

# Information Ethics Education in Africa. Where do we stand?<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The paper recognizes some of the ethical dilemmas facing information professionals and maintains that information ethics threads through all human activities where information and knowledge is generated, processed, stored, disseminated and used, and therefore IE education should be more widespread. Through a literature review and a case study conducted via email with purposely selected LIS experts in Africa, information ethics education within LIS (Library and Information Studies/Science) schools in Africa was explored to determine the following: Is ethics and information ethics education as a whole and in LIS schools necessary? Who should offer such education in terms of discipline or academic unit/department/faculty, and individual/expertise? Who offers such education and why? Who should learn information ethics? How long should information ethics education take in the curricula (e.g quarterly)? At what learning level should it be offered? What should be learnt or taught in an information ethics course? What are the challenges and opportunities of information ethics education in Africa? Overwhelmingly, it was agreed that Information Ethics (IE) should be offered by LIS departments with a multidisciplinary mindset, tapping into knowledgeable and experienced faculty/academic staff members who would make it available to all students at all levels. The content should be objective and outcome based or driven. The challenges and opportunities enumerated in this study could potentially be used to set the agenda for further research and professional engagement.

**Keywords:** Information Ethics; Ethics Education; Africa; Applied Ethics; Ethics

## Introduction

Since the concept was [re]conceived in 1990's by scholars(visit their websites) like Stephen Almagno, Rafael Capurro, Luciano Floridi and Robert Hauptman some of whom are recognized by Thomas Froehlich in his 'brief history of information ethics'(2005) and the sterling work done towards the development of EI education by the University of Pittsburg through the initiative of Toni Carbo and Stephen Almagno,, 'information ethics' as a field

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of study has grown rapidly and seen the publication of a number of articles in various scholarly journals and databases such as LISA, ISA, LISTA and the Web of Science, to name a few. The epistemology of information ethics largely resides in applied ethics, which provides the basic theoretical framework on which the pedagogical foundation and practice of information ethics can be constructed and applied. Ethical theories (see also Teleology and Deontology) that define what right actions and wrong actions people may take under different circumstances are generally accommodated under four widely known theories, i.e. consequence-based theories, duty-based theories, rights-based theories and virtue-based theories. These theories demonstrate the difficulties and contradictions that arise in the conceptualization and contextualization of ethics. Don Fallis' recent article (2007) reminds us that consequence-based theories are driven by utilitarianism and built on the premise that "*what distinguishes right actions from wrong actions is that they [actions] have better consequences*". Although Fallis feels that the consequence-based theory, as will be elaborated on latter, is the most applicable to the 'ethical dilemmas faced by library professionals', as illustrated on page 3, in actual fact, all four ethical theories are applicable in information practice. Fallis (2007), referring to other duty-based theorists such as Immanuel Kant, explains that "*there are ethical duties that human beings must obey [or abide by] regardless of the consequences*". Thus, there could be a long list of duties that are to be obeyed without necessarily being aligned with either wrong or right, as W.D. Ross pointed out in 1930. Rights-based theories work according to the notion that "*the right thing to do is determined by the rights that human beings have*", or in other words, human rights such as those captured in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948<sup>3</sup>. Examples of such rights are the right to live, eat and breath, to shelter, companionship, access to information, the freedom to think, speak or express ourselves, and benefit from the 'fruits of our labour'. We ought not to be 'ethicized', so to speak, due to differences in our social, economic, political and technological conditions and/or mindset. For example, marginalized communities the world over, such as children, women, the illiterate, rural dwellers or other social groups that are segregated because of race, creed, religion or poverty, may not necessarily benefit from the human rights that others enjoy. To them in most instances, equality and human rights are utopian - what is naturally right to them is often decided not by themselves but by somebody else, some 'superior' being.

The fourth theory highlighted by Fallis, referring to its originator Aristotle in 350 BC, is the virtue-based theory (Fallis. p.32). He explains that virtue-based theorists believe that "*the right thing to do is determined by virtues that human beings ought to have*". Thus, what a virtuous person would do under similar circumstances would be the right thing to do. The problem with

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<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.un.org/overview/rights.html>

all these theories is the difficulties faced in their application, particularly because of the contradictions one comes across when attempting comparisons, both within and without. For example, an excellent consequence that brings happiness to an individual, community or an institution may not necessarily be either right or virtuous. Similarly, the way people understand duty varies, and the question therefore is, duty to whom - family, belief/religion, employer, government or nation? Some of the most virile conflicts in family units, workplaces, governments and international relationships have largely arisen from conflicts in the interpretation of ethics.

Alternative or supplementary approach to the question of ethical theories is the contradiction between mores, ethics and laws (see Froehlich, 1997:1-2). Froehlich views mores or morality to be “*the implementation and social institutionalization of ethical values, generally acquired through socialization into a culture or society, through family, peers, education etc*”. Ethics, according to his definition, is “*concerned with the universal or commonly held values of persons, despite or because of moral or cultural variations, values such as a belief in justice, truth, competence in ones work and the like*”. He argues that “*there are cultural variations of ethical values which may provide for different implementations of an ethical value (i.e. Mores)*”. Laws, according to him, are “*formalized codes [of behavior] by governing bodies to provide mechanisms for enforcing appropriate behavior or deterring inappropriate or unacceptable behavior*”. Thus, “*laws most often find their origin in the ethics and mores of a given nation or region*” (Froehlich 1997:2). It is noted (see Froehlich 1997:3) that morals, ethics and laws contravene one another. Ultimately, the nature, level and challenges of such contraventions must be understood by the information ethics scholar and professional.

