

“WHY DO WE HAVE TO LEARN THIS STUFF?”
REVISING OR DEVELOPING A COURSE USING ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how the concept of “essential questions” can be used as a structural tool for revising or developing a business course such that active learning and student engagement are fostered. The concept of essential questions is different from and similar to the Socratic method. The relationship between essential questions and other course elements is discussed. An example is provided for how this approach was used in a business ethics course taught from a biblical worldview.

Key Words:

Active learning, business ethics, course architecture, curriculum planning, essential questions, front-loading activities, guiding questions, pedagogy, Socratic method.

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INTRODUCTION

Some business students see some business courses as unimportant or unrelated to helping them learn how to be successful business professionals. Courses that qualify for this may include economics, business ethics, principles of management, and for some students, accounting and other core business courses. Having difficulty finding personal relevance in some of the topics in these courses, having had prior educational experiences where their professors assumed too much regarding their natural interest in course material, having completed more than one homework assignment they considered “busy work,” these students approach such courses with a degree of cynicism asking, “Why do we have to learn this stuff?”

Accordingly, this raises an important question for professors: How might the professor can get ahead of students who tend to ask this question (either openly or silently)?

Historically business professors have employed a variety of approaches to engage students. Notably, role playing, case studies, small group discussions, service learning,

classroom debates have been reported. Another approach to engage students in the business disciplines is through the use of what is known as “essential questions” (Wiggins & McTighe, 2004, 2008). Examples of how essential questions have been used as a structure to curriculum content include history (DiCamillo, 2010), astrobiology (Slater, 2006), psychology (Lawson, Bodle & McDonough, 2007), and teacher education (Blair, Donovan & Sheehan, 2010). But this approach may be applicable in the business disciplines: “Every discipline can utilize this process of essential questions to support learning as students move from surface learning of factual information to a more meaningful understanding of the important concepts of the discipline.” (Singleton & Newman, 2009, p. 247) While some business scholarship has been devoted to considering the role of questions in during class periods (e.g., Morrell, 2004), none that the author has found to date has considered the use of essential questions as an overall architectural device for structuring a course in the business curricula.

The ability of the professor to ask students engaging questions during lectures and discussions has been recognized as an important teaching skill (Nilson, 2003; Bain, 2004; Davis, 2009; Gose, 2009). Indeed since ancient times the ability to ask penetrating questions has been seen as a mark of quality teaching. However, much of the discussion regarding the use of questions has focused on the lecture or discussion as the level of analysis. Using questions as an architectural framework for the entire curriculum of a course has recently surfaced as a level of analysis worth pursuing. It is this larger level of analysis which is the focus of this paper.

The concept of Socratic dialog has been presented as a pedagogical tool in business ethics courses (Kerlin, 1997; Morrell, 2004). While the Socratic method depends on a central question around which dialog takes place, to date the author of this present paper has found nothing in the business education literature regarding how to identify discipline-specific student-oriented

essential questions or how to use such questions as a structural framework for the curriculum of a course as a whole including the design of course objectives, assignments, classroom experiences, and assessment. Further, a distinction needs to be drawn between the type of questions envisioned in this present paper and the questions used in the classical Socratic method.

Accordingly, the **purpose of this paper** is to show how, based on the literature on the topic and the author's experience in teaching an undergraduate business course, the pedagogical tool of "essential questions" can be used to increase active involvement in learning in business courses and in so doing to counteract the natural tendency for students to wonder why they have to learn the material. To accomplish this aim the paper will offer synonyms for the term and between essential questions and the Socratic method. The paper presents the purpose of essential questions and the benefits of structuring a course curriculum around a series of interrelated questions. It describes the characteristics of effective essential questions. Further, the paper shows what is involved in the curriculum planning process as well as the question development processes. It illustrates essential questions for a course in business ethics taught from a biblical worldview and the feedback from students during and after the author used this approach. Finally, the paper explores the limitations of this teaching method.

