each participating school had to sign an online signature, pledging honesty and accuracy of the reported data and parts of the final data have been made publicly available at the BGP website to allow for a review process by students, competitors, and alumni. Third, specially trained PhD and DPA research fellows working for the Aspen Institute assessed all submitted coursework data. Two research fellows independently assessed each submitted course (e.g., regarding its classification into a certain discipline) and results were then compared. If no agreement could be reached, the problem was transferred to the Aspen project team for further exploration. All assessments were conducted “blind”; research fellows did not know the names of schools and faculty of the courses they were assessing.

For our exploratory analysis we mainly draw on descriptive statistics, like arithmetic means or relative frequencies. To compare observed differences between groups of schools we apply statistical tests to check the significance of our findings. When investigating regional differences, we only compare North American schools to European schools.

Institutions from other parts of the world accounted for only a small number of respondents and were excluded due to the insufficient sample size.

RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The Influence of Geographic Location

We grouped business schools into regions depending on the location of their campus. If a program used campuses in more than one region, we classified this institution according to the location of its main campus. All schools which had their main campus in Canada or the USA were labeled as North American Schools (n=99) whereas all schools located in Continental Europe, UK or Ireland were labeled as European schools (n=25). The data reveals similarities and differences with regard to the core/elective status of course offerings in the two regions (see Table 1). While European schools offer almost the same amount of core courses with ethics-related content (9.00 courses per school) than North American institutions (8.54 courses per school), both regions differ toward their approach to elective courses. With an average of 22.42 courses per school, North American institutions offer more than twice the amount of electives than their European counterparts with 10.68 courses per school. A Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney shows that the slight difference in the number of core courses between North American and European schools is not significant, whereas the difference in the number of elective courses is significant ($p < 0.01$). One possible explanation for the predominance of elective courses in North America is the duration of MBA programs. On average, North American schools tend to have longer

programs than their European counterparts allowing for the inclusion of a greater choice of electives (see also our discussion below).

Comparing the relative importance of the different disciplines that contain ethics-related discussions, we find that European institutions put more emphasis on teaching ethics through dedicated standalone courses. North American schools mostly teach ethics-related topics in general management courses (13.8%, see Table 2), whereas European schools put more emphasis on creating standalone courses (15.2%). In addition to this, teaching ethics in human resource management and in strategy courses plays a more important role in European institutions. All reported differences are significant at $p < 0.01$ according to a binomial test. The embeddedness of ethics into general management courses in North America is likely to have historical reasons. According to Khurana (2007), ethics-related debates first entered US business schools via general management courses, largely through a discussion of the stakeholder management model. However, our discussion also shows that North American and European institutions are comparable in many respects when it comes to ethics education in the MBA. We see this as evidence that the content underlying MBA programs becomes increasingly standardized due to a variety of isomorphic pressures (e.g., rankings and accreditations; see also the discussion by Mazza, Sahlin-Andersson & Standgaard Pedersen, 2005).

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The Influence of Rankings

We evaluated an institution's ranking status based on their listing in the 2009 *Financial Times* (FT) Global Top 100 MBA ranking. While 53 of the 139 participating schools were included in this ranking, 86 schools were classified as non-ranked institutions. We used the 2009 FT ranking for three reasons. First, it represents a school's prestige at the time the BGP survey was conducted. Second, it is a global ranking including schools from different continents, while other rankings only list North American institutions (e.g., *US News* and *Forbes*). Last but not least, the FT ranking is lauded for its high reputation and significant reach (Devinney, Dowling & Perm-Ajchariyawong, 2008; Wedlin, 2011).

We find that ranked schools tend to discuss ethics-related debates more in core courses (on average 10.08 courses per school), compared to non-ranked institutions (on average 7.38 courses per school), although these differences are slightly above the significance threshold ($p = 0.056$). Differences between ranked and non-ranked institutions are even more evident when comparing elective course offerings (on average 10.87 courses per non-ranked school vs. 31.10 courses per ranked school, $p < 0.01$; see Table 1). These results point out that ranked schools are driving the infusion of ethics-related content into their portfolio of electives. As ranked schools increasingly offer a wide range of electives,

in part due to competitive pressures but also to provide students with additional flexibility and value-for-money, they create more opportunities to discuss ethics. Moreover, it is possible that ranked schools have access to greater financial and intangible (e.g. reputational) resources making the integration of ethics into a larger number of courses (including the recruitment of qualified personnel) easier.

