BEFORE A STUDENT SUCCESSFULLY FINISHES BUSINESS 1301, a foundations course for freshmen and transfer students, he or she will have recited a 17-word code of behavior more than 25 times.

The student will have heard and read the code in almost two dozen different languages – including Amharic, Croatian and Vietnamese – to name just a few. He also would have seen the code on every test he took.

And although he might not think his behavior changed as a result of repeating the words daily, the student will likely never forget them or their significance.

The 17 words make up the Baylor University Honor Code, and they are striking in their brevity and simplicity:

"It's a one-sentence honor code, which in itself is extremely good," said Management professor Blaine McCormick of the length. He teaches Business 1301, "Business, the Economy, and World Affairs," and has lectured on the honor code for years in this course that emphasizes decision-making.

However, he has modified the way he teaches it in remarkable ways over the years, giving the honor code brand status with students who have gone through his classes.

When McCormick first started quizzing students on the honor code, only about 50 percent could identify it on a multiple-choice test. That lack of knowledge about such a short and important message embarrassed him. He lectured harder on its contents.

Still, only about 70 percent of his test-takers spotted the correct version on tests.

So McCormick changed his methods. He knew that employees of an international organization headquartered in Waco recited their "code of values" before every meeting, "and it's long – a page long," he said. He also thought about other recitations that children grow up knowing by heart.

"Can you say the Pledge of Allegiance? Can you say the Lord's Prayer? Most likely, yes," McCormick said. "These really important things we ought to be saying again and again. So I wondered if we said the honor code before every class, would students begin to internalize it and remember it?"

He decided to test his theory, and recognition of the code on his tests finally made it to 100 percent.

Although some of McCormick's students were surprised to discover that the class recites the code every day, they recognize the significance of doing so. Continuous recitation "makes the thought of the honor code more prevalent," said junior Accounting major Samantha Stephenson, a course leader for McCormick. Although she considered herself an ethical person before arriving at Baylor, she sees the impact that familiarity with the code of behavior has had on her and other Baylor students.

"Reciting it, knowing it and living it are different for me than for students who don't recite it every day," she said.

The recitation makes it an ever-present part of her educational career, and thus, her life.

"I will be put into a situation as an accountant where I will have to make ethical decisions," Stephenson said. "I know that I have the foundation to make the right ethical decision. The relevance and presence of the honor code and the ethical culture of Baylor are really going to impact my career as a professional."

That was McCormick's goal. "Going to college is one of the most demanding jobs in America," McCormick said. "Once I started thinking about student life as a job, I realized there is a code of ethics at work, so I asked, What applies here – where our core business is academic ethics?"

Many organizations set the tone for employee behavior with clear codes of ethics that apply to everyone, from CEO to the newest hire, he noted.

"My hope is that students choose organizations that will remind them of how it was at the business school," McCormick said. "It is harder to behave honorably when the environment does not support that."

By Barbara Elmore
On the second day of Business 1301, McCormick spends the entire class talking about the honor code. "It sounds kind of dull, but you would be surprised how interested students are when they understand how it affects them," he said. After the first test on the code, he finds "persistent blind spots" to review.

"For example, students continually misunderstand that the faculty controls the sanction or punishment for violations of the code," McCormick said. "It is not controlled by an administrator or the dean's office. It's between the student and the professor, and they'd better take it seriously."

He also wants students to grasp the whole process so that they can protect their rights. "They have a right to tell their side of the story," he said. "I help them understand where their rights are because to be accused of dishonorable behavior is very nerve-wracking."

His expansion of honor code recognition and understanding did not stop at daily recitations in English. Baylor is a multicultural campus, and McCormick's classes reflect that. One day, about six weeks into the class, he asked a Chinese student to recite the code in Chinese. "And the whole class clapped afterwards," McCormick said. "It was a great moment."

He realized that he and his students had stumbled onto something important. Soon, he had students recite the code in Spanish.

"The whole class erupted," he said. "So I started calling for other languages in the room. There are close to 20 now." Students have recited the honor code in German, French, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Croatian, Serbian, Italian, Afrikaans, Amharic, Arabic, and Tagalog, as well as sign language.

"It's an amazing part of class," McCormick said. "Sometimes the students give a commentary on the words. It teaches you something about the language they are speaking when they say, 'I could not find an exact word for this.'"

TO ALLOW McCORMICK AND STUDENTS TO READ ALONG, HE AND HIS COURSE LEADERS TRANSFER THE TRANSLATIONS TO A BIG SCREEN. EVEN THOSE NOT FLuent IN THE LANGUAGES CAN PICK OUT CERTAIN WORDS - "INTEGRITY" AND "BAYLOR," FOR EXAMPLE.

For junior Accounting major Scott Neumann, another course leader, reading the code in different languages "symbolizes that the honor code and integrity matter in all aspects of life, no matter where you are from or what culture you live in."

Neumann, like Stephenson, knew before taking Business 1301 that he was an honest and ethical person, but realized later that the daily code recitation makes a person more conscious of it, and shows how "little decisions during the day can affect your overall ethical behavior."

As course leaders, he and Stephenson helped McCormick maintain academic integrity in the class, and the code was an aid there, too.

"A lot of students want real-world application in their classes," Neumann said. "It doesn't get much more real world than that — for your decisions to be watched in everyday life."

McCormick is developing even more plans for showcasing the honor code. Next, he wants to have "celebrity readers," well-known figures in the Baylor community, reciting the code on video.

Meanwhile, his usage of the code has gone well beyond the way others use it in their classes, said Linda Cates, director of the Baylor Office of Academic Integrity.

"I don't know of any who use it to the extent that he does," Cates said. "There are many other professors who mention the honor code and have a statement about it in their syllabi, but I don't know of any who teach it and use it as Blaine does." WWW.BAYLOR.EDU/HONORCODE