Observably, ethics theories and the relationship between ethics, mores and laws can be contradictory and require rational judgment by information professionals, but even these professionals may sometimes encounter highly ‘sticky’ dilemmas. Examples of possible dilemmas in the process of information gathering, processing and distribution, as highlighted by Don Fallis (2007:23) citing Doyle, Garoogian, Nesta and Blake, Baldwin, Wolkoff, Hannabuss and Pendergrast, include the following;

- Should internet filters be put on all the computers in a public library?
- Should law enforcement officers investigating a potential terrorist be allowed to know what a particular person checked out?
- Should books donated by a racist organization be added to the library collection?
- Should a homeless person that smells very bad be allowed to use the library?
- Should Holocaust denial literature be included in the library collection?

- Should there be charges for specialized information services in a public library?
- Should a warning label be placed on an encyclopedia that contains clearly inaccurate information?
- Should we stop a music fan from downloading music from the Internet without paying?( Fallis 2007:34)
- Should a bookseller tell law enforcement officers what books her patrons are reading?(Fallis 2007:34)

From the myriad of definitions available, ethics seem to focus on the norms and standards of behavior of individuals or groups within a society based on normative conduct and moral judgment, principles of wrong and right (Roland and Heilyer, 1996), “moral consequences of human action”(Wojtzak, 2000), and responsibility and accountability (Sembok, 2004). Gleaning from these definitions, the role or purpose of ethics in society is to promote what is good in people, avert chaos, and provide norms and standards of behavior based on morals and values that are unifying, as opposed to dividing. Information ethics is a field of applied ethics that “investigates the ethical issues arising from the development and application of information technologies. It provides a critical framework for considering moral issues concerning informational privacy, moral agency (e.g. whether artificial agents may be moral), new environmental issues (especially how agents should one behave in the infosphere), problems arising from the life-cycle (creation, collection, recording, distribution, processing, etc.) of information (especially ownership and copyright, digital divide). Information Ethics is therefore strictly related to the fields of computer ethics and the philosophy of information”(Information Ethics,nd:np). A wider context of Information ethics is provided by Floridi(2007)<sup>4</sup> for example.

## **2. Case study on selected LIS Schools in Africa**

In order to compare the views expressed in the studied literature to information ethics education in LIS schools in Africa, 12 senior LIS faculty members from the following LIS schools were sent open ended questionnaires via e-mail correspondence: Botswana (2) - University of Botswana (UB), Ghana (1) - University of Ghana (UG), Kenya (1)- Moi University (MOU), Namibia (1) - University of Namibia (UNAM), Nigeria (1) - University of Ibadan (UI), South Africa (4) - University of Pretoria (UP), Durban University of Technology (DUT) University of Zululand (UZ), University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN), University of South Africa (UNISA) and Uganda (2)-Makarere University (MU). The largest LIS Schools in Africa are found in the selected Universities. The faculty members were asked to comment on the

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<sup>4</sup> See also <http://www.philosophyofinformation.net>

following eleven items: Is ethics and information ethics education as a whole necessary in LIS schools? Who should offer such education in terms of academic unit/department/faculty, and individual/expertise? Who offers such education? Why is it being offered by the academic unit, discipline or the individual? Who should learn information ethics? How long should information ethics education take in the curricula (e.g quarterly)? At what learning level should it be offered? What should be learnt or taught in an information ethics course? What are the challenges and opportunities of information ethics education in Africa?

### **2.1. Is ethics and Information ethics education necessary and why?**

The University of Makerere (Uganda) respondents both stated that it is necessary, with one believing that “*it encourages LIS professionals to practice and apply correct moral professional obligations in the performance of their duties*”. The second MU respondent elaborated on why it is important by raising his concern on the proliferation of western media on the African continent, and the problems that this has brought to families in controlling access to unsuitable information originating from such media in the form of movies (e.g. sex - escalating HIV/Aids, drugs and violence) and other displays that would normally be considered taboo in the African setting. He blames freedom of access to information, mainly through ICTs, for causing the problem. Assumingly, such broadcasts or media could only occur when there is insufficient broadcasting and cinematographic policies and legislations or mechanisms to regulate access. It is uncommon to find unregulated media in Africa. Other issues that justify ethics education, according to an MU respondent, include what he calls ‘Ethics on intellectual property’ which have been increasingly violated through plagiarism, mainly through copying and pasting, and the exploitation of unlicensed IP( e.g software) products and services (a crime often committed by our students and also staff). Cyber terrorism and cyber crime is also rising. The UB respondent reiterated that information ethics should concern all information professionals in their attempts to delineate what is wrong from what is right in the dispensation of their professional duties. Such (IE) education, in the UB respondent’s view, should also “*enable one to defend actions that he/she takes in the execution of professional responsibilities, especially where there are forces that would want to deny access to certain information in the custody of information professionals*”. He believes that the “*ethical aspects of any discipline delineate one profession from another and in effect give identity to a profession*”. For example, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institution’s (IFLA)<sup>5</sup> core values for Librarians, such as intellectual freedom, protecting the rights of library users through privacy/confidentiality, intellectual property rights, professional neutrality,