Our results also show that ranked schools have a lower number of standalone courses discussing relevant topics (see Table 2). In other words, ranked schools seem to prefer an integrative approach towards ethics education by putting more emphasis on infusing ethics into selected disciplines than isolating debates in standalone courses. These findings can also be interpreted as a response by ranked business schools to student preferences. Recent research by the European Foundation of Management Development (EFMD) among prospective MBA students highlights that “students consistently report that these subjects [ethics-related topics] are of interest, but not as standalone items, instead they should be embedded throughout the MBA.” (EFMD, 2012: 5). Looking at the distribution of relevant courses across disciplines, there are only small differences between ranked and non-ranked schools. In particular, ranked schools put more emphasis on debating ethics within strategy courses. Overall, our results confirm the findings by Evans et al. (2006) who observed a slight influence of schools’ position in the *BusinessWeek* ranking on inclusion of ethics into the MBA curriculum.

The Influence of Program Duration

We coded schools with MBA programs of up to 18 months as “short programs” (n=55), while we classified schools with programs lasting longer than 18 months as “long programs” (n=83). Program duration was measured through self-reported data from participating schools regarding the average time it takes a student to finish a full-time, on-site MBA. Additionally, we double-checked the data with information provided on the websites of business schools and contacted institutions directly in case there was need for clarification. We achieved non-ambiguous information on program duration for all but one school. This institution was excluded from the following analysis (n=138).

Our results indicate that schools with short programs offer almost the same amount of core courses with ethical content (on average 8.11 courses per school) than schools with longer programs (on average 8.71 courses per school; see Table 1). In other words, program duration does not influence the number of mandatory courses discussing ethics-related topics. The availability of mandatory courses with ethics content is less dependent on the time that is available for educating the students and more dependent on a general willingness of the school to offer and integrate such courses into the curriculum.

Looking at the number of elective courses it is not surprising to find that schools with shorter programs offer by far less courses discussing ethics-related issues (on average 10.24 courses per school) than schools with longer programs (on average 24.31 courses per school, $p < 0.01$; see Table 2). These results confirm the findings by Evans et al. (2006) who suggested a positive relationship between program size and the availability of elective courses. However, our results also show that schools with shorter programs put slightly more emphasis on teaching ethics in dedicated standalone courses than trying to infuse

relevant debates into other disciplines (see Table 2). This suggests that standalone courses have turned into an accepted phenomenon and that even those schools offering shorter MBA programs cannot afford to exclude such courses. Considering that potential students increasingly prefer an integrated approach towards ethics education (EFMD, 2012), it will be interesting to see whether shorter programs will move more towards an integrated approach.

When considering the role of different disciplines, it is noteworthy that longer programs contain a much higher rate of management courses discussing ethics-related topics (see Table 2). We believe that this could be explained by the rather broad nature of management as a discipline (Mintzberg, 2004). Longer programs are likely to differentiate general management into a variety of different course offerings (e.g., leadership and change management) creating additional opportunities for the discussion of ethics.

The Influence of Participation in the PRME

Currently, 414 business schools worldwide participate in the PRME initiative (as of January 2012). Out of the 139 schools participating in the 2009 BGP survey, 62 had signed up to the PRME (coded as “PRME schools”), while the remaining 77 schools had not signed the principles (coded as “non-PRME schools”). Our analysis shows that PRME schools tend to place ethics-related debates more into core courses (on average 9.82 courses per school) when compared to institutions that did not sign up to this initiative (on average 7.27 courses per school). These results are significant ($p < 0.05$). There are no differences when looking at elective course offerings (see Table 1). PRME signatories seem to have

almost the same amount of elective courses with ethics content than schools that do not participate. However, our findings suggest that PRME participants put slightly more emphasis on teaching ethics through standalone courses, while having less courses with relevant content in the general management area (see Table 2). These results indicate that PRME supporters seem to favor a more explicit approach towards ethics education – i.e. an approach that gives a high visibility to debating ethical issues in standalone courses. As most PRME participants understand themselves as leading institutions in the context of ethics education (Rasche & Escudero, 2010), the adoption of a more visible approach is understandable.

