

# Analysis Regarding the Perception and the Evolution of the Ethical Values of the Economist Students of the Faculty of Economic Studies of University of Oradea

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***Abstract.** The present work of research analyzes the evolution of ethical values among economist students during the university year. The ethical values studied have been: trust, morality, relationships, social behaviors, the immigrants as labor force, attitude towards the work place, the accepted means of social protest, environment protection, voluntary activities. Surprisingly is that certain values, attitudes didn't change at all during the analyzed period, for example the answer at the ethical dilemma, while other attitudes such as church trust, have known significant variances.*

**Key words:** ethics in business; ethical values of business; moral values; the culture and the ethics of business.

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**JEL Codes:** A13.

**REL Codes:** 4B, 4D, 14C.

The present work is the result of a field research<sup>(1)</sup> whose general objective is to take stock, to study in evolution, having as subjects – students of the Faculty of Economic Sciences of University of Oradea – during two years, ethical values, the perception of ethics in business, the evolution of defining concepts and the evolution of ethic behavior in business of the future economists who will be part of the Romanian and global business environment. The specific objectives are: the identification and definition of the ethical behavior dimensions, organizational values, religious values and family values; the observation of evolution and the transformation of perceptions and ethical behavior through the process of instruction from the first to the second year of study, the identification and definition of the principal directions and ways of forming and valuing of an ethical behavior into a more and more competitive market. The final purpose of the research is the investigation of the fundament of an ethic culture of business in Romania and the in building of some educational strategies of the Economic Sciences students in the direction of forming and respecting a minimal set of ethical values in business.

The field research took place in two phases: in the first phase there were questioned the first year students, and in the second phase the questionnaire was applied to the same students now being in their second year of study. We specify that some of those students chose the optional course of Ethics in business, but questioning those students wasn't our aim. In order to analyze the questions from this research, we considered as relevant the differences towards the first phase of the survey.

In the first phase of the survey the total number of validated questionnaires applied at the University of Oradea, Faculty of Economic Sciences, was 277, the distribution of the subjects questioned has been: 33.6% men and 66.4% women, respectively 74.6% from the urban area and 25% from the rural area. In the second phase of the research the total number of filled in questionnaires was 151, the representative consisting of 80.8% women, and 19.2% men, 65.6% from the urban area towards 34.4% from the rural area, 88.1% of them living in Bihor county.

In the present work we try to capture the perception and evolution in time of the moral and ethical values of the students from University of Oradea in order to fundament an educational strategy proposal in the spirit of forming and consolidation an ethical system of business values for our students and in order to create an Ethics of business course specific for them to capture their interest, to motivate them, and to value their ethic potential. In order to complete this we selected items referring to:

I. Moral values religiosity (considered to be the base of moral values in this work), morality or the way of solving a moral dilemma, values that should be sustained in the family, the fundamentals of building the relationships, the tolerance towards certain behaviors, evaluation ethic – non-ethic of school behaviors, importance given to the diverse dimensions of life.

II. Ethical values: the ethic – no ethic evaluation of school behavior.

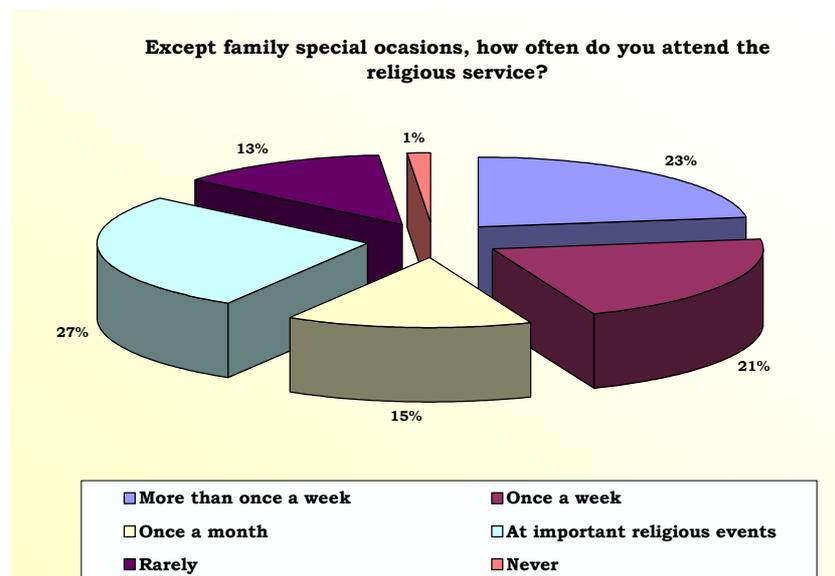
III. The institutional trust, the attitude towards different forms of bribery, corruption, civism, attitude towards work, attitude towards immigrants as labor force, the relationships of man with the nature and environment.

