

# **RESIDENTIAL LEARNING COMMUNITY**

## **UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS — RLC BOOK FORUM**

### **Purpose**

The goal of this year's SigEp Book Forum is to engage undergraduates (business and non-business majors alike) to consider the place of ethical thought and action in professional life. The program consists of three parts: first, reading the book If Aristotle Ran General Motors by Tom Morris; second, public lectures by business leaders commenting upon the lessons of the book by drawing upon their own personal and professional experience; third, small group discussions that further explore these ideas and their application.

Of particular interest, given the Sigma Phi Epsilon ( $\Sigma\Phi E$ ) Fraternity's sponsorship of this series, will be reflection upon the Fraternity's cardinal principles of Virtue, Diligence and Brotherly Love, and upon the Fraternity's ideal of "building balanced leaders for the world's communities." In a business world that often emphasizes only diligence – to the neglect of both virtue and brotherly love – these last two need special emphasis for those who truly seek a balanced, fulfilling, and responsible professional life. Hopefully, through this program, students will more fully realize that such values and ideals are not mere slogans or empty platitudes, but rather wise and practical guidelines for both personal and professional life.

Ultimately, the fundamental message of this series should be not just that ethical practices are important in business, or even that ethical practices are useful for professional and financial success (though, certainly, often they are just that) but, in fact, that *true* success should be measured first and foremost by these larger ethical considerations and only secondarily by "lesser" considerations such as profit margin or political influence.

### **The Forum's Format**

This series is intended for two audiences: first, the wider academic and civic community; second, the  $\Sigma\Phi E$  students.

The whole program will consist of six meetings. The first meeting, a general orientation, will be for  $\Sigma\Phi E$  students only and will serve to introduce them to the themes and goals of the lecture series, preparing them for active participation in the upcoming small-group discussions.

The next four meetings – two in the fall, two in the spring – each will feature an invited speaker and will focus, in turn, on one of the four sections of the book If Aristotle Ran General Motors. First the speaker will give a lecture to the general community, discussing and commenting upon the particular section and relating its lessons to his or her own business experience. Next, after each lecture, the fraternity students will meet in small groups to further discuss the ethical and business lessons of the day's reading and presentation.

The last of the six meeting will be, again, a  $\Sigma\Phi E$ -only event and provide an opportunity for those students to reflect upon the lessons and import of the program as a whole and its application to their lives and future plans.

All the meetings will be on Sunday afternoons during the academic year. The dates on which these meetings are currently (and tentatively) scheduled are:

September 12, 2004 (Introduction)	November 14, 2004	March 20, 2005
October 17, 2004	February 20, 2005	April 24, 2005
(Conclusion)		

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### **Themes of the Forum**

The book by Tom Morris, If Aristotle Ran General Motors, has four central sections which set the themes for the four major presentations. These sections focus in turn on one of the four “transcendental values” of truth, beauty, goodness, and unity.

In each case, the author focuses upon the human dimension of these values in both employees and customers, and he discusses the need for businesses to address these qualities in their policies, attitudes, and values. Thus when speaking of “truth”, Morris discusses the need for honesty and openness; with “beauty” he discusses the need for attention to the aesthetic dimension of employees, workspace, and practices, and so forth.

The basic points and themes of the book’s four sections are itemized on the separate sheet enclosed with this letter.

### **Expectations of Speakers**

Speakers are requested to read the appropriate section of the book and to prepare a public lecture of approximately 40-50 minutes which addresses those themes. Many, though not all, of those in the audience will have read the book, so the student who introduces the speaker will probably provide a brief summary of the section to help set the stage. The speaker may use whatever format he thinks best for his presentation, be it in simple lecture or in more participatory format.

While the book contains some examples and anecdotes from the business world, the tone and focus of the book is chiefly academic and philosophical; the author is, after all, a professor of philosophy. Accordingly, the guest lecturer is requested to take the themes and philosophic ideas of the day’s chapter and “flesh them out” with real-life examples from his or her own personal and professional experience.

After this public lecture, the fraternity students will meet in several small groups to further discuss, debate, and reflect upon the day’s lessons. The guest speaker is requested, if possible, to participate in one of these groups; he need not prepare any extra material, but rather simply to be available to offer additional insights, anecdotes, and observations during the discussion. These smaller groups will also focus on the fraternity’s ideals (Virtue, Diligence, Brotherly Love; balanced leaders for the world’s communities), and so if the guest speaker is able to speak specifically to those ideals in this more intimate setting, that participation will be all the more valuable.

The day’s events will conclude with an informal dinner with the fraternity students at the fraternity house and the opportunity for further informal discussion.

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#### I. Truth: People’s affinity for respect, honesty & thoughtfulness

##### A. Respect for employees and customers

1. Avoid a “mindless” job and work environment.
2. Respect employee’s thoughts and insight: solicit & value input, feedback, and opinions.
3. Treat customers as *people*, not just pocketbooks: seek a *relationship*, not just a sale.

##### B. Communication

1. Keep employees informed; avoid a “need to know” mentality.
2. Open-book management.
3. Honesty in relationships with employees and customers.

##### C. Excellence

1. Find an appropriate balance between competition & cooperation.
2. Striving for and emphasis on personal and corporate “best”.
3. Avoid self-centeredness – strive for collaboration.

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### II. Beauty: Aesthetics in workplace, production and product

#### A. Aesthetics and the Individual

1. Work environment.
2. Respect and provide for the physical, emotional, and aesthetic needs of employees: avoid impersonal focus on just their productivity or intellectual contribution.

#### B. Aesthetics of work & product

1. “Performance” aspect of work – find beauty in the production.
2. Attention to the “feel” of the job.
3. Foster an appreciation for the work and the value of its product.
4. Appreciate creativity.

#### C. Beauty of business itself

1. “Relationship” aspect of business, both in the company and with the customer.
2. “Living well” should be the goal of a successful business.

### III. Goodness: Moral considerations

#### A. Recognition of morality & ethics as necessary for human fulfillment

1. Good people and good relationships needed for good business.
2. Ethics are fundamentally ‘positive’ not ‘negative’ (i.e. not just “thou shalt not’s”).
3. Fundamental virtues do not differ between the personal and business worlds.

#### B. Etiquette and Manners

1. Attention to small things / details.
2. *Kindness* to employees and customers.
3. Attitude & behavior within company will be reflected in relationships with customers & others.

#### C. Rules & Guidelines

1. Focus on “do right” not on “don’t get caught.”
2. Importance of a company’s values statement & policies.
3. Cultivate a *moral character* in company to help guide decisions.
4. Importance of moral behavior & outlook in winning loyalty of employees & customers.

#### D. Big Picture

1. Avoid self-centered & short-term-gain approach.
2. Respect property, people, etc.
3. Provides a compass; helps avoid “cult of personality”, “going with the flow”, etc.
4. Awareness of the destructive effect of dishonesty & corruption.
5. Gives a sense of value and worth of work & its product.

#### E. Keys to ethical environment: mentoring, attention to detail, “moral imagination.”

### IV. Unity: The ‘spiritual’ dimension at work – ‘depth’ and ‘connectedness’

#### A. See and value the whole person

1. Connect with employees and customers as *people*, not superficially, not as means to an end.
2. Affirm value of work, duties, goals.

#### B. Integration & connectedness: individual, departmental, corporate, social.

#### C. The “four ‘U’s”

1. individual *uniqueness*: respect & affirm people as people.
2. *unity*: give people sense of participation in something greater which binds them together.
3. *usefulness*: inspire appreciation of the value both of individual contribution and of company as a whole.
4. *understanding*: shared knowledge of and appreciation for the big picture – shared mission and values.