

In 1992 a veteran art professor at Northwestern University, Olan a Rand Jr., was suspended pending discharge for stealing his dead mother's social security checks. Rand pleaded guilty in federal court to stealing more than \$30,000 from the government by cashing his dead mother's social security checks from 1981 to 1986. He admitted diverting the money from a joint bank account at a Quincy Massachusetts bank where the money was deposited electronically. Opinion of students and faculty at Northwestern concerning the administration's decision with respect to Professor Rand was divided. About two dozen students attended a gathering at which they agreed to launch a letter writing campaign to dissuade the administration from firing Rand. The Northwestern student newspaper, however, supported the administration in an editorial calling for Rand's dismissal.

Should Professor Rand have been fired? If so, why? If not, why not?

MODERATOR'S ANSWER: Professor Rand should not be fired. His behavior was unethical, illegal, and shameful. The key ethical issues for Northwestern, however, in deciding whether to fire Professor Rand are whether his actions significantly harmed the University by tarnishing its reputation, or whether they reflect character defects of a kind that call his fitness into question for the specific position he holds at the University as a Professor of Art. The answers to both questions are negative. The disgrace associated with Professor Rand's actions falls upon him rather than the University, and his dishonesty in financial matters at most has only a remote connection to the issue of his fitness to teach art.

Case from the 1995 Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl. Copyright Robert Ladenson, Illinois Institute of Technology, 1995.