## I. Moral values

### Religiosity

While 98.9% of the subjects declare that they have faith in God, most of them (31.39%) say that they go to church at the important holidays, followed by those who go weekly (24.82%), those who go once a month (18.25%), and those who go daily (13.14%). 11.31% say they go very rarely, and 1.09% don't go to church at all. After one year, the participation of the students at the religious services remains predominant due to the

traditional holidays which are also the religious ones. Nevertheless, as you can observe from the bellow graphic, a big percentage is represented by the students who participate more than once a week, fact that indicates a relative polarization between those who practice religion only as a costum or those who go often to church. Making a comparison with the dates obtained last year this polarity is more obvious, because on this sample those who go once a month or even rarely represent a smaller percentage.



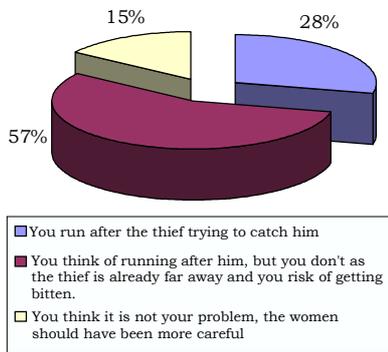
**Figure 1.** The participation at church services of economist students

### Morality or the way of solving a moral dilemma

The morality of the questioned students and the solution in the case of an ethical dilemma was observed through the answers to the question “You are in a bus station at 10 p.m. The bag of a woman standing in the same bus station with you is being stolen. The thief runs, and the woman cries for help. What do you do?” . At this question, the answers are being distributed in the first

phase of the research like this: 29% declare that they would run after the thief, trying to catch him, 58% only think about doing this and 13% declare that they would think that it is a problem that doesn't concern them. The values of this characteristic didn't change in a significant way, so, after one year, the balance of those who take attitude didn't change, but there is a slight increase of 2.3%, from 13% to 15.3%, we consider that unwelcome, at the total passiveness.

**Your are in a bus station, at 10 p.m.  
A women's bag got stolen, in the  
same station as you. The thief run away.  
What do you do?**



**Figure 2.** *The solution of the economist students for the ethic dilemma*

One observes like this that there are very little changes in the solutions chosen by the students for the ethic dilemma. The difference of 2 per cent of those who declare that the problems of other persons does not regard them and they wouldn't do anything for catching the thief, per cent higher in the second phase than in the first one it is to be noticed. This fact can indicate a decrease of the morality or of the civic attitude of the students, but the relative small number of cases doesn't allow doing generalizations.

*Values promoted in the family*

According to the opinion of the economist students, the most important three characteristics that should be encouraged by the parents are: the assumption of responsibilities (with 77.2% options), diligence (50.4%), and religious faith (49,3%).

Also, after one year, the most important three values promoted by the family considered by the people questioned are: the assumption of responsibilities (76,8%), followed by religious faith (52,7%) and then by tolerance – the respect towards others (48%). This percentages correspond to the data obtained the year before, the significant difference being the decrease of the importance given to diligence – 50,4% towards 41,2 % this year

being situated on the forth place from the second place last year. The most unimportant are the respect for hierarchic structures, the altruism and the creativity.

**Values promoted in the family**

Table 1

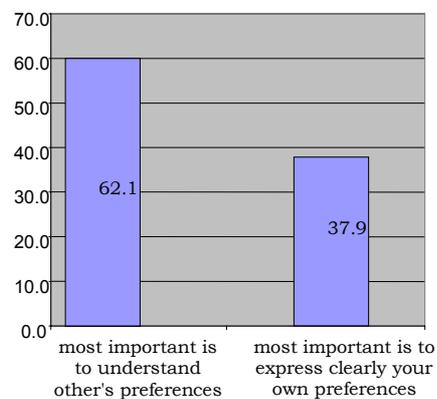
	No (%)	Yes (%)
Independence	66.4	33.6
Diligence	58.8	41.2
The assumption of responsibilities	23.2	76.8
Imagination/Creativity	83.2	16.8
Tolerance/ respect towards others	52.0	48.0
Intendance/Economical attitude	71.5	28.5
Perseverance	74.0	26.0
Religious faith	47.3	52.7
Altruism	90.7	9.3
Respect for hierarchic structures	94.0	6.0

*The fundamentals of building human relationships*

Concerning the possibility of building human relationships, 51.1% of the people questioned state that the most important thing it is to understand the preferences of the others, and 48.9% consider that the most important thing is to state your preferences very clear.

As you can see from the graphic bellow, the understanding of the preferences of the others it is considered to be more important than the clear statement of your own opinions after a year of faculty, showing besides a big polarization of the answers compared to the year before.

**Here are two sentences regarding the bases of human relationship.  
Which one is closer to your opinion?**



**Figure 3.** *Relationships*

*Tolerance towards certain behaviors*

Student's attitude toward some social behaviors is mostly negative, intolerant in both years in which we applied the questionnaires. In the table below we present in a comparative way the means of the responses for each behavior noted on a scale 1 to 10 (where 1 means never justified and 10 always justified).

**Attitude toward social behaviors**

Table 2

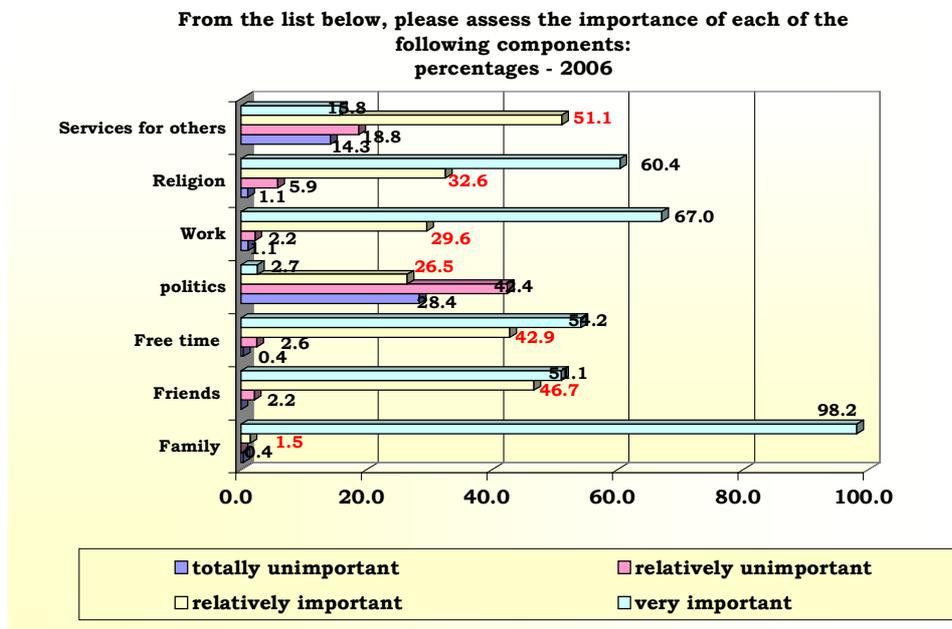
	Mean score year 1	Mean score year 2
Homosexuality	2.64	2.81
Prostitution	2.25	2.36
Abortion	2.68	3.21
Divorce	4.6	4.88
Euthanasia	3.32	3.35
Suicide	1.52	1.53

This table shows the intolerant attitude of students toward all behaviors from the

study, the smallest tolerance being shown towards suicide, followed by prostitution and homosexuality. The most significant difference between the 2 years appears regarding the attitude towards abortion, even if it is on the fourth level in both stages, and which becomes more tolerant in the second year. The most accepted behavior by the students from Oradea is divorce, which in the second year is approaching the middle level (it's between approve and disapprove)

*The importance given to the diverse dimensions of life*

In order to gradate these aspect students had to put on a scale of importance the following aspects of life: family, spare time, friends, work place, politics, religion, serving of others.

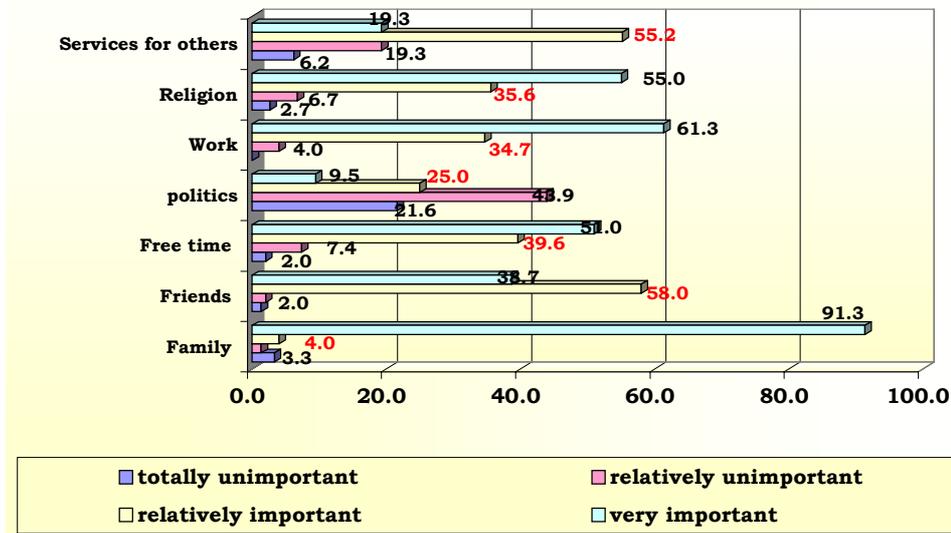


**Figure 4.** Importance given to the different dimensions of life (2006)

In the first study year, the most important is declared the family, followed

by the work place, on the last place being situated politics.

**From the list below, please assess the importance of each of the following components: percentages - 2007**



**Figure 5.** Importance given to the different dimensions of life (2007)

In the second year of study, family is still the most important, with a percentage even higher of those who consider it very important, followed by the work place. With a smaller percentage than last year, politics is again on the last place, being considered totally or relatively unimportant by most of the students.

**II. Ethical values**

*The evaluation ethic – non-ethic behaviors from school*

The most unethical behaviors for teachers, referred to by our students (in the first phase of the research) were: teaching under the influence of alcohol (48%), acceptance of bribe for passing exams (47%), and teaching under the influence of drugs (44.4%). As presented in table 3, in the

second year the most unethical behaviour became the acceptance of bribe (with a slightly higher percentage than the previous year – 48%), followed by a problem that was not highlighted in the first year: insulting students (43.7%). Only on the third place we find teaching under the influence of alcohol which was considered worst in the previous analysis.

Respondent rates are significantly higher for accepted behaviours, out of which the highest rates of acceptance are for: comments with political propaganda content (92%), ignoring copying during exams (90.5%), plagiarism (88.7%). In the second year these choices are repeated yet in different order: plagiarism gets on the second place, showing the rise of tolerance regarding it.

### Attitudes towards unethical behavior on behalf of teachers

Table 3

From the following list of behaviors of your teachers. please select the most unethical two:	First year		Second year	
	No (%)	Yes (%)	No (%)	Yes (%)
Comments of gestures with sexual meaning	69.9	30.1	64.7	35.3
Teaching under the influence of alcohol	51.3	48.7	59.7	40.3
Teaching under the influence of drugs	55.6	44.4	63.1	36.9
Acceptance of bribe for passing exams	52.4	47.6	52.0	48.0
Comments or gestures with racist meaning	84.0	16.0	82.8	17.2
Comments with political propaganda content	92.0	8.0	92.1	7.9
Including subjects in exams which were not taught during class	69.5	30.5	70.9	29.1
Insulting students	58.2	41.8	56.3	43.7
Public presentation of personal information regarding students	81.8	18.2	84.1	15.9
Ignoring copying during exams	90.5	9.5	87.4	12.6
Plagiarism	88.7	11.3	91.4	8.6

Regarding the unethical behaviors of colleagues, in both research phases, the most unaccepted behaviours were: insulting colleagues, coming to class under the influence of alcohol and bribery for passing exams. Comments with political propaganda content are the most accepted behaviour, along with plagiarism and comments of gestures with sexual meaning. One can note a significant difference between the two phases of the research the gravity regarding

comments of gestures with sexual meaning and copying to pass exams which are seen worst in the second phase. Less important are in the second year compared to the first “coming to class under the influence of drugs” and plagiarism. Most of these changes are probably also the effect of experience of students within the school, from the presence of problematic situations both regarding comments with sexual meaning and, which graver, copying at exams.

### Attitudes towards unethical behavior on behalf of colleagues

Table 4

Out of your fellow behaviors choose the most non-ethical ones:	First year	Second year
	Yes	Yes
Comments of gestures with sexual meaning	16.7	21.2
Coming to class under the influence of alcohol	38.0	35.3
Coming to class under the influence of drugs	46.2	36.0
Bribery for passing exams	39.6	36.4
Comments or gestures with racist meaning	19.9	24.5
Comments with political propaganda content	5.1	6.0
Insulting colleagues	50.5	41.1
Public presentation of personal information regarding students	25.5	25.2
Passing exams by copying	17.8	23.8
Plagiarism	9.8	8.2

We consider as interesting two of the behaviors, both on behalf of teachers and of colleagues, which were more tolerated in the

second year then in the first: the influence of drugs and the attitude towards plagiarism, aspects that need further investigations.

*The institutional trust*

The initial research revealed the fact that the highest levels of trust are in church (with a very big percentage of the subjects who declared total trust: 60.4%), followed at big distance by ONU (with 18.5% total trust), and by the army with (17.1% total trust). On the last positions as trust given by students of Oradea University we find political parties (49.6% of the subjects declare total disbelief), followed by the government (39.2% total disbelief) and parliament (32.9% total disbelief).

After one year, compared to those dates and significantly as change is the decrease of the trust in church, which the year before was among the most trusted institutions, and now has been appreciated on the fourth position, after the international institutions who register the higher trust

level: EU, on the first place with 13.7% ONU, on the second place with 13.4%, on the third place with 12.1% the ecologist institutions and organizations. The highest levels of disbelief are declared towards the political parties (52.9%), followed by the parliament (36.8%) and by the government (35.9%).

*Attitude towards different forms of bribery, corruption, civism*

In order to analyze the attitude towards different forms of bribery, corruption, civism, the students stated their opinion towards the several behavior: Recourse to public funds unwarrantable, free riding in public transportation, non-payment of taxes and contributions, accepting bribe in order to obtain different benefits.

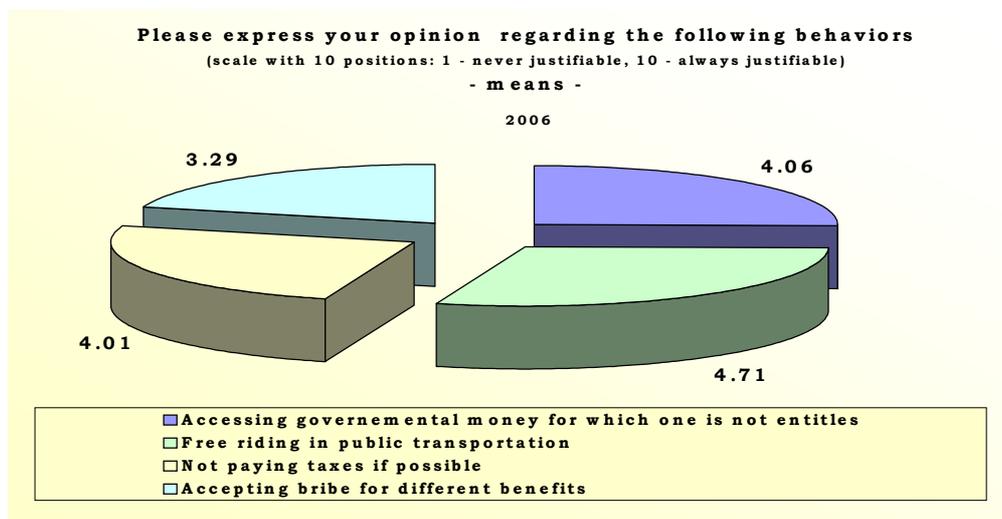


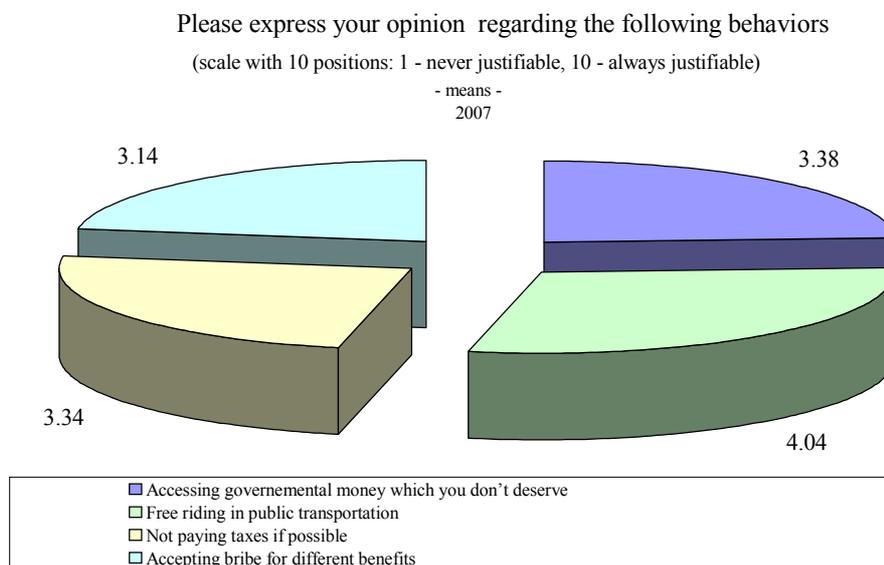
Figure 6. Attitude towards different forms of bribery, corruption and civism (2006)

In the first year of study, the general opinion is that those attitudes are seen as rather unjustified. The activity which is considered the least justified is the acceptance of bribery, and the one that is accepted as being sometimes justified is

traveling by public means of transport without a ticket. Therefore, the answers of the students can be considered desirable being situated in the negative attitude towards bribery generally speaking, or especially at the questions referring to the

ethic behavior of teachers and students (the bribery being declared in this group of

questions among the behavior towards which there is the biggest rejection).



**Figure 7.** Attitude towards different forms of bribery, corruption and civism (2007)

Making a comparison, it can be observed that in the second year the attitude towards aspects did not change in a significant way, the medium scores being much closed. Nevertheless, we can notice that in 2007, all the medium scores get closer to 1 – *Never justified*, thing that let us hope that these results are indeed the behavior that the University wants to infuse to its students.

#### *Attitude towards work*

The considered characteristics of the work place have been: the certainty of the work place, the chance to build a career, the social importance of the work place, the gross wage, low stress, flexible program, the opportunity of being inventive, creative, many holidays and a lot of off days, interesting content of activity, the use of a special talent that you have. The most important characteristics of the work place for the economist students from Oradea have

been the same in the both years, the first three position stay unchanged – the importance of the gross wage 88.3% (2006) and 82.1% (2007), second position – the chance to make career with 59.8% (2006) and 63.6% (2007), followed by the certainty of the work place with 59.4% (2006) and 55.0% (2007). To be noticed is that the least appreciated characteristics of the work place are: the social importance of the work place, many holidays and a lot of off days, on the last place being situated the use of a special talent – even with a decreasing evolution from 8.5% in 2006 to 4.8% in 2007.

Also, it has been followed up attitude towards work, through the statement of the accord or disaccord regarding certain statements regarding the work: work is the most important, even if by this the time spent with the family is shortened, people do not have to work if they do not feel like working, all the people with total power of work who

do not do it are lazy, it is unfair to receive money without working in change, in order to fully use your talents and abilities it is necessary to have a work place.

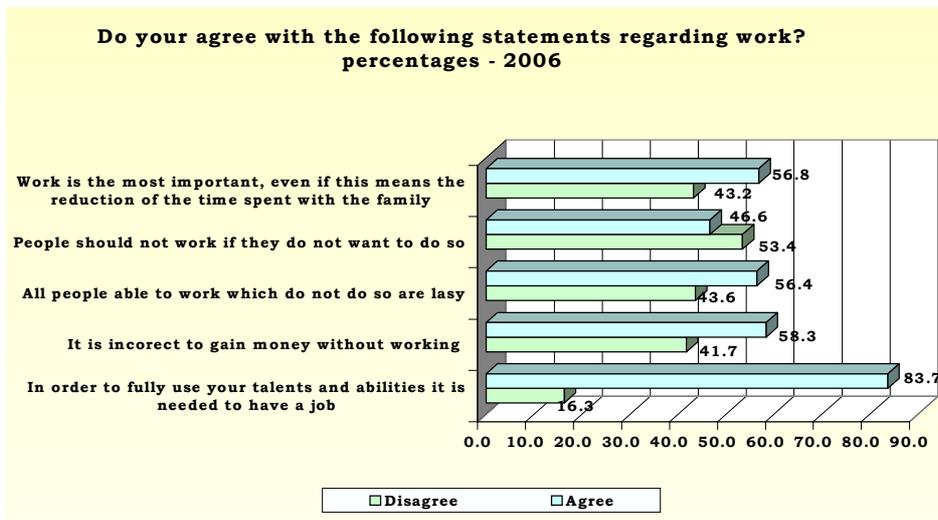


Figure 8. Attitude towards work (2006)

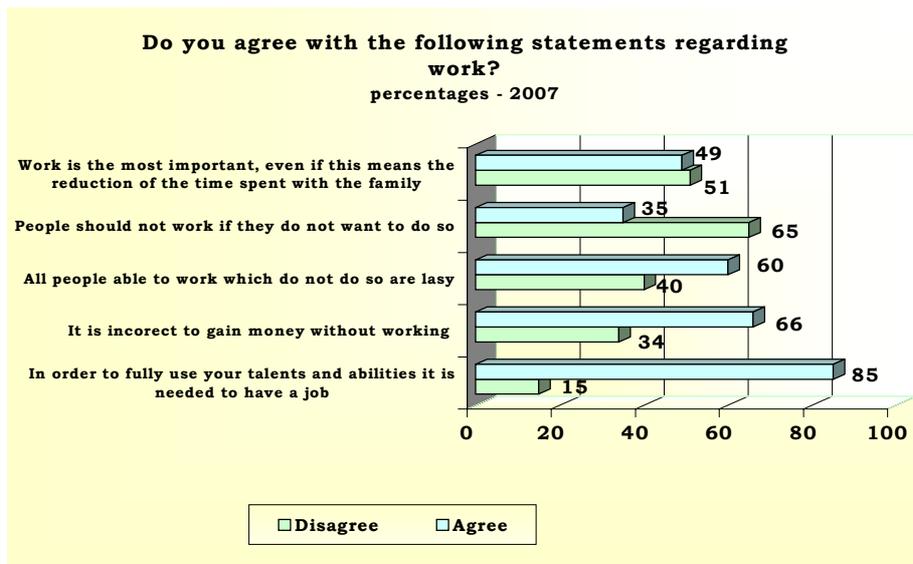


Figure 9. Attitude towards work (2007)