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<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.ifla.org/III/intro00.htm>

preservation of cultural records, and equity access; are core values that give identity to the profession. A study by Koehler et al. (2005) on the ethical values of information and library professionals confirms these values, but reports that overwhelmingly, librarians identify “*service to the client or patron as the most important of their values*” (Koehler et al., 2000:503). Furthermore, “*ethical aspects of a professional that are instilled through relevant education and professional codes of conduct ensure quality of service delivery*”. The Moi University (MOU) respondent was also of the view that information ethics education is essential in modern times, and reasoned that “*there are many ethical issues relating to the acquisition, processing, storing, dissemination and use of information that require information professionals, managers, and citizens to be aware of and equipped to be able to cope effectively with them*”. This respondent observed that most jobs are information and knowledge driven, and therefore require an ethical approach to information handling at all stages of the information process. This idea was shared by the UI’s respondent in general terms. The UNAM respondent believes that information ethics education is necessary because we live in a society that abhors divulging information that hinges on the privacy of others. He also asserts that there is a need to practice more professionalism as the importance of information becomes more prominent in today’s information and knowledge society. He reiterates that issues of access to information in an environment of inequality become unavoidable ethical issues. Furthermore, he is of the view that demands of good governance and fair practices in the distribution of information in society are demanding more ethics, and concludes that “*the fact that there is a lot that is written on information ethics also means that it is now viable to have such courses run in universities as there are enough back up materials*”. The UG (University of Ghana) respondent was of the view that “*information ethics education is necessary so that students are aware of the ethical issues that arise from information; information is definitely a good thing, but how it is used and disseminated can have far reaching implications – students need to be aware of this. Issues of IP, censorship, etc must be addressed*”. The University of Pretoria respondent also agreed with the notion of information ethics education and emphasized that “*it reflects the core values of those who are professionally involved in the life cycle of information – and it also ‘imbed’ core values in information professionals*”. The Durban University of Technology (DUT) respondent agreed with the above, and noted that this was especially the case “*in view of the current knowledge society (currently being driven by rapidly advancing information and communication technology) where information is often the factor determining competitive advantage in many enterprises*”. The UNISA respondent added that “*ethical behaviour should be part of professional conduct. Issues related to this therefore need to be taught within the first professional qualification*”. In the opinion of UKZN respondent, “*ethics in general (and in its absence!) is a crucial issue in our*

*society at present. More specifically, ethics as it relates to information is an issue that we cannot ignore, particularly if we consider ourselves to be living in what is referred to as an information society”.*

Notably, all the respondents agreed that ethics and information ethics education is essential. Raising awareness of moral values in the profession, sensitivity to protection (e.g. privacy) and accessibility, professional identity through codes of ethics, awareness of ethical issues and the growing amount of research and publication in the field, are some of the reasons used to justify information ethics education.

Whether or not information ethics education in LIS schools is necessary raised interesting views. The MU respondent asserted that it is “*very necessary because these are the educators and trainers of LIS professionals*”. He emphasized that “*students should be indoctrinated in ethics during their education and training*”. The UB respondent concurred by adding that “*the dispensers of information, should be equipped with skills in the ethics of their discipline to enable them to function effectively in an information society where access to information is democratized against other competing forces – i.e. censorship, privacy, confidentiality, security, etc*”. She continued, by arguing that “*information professionals, as custodians of information, often come across information of a private nature, classified or otherwise, and must handle such information in their highest professional capacity without being seen to be restricting access to such information*”. The MOU respondent emphasized that “*LIS schools are responsible in training students in a broad range of information science disciplines, and imparting knowledge and skills to enable them to respond intelligently to problems of information collection, processing, storage, retrieval and dissemination. Upon graduating, the information professional should possess special knowledge and skills in information handling and dissemination. It is therefore necessary to expose the students to many ethical issues relating to the information transfer cycle*”. The UI respondent concurred and highlighted the importance of information ethics in inculcating “*knowledge and skills of ethics and laws in students and good professional practice*”. This viewpoint was supported by the UG respondent, who noted that “*library schools are one of the best means of education on Information Ethics so that the professionals also educate the users*”. The UP respondent emphasized that “*many ethical challenges, for example access, quality, privacy, ownership of information, asymmetric information relationships, information and dependency*” should be emphasized in LIS education. These factors are also echoed by the DUT respondent, who noted that “*LIS education and training has to orientate students (who will, in future, be participants in an information society) to ethical issues surrounding the availability of and access to information, responsible use of information, acknowledging sources of information,*

*property rights relating to information, etc*” which are all essential in their professional dispensation. The UKZN respondent is “*not sure who would teach information ethics in the academic context if not the LIS discipline. IT/Computer Science? Philosophy? Law? Possibly, but I would imagine that issues such as censorship, copyright and plagiarism, intellectual freedom, the digital divide and the like should be taught in a discipline with "information" in its nomenclature*”.

These views appear to be in agreement with recent international research (e.g Carbo and Almagro 2001, Smith 2003, Ethics Special Interest Group 2007). Smith (2003:3) for example, points out that threats to information access, accuracy and privacy, and matters relating to the digital divide and alternative technologies demand immediate attention, and in turn provide a sound rationale for teaching information ethics. Similar views are shared by the Information Ethics Special Interest Group (2007:2), whose focus it is to understand “*pluralistic intercultural information ethical theories and concepts*” and ethical contexts.

It is increasingly recognized that research and teaching in ethics/morals/deontology is rapidly spreading at all levels. Vagaan (2003), for example, citing the International Center for Information Ethics (ICIE), notes that “*information ethics (infoethics) by 2003 was a research discipline in around 70 institutions world-wide*” and observes that the underlying research in these institutions is “*multidisciplinary and based on a variety of staff competencies, particularly information science and technology, but also philosophy, mass media and communication studies, LIS, organization theory, and the sociology of professions*”. According to Vagaan, and again citing ICIE when referring to the USA, “*ethics plays a key role, for example, in the American Library Association’s Bill of Rights. Research in and teaching of, information ethics have increased in the USA in recent years and are today[then] carried out at 20 universities, according to ICIE*” (Vagaan 2003:1). Sadly, Buchanan (2004) does not seem to share this excitement when referring to information ethics education in the Library and Information Science Programme in the US. Her study observes that despite the importance of information ethics courses, less than half of the American Library Association’s accredited programs offered such courses, and only a few of these courses required students to take a course on information ethics. She also revealed that in most Library and Information Science programs, ethical issues were only covered briefly in courses that dealt with other topics such as collection management, information policy and information literacy. Buchanan’s observation is shared by Carbo and Almagro(2001) and Froehlich(2005). Reasons why LIS students should receive information ethics education are coined in these metaphorical questions posed by Vagaan (2003), referring to Castell’s ‘global information superhighway of the new millennium’ concept, thus, “*Would LIS scholars and educators want their*

*students to drive on this superhighway without knowing the traffic rules? Should our students not also be provided with moral benchmarking tools so they can better assess the challenges and pitfalls referred to initially, such as globalization, and the possibility of ethical misconduct such as the misuse of information?*

## **2.2. Who should offer such education in terms of discipline or academic unit/department/faculty, and individual/expertise?**

There were generally mixed feelings on this item, with some suggesting LIS schools and the LIS Faculty and others opting for a more multidisciplinary approach. One of the MU respondents believed that LIS Schools/departments should take the responsibility because they know the context. This position was shared by the second MU respondent, who added that LIS is more responsible than other disciplines with regard to information access, and prescribed that IE “*must become part of the curriculum of all faculties in a university or tertiary institutions because at this level all are prospectors of information in a big way*”. One UB respondent stated that “*IE is a crosscutting discipline and should be offered as a joint curriculum involving, for example, LIS, IT (IT ethics), Law (legal aspects of information) and media studies. Depending on academic structures in different universities, it is possible that IE could be offered as a common course with involvement from various departments*”. The MOU respondent felt that the “*information ethics course should be a joint venture undertaken by LIS schools in conjunction with the School of Law. In other words, some topics on legal issues may best be undertaken by the School/Faculty of Law*” and gave examples from Moi University where for many years the IE course was handled with expertise from the School of Law. The UI respondent concurred that “*a lecturer with a legal/ sociology or law background*” is ideal, and gave an example of a lawyer in Ibadan who is also a member of staff who teaches the information ethics units that are integrated in the courses. The UNAM respondent is more philosophical. His belief is that it “*should depend on the context of individual departments. Where one has departments which have legal backgrounds, or philosophy /religion etc. one could tap into the knowledge of these colleagues to augment the knowledge of lecturers in LIS. However, if such sister departments are not there, training can be given to LIS staff to provide such courses*”. He illustrates this with an example of their media studies programme – “*we have a course entitled Media Laws, Ethics and Policies - some topics of the course are taught by law lecturers if they are available, otherwise our media studies lecturer can handle the entire course. The difference is that there is a code of ethics for media practitioners, laws and policies which need to be mastered to avoid defamation and other legal problems for a practicing journalist - there are no such stringent frameworks for a practicing librarian*”. The second UB respondent was of the opinion that

IE is “*a premise for all departments really, but more so in Media studies, library and information studies, archives and records management, law, business, etc*” therefore it is better handled by faculties from the related disciplines. The UP respondent prefers for IE education to be handled by LIS schools, but does not prescribe who, in terms of knowledge, skills or academic discipline, should provide the course. An interesting approach is provided by the DUT respondent. She feels that all stakeholders should be involved in the offering of the programme and enumerates “*individual educators in their areas of teaching and research, particularly aspects in information ethics affecting these, the department/programme via student guidelines and handbooks, the institution via institutional publications (e.g. postgraduate research guidelines, technology transfer guidelines, work integrated learning (WiL) guidelines, teaching and learning publications, etc)*”. In the opinion of the UNISA respondent, IE should be offered by the “*Department of Information Science, among others who have to deal with other aspects of information handling, e.g. Law, Philosophy, Theology, etc*”. In her view, “*ethics has a significant contribution to each of the disciplines named above, but may take a certain perspective in each case which may not necessarily be applicable to all and sundry. Thus each discipline needs to customize its brand of information ethics*”. The UKZN respondent added that “*I would think that some issues relating to information ethics would be taught by and could be applicable to all academic disciplines, e.g. plagiarism and copyright.*”

From the above, it can be seen that a multidisciplinary approach to information ethics education appears to prevail, with a number of context specific approaches being suggested (case studies can bring the context home). The reasons for supporting this approach, in my view, are pedagogical and resource-oriented. Many schools often decry the lack of qualified staff to offer IE and therefore would rely on staff from other units or departments for support. For example, at the time that the course was introduced in Moi University (Kenya) in 1988, there was nobody on the LIS School staff to offer the course, and therefore they had to resort to the nearest discipline, which was Law, for support. At the University of Zululand, we have involved a staff member from the Department of Philosophy with a PhD in the Philosophy of Ethics to supplement IE teaching and learning, largely because he is more knowledgeable in ethics than any of our staff. However, due to a scramble for FTEs and other reasons, we had to limit his involvement. The bottom line is that the information ethics curriculum should be taught by a knowledgeable and experienced person (Carbo 2005:27, Information Ethics Interest Group 2007: 3). Fallis (2005:7) contextualizes his advice by arguing that the course should be taught by library and information professionals who have actually faced some of these ethical dilemmas, and not by philosophers trained in applied ethics. However, well planned and organized scenarios/case studies,

in light of what Stuart Hannabuss (1996) outlines, can strongly augment teaching by any IE course provider. Additionally, the course should be taught throughout the curriculum and also as part of a continuous education programme (Carbo, 2005:27).

In response to who (in terms of discipline) offers IE education, LIS involvement was highly cited. For example, as far as Uganda is concerned, the course is offered mainly by EASLIS [East African School of Library and Information Science] at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. At the University of Botswana, the UB respondent explained that “*aspects of IE are dispersed in different courses in different departments. In LIS, for example, it is offered as part of Legal information systems and Legal aspects of information courses. In Media Studies, it is offered under media ethics. In Business it is offered as business ethics, etc*”. The MOU respondent indicated that “*the School of Information Sciences offers information ethics education. However, such a course is not taught across faculties in the university. Apart from the School of Information Sciences, the School of Law and the Department of Communication and Media Studies offer related courses on information ethics*”. At UI, the course is offered by “*a lecturer with a law background*”. At the UG, according to the respondent, it is offered by “*the Department of Library and Information Studies and the Department of Communication Studies*” while at UP it is offered by the Department of Information Science. At the University of Zululand, the course is offered by the Department of Library and Information Science to LIS students and the Department of Philosophy to other humanities and social sciences students as an elective. DUT uses a multidisciplinary approach. The UNISA respondent indicates that IE is offered by the Department of Information Science in a module entitled “*Investigating Information Ethics*” at the 2nd year level of a BA in Information Science. At the UKZN, according to the respondent, “*the Information Studies Programme does cover issues relating to information ethics, but this would be done over several modules and not in a specific stand-alone one*”.

### **2.3. Why is it being offered by the academic unit, discipline or the individual?**

One of the MU respondents opined that “*they [the LIS School] know the context in which ethics should be taught*”. A UB respondent pointed out that it is “*at the discretion of various departments and even individuals. There is no unified approach from the university point of view to IE. This is why perhaps it should be a cross cutting common course that should be offered in different disciplines*”. The MOU respondent noted that “*the School of Law offers a course on legal issues on information to acquaint students with legal issues in the sources of information. Similarly, ethical issues are important to those training to provide information through the media*”. The UI respondent

proceeded to point out that IE is offered by the academic unit “*to eliminate sharp professional practices and for quality assurance*” while UG’s respondent observed that IE is offered by the unit “*as a means of Education for future Information Professionals*”. The second UB respondent opined that it “*is crucial, as stated before, that students are aware of some of the ethical considerations, such as the information divide, state control of information, privacy of information issues, etc*”. The UP respondent developed the course in 1990 and has ‘been teaching it since’. UKZN’s respondent considers the IE offering to be part of their brief.

#### **2. 4. Who should learn information ethics?**

The MU respondent felt that “*practically everybody working in the LIS fields*” should learn IE “*because doing the right thing is not limited to a few individuals in a particular category, but to all*”. The second MU respondent shared this view, but added that “*all students at the university, at all levels, should learn the course*”. One of the UB respondents also added that “*any professional involved with the management of information, such as librarians, records managers, archivists, Internet service providers, IT managers, web designers, information security managers, journalists, publishers, lawyers, etc*” should be offered the course. The MOU respondent believed that “*information ethics should not be restricted to those managing information services and systems. In today’s information society and global village it is necessary for all faculties/schools/departments to have some course on information ethics to prepare students for the effective handling and use of information*”. The UI respondent agreed, citing “*students of all LIS programmes, in particular those specializing in publishing, records management, archives etc. Students of mass Communications, Public Relations etc*”. This view is shared by the UNAM respondent, who stated that “*in my view, all students of information studies (library science, records and archives management) and all practicing information workers should learn about information ethics*”. This view was also shared by the UNISA respondent, who mentioned that all prospective information professionals should access IE; and the UKZN respondent, who believes that both students and staff members should learn it. Similarly, the UG respondent felt that ‘all tertiary students and lecturers’ should be involved, a point that was shared by the second UB respondent. The UP respondent pointed to all ‘knowledge workers in the new knowledge society’. The DUT respondent felt that “*all persons currently working with information (including students and practitioners) and those being trained in professions that work with information in one form or the other*” should be offered the course.

