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# Ethical beliefs of hospitality and tourism students towards their school life

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## Keywords

Ethics, Beliefs, Hospitality, Tourism, Students, Curriculum

## Abstract

This study aims to find out the ethical beliefs of hospitality and tourism students in Hong Kong by using a questionnaire with 21 ethical statements. From the 402 valid questionnaires received, four major dimensions were identified by factor analysis. The highest level of tolerance, or in other words, the lowest ethical standard, was found towards "violations of school rules", followed by "plagiarism and copying assignments". "Unfair advantage" was ranked third whilst "selfishness" has the lowest level of tolerance (highest ethical standard). Independent *t*-test and ANOVA analysis reveal that types of school attended, gender and level of program have various degrees of influence, while religious background and age show no indication of significant impact. In view of the limited resources and teaching hours available, it is recommended that priority should be given to the teaching of "business ethics" as it impacts on students' moral development and future career in the industry.

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## Introduction

During the last decade, there was evidence of decline in moral standards among university students. In a study by Casado *et al.* (1994), it was reported that 12 to 24 per cent of student résumés contain false information and there is an increasing willingness on the part of students to lie on financial-aid forms. It has therefore become the responsibility of educators to ensure that when students graduate, they possess a strong ethical belief and the ability to handle ethical problems. It is believed that both faculty and staff should engage proactively in student ethical development (Mathiasen, 1998). As a result, many educators support the integration of ethics teaching by offering courses in ethics and require students to take them (Vallen and Casado, 2000).

However, Enghagen (1990a) reported that although many articles are written on business ethics, very few of them concerned the teaching of ethics in hospitality and tourism studies. It is indicated that only 4 per cent of hospitality and tourism programs in the USA offer ethics as a separate course.

It should be noted that given the unique characteristics of the hospitality and tourism industry, it has a closer link with ethical issues than any other industries. It is argued (Stevens and Fleckenstein, 1999) that the ethical ambiguity mostly arises from the fact that employees and customers are from different backgrounds, which implies that people under these social contexts can carry diverse expectations and ethical standards. This may lead to problems of harassment, racism and even theft cases. By its very nature, the industry invariably places its employees and guests in morally ambiguous situations. Furthermore, at the heart of the ethical question in management, it is

necessary that managers should be moral about the distribution of benefits and be aware of the potential harm caused by their decisions and actions (Hosmer, 1994). Therefore, Allen (1992) comments that educators are now struggling to teach their students to avoid immoral practices by incorporating ethics into their curricula. It is believed that if students develop the habit of considering the ethical implications of decisions in their business subjects, then they are more likely to transfer this awareness to their future career (Oddo, 1997). On the other hand, students also support the teaching of ethics as they perceive quite strongly that it is worthwhile and important (Shannon and Berl, 1997).

In view of this, as a first step towards addressing the need for ethics as a subject for hospitality and tourism programs, it is important to understand the students' ethical belief system and the relationship between the system and their personal characteristics. The researchers felt that by identifying areas where their ethical beliefs are relatively stronger or weaker, educators can further approach the issue by determining strategies and developing appropriate curricula.

However, in the process of identifying students' ethical standard, biases would be likely to occur if students without prior work experience were being asked about their perceptions of hypothetical issues related to work ethics. Therefore, as a valid way to reflect their ethical beliefs, the study focuses on investigating their perceptions on authentic issues that relate directly to their daily life in schools.

Thus, this study primarily aims to understand the hospitality and tourism students' ethical orientation on various ethical issues related to their daily life in school, and second, to investigate if there are any statistical differences between the perception and their personal characteristics. Finally, recommendations



International Journal of  
Contemporary Hospitality  
Management  
14/4 [2002] 183-192

© MCB UP Limited  
[ISSN 0959-6119]  
[DOI 10.1108/09596110210427030]

The current issue and full text archive of this journal is available at  
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will be presented to educators to formulate strategies to teach ethics in hospitality and tourism programs.

