A Business Dean Brings the Humanities Into Business Education

By: David Glenn

Undergraduate business programs sometimes struggle to make the humanities and social sciences meaningful for their students. At the institutions that *The Chronicle* visited for its series on business education this year, some students said they saw their general-education requirements in literature and philosophy as tedious exercises they had to slog through before they could begin their "real" courses in management and finance.

But some programs have tried to integrate the liberal arts more deeply into the undergraduate business curriculum itself, in part because of employers' concerns about business graduates' weak skills in writing and logic. One such institution is Bentley University, a business-oriented institution in Massachusetts. Bentley's "Philosophy of Work" course was praised in *Rethinking Undergraduate Business Education*, a volume released this summer by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. (That course's syllabus appears below, along with annotations from its instructor, Carolyn H. Magid, an associate professor of philosophy.)

*The Chronicle* recently spoke with Daniel L. Everett, Bentley's dean of arts and sciences. Before joining Bentley last year, Mr. Everett taught linguistics and phonology and at Illinois State University, the University of Manchester, and the University of Pittsburgh. He is best known for his studies of indigenous languages in the Brazilian Amazon.

**Q. How did you find your way to this job?**

**A.** Years ago, I never imagined that I would wind up in administration, and I certainly never imagined that I'd be at a business school. But I have come to believe—and this is one of the things that brought me to Bentley—that the future of the humanities and social sciences is integrated with professional education.

**Q. At Bentley, how often do faculty members from business and the humanities sit down together? Do they know what is happening in one another's classrooms?**
A. I hope to create an institute for the integration of business and liberal arts. My hope is that pairs of faculty—one from business and one from the liberal arts—can work together to develop new courses and new research programs.

But the problem with developing new courses is that people often have good ideas, but then the courses sit outside the curriculum as electives that nobody ever takes. Part of the point of this institute would be to get people to integrate these ideas into the curriculum more deeply. If you're an accounting major at Bentley, you don't have time to do anything else. So we have to find ways to bring the liberal arts into the existing courses, and to change the curriculum from the inside out.

Q. This kind of integrated model might improve business education, but I'm not sure that it would do much to solve the job crisis in the humanities. How many humanities Ph.D.'s are employed at Bentley?

A. We have 109 arts and sciences faculty and 176 business faculty. In the long run nationally, the number of humanities Ph.D.’s who get traditional tenure-track jobs, that's going to continue to diminish. But I still see a robust future for the humanities. Not quite as large, but still an exciting future for people who can bring their expertise into standard liberal-arts courses and into the new area of professional schools, where the humanities are being looked to for improving the quality of education.

The syllabus of Bentley University’s Philosophy 131 course, with annotations by Carolyn H. Magid, an associate professor of philosophy:
PHI131: PHILOSOPHY OF WORK
Professor Carolyn Magid
Spring 2011/revised

Course Goals:
• to encourage you to identify what you want and what workers generally need from work
• to help you think both comprehensively and in detail about major factors impacting work and workers in the 21st century
• to identify moral problems about some of the most important and difficult issues confronting today’s workers (drawing on multiple and competing moral theories)
• to develop and defend (multiple and competing) solutions to these problems

Objectives:
• You will explore and respond to different approaches to the role work plays in a good life.
• You will understand major factors shaping work today, including globalization, technological change, recession, and changing workforce demographics, and ways they are interconnected.
• You will study a variety of important cases which raise moral problems or issues
• You will develop concrete and practical approaches to solving the moral problems, drawing on moral theories, your understanding of the case and its context, and the business expertise you bring to the course.

Note that there may be changes to this syllabus.

I: BACKGROUND.

We will begin with your, your work experiences, and what you want and/or need from work after you finish college. We will go on to review some major moral concepts and theories that will be important in discussions throughout the course. We will also discuss the case method as used in this course, will explore the application of ethical theory to a complex case, and will start a discussion about how and why proposals for change might be adopted.

Mon. 1/24: Introduction to course issues, topics and requirements. Discussion topic: work experiences of course participants. No reading due for this class but start reading Bebe Moore Campbell’s Brothers and Sisters (whole text is due 4/26 – read as it fits your schedule.)

Wed. 1/26: What do we need and want from work?

Think about the issues these articles raise and your personal answers to the following questions, which we will discuss in class: