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Global Information Ethics: a mandate for professional education

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In the last ten years, information ethics has become a vital field. Addressing the challenges of the information society both for professionals and for the public information ethics bridges the path between personal decision making and public policy. Yet there are still very few courses or continuing education programs focusing on ethical issues in programs of library and information science. In contrast, computer ethics courses are frequently offered and often required. Today the complexities of the global information environment present issues of access, intellectual property, privacy, security, and human rights that demand critical ethical reflection and dialogue across boundaries of geography, language, and cultural background. With these factors in mind, this paper presents a case for and a brief model of courses in global information ethics and defines the scope, content, and various approaches for courses to be taught co-operatively involving faculty and students from all around the world. Please see more detailed course syllabi on the web site of The International Center for Information Ethics, <http://icie.zkm.de> or <http://www.infoethics.net>

For some years now, departments of computer science in the United States have required a course in computer ethics. To be fair, for a long time programs in library science and now in successor programs, the ethical heritage of librarianship has been an integral part of the curriculum. Nevertheless, only a few stand-alone courses in information ethics have been offered in programs in LIS. Some years ago, many schools offered courses called Intellectual Freedom Seminars concerned with censorship, patron privacy, the ALA code, and other issues in library service. But these have largely been omitted from the curriculum.

In the last twelve years, my research has followed the development of information ethics as an emerging field in applied ethics. From the beginning the field had an international scope. In the last five years, the term information ethics has begun to be used by scholars in computer ethics and related fields. As of 2002, global information ethics can be defined as a broad, umbrella field combining professional ethics, consumer ethics, and issues of public policy. While this presentation focuses on courses in library and information science, similar courses will likely become a standard in higher education along with courses in bioethics and medical ethics/bioinformatics, business ethics, and environmental ethics and animal rights.

The clearest mandate for GIE in professional education is the urgency of issues in global information justice. Threats to access and free use of information, large multi-national commercialization of media, and matters relating to the digital divide and alternative technologies demand immediate attention. LIS professionals have a head-start on understanding the power of knowledge for decision-making.

Ten Reasons to Teach Global Information Ethics

Students need:

1. To study **the heritage and traditions of international librarianship** and begin rethinking these traditions in light of current challenges.
2. To study the historical and philosophical background of **ethical traditions and various strategies for decision-making**.
3. To understand the **social contexts** that have shaped the values and moralities of the successive information ages, the history of reading, writing, and literacy, and the rise of contemporary information and communications technologies.
4. To become comfortable with the **vocabularies and methodologies** of applied ethics, STS (Science, Technology, and Society), social informatics, and the philosophy of technology.
5. To **practice critical thinking** and various approaches to decision-making in **supportive environments** where many different voices can be heard.
6. To learn to apply the values represented in **professional codes** yet also to think and act beyond the confines of established codes.
7. To appreciate **global dimensions** of ethical, legal, and cultural issues.
8. To learn to use resources that will guide them throughout their **careers** to explore and evaluate ethical challenges, the professional literature, the work of organizations and associations both inside and outside the field of LIS, governmental, and non-governmental policy resources.
9. To become familiar the **research** literature and methodologies of the various academic disciplines contribute to understanding of global information ethics
10. To develop a **professional perspective** to guide them toward personal integrity and social responsibility in the work place and in their participation in larger society.
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Global Information Ethics: Brief Course Outline

For a model syllabus with assignments and readings and many other examples for teaching courses, please see the web site of the International Center for Information Ethics

<http://icie.zkm.de> or <http://www.infoethics.net>

Part I: Foundations: History, Philosophy, and Public Policy

Trajectories for Analysis:

- Moral Agency: The Self, the Professional, the Society
- Humanity, Nature, and Technology
- Identity, Knowledge, and Community

Historical Foundations: The World after World War II and Hopes for Peace

Philosophy:

- Employing Philosophical Foundations: Deontology, Utilitarianism, and Justice Theory
- Models for Decision-Making
- Strategies for Consensus Building

Public Policy:

- Shaping Public Policy
 - Social Responsibility: Professional Organizations and Public Policy
 - The Universal Declaration of Human Rights
 - The Universal Declaration of Genetic Rights
 - UNESCO and Other International Organizations

Part II: Major Issues: Access, Ownership, Privacy, Security, and Community

Part III: Professional Ethics in a Global Context: Preparing for the Future

- The Impact of Information and Communications Technologies and the World Wide Web
- The Expansion of the Information Professions
 - Codes of Ethics
 - The Library Association (British)
 - American Library Association (ALA)
 - American Association for Information Science and Technology (ASIST)
 - Association for Computing Machinery (ACM)
 - Institutional Statements of Purpose and Mission
 - Statements of Right Use/Appropriate Use Policies

Part IV: The Ethical Challenges of the Global Information Infrastructure

- Language, Literacy and the Digital Divide: The Right to Read and to Know How to Read; The Right to Use Technology
- The Open Source Movement: Sharing Intellectual Property
- Alternative and Appropriate Technologies: When Digital Is Not the Solution
- Human and Machine Intelligence: Who's in Charge?

Part V: The Future of Global Information Ethics: Recent Trends in Research, Public Policy, and Other Fields of Applied Ethics (Computer Ethics, Internet Ethics, Cyberethics, Engineering Ethics, Medical and Bioethics, Environmental Ethics, and BioInfoEthics)

A Brief Sample for Readings (Note that fiction and film selections are included in the master syllabus.)

Bynum, T. W. and Rogerson, S. (Eds.) (1996). Global Information Ethics: Selected Papers from ETHICOMP95, an International Conference on the Ethical Issues of Using Information Technology. *Science and Engineering Ethics* (UK). 2, 129-256.

Capurro, R. 1996. Information Technology and Technologies of the Self, *Journal of Information Ethics* 5,19-28.

Christians, C. G. 1991. Information Ethics in a Complicated Age. In *Ethics and the Librarian.*, Lancaster, F. W. (ed.) Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois, Graduate School of Library and Information Science.

Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility. URL: <http://www.cpsr.org/>

EPIC. Electronic Privacy Information Center. URL: <http://www.epic.org>

Froehlich, T. 1997. Survey and Analysis of Legal and Ethical Issues for Library and Information Services. UNESCO Report (Contract No. 401.723.4), for the International Federation of Library Associations. IFLA Professional Series. Munich: G. K. Saur.

Mason, R., Mason, F. and Culnan, M. (1995). *Ethics of Information Management*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Mitcham, C. (1995). Computers, Information, and Ethics: A Review of Issues and Literature. *Science and Engineering Ethics* (UK). 1,113-132.

Rawls, J. (1971). *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Smith, M. M. (1992). "Infoethics for Leaders: Models of Moral Agency in the Information Environment." *Library Trends* 40, 553-570.

Smith, M. M. (1997). Information ethics. *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology (ARIST)*. Vol. 32 (pp. 339-366). Medford, NJ: Information Today for the American Society for Information Science (ASIS).

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Smith, M. M. (2001). Global information justice. *Library Trends*, 49,3,519-537. Ethical Issues of Information Technology.