SYNONYMS & A DISTINCTION

Synonyms for the term "essential questions" include "guiding questions," "higher-order questions," and "central questions." In this paper the terms essential questions and guiding questions are used as synonyms. Essential questions invite students voluntarily to analyze, synthesize, evaluate and even conjecture, encouraging students to use what they have already learned to think more deeply about the issues in the topics being discussed, representing the big

ideas worth spending time in understanding (Blair, Donovan & Sheehan, 2010), helping the student become prepared for a life time of thinking and learning about life. While higher-order questions have been used for years in the context of a particular classroom discussion, while professors have wrestled with these higher-order questions in their own study of their discipline, using a few higher-order questions as the architecture for an entire course including its main elements has not been reported in the business literature as of this writing.

When considering the term “essential questions” it might be natural to think that this is simply another way of referring to the Socratic method of teaching where instead of the professor telling students in a lecture what they need to know, the students passively listening to what someone else has learned, the professor asks a series of questions which are designed to guide students to a correct thinking about the issues, thinking that the professor has already worked out prior to the class period, thinking which the professor has determined is the correct thinking (Brickhouse & Smith, 1994), and a process of questions which serve to foster the imbalance of power between instructor and student (Morrell, 2004, p. 390). In addition, as described by Morrell (2004), Socratic dialog is “a deceptively simple way of asking questions about beliefs, where sustained cross-examination and the use of counter-examples reveal contradictions that would otherwise go unrecognised.” (p. 386) The Socratic method is comprised of three stages (Morrell, 2004, p. 386):

- a) The one leading the conversation asks a complex question (e.g., What is justice?).

This introductory question is similar to the essential questions considered in this paper though used in a different manner employed in the context of one conversation.

- b) The student responds by giving an answer based on conventional wisdom.

- c) The discussion leader follows by showing, through a series of, at times confrontational propositions and questions and at other times less aggressive responses, that the conventional thinking is incoherent. This series of Socratic questions leads the student to an awareness that conventional wisdom is insufficient to answering the introductory question.

An important dimension to the Socratic method should be noted here: It involves the professor asking a series of *leading* questions, questions for which there are predetermined *correct* answers which are designed to reveal the incoherence in thinking on the part of the student. Leading questions can be useful in classroom discussion in some situations. However, as leading questions which have what the questioner believes to be correct answers classical Socratic questions are different from the essential questions used as the architecture for an entire course. While essential questions possess a leadership quality in that such questions give voice to an intellectual or practical journey of curiosity that is of interest to the student, leading questions can carry with them the presumption of a correct answer. Said another way, leading questions have in mind a correct answer which the professor believes has more merit than alternative, incorrect answers.

In spite of this distinction with Socratic dialogue essential questions considered here are related to classic Socratic dialog. The connecting point of similarity to Socratic dialog appears to be that Plato begins (or at least presents it early in the dialog) with an essential question which is the launching pad for discussion. In terms of the topic of this paper, what is more ambiguous is the selection of the essential question, namely the starting point for the dialog, and how such a starting point can become the structural glue for organizing the teaching learning processes of a course as a whole. It is this ambiguity which this present paper seeks to address.

A related distinction made in this present paper is that while essential questions are used in the context of particular class period discussions, they have a larger, more pervasive purpose that extends beyond one class period, as already suggested, to the course as a whole. To this we turn next.

PURPOSE & BENEFITS

A professor's approach in lecturing and guiding classroom discussions can contribute to the "Why do we have to learn this stuff?" learning barrier. For example, when the professor reduces curriculum content to points of emphasis on a PowerPoint slide, students become disengaged. Students quickly learn that they can passively sit in the room and direct their thinking toward the words on the slides. Rarely will students challenge the rigidity of the slides. Facts travel from teacher to the PowerPoint slide and from the PowerPoint slide to the student with little or no chance for analysis (Isseks, 2011). Or, if the professor simply provides students with definitions of terms, descriptions of theories and conceptual models, and the findings of research, students can either zone out or, perhaps dutifully take notes so that they are prepared to answer questions on an examination. What both the professor and the students desire is a higher degree of engagement, engagement that takes them beyond the bare minimum rationale for studying, i.e., preparing for exams. Essential questions, some scholars believe, are the keys to moving past the "Why...?" question.

In terms of an entire business course such as a semester-long course in Business Ethics, Economics or Management, essential questions are the connecting structure necessary for crafting course objectives, selecting course content, identifying course assignments, and designing assessments all these elements when in alignment giving rationale for the student to be

engaged. “What ties the instructional activities together is the *essential question*, which allows students to know on the first day of a unit of study, not the last day, the instructional expectations of the unit.” (Blair, Donovan & Sheehan, 2010, p. 33) Thus, when the whole curriculum is structured around a few big, essential questions, everything that is done including assessments, lectures, discussions, assignments is done in service to one or more guiding questions. Using guiding questions directly addresses the problem of students asking “Why do we have to learn this stuff?” “Why does the professor give us so much busy work?”

Implicit in the previous section is the assumption that the goal of teaching and learning is understanding. This gets to the heart of why essential questions might be used as an organizing device for a course curriculum as a whole. Guiding questions foster deep understanding of enduring concepts. Such questions lead students to face some of the assumptions on which the discipline is founded. This approach to teaching is known as an “inquiry process.” “It gets at the central reasons that the material being studied was developed or discovered in the first place. It foregrounds the functionality of what is being learned.” (Wilhelm, 2007, p. 8-9)

Guiding questions provide coherence to the curriculum from the perspective of the learner. It encourages students to be active participants in the conversation of the discipline with which the professor is familiar. When students understand, they can see patterns across information related to a topic, see and articulate new connections, translate what they know and offer new and personal dimensions regarding the topics, use, transfer, and adapt what they know into new contexts, and critically perceive and respect multiple points of view regarding the topic. Essential questions foster understanding of how competing views weigh in. Through essential questions students come to respect and find value in new ways of thinking on issues. Students work to understand the personal dimensions and importance of various knowledge constructions

for different groups. Such questions lead them to reflect on, consider, critique and revise their own thinking. These questions help students perceive their own biases which impede their understanding. (Wilhelm, 2007, pp. 11)

Telling students results in them forgetting much of the information within two weeks and practically all of it within two years. The use of an inquiry process, structured around essential questions, lengthens the memory. (Wilhelm, 2007)

Essential questions require the professor to focus on how students think when engaging the material in the course. In this we see a paradox. On the one hand, the professor listens to other scholars as they give voice to the big questions in the discipline, the professor tuning a flesh ear to other scholars believing that serious students of the discipline offer comparatively more substance than do less-informed, undergraduate students who are unsophisticated in their understanding of the discipline, the professor tuning a tin ear to students who are just starting their intellectual journey in the discipline. On the other hand, the professor who is interested in engaging students in learning for understanding will practice listening to how students voice the big concerns that they have in terms of the field of study, not concerns over how to prepare for exams or how to write a term paper, but concerns regarding the curiosities that student has in the field of study. What this paradox means is that both professor and students view the goals for understanding as shared goals, goals that are co-constructed during the teaching-learning process, goals that have an improvisational dimension not completely under the direct control of the professor (DiCamillo, 2010, p. 11).

Because they are student-focused, effective essential questions capture student interest holding that interest long after the final exam. These are questions that are enduring, provocative and that “challenge students to construct meaning and relevance from the facts and concepts they

are learning. They transform a topic-centered unit into an issue-centered one that students will find stimulating and worthy of debate and discussion.” (Chill, 2007, p. 27) Such questions carry a power to help students get beyond the facts which the course content presents, even beyond the topics of the course to larger questions of life (Eldrridge, 2007, p. 27). “Essential questions are considered "essential" in part because they focus on big ideas that not only reappear throughout one's education but also resurface throughout one's life. An essential question does not elicit a response of "So what?" when it is asked” since by nature the question gives voice to something viewed as important to the student (Brown, 2009, p. 26)

Essential questions encourage multiple perspectives:

