

Ethical Issues Related to Online Education

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General Principles

- Ethical codes vary sharply from discipline to discipline and from country to country.
- For this reason there exist multiple ethical decision-making frameworks used to resolve conflicts in values and interests in online education.
- Many of the questions I raise will evoke more than one ethically defensible response: ambiguity and disagreement are inevitable.
- Within a particular context what is desirable is to articulate parameters that provide significant restrictions on what may and may not be defended as ethical behavior.
- Whereas “best practices” generally work to make the enterprise *sustainable*, we focus on ethical practices to make it *sustaining*.

Four Categories of Ethical Issues

- Faculty
- Researcher
- Student
- Institutional

Faculty: Course Design

- Copyright: Use of materials in the online environment is even more strictly regulated (The Teach Act vs. Fair Use).
- Designing for diverse populations:
Assumption of dominant approaches to learning

Faculty: Instruction

- Whose students are these?
- Out of sight, out of mind
- Engagement vs. “encagement”

Researchers

- Researchers' conception of study participants as "unreal"
- Participants' false belief in the anonymity of the online environment
- Insufficient guidance and protections from traditional institutional Human Subjects policies
- Intercultural challenges

Students

- Cheating: New technologies and a changing standard of conduct
- Identity misrepresentation: The blurring of informal and academic virtual environments and their respective codes of conduct

Institutional: Faculty

- Coercion by the administration into teaching online
- Undervaluing of online work and inequitable reward structure
- De-professionalization through the “unbundling” of the faculty role
- Administrative vs. academic policy development and governance

Institutional: Students

- Access: The reality behind the rhetoric
- Marketing or recruitment? The customer vs. student question

Institutional: Change Management

- Policy development
- Institutional resource allocation
- Institution-business partnerships
- Support for change

Questions?

Insights?