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## Review of literature

### What is ethics?

It is always difficult to give definitions of ethics. Mackinnon (1995) states that the main objective of ethics is to help someone decide what is good or bad, better or worse, either in some general way or regarding particular ethical issues. Velasquez (1998) describes ethics as an activity of examining one's moral standards or the moral standards of a society. It asks questions such as how these standards apply to our lives and whether these standards are reasonable or unreasonable. On the other hand, Pojman (1995) refers to ethics as the whole domain of morality and moral philosophy since they have many features in common such as values, virtues, principles and practices.

There are various major ethical theories. The teleological theory says that the basic standard of what is morally right, wrong or obligatory depends on the comparative amount of good produced, or the comparative balance of good over evil produced. However, the deontological theories assert that there are certain features of the act itself other than the values it brings into existence that may make an action or rule right or obligatory (Frankena, 1973). In addition, the ethical universalism or utilitarianism views that an act or rule of action is right if and only if it is conducive to at least as great a balance of good over evil in the universe as a whole as any alternative would be. The utilitarian argues that the rightness of a particular action is measured by whether it tends to produce the greatest good for the greatest number (Mill, 1986).

### Ethical studies

Moral ideals are referred to as a body of standards that a society sets for its members and wishes to transmit to its young people. These standards are embodied in the institutions, traditions, and precepts of the society. Moral principles as a set of rules or acts that predetermine conduct are the essential subject and content of moral education. Thus, moral education aims at morally socializing the individual to act in certain ways that are consistent with the norms of the society (Chazan, 1985).

However, there are different meanings of "teaching" ethics depending on one's definition of teaching. According to the *Webster's Third New International*

*Dictionary*, to teach can be defined as to cause to know a subject, e.g. to teach someone to know ethical theories. But teaching ethics can also mean to cause to know how to do something, e.g. to analyze the benefits and harms brought by some decisions or actions. By taking this perspective, teaching ethics can be interpreted as an outcome whereby the conduct of the students is based on what is good or bad, right or wrong, or a moral duty and obligation (Enghagen, 1990b). It is felt that in the teaching of hospitality ethics, the second interpretation of teaching, which is to cause the students to know how to do something, is more appropriate in this study. Focus should be placed on motivating students to conduct themselves in an ethical manner in their future career in the hospitality and tourism industry.

### Factors affecting moral and ethical development

Many studies have reported that an individual moral development is based on factors such as age, gender and experience and that the moral development progresses through stages starting in early childhood and ending in adolescence (Liebvert, 1984, cited in Freedman and Bartholomew, 1991; Colby and Kohlberg, 1984; Velasquez, 1998). Gilligan (1982) also notes that the moral development of females is of a higher level than the males'. A similar study by Freedman and Bartholomew (1991) also concluded that male hospitality management students have significantly lower personal business ethics score (PBES) and social responsibility score (SRS) than their female counterparts. In terms of age, studies also support that respondents of elder groups usually demonstrate a higher level of ethical standard (Ruegger and King, 1992; Malinowski and Berger, 1996). These findings suggest that a higher level of moral maturity may be a function of age and gender.

On the other hand, the influence of religion on ethics is somewhat arguable. Many studies point out that the ethical behavior and attitudes of evangelical students should be higher than those who are not (Steinfels, 1993; Kennedy and Lawton, 1996; Driks, 1998). However, other studies pinpoint that there is an inverse relationship between conservatism Christianity and moral reasoning (Lawrence, 1978; Wahrman, 1981).

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## Methodology

This survey was conducted with students of three major institutes in Hong Kong that

offer hospitality and tourism programs. They are:

- 1 the Department of Hotel and Tourism Management of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University;
- 2 the Department of Hotel, Catering and Tourism Studies of the Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education (HKIVE) – Chaiwan; and
- 3 the Department of Hotel, Services and Tourism Studies of the HKIVE – Haking Wong.