#### **2. 5. How long should information ethics education take in the curricula (e.g. term, semester)?**

The two MU respondents felt that IE education should take a semester, i.e. “forty contact hours or a term”. A more pedagogical suggestion is provided by the first UB respondent, who is of the view that “*perhaps the best place to start is to first determine what should be taught. However, this notwithstanding IE should be taught throughout the program (1-4 year degree programs). More basic issues of IE can be taught at lower levels while the complex ones can be taught at higher levels*”. The MOU respondent was of a different opinion, stating that “*information ethics education should be offered in LIS schools as a core course on its own for one semester, rather than discrete coverage in a number of courses. However, I still strongly recommend that such a course be offered to all students across the faculties as one of the foundation courses*”. In contrast, the UI respondent felt that one semester is enough. The UNAM respondent believed that “*this should depend on the structure of the curriculum. I feel that in cases where courses are semester courses, the topics should occupy a quarter of a semester... in cases of a double major degree; it is about all that you can afford to devote to these issues. However in cases of a single major or Masters degree by course work, one can afford a semester course (because the curriculum has more space) but I feel it should then explore other issues related to ethics, such as legal and regulatory frameworks - IPR, open access, laws and policies, intellectual freedom, information privacy, censorship etc*”. The UG respondent stated that “one course in a semester is okay”, while the second UB respondent suggested “more than one semester courses”. At the University of Pretoria, it is a 3 credit undergraduate course offered as a selection at honours level, and students can specialize at Masters as well as PhD levels (UP respondent). At the University of Zululand, the IE courses take one term (quarter) but will take on one semester from 2009. The duration of the course is likely to vary by way of the teaching and learning that takes place at the institution, and will also depend on whether IE is integrated into other courses and taught as units. This view is shared by the UKZN’s and UNISA’s respondents who stated that it “*depends on the model applicable in the university*”.

## **2. 6. How should it be offered (i.e. integrated in other courses, autonomous courses etc)?**

In terms of how it is offered, the MU respondent suggested ‘integrated in courses’, while his colleague (MU2) felt that “*it should be autonomous because of the importance it has and because of the problems arising from reckless misuse of information throughout the world*”. The UB respondent believed that it should be offered using both ways - “*at 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year levels (Certificate and diploma) it should be taught as a separate course, while at 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year levels, it should be integrated in other courses. This would ensure that an LIS graduate at whatever level has some knowledge of IE.*”

*Moreover, professionals should not view IE as an isolated component of the curriculum, but as part and parcel of the information architecture*". The MOU respondent narrates that *"the School of Information Sciences at Moi University offers a course known as Legal Aspects of Information at 4<sup>th</sup> year level. The course is a 3 unit course that runs for a semester. This course covers many aspects of information ethics relating to censorship, privacy and freedom of access to information; plagiarism, software piracy, electronic data protection; intellectual property, copyright, patents etc"*. The UI respondent opined that it would be better off as an autonomous course, while the UNAM respondent stated that at his university, *"we offer information ethics as an integrated course in the first year as part of information studies, rather than as a stand alone course"* At UG, it is integrated in a course called 'Information and Society'. The second UB respondent observed that *"at the moment in DLIS, there is an autonomous course, but there are aspects of IE in other courses"*. UP advocates it's teaching in separate courses. The DUT respondent observed that *"while it is useful to teach it as a stand alone module over a term or a semester, I believe it is more meaningful if it is integrated into different aspects across the curriculum"*. At UNISA, the course is offered at second year level, while at UKZN, IE is integrated into other courses/modules.

In response to the level at which it should be offered, respondents seem to have largely reflected and defended how they offer the course in their respective institutions. The MU respondent stated *"all levels, because practicing ethics in a work situation is everybody's responsibility"* while the UB respondent added that *"it should also be offered as a continuing professional development programme"*. According to the MOU respondent, *"the course should be offered at undergraduate level in the first and final year. It should also be offered at Masters Level"*. The UI respondent believed that it should be offered at *"final year undergraduate level if it is a bachelor's programme or during any semester in the Masters Degree programme"*. UNAM's respondent provided an example, that in their case *"our level is second year level, but it also comes in at higher levels in the degree programme"*. UKZN and UG respondents support IE's entry into "Undergraduate and Graduate Levels" while the second UB respondent suggests "from the second year onwards". The UP's respondent noted that at UP it is offered in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year, honours, and Masters and PhD levels. At DUT, *"it is integrated across the curriculum and also emphasized at the institutional level....starting at year one right up to postgraduate research"*. At the University of Zululand, it is offered at undergraduate and postgraduate level (information policy, research methods) as an autonomous course and is also partly integrated in other courses at lower undergraduate levels, such as in 'information literacy', 'introduction to information science' and 'research methods'. The UNISA respondent strongly felt *"...not in 1st year, since students need to learn other basics first"*.

