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**ASPEN INSTITUTE SURVEY:
MBA students still value challenging career opportunities and
compensation, but social issues are registering more, especially
among women**

NEW YORK – Salary is still a high priority for most MBA students at top business schools, but more of them, especially women, also cite business’s responsibility to society as a top concern, according to a survey conducted by the Aspen Institute Center for Business Education, a part of the Aspen Institute Business and Society Program.

Where Will They Lead? MBA Student Attitudes About Business and Society (2008), conducted in 2007, probed the thoughts of 1,943 students at 15 leading business schools—from Wharton to the London Business School to the University of California, Berkeley—on a variety of issues, including business ethics, business school coursework and the corporate recruitment process. The previous survey was conducted in 2002.

“In a broader sense, the most important finding is that students seem to be taking a more holistic view of the role of business in society,” says Nancy McGaw, deputy director of the Aspen Institute Business and Society Program. “But the findings also suggest that while students may have these values, many of them sense those beliefs are not valued by employers or linked to career opportunities.”

For example, only 50 percent of students who were surveyed felt that recruiters placed a high value on personal integrity, and only 7 percent said they think recruiters place high value on their understanding of sociopolitical issues.

Additionally, while more of today’s students are saying they want a job that has a positive impact on society, this priority decreases in importance for men as they move through their MBA program.

The findings indicate that the tension between financial compensation and pursuing a job that aligns with personal values is becoming even more pervasive as the so-called Millennials enter business schools and that recruiters ignore these growing concerns at their own peril if they wish to attract top talent.

The survey also found that while values, ethics and corporate reputation are increasingly important to today’s crop of MBA students, environmental issues are not, at least not yet, very important to a majority of students.

For example, on the environment, with many corporations at least espousing the importance of green business practices, “we would have expected a large percentage of students to say that a company’s environmental practices are very important to them



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when choosing an employer,” McGaw says. “At this point, only one-third of students say so.”

Additionally, as they progress through their business school education, students in 2007 feel less prepared to manage the values conflicts they anticipate facing in the workplace.

An executive summary with detailed findings of the MBA Student Attitudes Survey can be found at:

<http://www.aspenbe.org/documents/ExecutiveSummaryMBAStudentAttitudesReport2008.pdf>

Methodology: 1,943 students responded to the survey at the following 15 business schools:

Carnegie Mellon University, Tepper School of Business
Columbia University, Columbia Business School
Duke University, Fuqua School of Business
London Business School
Thunderbird School of Global Management
University of California, Berkeley, Haas School of Business
University of California, Los Angeles, Anderson School of Management
University of Colorado, Leeds School of Business
University of Michigan, Ross School of Business
University of Notre Dame, Mendoza College of Business
University of Pennsylvania, Wharton School
University of Virginia, Darden School of Business
University of Western Ontario, Richard Ivey School of Business
Yale University, Yale School of Management
York University, Schulich School of Business

Sample Findings from *Where Will They Lead? MBA Student Attitudes About Business & Society* (2008):

- Students’ definition of a “well-run” company has remained consistent over the past five years—attracting and retaining exceptional employees and providing excellent customer service topped the list in 2007, as it did in 2002, when the Aspen Institute last conducted an MBA Student Attitudes Survey.
- Eighty-three percent of students in 2007 anticipate that their values will sometimes conflict with what they are asked to do in business. However, even in a post-Enron world, only 45 percent say that they are very likely to speak up about their objections.
- Discussion of business and society issues has become more commonplace in business schools. In 2007, three-quarters of the respondents agree that they feel free to raise



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issues related to the social responsibility of companies in the classroom – up from 70 percent in 2002.

- 55 percent of students strongly agree that faculty are interested in such discussions, compared with 40 percent in the 2002 survey.
- Students in 2007 feel more prepared for managing values conflicts than those in the 2002 survey. However, their confidence in that preparation falls persistently throughout the MBA program.
- The importance of “having a positive impact on society” decreases over the course of the MBA program, especially for men. By the time they are close to graduation, only 29 percent of men place high importance on this issue, compared with 43 percent of men in their first year. There is only a small drop in importance for women students as they move through the MBA program – 52 percent when they start out versus 50 percent as they near graduation say this priority is very important.
- Only half of the 2007 respondents think that their personal integrity figures largely in corporate recruiters’ evaluation of them as a potential employee.

Background

The Aspen Institute Center for Business Education (Aspen CBE) seeks to create business leaders for the 21st century who are equipped with the vision and knowledge necessary to integrate corporate profitability with social value. To that end, it offers programs that provide business educators with the resources they need to incorporate issues of social and environmental stewardship into their teaching, research and curriculum development.

As part of the Aspen Institute Business and Society Program, Aspen CBE maintains close ties with over 100 MBA programs in 23 countries. Its websites draw over 75,000 visits monthly and its events and networks attract over 1,000 participants each year.

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