“Essential questions are structured as open-ended inquiries that do not have an obvious, simple, or specific answer. In fact, a person's response to a question may change over time as his or her understanding of the topic or issue expands, illustrating the fluid and evolving nature of knowledge.” (Brown, 2009, p. 26)

Essential questions connect learning with personal experience. When students enter the classroom each day, they do not leave their emotions, values, beliefs, and experiences at the school door. Essential questions encourage students to tap into their own experiences as a means to connect with the topic or issue being considered.” (Brown, 2009, p. 26) Using an essential question “does not change the factual information that is taught. It only requires that students become more involved with the facts as they consider how the information they are learning could be relevant to them...” (Singleton & Newman, 2009, p. 247) Effective questions provide support to students who lack confidence in a particular area of study or who have had a prior negative experience with a topic of study in the past.

Now that we have explored the purpose and benefits of essential questions, we need to explore the characteristics of effective questions.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

We turn now to consider the characteristics of effective essential questions. According to experts on this question (Wilhelm, 2007, p. 44; Wiggins & McTighe, 2004, pp. 106-112)

effective questions are those that:

- Address a big issue of a discipline from the students' point of view. Wise professors will test with students the essential questions that the professor dreams up. Where possible, revise the wording to reflect how students give voice to the big issues.
- Address the "heart of the discipline" being studied. Essential disciplinary knowledge will be required to answer it.
- Possess emotive force, intellectual bite, or edginess.
- Invite the student into ongoing conversations and debates about real-world practitioner issues.
- Cause a genuine, voluntary inquiry into the big ideas and core content.
- Are likely to recur throughout the student's life.
- Broad in scope and relatively timeless.
- Are open-ended, possible to contend, or arguable. Essential questions are complex enough to house multiple perspectives and more than one possible answer. Questions with a "yes"- "no" response are probably poorer candidates for being classed as essential questions.
- Provoke good discussion or even debate.

- Stimulate continued thinking or rethinking of ideas and assumptions.
- Naturally arise when considering how the content of a discipline interacts with human life.
- Spark meaningful connections with prior life experience while they spawn thinking for how to apply the new things we learn to new settings.
- Are concise and clearly stated. Achieving this comes with practice.
- Lead to new questions asked by the students. Wise professors will provide a venue for students to articulate their curiosities.
- Pose dilemmas or subvert obvious, commonly believed “truths” of the discipline or challenge students with incongruities.
- Elicit interesting and alternative views or spark student thinking to evaluate alternative views.
- Focus student thinking as much on the reasoning needed to arrive at or defend an answer, as it does on the answer itself.

Given the various ways essential questions are characterized, we conclude as do Wiggins and McTighe that “to call a question ‘essential’ is thus ambiguous.” (p. 109) Students may not immediately grasp the penetrating power of a particular essential question the first time they hear it. After all, some of the big ideas of some disciplines are quite abstract and not obvious. Even so, the effective essential questions carry the power of “signaling interesting or useful inquiries and insights.” (p. 109) Experimenting with various questions in the curriculum the professor will begin to learn which questions carry the emotive and intellectual stimulus power. All essential questions must reside in a particular context in which they are evaluated. Accordingly, evaluating the goodness of fit for a particular question can best be accomplished only in the

context of using the question in a particular course rather than in the safety of a professor's office. Further, a professor may not realize that a particular question had an impact on students until after a unit of study or even the entire course is completed and students are reflecting on their learning experience.

A few examples are in order to illustrate essential questions, the essential question for the course as a whole and Unit-specific essential questions. The following Table is offered:

[Insert Table 1 here.]

The next section of the paper will explore how to build a curriculum plan on essential questions.

CURRICULUM PLANNING WITH ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

To make use of their full potential essential questions should be used to plan the other elements of a course (Wilhelm, 2007, pp. 43—44). Your overall essential question will be central in everything that is done during the Semester. And for each course element you can ask: How does this element support the experience of the student in exploring the essential question in this Unit?