## 2.7. What should be learnt or covered in the information ethics course?

This is an area that invited multiple responses as colleagues tended to enumerate what they offer, which is a sign that IE is actually offered. While a number of views were provided by the respondents, most turned out to be similar or shared. Most departments have provided a list of what they teach. The first MU respondent listed topics such as “*what is ethics; origins of ethics; functions of ethics; structures to implement ethics; the librarian’s creed - strengths and weaknesses; ethics in the work place; dilemmas in ethics, etc.*” while his colleague suggested a “*study of the concept and its history in information institutions; importance of ethics in information work; application of ethics in the information environment; professional code for information workers; case studies (challenges) depicting use and misuse of information; role of educators and information associations in information ethics; the IFLA/UNESCO Library manifesto; and national legislations on censorship, privacy, information access, and data security. Furthermore, relating these to information utilitarianism, natural rights, intellectual property rights, trust and censorship, the social contract theory, and the effects of globalization on information access*”. The UB respondent listed “*ethics theories, intellectual property rights, patent laws, trademarks, branding, copyright, information security, data protection, freedom of information, censorship, code of professional ethics, open access, cost of information, civil liberties, information policies, collection development policies, cyber ethics, cyber law, plagiarism, trans-border data flow, business intelligence, consumer protection, publishing and book trade, information technology ethics, IPR regimes (WTO, WIPO, ARIPO, etc), legal aspect of information, legal information systems, intellectual freedom, user services, IK, information licensing, universal access, universal services, information society, information as a common good, information needs, etc*”. The MOU respondent suggested that the course should include but not be limited to the: fundamentals of information ethics; applications of information ethics in society; information ethics in an organization; legal issues and information ethics; and emerging technologies and information ethics. The UI respondent denoted “*information ownership, copyright and intellectual property rights, security and integrity of information content, respect for users, fair charges, access and fair use, information theft etc*” while UG suggested copyright, censorship, libel, freedom of information, right to privacy, and plagiarism. Other suggestions were that all the ethical dimensions of information should be offered. The UP respondent suggested privacy, access, quality, security, and property as they pertain to the life cycle of information at both professional and social levels (for example, in the case of information poverty). The DUT respondent listed: making information available;

providing access to information; encouraging the responsible use of information; acknowledging the sources of information; intellectual property rights; copyright issues; and plagiarism issues. At the University of Zululand, we cover: information ethics theories; information policy; intellectual property rights, which include copyright and industrial property rights; electronic information transfer; and accessibility and protection. The UNISA respondent suggested the following content: information ethics and the information scientist; different types of information; the ethical dilemma of information; ethical theories; privacy in the information age; and copyright – an overview - and copyright law in the electronic environment. In the opinion of the UKZN respondent, the following should be covered: intellectual freedom, censorship, plagiarism, copyright, the digital divide, the commodification of information, information access, privacy, etc. - taking into consideration the proliferation of information and communication technologies.

In terms of what should be taught, generally case studies dealing with various scenarios of IE come highly recommended (Hannabuss 1996, Carbo and Amalgo 2001,); and tools (ethical theories) that analyze these concrete cases for ethical reasoning (Woodward 1990, 8-10) are absolutely essential. The Information Ethics Special Interest Group (2007) advises that the content of an information ethics course should enable students to: recognize and articulate ethical conflicts in the information field; inculcate a sense of responsibility with regard to the consequences of individual and collective interactions in the information field; provide the foundations for intercultural dialogue through the recognition of different kinds of information cultures and values; provide basic knowledge about ethical theories and concepts and about their relevance to everyday information work; and learn to reflect ethically, think critically, and to carry these abilities into their professional life. The Interest Group believes that the course content should include: intellectual freedom; intellectual property; open access; preservation; balance in collections; fair use; surveillance; cultural destruction; censorship; cognitive capitalism; imposed technologies; public access to government information; privatization; information rights; academic freedom; workplace speech; systematic racism; international relations; impermanent access to purchased electronic records; general agreements on trade and services (GATS) and trade related aspects of intellectual property rights (TRIPS); serving the poor, homeless, and people living on a fixed income; anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality; human security; national security policies; the global tightening of information and border controls; transborder data flows; and information poverty. Carbo (2005:28), however, cautions that the topic of information ethics is far too complex to suggest what should be taught. He therefore proposes the following questions to be addressed by the course: How much of the course should be devoted to ethical foundations? How should practical and

theoretical knowledge be balanced? What key issues should be discussed? What multicultural content should be included? How many materials should be included for each course?

In essence, there are likely to be a number of suggestions on what the content of an information ethics course should be. Pedagogically (see Ethics Special Interest Group, 2007), the purpose, objectives and expected outcome should dictate the content as both the levels of teaching and learning, and the contexts, will always vary.