The first institute, which offers both degree and higher diploma programs, has approximately 600 full-time students while the latter two offer mainly higher diploma, diploma and certificate programs and have approximately 480 and 450 full-time students respectively.

The design of the questionnaire is based on an instrument used in a past study by Wong *et al.* (1999), who conducted a similar survey with degree students of an institute in Hong Kong. Their original questionnaire was constructed by interviewing 13 students and asking them in what areas they frequently encounter ethical challenges in the university. The answers given were later grouped together in a meaningful way by using the induction method. Finally, 24 ethical statements were developed under two main categories; “academic behavior” and “use of school services and facilities”. However, to ensure validity and reliability of the questionnaire in this study, a pilot test for the adopted questionnaire was carried out with 30 students of the three institutes and three items that could not commonly apply across the three institutes were deleted. These statements include:

- 1 “disclosing the department’s computer center’s code to other department students”;
- 2 “in the library, photocopying more than ten pieces of materials in the express photocopying machine, which is not allowed”; and
- 3 “in the computer center, modifying documents in the computer that is set for printing only”.

The final questionnaire is divided into two parts. The first section has a total of 21 statements related to students’ perception on ethical issues in relation to their school life. A five-point scale is adopted from the consumer ethics scale developed by Muncy and Vitell (1992) with “1” equal to “strongly believe that the statement is wrong” and “5” equal to “strongly believe that the statement is not wrong”. The second section asks questions related to personal characteristics

of the respondents including institute attended, gender, age, program level and religion.

A convenience sampling was adopted in this study; 250 questionnaires were provided to each HKIVE (Chaiwan and Haking Wong) in June 2000 through the assistance of their lecturers. Another 250 questionnaires were distributed to the students of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University in October 2000, also through the assistance of the lecturers.

Initial analysis of the collected data included summary of means and standard deviation for the demographic profiles of the respondents and the 21 statements. Factor analysis was adopted in order to define a set of common underlying dimensions among the 21 statements. Finally, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) and tests of significant differences (*t*-test) at the  $p < 0.05$  level of significance were used to determine if there were differences in the responses of the hospitality and tourism students in relation to the various personal characteristics.

## Results

### Respondents’ profile

A total of 402 questionnaires were received, representing a response rate of 53.5 per cent. Out of these 402 questionnaires, 216 were returned from The Hong Kong Polytechnic University while 105 and 81 were received from HKIVE – Chaiwan, and HKIVE – Haking Wong respectively. Table I shows the characteristics of the respondents. Female students make up the majority of the student population (78.3 per cent) while only 21.7 per cent are male. More than half of the respondents (53.7 per cent) are studying the degree program, while sub-degree (including certificate, diploma and higher diploma programs) students account for 46.3 per cent. About 72 per cent of the respondents are above the age of 21 and 27.9 per cent are below that age. Approximately 71 per cent of the respondents do not have any religious background while 28.4 per cent have religions, such as Christians, Catholics and Buddhists.

### Mean scores and standard deviations of all statements

As Table II indicates, the two statements that received the lowest mean scores are “give false tips to classmates before tests” (1.55) and “refuse to lend lecture notes to classmates who are absent” (1.72). At the same time, the two statements having the highest mean scores are “photocopy a copyright book without permission” (3.19) and “occupy seats

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14/4 [2002] 183–192

for friends in library” (3.02). In this study, it should be reiterated that the lower the mean score, the lower the degree of tolerance towards the statement or, in other words, the stronger the ethical belief towards the statement.

### Factor analysis

As shown in Table III, the study used factor analysis to reduce the 21 statements into a set

of underlying dimensions or factors that portray the perception of the hospitality and tourism students towards the ethical issues in their school life. In addition, for the purpose of quality control of the factors, the data were first tested by Bartlett’s test of sphericity, a statistical test for the overall significance of all correlations within a correlation matrix. The result of the Bartlett’s test was 3,201 (sufficiently high) with a significance level of 0.00. This indicated that factor analysis could be performed to further analyze the data. The final test conducted was the test of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin of measure of sampling adequacy (KMO). Hair (1995) claims that the data are valid if the value of KMO is greater than 0.5. Since the value of KMO of the data in this study equals to 0.886, it further affirms that factor analysis is appropriate.

According to Hair *et al.* (1995), only those factors with eigenvalues or latent roots greater than 1 are considered significant; all factors with the value less than 1 will be considered insignificant and should be disregarded. The rationale for this is that any individual factor should account for the variance of at least a single statement if it is retained for interpretation. With the factor analysis using principal component with varimax rotation, the eigenvalues of the four factors in this data, as indicated in Table III,

**Table I**

Profile of respondents ( $n = 402$ )

Personal characteristics	Valid percentage
<b>Institutions</b>	
Hong Kong Polytechnic University	53.8
Institute of Vocational Education – Chaiwan	26.1
Institute of Vocational Education – Haking Wong	20.1
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	21.7
Female	78.3
<b>Program</b>	
Sub-degree (certificate, diploma and higher diploma)	46.3
Degree	53.7
<b>Age group</b>	
Below 21	72.1
Above 21	27.9
<b>Religion</b>	
Have religion (Catholic, Christian, Buddhism etc.)	28.4
Have no religion	71.6

**Table II**

Mean scores and standard deviation of statements ( $n = 402$ )

Statements	Mean score	SD
1 Obtain useful tips for tests from teachers but refuse to share	2.15	1.06
2 Refuse to share subject’s reference books	2.07	1.28
3 Refuse to lend lecture notes to classmates who are absent	1.72	1.01
4 Give false tips to classmates before tests	1.55 <sup>a</sup>	0.99
5 Obtain past test papers from previous years’ students but refuse to share	1.95	0.96
6 Do not write down notes but borrow from others	2.58	1.12
7 Try to get better relation with teachers in order to obtain advantages	2.21	1.12
8 Give marks to group member by factors such as friendship	2.09	1.02
9 Do not put full efforts in group projects	1.96	1.40
10 Break glasses in F&B lessons and do not report	2.07	1.08
11 Photocopy a copyright book without permission	3.19 <sup>b</sup>	1.08
12 Copy other classmates’ ideas in homework	2.41	1.04
13 Copy previous year’s students’ homework	2.52	1.06
14 Copy from books and pretend that it is your own idea	2.37	1.03
15 In library, put certain useful books in secret corners to prevent others from borrowing	2.03	1.08
16 Give student ID cards to outsiders to use library facilities	2.57	1.12
17 Occupy seats for friends in library	3.02	1.05
18 Reserve school facilities but do not show up	2.35	1.00
19 Pretend to be sick in school clinic, intend to obtain medicine for others	2.37	2.31
20 Give student ID cards to outsiders to use school sports facilities	2.51	1.13
21 Occupy seats for friends in computer center	2.89	1.09
Overall mean	2.31	0.62

**Notes:** Mean value of 1=“Strongly believe that the statement is wrong”; Mean value of 5=“Strongly believe that the statement is not wrong”; <sup>a</sup> Statement with the lowest mean score; <sup>b</sup> Statement with the highest mean score

are all greater than 1 and they together explain 52.23 per cent of the cumulative variance. However, two statements are deleted because their factor loadings are less than 0.5 and another four statements are also deleted after the internal alpha reliability test (please see remarks below Table III).