One place to begin in the planning process is to think about the **enduring understandings** that you hope students will take away with them at the end of the course. To identify the enduring understandings ask yourself: What do I hope students will take with them when they enter life after this course? What is the overall focus of the course and why does it matter in the long run?

If in your course you employ a **culminating project** of some kind such as a team case study assignment, term paper, a personal journal, or a management observation project, plan how you will describe this project to students in terms of the essential question. Ask yourself: How will participation in the culminating project move students toward answering the essential question for the course?

Organizing the various **Units of study** into the different “chunks of information and questions” can be done in a way such that there is an obvious logical connection between each unit of study and the overall essential question of the course. Sequencing the Units of study will likely be important to lead students to progressively improve their ability to form answers to the essential question. Likewise, each Unit of study should have its own essential question which is the glue to hold all topics and assignments together moving everyone forward to the answering of the overall essential question for the course. This communicates to students explicitly what they should stay focused on all throughout the Semester.

The instructional **sequence of topics** covered within the various Units of study also should be directly related to the essential question for the course. This part of your curriculum plan outlines the knowledge and skills needed to help move the student toward answering the question. Also you will plan lecture topics, discussion topics, and small group activities that will contribute to developing student understanding.

To avoid students thinking that **homework assignments** are simply “busy work,” the linkage between the essential overall course essential question or a Unit essential question must be clear to students. Ask yourself: How will each homework assignment in this Unit foster student ability to develop an answer to the related essential question?

In order to foster the power of essential questions, you will need to plan an initial **front-loading activity** which, when conducted in class, activates students' background knowledge, skills and interest in pursuing the essential question. The front-loading activity will be created for the overall course guiding question as well as one activity which introduces each of the Unit essential questions. An example of a front-loading activity is that provided by Morrell (2004, pp. 386-389) whereby the instructor guides students through a Socratic-style dialogue in role-playing fashion. Other front-loading activities in a business ethics course include the following:

- Dirty Tricks & Grey areas.
- Current events (related to ethics and debatable social issues): the BP Oil spill, the firing of Joe Paterno, etc.
- Provocative, controversial quotations from highly visible business leaders or scholars.
- Debatable contemporary issues: The value of private equity firms in society, use of sweatshops, retailer price-matching policies, involvement of the US Government in business affairs (E.g., Solyndra, LLC; US automobile industry bail out), morality of the free-market economy, whistle blowing, bribery, etc.
- Interesting laws and regulations relevant to students: local noise abatement statutes, parking laws, etc.
- University Student Handbook policies.
- Student Newspaper stories that have an ethical dimension.

Essential questions should also be reviewed when planning the various **assessment tools** to be employed. This answers the question: How will we know that we have arrived? In this part of your curriculum plan you will specify the critical standards of performance describing how learning will be assessed in terms of the essential questions

Appendix B contains a simple curriculum planning guide for use with essential questions based on this discussion.

Having planned a course using essential questions to link course objectives, assignments, assessments, and classroom experiences, we turn next to some of the practical ideas of how to use effective questions throughout a course.

INTRODUCING ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS WITH FRONT-LOADING ACTIVITIES

An effective way to introduce essential questions is by deploying a “front-loading activity.” (Wilhelm, 2007, p. 74) As with Kerlin (1997) the use of essential questions begins with what students already know. Thus, a front-loading activity should be designed to engage or build upon students’ prior knowledge or experience. It will establish a reason for asking the essential question that is relevant to the student. For example, in a business ethics course a front-loading activity might involve reading a portion of the student handbook (student policies) such as the section on curfews. Or, show students a section of the local city ordinances relating to noise. A discussion can follow immediately regarding the reasons for such policies and laws, why some students will value such rules and why other students will not value such rules, what are the fundamental principles or issues at stake in such rules, and how a student might decide whether the rule is “good” or “bad.” Such a discussion provides a natural segue to position an essential question such as “How well does a Christian approach to ethical decision making compare with other approaches?” or “What role does perspective play in understanding and applying ethical thinking in life situations?” Another approach might involve asking students to complete an opinion survey, or react to a short story where an ethical dilemma is central to the story line.

Essential questions are posed at the beginning of a course and at the beginning of a new Unit of study within a course. Then in the class periods that follow the professor explicitly revisits the essential question often in the form of class discussions or writing assignments (Slater, 2006). Periodically the professor can pause during lectures or discussion and ask students how a particular concept is useful in developing an answer to the essential question (Slater, 2006).

Test essential questions with students. Ask students to evaluate a question or pose alternative wording to the question. At the end of a Unit of study tell students that you want their help to improve on the question based on their point of view. Put them into teams and ask each team to craft an alternative question. Then select one or two of their questions and post them online for students to respond to. At the end of the course come back to the overall essential question and ask students to give voice to their ideas, in writing or verbally, regarding how the question might be answered given what they have learned in the course.

EXAMPLES OF ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS IN A BUSINESS ETHICS COURSE

Morrell (2004) offers examples of central questions employed in dialog about business ethics that emerge from a reading of Plato's writings: "What does it mean to do business ethically? What is justice? Can virtue be taught?" For Brickhouse and Smith (1994) one of Socrates' big questions related to ethics is "How ought one to live?" (p. 11)

The author of the present paper experimented with employing essential questions in the context of an undergraduate business ethics course. The initial set of questions the professor posed to students is represented in the following Table.

[Insert Table 2 here.]

Examples of essential questions for use in an undergraduate Principles of Management course are presented in **Appendix C**.

RESULTS FROM USE

The approach of using essential questions as the architecture for a course was used during the Winter 2012 semester. As mentioned Table 2 presents the essential questions used and subsequently revised during the course BUAD 358 Ethical, Social & Legal Environment of Business.

Students were surveyed and interviewed regarding to begin determining the impact of essential questions on their experience. The following are observations that emerged from this study:

- Just like professors and other persons, students experience “inattentional blindness:” They get lost in the details of ethical dilemmas.
- Professor must repeatedly connect the Essential Question to each assignment, lecture, discussion, and major project.
- Students appreciate when a professor trains his/her “tin ear” to hear how they verbalize the big issues.
- There are likely multiple essential questions for a given learning unit or topic, each with a slightly different perspective: Cognitive, Affective, Faith-based.

- ⦿ As the professor is open to critique his own questions, students appear to be more open to talk about their inner feelings.
- ⦿ 86% of students in the course found that the use of essential questions helped them stay focused on the purpose of studying the subject matter.
- ⦿ 46% of students in the course think about the essential questions outside of class.
- ⦿ 97% of students in the course appreciated that the professor was willing to revise one or more essential questions.
- ⦿ 84% of students in the course believe that the professor is making improvements in how well he listens to students when considering Essential Questions for the course.
- ⦿ 70% of students in the course feel better prepared to participate in a conversation with other people regarding ethical principles that they prefer to use.
- ⦿ 70% of students in the course desire more emphasis on essential questions.
- ⦿ 74% of students in the course are more aware of the approach(es) that they prefer to take when making decisions that involve a moral issues.
- ⦿ 30% of students in the course more participation (asking questions, answering questions) during the semester (online and in-class).

CONCLUSION & LIMITATIONS

The focus of this paper has been to explore the use of essential questions as a structural framework for developing or revising a business course. It provides guidelines for how to identify essential questions and how to use these questions to introduce a course and its various

learning units. Further, it provides guidance in how to link the essential questions to learning objectives, homework assignments and assessments.

Although asking a big question is considered a best practice for college teaching (Bain, 2004), the particular approach advocated here, to use big questions as the architecture for an entire course, comes with the following limitations.

Stating an essential question is a process of the professor giving voice to what he/she believes is in the heart of many students. This process is not unrelated to the process that a political candidate pursues as the candidate searches for ways to voice what citizens are chiefly concerned about. Accordingly, one limitation is in the ability of the professor to listen to the sometimes unspecified or implicit concerns of students. This requires establishing an atmosphere inside and outside the classroom where students feel safe in expressing themselves.

