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COMIC BY JAMES CARLTON, CONTRIBUTING ARTIST/THE DAILY CAMPUS

Daily OPINION

Business and engineering majors need ethical education



"You Can See Everything" is a documentary that features Elizabeth Holmes, the disgraced businesswoman and entrepreneur. The film highlighted Holmes' ethics, and exposed her corruption and fraud.

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This October, the film "You Can See Everything" hit United States theaters. Featuring Elizabeth Holmes, the disgraced founder of Theranos, it quickly rose to the top of the box office rankings, a rare feat for a nonfiction film. Audiences are enthralled by the story of the American businesswoman and entrepreneur who defrauded investors of hundreds of millions in pursuit of Silicon Valley fame and recognition.

While "You Can See Everything" highlights just one outstanding example of white-collar crime, Holmes is not alone. Alongside notorious criminal engineers and professionals like Sam Bankman-Fried, Bernie Madoff and Jordan Belfort, a surprisingly large number of individuals and businesses around the world are involved in white-collar criminal activities each year.

Since criminal activity and ethical violations are so common in professional life, it is important to educate future professionals on the ethical and legal requirements of their future fields. At the University of Connecticut, the education in this area is lacking and must be expanded.

For new students in the School of Business, there is only one required course, BLAW 3175, that is dedicated to law, philosophy and ethics. Before the 2025-26 school year, the core curriculum requirements had an additional philosophy requirement in a specialty of choice. Since the 2025 rollout of the new core curriculum focused on Topics of Inquiry, students can now avoid taking the additional philosophy course altogether, leaving BLAW 3175 as the only required moral education.

The situation for engineering majors is even more dire. Of the fifteen engineering majors offered at UConn, only two — mechanical engineering and management and engineering for manufacturing — require a dedicated ethics or philosophy course for the 2026-2027 school year. Even engineering specialties with highly consequential projects, like biomedical, civil and environmental engineering, have no required courses in ethics, law or philosophy. For these students, UConn is more concerned about their technical ability than the people their work affects.

For UConn students in particular, ethical education is important. Most of the top employers of UConn students are in the defense, insurance, health care and accounting sectors, all of which have a large impact on the safety and well-being of people in the community and around the world. Notably, some of these companies, such as Raytheon and Cigna Group, have recently paid multimillion-dollar settlements over ethical and legal dilemmas. So why should we let this behavior continue?

UConn graduates may find themselves developing military technology, auditing public companies or determining insurance coverage, and none of these are positions where ethics can be an afterthought. Beyond the basic skills that graduates need to do their jobs, UConn has a responsibility to its community and employers to ensure that its students can identify and prevent ethical missteps like those that have happened in the past.

No matter what discipline or company a student ends up in, they need an ethical education. Professional misconduct doesn't usually start with a desire to break the law. Instead, a lot of white-collar crimes begin with pressure to satisfy shareholders, deliver on deadlines or cut costs and quickly spiral into repeated misconduct due to ethical fading and the prioritization of business interests.

Elizabeth Holmes is a prime example of seemingly small ethical violations that escalate when unchecked. At first, she deliberately refused to admit the limitations of her technology, but her repeated false claims grew in scale and grandiosity. Without ethical accountability, an ambitious young woman looking to revolutionize healthcare turned into a notorious white-collar criminal, ultimately harming both investors and other companies that depended on her technology.

UConn's mission statement emphasizes integrity, leadership and engaged citizenship, but these values require more than technical capabilities. While our graduates can design products and structure transactions, they may not consider the impact on the local and national community. Under the current ethical, legal and philosophical curriculum, we risk graduating young professionals who are morally underprepared and lack understanding of the weight and consequences of their decisions. It's time to bring ethics to UConn and protect our students from becoming offenders or victims in moral and legal missteps. We want to educate the next generation of leaders, not the next Elizabeth Holmes.