

NEWS RELEASE

Wilfrid Laurier
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Students to recommend course of action to Meritas Mutual Funds *Integrated Case Exercise challenges Laurier BBA students to tackle real-world dilemma*

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WATERLOO (Ont.) – A socially responsible mutual fund company is hoping business students at Wilfrid Laurier University can help it determine if it is heading in the right direction. Meritas Mutual Funds has challenged 191 students to assess this question during a gruelling, week-long integrated case exercise (ICE).

Most classes are cancelled for third-year bachelor of business administration students as they test all they've so far learned. At noon yesterday, 36 teams of five or six students began devoting every waking hour to developing the best solution to the Meritas challenge.

"ICE week is an intensive exercise designed to assess all aspects of the students' education under situations very much like what they could encounter in the so-called real world," explains Mark Baetz, the professor who co-authored the case. "We keep the subject of the case a secret up until the moment the students receive it, so they start on a level playing field and have only their education and savvy to draw on."

The students are being asked to consider a number of issues. These include:

- Can Meritas go beyond the traditional buyers of socially responsible mutual funds and target mainstream investors looking to manage risk, obtain a good return and diversify their portfolio holdings?

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- Should Meritas aggressively promote the financial performance aspects of these funds or emphasize the usual attributes associated with socially responsible investing?
- Should values play a role in the recruitment of employees, fund managers and investment dealers?

“We have the opportunity to be the first faith-based fund in Canada. If we shy away from publicizing our Mennonite ownership, potential investors and dealers might not be aware of these connections,” explains Gary Hawton, chief executive officer of Meritas Financial Inc. “But, if we are too aggressive in marketing the faith-based connection, people outside that market may not buy us, and we may never get out of that market, which cannot sustain us.”

With few classes to contend with, the ICE teams will devote the week to researching the case and preparing their responses. To ensure that no one group has any advantage over others, all information for the challenge has been withheld until the case was made available. Professors continue to be vague when discussing the case.

On Friday, the groups attend a question-and-answer session with Meritas representation. The groups have until noon on Monday to submit a written report. The marks awarded the reports and associated presentations account for 10 per cent of the final mark in each of the students’ four core courses.

On Tuesday morning, each group presents its analysis and recommendations to one of six internal boards, which then select the six groups that qualify for the final round. The written reports submitted by the six finalists are couriered to members of an external board while the groups prepare for final presentations.

On the morning of Wednesday, March 27, the six finalists present their analyses to the external board, which includes Hawton. The award for the best ICE response is presented on Wednesday afternoon.