**Factor 1: violation of school rules**

The first factor identified is named “violation of school rules” as the four statements included in this dimension are all related to the breaching of rules and regulations set forth by the school authority. There are clear policies that students’ identity cards are the property of the school authorities and should not be given to and used by other people except the student him/herself. There are also regulations that one cannot occupy seats for others in either the library or computer center. A factor mean of 2.75, which is the

highest mean among the four factors, suggests that the students showed the highest tolerance i.e. the lowest ethical standards, towards this category. The students perceived the four statements below from “wrong” to “not sure if they are wrong”:

- 1 “give students’ identity cards to outsiders to use school sports facilities” (2.51);
- 2 “give students’ identity cards to outsiders to use library facilities” (2.57);
- 3 “occupy seats for friends in computer center” (2.89); and
- 4 “occupy seats for friends in library” (3.02);

**Factor 2: plagiarism and copying assignments**

The second factor includes three statements, namely:

- 1 “copying other classmates’ ideas in homework”(2.41);

**Table III**

Results of factor analysis

Factor names and statements	Statement mean	SD	Factor loading	Factor mean	Cronbach's alpha	
<b>Factor 1: violation of school rules</b>				2.75	0.83	
Occupy seats for friends in computer center	2.89	1.09	0.79			
Occupy seats for friends in library	3.02	1.04	0.78			
Give student ID card to outsiders to use library facilities	2.57	1.12	0.74			
Give student ID card to outsiders to use school sport facilities	2.51	2.51	0.74			
<b>Factor 2: plagiarism and copying assignments</b>				2.43	0.84	
Copy other classmates’ ideas in homework	2.41	1.04	0.81			
Copy former student’s homework	2.52	1.06	0.81			
Copy from books and pretend it as own ideas	2.37	1.03	0.73			
<b>Factor 3: selfishness</b>				1.97	0.80	
Obtain past test papers from previous years’ student but refuse to share	1.95	0.96	0.78			
Obtain useful tips for tests from teachers but refuse to share	2.15	1.06	0.77			
Refuse to lend lecture notes to classmates who are absent	1.72	1.01	0.75			
Refuse to share subject’s reference books	2.07	1.28	0.74			
<b>Factor 4: unfair advantage</b>				2.21	0.65	
Do not put efforts in group project	1.96	1.41	0.73			
Give marks to group member by factors such as friendship	2.09	1.02	0.71			
Do not write down notes but borrow from others	2.58	1.12	0.50			
Try to get better relation with teachers in order to obtain advantages	2.21	1.13	0.58			
			<b>Overall mean</b>		<b>SD</b>	
<b>Overall of the 21 statements</b>			2.31		0.62	
			<b>Violation of school rules</b>	<b>Plagiarism and copying assignments</b>	<b>Selfishness</b>	<b>Unfair advantage</b>
<b>Eigenvalue</b>	2.99	2.97	2.86	2.16		
<b>Cumulative variance explained (per cent)</b>	14.23	28.40	41.97	52.23		

**Notes:** 1 Mean value of 1 = “Strongly believe that the statement is wrong”; Mean value of 5 = “Strongly believe that the statement is not wrong”. 2 Bartlett’s test of sphericity: 3,201; Significance level at 0.00; Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy: 0.886. 3 Four statements are deleted after conducting the internal alpha reliability test: Statements: “Pretend to be sick in school clinic and intend to obtain medicine for others” (factor loading = 0.82); “Reserve school facilities but do not show up ” (factor loading = 0.48); and “Give false tips to classmates before tests” (factor loading = 0.47) are originally loaded into factor 5 but are deleted because their alpha value is only 0.46 which is considered to be weak; Statement: “Photograph a copyright book without permission” (factor loading = 0.60) is originally loaded into factor 2, but is excluded afterwards because its presence decreases the alpha value from 0.84 to 0.81. 4 Two statements are deleted because their factor loadings are less than 0.5: “Break glasses in F&B lessons and do not report ” (factor loading = 0.46); “In the library, put certain useful books in secret corners to prevent others from borrowing ” (factor loading = 0.39)

- 2 “copying former students’ homework” (2.52); and
- 3 “copying from books and pretend that it is your own idea”(2.37).

It is given the name of “plagiarism and copying assignments” as the statements are related to the taking and copying of somebody else’s thoughts, ideas or work as one’s own without permission. They evolve around the issues of stealing and illegal adoption of other people’s intellectual properties. A factor mean of 2.43, being the third highest among the four factors, suggests that the students showed relatively high tolerance, implying that they did not consider such behavior shocking.