However, we should not easily rush into conclusions when distinguishing between PRME participants and non-participating schools. First, the PRME initiative was launched in 2007. Hence, our results, which are based on a 2009 survey, are unlikely to be directly related to schools' active *participation* in the PRME. Rather our findings show that there is a self-selection mechanism among participants (i.e. those schools giving a high visibility to ethics education are more likely to join the PRME). Second, the PRME reflect a framework for continuous improvement and not a compliance-based mechanism (Waddock et al., 2010). In this sense, participation in the initiative aims at creating long-term changes regarding ethics education and thus calls for longitudinal impact assessments.

DISCUSSION

Ethics Education in the MBA: What Makes a Difference?

Our results indicate that geographic location, a school's ranking, program duration, and participation in the PRME affect ethics education in the context of the MBA. It is noteworthy that these drivers largely impact the availability of core/elective courses (e.g., with North American and ranked schools offering more electives) as well as the importance of delivering relevant topics through standalone courses (e.g., with European and non-ranked schools putting more emphasis on standalone courses). These differences in how schools approach ethics education do not allow for drawing conclusions regarding the effectiveness and impact of their actual teaching. It remains subject to ongoing debate and further research whether ethics-related topics are "better" delivered through core/elective and standalone/integrated courses (Windsor, 2004), with some scholars arguing that these distinctions represent unnecessary dichotomies (Swanson & Fisher, 2008).

Interestingly, our results also show that ethics education in MBA programs is homogeneous *in some respects*. While the four discussed "drivers" of ethics education lead to differences regarding the availability of core/elective courses as well as schools' emphasis on standalone courses, our findings only reveal few differences when it comes to the integration of ethics into selected disciplines. In other words, the analyzed drivers do not seem to impact very much the disciplinary integration of ethics education, as schools follow by and large similar integration patterns (with a few exceptions discussed above). This lack of influence shows that whereas the discussed drivers affect the *general availability* of ethics education (reflected by the number of core/elective courses) and also the attention to standalone courses, they do not impact the integration of ethics content into various disciplines. This implies that schools have rather high degrees of autonomy when

thinking about how to integrate ethics into their MBA programs. It may also be possible that discipline-specific integration is more driven by mimetic isomorphism among institutions (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), than any of the four drivers discussed in this article. Clearly, this reflects an interesting question for future research and theorization.

Our data also suggests that prestige reflected by a school's ranking status seems to be a driver of ethics education, as FT-ranked schools offered significantly more courses than non-ranked institutions. Again, this does not say anything about the *quality* of education at these institutions. However, it shows that institutions, which have a reputation to protect and are regularly examined by external audiences (e.g., the media), tend to invest more resources into ethics education. As emphasized by resource dependence theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), organizations with high levels of prestige also face higher legitimacy expectations. This finding is consistent with research stressing the effect of media rankings on schools' behavior. Espeland and Sauder (2007), for instance, find that schools change their policies and practices in response to being evaluated and observed (see also Wedlin, 2007). This points towards an interesting insight: ethics education may be partly shaped by self-reinforcing practices. Ranked schools may "invest" more in ethics education because their higher visibility creates additional pressure to legitimize the MBA offering. This, in turn, positions these schools as leaders regarding ethics education calling for further attention and investments. In this sense, the effects of rankings can harden over time putting more pressure on ranked schools to embed relevant debates.

If external pressures like rankings impact ethics education, it is necessary to critically reflect the role of accreditation agencies and the PRME. While we could not analyze the

effects of business school accreditation on the availability of ethics education (as accreditation was a prerequisite to participate in the BGP survey), it is also clear that accreditation agencies as well as the PRME could potentially act as other sources of external pressure. However, the impact of accreditation agencies remains weak to date (Swanson, 2005). Although all three major agencies (i.e. AACSB, EFMD and AMBA) encourage schools to pay attention to ethics-related content, they do not outline any specific requirements. The resulting flexibility unnecessarily reduces the impact of accreditation as a driver of ethics education in MBA programs (see also the discussion by Swanson & Fisher, 2008).

