

A CASE STUDY: MORAL AND ETHICAL DECISIONS SOME DOCTORAL
STUDENTS FACE PURSUING DEGREES FROM ACCREDITED,
FOR-PROFIT UNIVERSITIES

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the EDUC 980 Course

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this case study is to identify issues some doctoral students face in obtaining their Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree from accredited for-profit colleges and universities. The three participants attended for-profit universities in the past five years and failed to obtain their doctoral degrees. Data collection is through an initial demographics survey, qualification survey, vignettes, and the interview itself. Data analysis from the *Coding Manual for Qualitative Research* by Johnny Saldana is used to analyze the data collected from problems doctoral students encounter in pursuit of their doctoral degree (Saldana, 2013). The theoretical foundations for this project come from Kohlberg's Three Stages of Moral Development, in which the last stage focuses on the evaluation of the individual's society (Crane, 1985). This research serves as information for administrators and curriculum designers for doctoral programs for accredited public, private, for-profit and nonprofit, traditional and nontraditional colleges and universities offering doctoral programs. According to the results, non-traditional students find themselves having to make moral and ethical value judgments based on Kohlberg's Moral Stages of Development in pursuit of their PhD doctoral degrees. Based on the evaluation of data, the method of accrediting agencies evaluating higher education must be revamped in order to meet the rising needs of the student today, and these revisions are not limited to the federally funded aid offered to students but to the academic criteria involved in evaluating student success through the degree process as well as in the final stages of the doctoral process.

Keywords: ethics, moral, Moral Law, business ethics, accredited colleges and universities, non-accredited colleges and universities, for-profit colleges and universities, not-for-profit colleges and universities, traditional students, nontraditional students, Human Resources

Dedication

To God

and

My best friend and soul mate

Acknowledgements

*“I shall pass this way but once
 So any good I can do
 Or kindness I can show
 Let me do it know
 For I shall not pass this way again”*

These inspirational words to live by are attributed to Stephen Grellet, a Quaker missionary, who is believed to have written them around 1869. I first found these words in a cross-stitch wall hanging I made, and they have been my motto for many years.

Generally, I skip over the dedication, thinking the writer wanted to say something personal to the people named. The problem with picking and choosing an acknowledgment means running the risk of omitting someone. As it is now my turn to write something profound, I find I am truly at a loss for words. Looking back at the path this entire dissertation process took, I wonder who really is important and deserving mention. There is only one.

Writing on ethics, I began looking back realizing how far from center we have come as a society. We are no longer the nation that prides itself on “our word” or its importance. I see that young people today lack the realization and the importance and meaning of the words integrity, honesty, and respect. I see us, as teachers, parents, and leaders, let this generation down, taking instead the easy road. We chose, as this paper calls it, the lazy brain syndrome. We no longer try to stand to be the models our young people should emulate. Instead, we turn our heads as we watch the moral and ethical decay eroding the very fabric of our great nation. What have we lost? We have lost the respect of nations and of our generations of young people. We, instead, stand independent of the truths our forefathers tried to instill; the truths education is all about.

I understand now why it was important that I turn from my ten-plus years' study of adult learning and focus instead on the moral and ethical values we teach in our schools. This work stands as a tribute to those who tried to show me the important things in life: integrity, honesty, giving of oneself—the basis of those inspirational words written above. Most of all, I understand the love of God and honoring Him for my ability to complete this work with the help of those He sent in my path. Those of you He sent, you know who you are, I salute you with all my undying gratitude for answering His call.