

NEWS RELEASE

Wilfrid Laurier University



Laurier team takes second in North American ethics competition *Business students finish first among Canadian competitors*

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WATERLOO – Four business students at Wilfrid Laurier University have finished ahead of all Canadian challengers at a North American competition on business ethics. The team from the Laurier school of business and economics finished second, behind Boston College.

Students representing 16 business schools in Canada and the U.S. competed in the Dalhousie Business Ethics Case Competition in November. The competing teams had four weeks to prepare a solution to one business case and only four hours to prepare a second. Combined scores from those two cases determined who competed in the finals, which also challenged the students to prepare and present their solutions in four hours.

“I thought the competition was fascinating,” said Laurier team member Mirjana Varjadic. “Not only did we get to meet other top business students, professionals, professors and not-for-profit organizers from around North America, we all opened our eyes to serious issues that corporations face today. The guest speakers added their personal experiences to the event to help us understand the importance of ethics, first from within ourselves and, second, within our work environment.”

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Mark Baetz, a policy professor and advisor to the team, described the first case as Arthur Anderson and Enron in disguise. It involved a firm that provides both auditing and consulting services, and the conflicts that can arise. Over the four weeks of analysis, the team became very familiar with the specifics of Enron and with the accounting laws that have emerged or changed post-Enron.

The Laurier team, made up of Varjadic, Adrienne Paquette, Allison Hui and Sarah Lodi, ultimately determined that the current corporate structure could not be salvaged. The company should divest itself of its auditing operation and re-brand as a consulting firm.

“Our recommendation had a lot to do with the fact that reputation is all a firm has in the accounting field,” said Paquette. “In the current climate of constant business scandal, the public has little patience for dishonesty. Once a firm tarnishes its reputation it is very hard to rebuild it. We felt that a dignified exit was better than hanging on to the bitter end, so we recommended that the firm salvage what it could and try to move on with the consulting side of the business.”

The second case required that competitors, working without faculty support, reassess standards and regulations for the fast food industry. In just four hours, the team researched the responsibilities of the fast food companies, their consumers and regulators. Laurier’s team recommended a proactive program to increase awareness of the nutritional value of food and an increase in regulations on pricing and labeling.

In the third case, the eight teams that moved into the finals had to determine how a bank should balance employee right to privacy and concerns about misuse of e-mail. Laurier’s solution, which clinched the second place finish, involved communicating expectations, establishing an internal auditing board and continuing to its use of monitoring software.

Case studies are widely used to teach students about realistic situations they might face in the business world. The competition at Dalhousie is designed to expose students to the crucial role that business ethics and corporate-social responsibility will play in defining leadership in business tomorrow.

With more than 3,000 students enrolled in its programs and 100 full-time faculty, Laurier’s school of business and economics, with campuses in Waterloo and Toronto, Ontario, is one of Canada’s largest and most innovative business schools. For more information, please visit www.wlu.ca/sbe.