An essential question voiced by one student may not have the same impact on another student. I have overcome this to a degree by asking students to offer for consideration alternative essential questions for discussion and evaluation by the class.

As we have seen, a characteristic of effective essential questions is that they do not have just one easily-identifiable answer. As Morrell (2004) has pointed out regarding a weakness of Socratic dialog, some students may become frustrated at not finding one easily stated answer which encompasses the complexity of the issues represented by one question. To the professor who wishes to provide students with carefully crafted answers to the deep questions of life this may be a weakness; however, to the professor who wishes to provide students with resources for asking questions and thinking deeply about complicated issues, this approach might be seen as a strength: essential questions help students begin to engage the big questions of life which will require life-long learning.

Other observations worth noting here include the following:

- Some courses may lend themselves better than other courses for the use of essential questions as a structural framework.
- Structuring a business course around essential questions is not the only way to approach our work. In some courses other structural approaches are valid.
- Formulating and revising essential questions is an iterative process. The first attempt by the professor in seeking a way to give voice to how students think may not be as effective as when the professor gets more experience.
- Professors may vary in their ability to tune a tin ear to the way students voice the big issues. The potential upside of practicing essential questions is that the process of revising one or more essential questions may bring an added benefit of improving the overall ability of the professor to listen to the unvoiced concerns of students.

An important tension point exists for the Christian business professor who wishes to engage student learning for understanding with the use of essential questions. Effective essential questions sometimes challenge students to consider through a different perspective what students consider “truth.” Such an approach, especially when the course material addresses matters of Christian faith, may leave some students uncomfortable. In some institutions professors will also feel uncomfortable about posing questions that do not automatically lead the student to the religious perspective of the professor.

Essential questions have the power to change how students approach a course; however, another tension point for the professor who desires to employ essential questions as architecture for a course is that the professor must change!

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TABLES

Table 1. Examples of Effective Essential Questions

Less Effective	More Effective
What is Utilitarianism and how does it work?	To what degree are the consequences of our actions sufficient to decide what is right and wrong?
Are universal moral standards necessary?	Why do people prefer moral standards in some situations but not so much in other situations?
What is egoism?	Why do selfish people irritate us?

Table 2: Sample Essential Questions in an Undergraduate Business Ethics Course

Overall Essential Question(s) for the Course:*	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what degree should ethical thinking be part of how we define business success? • How well does a Christian approach to ethical decision making compare with other approaches? 	
Unit 1	What role does perspective play in understanding and applying ethical thinking in business situations? Alternative: When what is right and wrong is unclear, how do you decide?
Unit 2	What makes some approaches, in <i>principle</i> , better than others for a Christian? Alternative: Why are some situations more difficult to understand than others?
Unit 3	What makes some approaches, in <i>practice</i> , better than others for a Christian when making individual-, organizational- and industry-level decisions? What makes some approaches, in <i>practice</i> , better than others for a Christian when participating in or evaluating society-level (public policy) decisions?
Final Exam:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What approach(es) do you prefer when making decisions that have ethical, social or legal implications? Defend your selection. • Accurately apply your preferred approach to an ethical, social or legal situation posed by the professor. 	
*Alternative over-arching questions are presented in Appendix A	

APPENDIX A

ALTERNATIVE ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS IN A BUSINESS ETHICS COURSE

- Why can the ethical thinking process be so difficult?
- Why is ethical thinking important to business success?
- How can you know you are always doing the right thing in business?
- Why is doing the right thing important?
- How does your motivation make a difference when deciding what is right and wrong? (assumes that it does make a difference)
- How do you respond to a situation where doing the right thing is unacceptable to other people?
- Is common sense enough when faced with a situation where what is right and wrong is unclear? (not open-ended, but debatable)
- How does the ability to decide right from wrong contribute to business success?
- To what degree does ethical thinking influence business success?
- Why do some bad people wildly succeed in business while some good people fail (or are only mediocre) in business?
- Are absolute standards of right and wrong universal world-wide? (not open-ended, but debatable)
- How can you respect the views of another person (regarding what is right and wrong) while putting your own views forward in business?
- Why is it easier not to think about the moral implications of business decisions?
- Why are moral problems in business complicated?
- Why are the “rules” we have to live by not perfect?
- What is the essence of wisdom?
- Why should I take into consideration society expectations when making business decisions?
- What are the implications of my decisions for all of society?
- What is the purpose of business?
- What ethical framework is most compatible with your personal values and beliefs?
- What ethical framework is most effective for making ethical decisions and having conversations with others who hold views different from your own?