Although our results indicate that PRME participants emphasize the importance of standalone courses, we cannot measure the effect of participation in the initiative (see above). However, the impact of the PRME may be limited in similar ways than the impact of accreditation agencies. The PRME do not specify any criteria for ethics education (Rasche & Escudero, 2010). Rather the initiative promotes a general framework for improving the integration of ethics-related topics into the curriculum. While the PRME and also related initiatives, e.g., the Globally Responsible Leadership Initiative (GRLI), are likely to influence attention to ethics education, we argue that a clear institutional standard outlining more precise guidance on how to approach ethics education within the MBA may be necessary and timely.

Our finding that schools with longer programs offer significantly more elective courses with ethics content points to an interesting discussion. Ethics education in MBA programs seems to be driven by the availability of “space” in the curriculum. Longer

programs tend to use their additional time to infuse ethics into elective discipline-specific courses. While shorter programs offer more standalone courses (because content can be squeezed into a single course), longer programs seem to use the additional time to spread ethics content into various disciplines via elective offerings. This finding reflects that credit hours in MBA programs are a scarce resource and that faculty needs to vie for space in the curriculum. As ethics education often lacks broader faculty support or also faces open resistance (Beggs & Dean, 2007), true integration into other disciplines will be difficult to achieve when programs are very short and competitive pressures for space high.

Strengths and Limitations of the Research

Our analysis relies on the data underlying the BGP survey of full-time and in-person MBA programs. This reflects both a strength and limitation of the study. On the one hand, the data makes ethics education in MBA programs comparable along a variety of dimensions (e.g., addressed disciplines and core/elective nature of courses) and includes data from a significant number of institutions (3752 courses from 139 schools). Due to the wide scope of the data, our analysis supplements those discussions of ethics education in MBA programs analyzing standalone courses at US-based and top-ranked institutions (Evans et al., 2006; Navarro, 2008; Litzky & MacLean, 2011). Further, the detailed evaluation of the data by the Aspen Institute enhances its reliability (see our remarks above). On the other hand, the self-reported nature of the data also limits its reliability and makes social desirability effects likely. The data is also limited to North American and European schools. Therefore we cannot claim to provide a comprehensive analysis of

drivers throughout all regions of the world. Last but not least, it is important to stress that we have taken a quantitative perspective on ethics education. This means we cannot provide information about the *quality* of delivered content, interesting as it may be.

CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

This paper contributes to the debate around what drives ethics education in MBA programs. While there is a rich conceptual debate around the contours of ethics education in business schools in general, we know relatively little about what shapes schools' attention to and implementation of ethics-related debates in the context of the MBA curriculum. We conclude that the mere availability of standalone courses as well as the core/elective status of courses is influenced by schools' geographic location, ranking, and the length of the MBA program. While no definite conclusions regarding the impact of the PRME can be reached at this stage, our analysis demonstrates weak effects regarding the availability of core and standalone courses within schools participating in the initiative. We also conclude that the four analyzed "drivers" do not significantly influence in which disciplines ethics-related content is integrated.

We see several ways in which future research can extend our discussion. First, little is known about the effects of accreditation systems on ethics education (for a recent exception see Wu et al., 2010). Given that the role of accreditation agencies in general, and the AACSB in particular, remains contested (Swanson & Fisher, 2011), there is need to analyze whether and in what ways these institutions drive ethics education. While we have proposed that the impact of accreditation agencies is expected to be low, it is also clear that

accreditation systems differ regarding their exact requirements. For instance, although EFMD does not require a compulsory course on ethics-related topics, schools have to report on a variety of dimensions influencing the delivery of ethics education (e.g., ways in which ethics is included into student development; EFMD, 2012). In this sense, it is not only interesting to research the general effect of accreditation on ethics education, but to also assess whether there are differences in impact when comparing different accreditation systems.

Second, there is need to supplement our quantitative results with qualitative data. For instance, little is known about how schools from North America and Europe approach ethics education. While this study has pointed to some differences, it would be interesting to explore how different academic traditions, promotion and reward systems, and also national cultures affect the inclusion of ethics-related courses into the MBA. These topics can be explored very well through in-depth interviews, case studies, and also observations. Beggs and Dean (2007), for instance, adopt a phenomenological approach to discuss faculty views on ethics education. The resulting rich descriptions of faculty attitudes help to better understand what drives and impedes the integration of ethics-related courses into the curriculum. We believe that such qualitative assessments can help to make sense of some of the observed differences introduced in this article (e.g., the effect of rankings).