#### *Factor 3: selfishness*

Factor 3 comprises four statements:

- 1 “obtain past test papers from previous years’ students but refuse to share with others” (1.95);
- 2 “obtain useful tips for tests from teachers but refuse to share with others” (2.15)
- 3 “refuse to lend lecture notes to classmates who were absent from class” (1.72); and
- 4 “refuse to share subject’s reference books” (2.07).

It is found that the four statements directly reflect the thinking and interest in one’s own needs and welfare without the concern for others. Specifically, the statements raise the ethical issues between obtaining resources or information and the willingness to share them with others. Thus, the factor is labeled as “selfishness”. The factor mean of 1.97 is the lowest among the four factors, suggesting that students exhibit the least tolerance towards issues related to one’s selfishness. It is common in Hong Kong that collegiality among students is good and warm. For example, on occasions when one student is absent from school because of sickness or personal matters, their buddies or close friends in class will ask for an extra copy of handouts from the teachers.

#### *Factor 4: unfair advantage*

Factor 4 has been named “unfair advantage” in view of the fact that the four statements mainly concern the issues of being fair and unfair to oneself and others. The four statements include:

- 1 “do not put efforts in group project” (1.96);
- 2 “try to get better relation with teachers in order to obtain advantages” (2.21),
- 3 “do not write down notes but borrow from others” (2.58); and
- 4 “give marks to group members by factors such as friendship” (2.09).

The former three statements relate to obtaining advantages from others not in accordance with what is deserved, while the last one indicates a situation where favors are shown to others on an inequitable ground. With a comparatively low factor mean score of 2.21, it reflects a relatively higher level of ethical belief among the students towards the importance of upholding a fair academic assessment based on actual efforts put forward by individuals.

#### **Ranking of the four factors**

Table IV shows that the students have the lowest tolerance level, in ascending order, towards “selfishness” (1.97), “unfair advantage” (2.09), “plagiarism and copying assignments” (2.43) and lastly “violation of school rules” (2.75). Specifically, the students believe or strongly believe that it is ethically wrong to act selfishly against their fellow students and to obtain good academic results on unfair ground. On the other hand, they have a higher level of tolerance towards plagiarism, copying others’ works and abuse of school facilities, although they may not perceive them to be right in the first instance.

Upon reviewing the nature of the four factors, it is found that factor 1 (violation of school rule) and factor 2 (plagiarism and copying assignments) could be appropriately grouped and further renamed as “violation of external rules and regulations”. Similarly, factor 3 (selfishness) and factor 4 (unfair advantage) could be grouped under “violation of internal personal integrity”. From the ranking of the factor mean analysis, it is concluded that in general students have a lower degree of tolerance towards the violation of internal personal integrity than the violation of external rules and regulations. In addition, the collected data are further analyzed below to test if statistical differences are found among the various personal characteristics of the respondents.

#### **Personal characteristics**

##### *Institute attended*

As shown in Table V, a mixed result is found in regard to the relationship between the school attended by the students and the four factors. Two factors, namely “plagiarism and copying assignments” and “unfair advantage” do not show any statistical difference in regard to the type of school attended. However, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University students have a significantly higher level of tolerance towards “violation of school rules” than the students of the Institute of Vocational

**Table IV**  
Ranking of the factors

Ranking	Factors	Mean	Remarks
1	Selfishness	1.97	Lowest tolerance
2	Unfair advantage	2.21	
3	Plagiarism and copying assignments	2.43	
4	Violation of school rules	2.75	Highest tolerance

**Notes:** Mean value of 1=“Strongly believe that the statement is wrong”; Mean value of 5=“Strongly believe that the statement is not wrong”

Education – Haking Wong. Interestingly, students of Haking Wong show a significantly higher level of tolerance towards “selfishness” when compared with the university students.