APPENDIX B

CURRICULUM PLANNING GUIDE BUILDING ON ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

Course As a Whole	Over-arching Essential Question			
	Front-loading Activity			
	Enduring Understandings			
	Culminating Project(s)			
Unit # —	Unit-specific Course Objective	Unit-specific Essential Question	Enduring Understanding(s)	Evidence for Understanding (Assessment)
	Knowledge Needed	Front-loading Activity	Gateway Activity	Assignment(s)

APPENDIX C

SAMPLE ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS for use in an undergraduate **Principles of Management** course.

1. Introduction
 - a. How might one's perspective make a difference when thinking about management?
 - b. How might a Christian manager think and act in a way that is different from a non-Christian?
 - c. How do managers actually impact their organizations?
 - d. Why are some managers mediocre and others exceptional?
2. History of Management Ideas
 - a. Why do some management ideas remain popular while other ideas decline in popularity?
 - b. Of what value is the history of an organization or an industry to a contemporary manager?
3. Systems thinking
 - a. How influential is the external environment in defining what managers do?
 - b. How do different organizations define effective management differently?
4. Cross-cultural management
 - a. How might managing in a cross-cultural setting be different from a domestic setting?
 - b. How does a manager become truly "smart" in terms of cross-cultural management?
 - c. Is it more difficult for a Christian manager to work in a cross-cultural environment?
5. Ethics and Social Responsibility
 - a. Why, if at all, should ethical considerations be part of how we define business success?
 - b. What makes some decision making approaches better than others for a Christian?
 - c. What approach do you believe is the best approach for a Christian to take?
6. Decision making and Planning
 - a. How can the Christian best discern God's will in managerial decisions?
 - b. What makes managerial decision making so difficult at times?
 - c. What is the most difficult part about planning and decision making for the practicing manager? Why?
7. Strategic Thinking
 - a. To what degree to personal values influence strategic decisions?
 - b. Why might a Christian manager approach strategic decisions differently than someone else?
 - c. Why, if at all, might strategic decision maker think about things differently than mid-level managers?
8. Organizing
 - a. Compared with the impact of how you treat workers, how influential is how you organize workers in terms of organizational performance?
 - b. How is it possible that some work teams can perform well without having a supervisor while other teams don't?
9. Human Resource Management
 - a. Why is managing the organization's relationship with each employee important?
 - b. What role does a manager have in managing the organization's relationship with employees?
 - c. What will a Christian manager do that is different than others in terms of human resource management?
10. Communication
 - a. How is managerial communication so easy and yet so difficult at the same time?

- b. What is a Christian manager really trying to accomplish with communication?
 - c. Why do managers spend so much time and effort communicating with employees?
11. Motivation
- a. When you pay workers a fair wage, why can it still be difficult to motivate workers to perform at high level of productivity and quality?
 - b. What has the biggest influence on motivating a worker: what the manager does or what the worker does?
12. Leadership
- a. Why are some leaders more effective than others?
 - b. How do Christian principles of leadership differ from secular principles?
13. Power, politics and managing change
- a. How do effective leaders and managers deal with change?
 - b. How might a Christian use his/her influence differently than someone else?
 - c. Why might using influence be both important and dangerous?
14. Managerial control
- a. Why is managerial control so important to organizational success?
 - b. What is the most important challenge that managers face when managing control?
 - c. How might the Christian manager manage control differently than someone else?
15. Spirituality and management
- a. How might spirituality and management be linked?
 - b. Why has spirituality become a more popular topic among managers?
 - c. How different do Christians think about their calling than other people?