HOW DO VARSITIES ENSURE THEIR GRADUATES HAVE ETHICS?

Q: With the Enron and WorldCom scandals, you mentioned it is even more critical that accountants be trained in professional ethics. I agree. Yet ethics can be a rather tricky issue to handle. How do you think university education in Singapore has adjusted to suit market demands and to ensure that graduates possess integrity?

Teh Yu Qing

A: Within every accounting course, and in particular, auditing courses, accounting students examine the Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics that all professional accountants are required to adhere to. Situational analyses and real life cases are discussed in many accounting courses so that students understand the pervasiveness of ethical issues in all aspects of business. The Singapore Management University (SMU) has a compulsory course, Ethics and Social Responsibility, that equips accounting students with the tools and ethical processes by which business decisions are made when individuals or businesses are confronted with ethical and moral dilemmas, and how to evaluate them.

Whether we can effectively teach professional ethics to students is moot. Ethics and integrity are values that an accountant needs to accept and internalise so that when the situation entails, these values will guide him or her to make the right decision. At SMU, the accounting curriculum aims to expose its students to these issues so that they will understand the importance and the implications of ethical (or unethical) behaviour. Our aim is to inculcate the values of ethics and integrity in our graduates as they enter the workforce.

Professor Pang Yang Hoong

Featured in our previous Dean’s List column on Jan 8, Associate Professor Pang Yang Hoong is dean of the School of Accountancy at the Singapore Management University. She is our expert of the week. Email us at succeed@newstoday.com.sg