From the graphics 8 and 9 there can be noticed the results obtained in the two years of study, results which did not register significant changes, with the exception of the first statement referring to the importance of work towards family – where it is registered a slight change of attitude. If in 2006 a percentage of 56.8% of the students disagreed with this

statement, after a year of study the accent is on work, registering a percentage of 51% in favor of work importance.

*Attitude towards immigrants as labor force*

Regarding the attitude towards immigrants in Romania as labor force it is

registered a tolerance quite high: 37.6 % of the students consider that every foreigner should be allowed to work in Romania, 49.6 % consider the same thing, in the measure of available work places, 11.6% declare that it is necessary the strict limitation of the number of immigrants from Romania, and only 0.8% consider that it should be forbidden the immigration of labor force in Romania. Compared to those dates, in the second year the tolerance is slightly lower: only 29.8% declare that every stranger has to be able to work in Romania, a higher percentage (56.3%) considering that this has to be possible in the limit of available work places. Only 0.7% consider, in this year, that the immigration of labor force should be forbidden.

*The relationships of man with the environment and the nature*

In order to analyze the relationships between man and environment students had to choose between two statements: *the environment protection is the higher priority and the economic growth and new working places are priorities*. On the first place, closer to the point of view of students, it was situated in the both years – the environment protection with the percentage of 53.7% in 2006 growing to 64.8% in 2007. Also, the option of students between the statements – man has to dominate the nature and man has to coexist with the nature it has been a substantial percentage for the first statement with 89.8% in 2006 growing to 91.4% in 2007. We consider these results as desirable considering that these students will probably work in the business environment of Bihor County, in which, for example, we register

only a percentage of 10% of companies (Pop Coțu, 2004: pp 280-281) which state the desirable attitude towards the environment protection in their conduit codes.

Synthesizing, our research reveals that the main ethical behavioral patterns, the values promoted in the family, the frequency of participation at religious activities, characteristics promoted through the family, attitudes towards unknown people did not change in two years in which we collected our data, despite the changes in the school environment, entourage, access to information. The explication can be driven from the fact that the majority of students did not change their residence, over 60% stay during their studies with their families.

Regarding the behavior promoted within the communities in the establishment of ethical values, one can notice the Romanians behavior in the general patterns of attitudes regarding several social behaviors (homosexuality, prostitution, abortion, etc.). Some data show that Romanians are less tolerant than other European citizens and it seems that our students have the same negative attitude. Worrysome is also the high rate of acceptance of ethical behaviors in school, mainly regarding plagiarism and the positive attitude of copying at exams.

Also, it is worrying the percentage regarding the acceptable behaviors in school, the easy acceptance of plagiary essays and also a very big percentage has registered the easily acceptance towards the attitude of ignorance of teachers towards the evident copying tentative. This behavior is surprising because in our faculty took place in 2006 an anti-copying campaign initiated by the student's representatives.

The research results we presented will form in the next laps of the research in the project called “The perception and the evolution of ethical values of business at the Economic Sciences students (The forming

of an ethic culture of business)”, the leaving point for promoting an education strategy of students from the Faculties of Economic Sciences aiming to form a minimal set of ethical values of business.

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### Note

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<sup>(1)</sup> Research realized in the project: “The Perception and the evolution of the ethical business values at students studying at business faculties (The Formation of a ethic culture of businesses)”, CNCSIS Grant, contract nr. 5662/2 June 2006, Theme nr. 5, cod 543, Length: 2006-2008,

Manager: Professor Gheorghe Ionescu, West University of Timișoara, Faculty of Economic Sciences, as member of the research team. The aimed group is formed of students who study in the field of business and management from Universities of Timișoara, Cluj-Napoca, Arad, Oradea

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