#### *Male/female*

Female students have revealed a statistically higher level of tolerance towards “violation of school rules” and a statistically lower level of tolerance towards “selfishness” and “unfair advantage” than their male counterparts. The male students in this study portray the aggressive character described by Maccoby and Jacklin (1974). It also concurs with the description of William and Best (1990) that men are believed to be aggressive and achievement oriented while women are higher in affiliation and succorance. Because of these characteristics, cooperative behaviors such as “occupying seats for friends in library and computer center” are commonly found among the female students even though they still believe that it is wrong (factor mean = 2.80). On the other hand, due to the nature of being more competitive and aggressive, male students tend to focus on end results, disregarding the means being used. This result fairly corroborates the findings of various studies that the moral development of the female is generally of a higher level than the male (Gilligan, 1982; Freedman and Bartholomew, 1991; Ameen *et al.*, 1996).

#### *Degree/sub-degree*

A result which is similar to the type of institute attended is found in regard to the relationship between levels of programs and the four factors. No statistical difference was noted in “plagiarism and copying assignments” and “unfair advantage”. However, the degree students have a significantly higher level of tolerance towards “violation of school rules” than the sub-degree students, while the sub-degree students have a significantly higher level of tolerance towards “selfishness”. According to a graduate survey conducted by the Department of Hotel and Tourism Management of the Hong Kong Polytechnic

University, only 51.1 per cent and 52.1 per cent of the degree graduates joined the hospitality and catering industry for 1997 and 1999 respectively, while the percentages for higher diploma graduates take up 81 per cent and 71 per cent for the same years (Lam, 2000). (Due to the Asian economic crisis, the department offered a special one-year full time conversion course for the higher diploma graduates of 1998 to upgrade their qualification to degree level. Therefore, the percentage of higher diploma graduates joining the industry for that particular year only accounts for 32.6 per cent, with 55.4 per cent pursuing further study.) However, the relatively low percentages of degree students joining the relevant industries may reflect the ultimate difference in the career choice between the degree and higher diploma students. Since there is no previous study available, it is only postulated that the degree students tend not to respect the rules and regulations of the university because they perceive the university only as a stepping stone to a comparably good job in commercial enterprises or civil service.

#### *Variables having no impact on ethics*

Although the study of Ruegger and King (1992) found that students of age 22-30 have a significantly higher level of ethical standard than students under age 22, the demographic variable of age in this study was found to have no statistical influences on the perception of the students. Since the age of most students in this study falls between the narrow bracket of 18 to 22, it is not surprising that their perception towards the statements does not indicate any statistical differences. In addition, the result related to religious belief (e.g. Catholic, Christian, Buddhism etc.) provides the evidence that the religion of the students does not have significant impact on the students, especially in their moral and ethical development. Although this contradicts the findings of Steinfels (1993) Kennedy and Lawton (1996) and Driks (1998), who revealed that religious people are more ethical than non-religious ones, the result of this study may suggest that the

**Table V**  
Independent t-test and ANOVA analysis of personal characteristics

Variables	Valid no.	Violation of school rules	Plagiarism and copying assignments	Factor names (mean value)	Selfishness	Unfair advantage
<i>Institutes</i>						
HK PolyU	204	2.92	2.48		1.82	2.18
IVE – Chaiwan	105	2.71	2.41		1.93	2.19
IVE – Haking Wong	81	2.37	2.38		2.41	2.17
F value		10.69*	0.47		14.13*	0.31
Statistical difference (LSD ANOVA)		HK PolyU > Haking Wong	No significance difference		HK PolyU > Haking Wong	No significance difference
<i>Gender</i>						
Male	86	2.56	2.57		2.13	2.30
Female	311	2.80	2.38		1.93	2.03
Significance level (two-tailed t-test)		0.03*	0.09		0.05*	0.01*
Statistical difference		Female > male	No significant difference		Male > female	Male > female
<i>Level of study</i>						
Sub-degree	176	2.57	2.40		2.13	2.14
Degree	204	2.92	2.48		1.82	2.03
Significance level (two-tailed t-test)		0.00*	0.35		0.00*	0.25
Statistical difference		Degree > sub-degree	No significant difference		Sub-degree > degree	No significant difference
<i>Age</i>						
Age below 21	284	2.76	2.43		1.98	2.06
Age above 21	110	2.73	2.42		1.94	2.16
Significance level (two-tailed t-test)		0.75	0.92		0.67	0.34
Statistical difference		No significant difference	No significant difference		No significant difference	No significant difference
<i>Religion</i>						
Have religion	112	2.76	2.40		1.93	2.07
Have no religion	110	2.74	2.41		1.97	2.08
Significance level (two-tailed t-test)		0.89	0.90		0.61	0.934
Statistical difference		No significant difference	No significant difference		No significant difference	No significant difference

