

eSociety 330 Project Assignment

The point of this assignment is for you to show your knowledge of how to apply ethical reasoning to concrete situations in the digital environment.

There are two options

1. Write a code of ethics for how to deal with interactions online for a group or organization.
2. Write an ethical consultation report evaluating the ethics of an organization's online activity.

1. Code of Ethics

Background:

Numerous groups and organizations have codes of ethics, policies, or values statements (see e.g., Ess pp. 138-139 and <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/proethics/codeofethics/codeethics>, <http://corporate.ford.com/microsites/sustainability-report-2011-12/blueprint-governance-sustainability-policy>).

These codes and statements are designed to provide guidance to members of these groups or organizations in making ethical decisions. As more of our interactions take place online there is a need for codes of ethics that provide guidance for ethical behavior online. Your assignment is to write such a code of ethics focusing on one or more ethical issues arising in online communication. Your final product should be a web document with links to the ethical justification for each principle and to a case study that shows how the principle applies in real life (word count 1750-2000, not including bibliography).

Steps in Project

- **Choose and investigate the group or organization.** What are the goals and mission of the organization? What ethical issues confront this organization in the online environment? Has this group or organization faced criticism for unethical practices in the past? [This would include looking at the organization's or group's website, news articles about the organization, interviews with members of the organization, etc.]
- **Determine the main problems or issues that confront the organization.** What are the main concerns—privacy, intellectual property, censorship, etc.? What has been written on these topics that is relevant to this organization? Develop a bibliography of relevant sources.
- **Look at relevant existing codes of ethics.** Does the organization already have a code? Are there similar organizations or groups that have codes? What might you add, change, adapt from these existing codes? How do these

ethics translate to the current digital environment or challenges faced by the group?

- **Write a draft of your code.** What issues do you want to cover? How many principles will you have? (Should be more than 2 and less than 10.)
- **Write a draft of your justification for each provision of the code with a case study for each principle showing how the principle would apply.** Make clear the ethical theories you use for justifying the principles. Explain why you selected this theory or theories. Explain how each principle is supported by one or more ethical theory. Go back and forth the between your justification, case study, and principles to refine and clarify the principles.

2. Ethics Consultant

Background: Organizations often hire consultants who are experts in a particular area to look at how the organization is doing in that area, write a report, and make recommendations. Many organizations are concerned about the ethical behavior of the corporation and its members. In addition to a desire to be good citizens, corporations can face legal and public relations disasters from unethical behavior. In the shift to digital communication, ethical standards have become less clear; so corporations need guidance through this new ethical environment. Your assignment is to act as a virtual ethics consultant for an organization that has a strong online presence. Your final product will be a paper (2000-2750 words, not including bibliography) that provides a description of the group or organization, their current policies and practices in relation to the digital environment, an ethical evaluation of these policies and practices, and 3-5 recommendations for improvement.

Steps in the Project

- **Choose and investigate the group or organization.** What are the goals and mission of the organization? What current stated ethical policies does the organization have? What unstated norms or practices does it follow? What ethical issues confront this organization in the online environment? Has this group or organization faced criticism for unethical practices in the past? [This would include looking at the organization's website, news articles about the organization, interviewing members of the organization, etc.]
- **Determine and research the main problems or issues that confront the organization.** What are the main concerns—privacy, intellectual property, censorship, etc.? What has been written on these topics that is relevant to this organization? [Develop a bibliography of relevant sources.]
- **The Paper Should Have the Following Components**
 - **Describe the organization or group and its policies (either written or unwritten) and actions.** Include a description of the purpose and goal of the organization and describe its stakeholders (employees, customers, stockholders, surrounding community). Describe both its stated policies and the actions that it has taken.

- **Evaluate the organization's policies and actions from the viewpoint of one (or more) of the ethical theories.** Take into account the particular purpose and goal of the organization. Also, draw on any concepts or other frameworks discussed in the course (e.g., privacy as contextual integrity, copyright as incentivizing creativity). Explain why you chose the ethical framework or frameworks that you use for this analysis. Note where the organization or group is doing well and where it has ethical weak spots.
- **Propose measures the organization could take to improve its ethics.** These proposals should clearly address the problems you noted in the evaluation. These proposals can include such things as changes in policy, training for employees, hiring an ethics expert, etc.