Last but not least, we encourage researchers to also discuss “internal” drivers of ethics education. Our study has adopted a macro-perspective discussing the effects of schools’ geographic and institutional environment. Although our discussion of program duration shows that school-specific features influence attention to ethics, we have not

analyzed the role of school's internal environment. Evans et al. (2006), for instance, find that schools with bigger marketing and management departments devote more attention to ethics education (see also Nicholson & DeMoss, 2009 for similar results). However, the role of internal politics and power relations remains unexplored. For instance, it would be interesting to study whether many faculty members really have an inherent bias against ethics education due to their academic training, as it is sometimes claimed in the literature (see e.g., Swanson & Frederick, 2005). Further, we lack knowledge about whether and how senior management (especially deans) influences the inclusion of ethics into the MBA. Again, qualitative data can be valuable in this context, as it helps to explore the full continuum of attitudes towards including ethics-related topics into the curriculum.

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TABLE 1
Differences in the Number of Core/Elective Courses per School

Average number of courses per school								
Discipline	Region		Ranking status		Program duration		PRME	
	North America	Europe	FT Global Top 100	Non FT ranked	Short program	Longer program	PRME	Non PRME
Core courses	8.54	9.00	10.08	*7.38	8.11	8.71	9.82	*7.27
Elective courses	22.42	**10.68	31.10	**10.87	10.24	**24.31	18.91	18.18

Differences between Non-PRME schools (reference group) and PRME schools significant at *p<0.05, resp. ** p<0.01 according to Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney test

TABLE 2
Comparative Analysis North America vs. Europe

Discipline	Importance of discipline in %							
	Geographic location		Ranking status		Program duration		PRME participation	
	North America (n=99)	Europe (n=25)	Non FT Top 100 (n=86)	FT Top 100 (n=53)	Short programs (n=55)	Long programs (n=83)	Non-PRME (n=77)	PRME (n=62)
Standalone Courses	10.3%	**15.2%	14.3%	**9.2%	13.4%	**10.6%	10.5%	*12.3%
Accounting	8.0%	6.1%	8.3%	*6.9%	6.4%	**7.8%	8.1%	*6.7%
Business and Government	1.6%	1.2%	1.2%	**1.9%	1.2%	**1.8%	1.9%	1.3%
Business Law	3.2%	2.4%	3.2%	2.8%	2.9%	3.0%	2.8%	3.1%
Economics	5.4%	7.1%	5.4%	5.8%	6.7%	**5.2%	6.1%	5.0%
Entrepreneurship	5.9%	6.9%	4.9%	**6.8%	5.1%	**6.4%	6.3%	5.7%
Finance	9.9%	8.3%	8.9%	10.0%	8.6%	*9.9%	9.4%	9.7%
Human Resource Management	2.6%	**7.5%	3.4%	3.4%	5.7%	**2.6%	2.9%	**4.0%
Information Technology and Systems (MIS/IT)	3.0%	2.2%	4.1%	**2.0%	3.7%	**2.6%	2.4%	**3.5%
International Management	6.5%	*3.9%	5.1%	**6.8%	4.2%	**6.8%	5.5%	*6.8%
Management	13.8%	**8.1%	14.0%	12.6%	9.9%	**14.3%	14.8%	**11.3%
Marketing	9.5%	7.5%	9.5%	9.0%	9.8%	9.0%	9.9%	*8.5%
Organizational Behavior	5.3%	4.5%	4.7%	*5.7%	5.1%	5.4%	4.7%	*5.9%
Production and Operations Management	4.4%	5.1%	3.9%	4.7%	4.9%	4.2%	4.7%	4.0%
Public and Non-profit Management	3.1%	2.2%	2.5%	*3.2%	3.1%	2.8%	2.5%	*3.4%
Quantitative Methods	1.3%	1.4%	1.5%	1.2%	1.0%	*1.5%	1.2%	1.6%
Strategy	6.1%	**10.2%	5.0%	**8.0%	8.4%	**6.2%	6.3%	7.4%
Total	100.00%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The importance of the disciplines is obtained by dividing the number of courses (core and elective courses) offered by each discipline by the total number of courses offered by all disciplines. Consequently the comparison between the left column (reference group) and right column was calculated using a binomial test (significance level is *p<0.05, resp. ** p<0.01).