Notes: Mean value of 1 = "Strongly believe that the statement is wrong"; Mean value of 5 = "Strongly believe that the statement is not wrong"; \* denotes significance level < 0.05

impact of religion on young people of Hong Kong is not significant.

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### Discussion and conclusions

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The results of this study suggest that hospitality and tourism students in general possess a comparatively higher level of ethical standard when dealing with “internal personal integrity”. This is possibly attributed to the various prolonged influences from parents, high school as well as the Chinese philosophy of “Confucius”, which emphasizes “unselfishness” and “integrity”.

However, the relatively higher tolerance level of the students towards the “violation of external rules and regulations” has highlighted this as the major area for concern. Therefore, in view of the limited resources and teaching hours available, it is recommended that priority should be given to the teaching of “business ethics” with an emphasis on the compliance of external rules and regulations in hospitality and tourism contexts such as the government laws against employment discrimination, bribery and corruption. As Enghagen (1990a) states, teaching ethics in hospitality and tourism education is more akin to an applied discipline than philosophy. It can take the form of a stand-alone subject or be incorporated into individual subjects and teaching it should begin as early as possible. Both Hosmer (1988) and Krohn (1984) support that a business ethics course should be part of the required curriculum in any business program and be positioned in the first term. It is believed that if students develop the habit of considering the ethical implications of decisions in their business subjects, then there is high possibility that they will transfer this awareness to their future career (Oddo, 1997). Therefore, the aim of teaching business ethics is to promote positive ethical behavior of the students in their future profession. It is true that many departments in a hotel, including both front- and back-of-house, are easily exposed to ethical dilemmas such as the front office, housekeeping, sales and marketing, accounts and purchasing where the employees have ample opportunities to deal with guests and clients directly. As a result, discussions on numerous sensitive issues such as the use of imported labor, signing of contractual agreements, acceptance of bribes and gifts, the abuse of company products and services, vendor relationship and sexual harassment at work should be included. It is believed that teaching business ethics will help students

become more perceptive towards detecting ethical problems in their daily work in the hospitality and tourism industry.

Finally, since the male and female students are found to have lower ethical standards in different areas, attention and focuses should be targeted accordingly when formulating strategies and allocating resources. For the particular problem of plagiarism and copying assignment, which is found to be most common among all students, the importance of respecting individual intellectual property and its possible consequences have to be stressed early in their first year of study and reiterated continuously to ensure the students are ethically conscious about this issue.

This study has its limitations. A better balance of respondents of various personal characteristics such as institute attended, gender, age group and religion would help to increase the validity of the findings. Furthermore, since this study only involves students of Hong Kong, further research can be conducted with hospitality and tourism students of other places such as Singapore, peoples of Republic of China or Western countries to investigate if there are statistical differences among students of different backgrounds and cultures. Comparisons between hospitality and tourism students and students of other business disciplines can also be made to determine the relative importance in incorporating ethics into the programs. Last but not least, the findings of this study do provide the support for a need to incorporate the discussion of ethical issues with the hospitality and tourism students.

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