## **2.8. What are the challenges and opportunities of information ethics education in Africa?**

This question generated interesting views. The first MU respondent argued that *“ethics is a new field in LIS, and is therefore still accorded lip-service or negligible attention”*. Further challenges that were listed by [the respondents from] the same institution were as follows: *“rapid developments in ICT and their use at home, at work, and in cyber cafes; limited knowledge of information ethics among information workers; and limited legislation (e.g. copyright) cannot match developments in ICTs, such as music piracy and household recording studios, as the Millennium Digital Copyright Act in the US has done”*. The UB respondent identified the following challenges: government legislations that impose restrictions on access to information; lack of professional expertise to teach IE given its multi-disciplinary nature; IE is an area that is not well understood or appreciated; and competing interests as to who should offer it. As far as the MOU respondent is concerned, the *“lack of value attached to information; weak legal system and lack of enforcement; low technological advancement; and inadequate or poor information management”* are some of the challenges faced by information ethics education in Africa. The UI respondent opined that *“good professional practice geared towards users' satisfaction”* is a challenge. The UNAM respondent enumerated the following challenges: *“I see the key challenges as: i. the lack of well defined content such as one has in media study courses; ii. few trained staff to offer such a course; iii. shortage of space in the curriculum in cases of a double major degree; IV. the profession not being aware of the importance of ethics issues, and also departments of LIS not being aware of this emerging area; V. the urgency one sees in the journalism for ethics is lacking in LIS, and this contributes to it not being taken as seriously”*. Other challenges, as observed by the UG respondent, are *“to get competent lecturers to teach the course since it cuts across various disciplines”*, while the second UB respondent thought it necessary to take into account *“issues of political correctness as far as the current regime is concerned, i.e., to what extent academics are able to teach the subject, and what examples they may or may not use. There is lack of research in this*

area as well since some aspects, e.g. freedom of information, censorship, etc., may be sensitive areas". The UP respondent believes that African philosophy should reflect on these issues and get more academics interested in the topic. As far as the DUT respondent is concerned, *"the major challenge revolves around ethics education relating to access for much needed information for the everyday survival of many African communities. The lack of adequate ICT infrastructure (which drives the knowledge society) in many areas of Africa precludes opportunities for access to basic information. This also hinders Africa's meaningful participation in a true knowledge society"*. The UNISA respondent found challenges in the *"digital divide and the fact that most information is produced outside of Africa"* but added that *"education can be customised to take into consideration the environmental issues of information use in Africa"*. In the UKZN respondent's view - *"plenty challenges I would imagine - witness the digital divide. Witness Zimbabwe and the denial of or withholding information. Literacy even would be a challenge. Censorship (again witness Zimbabwe). Copyright in the context of poverty"*.

Thus, the challenges facing information ethics and information ethics education are numerous. Robert W. Vaagan (2003), referring to his earlier article published in 2002, summarizes these challenges and issues succinctly as *"globalization, the digital divide between the information-rich and information-poor, digital inclusiveness, commercialization of information, authenticity, confidentiality, trust and confidence in cyberspace, censorship, copyright, intellectual property rights, grey literature, electronic filters, information overload, and finally, the consequences of The General Agreement on Trade in Services"*. He believes that the way LIS scholars and educators address these issues will vary according to individuals and common ethical and moral standards, which, citing Smith, are termed as 'infoethics'.

Opportunities lie in curriculum reviews that incorporate IE where it does not yet exist, and the active involvement of professional associations that have the power to influence information policies in countries where they are active. There are also hopes that the increased research in IE, and IFLA's involvement and guidance, will spur on interest in IE. The African Information Ethics Conference organized by Hannes Britz and Rafael Capurro held in Pretoria in February 2007<sup>6</sup> and World Summit on Information Society<sup>7</sup> resolutions also provided an opportunity for developing IE education in Africa, and the sensitization is already bearing fruit.

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<sup>6</sup> See <http://icie.zkm.de/Tswanedeclaration>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.itu.int/wsis/index.html>

### 3. Conclusions

Ideally, as information ethics threads through all human activities where information and knowledge is generated, processed, stored, disseminated and used, all the people working in the information and knowledge industry, including consumers of knowledge products and services, should undergo IE education, either formally or informally. At the very least, those involved should know their rights and responsibilities with regard to information access and protection. It should be questioned whether non-adherence to information ethics the world over arises from ignorance, arrogance, apathy or greed, and whether a cure can be found through IE education. The assumption in this paper is that by gaining knowledge of information ethics requirements, obligations and challenges, information professionals, knowledge workers and consumers (including colleges or university faculties and students) could not only reduce the evils of information misuse, but also protect the politics, culture, industry and economy of nations, and support the creation of a morally or ethically sensitive, sound and responsible society. This would essentially be a society that respects the rights and privileges of others in addition to its own. We understand from the ethical theories and the clashes/contradictions that occur between morals, ethics and laws that ethical behavior is not uniform, even within the information profession (see Koehler et al., 2000); but there are crosscutting values that supercede mere morals, which are shared by all irrespective of their contextual and conceptual background. Those who believe in the universality of ethics would expect information ethics to be known, practiced and popularized in all communities and institutions.

This paper recognizes, albeit not exhaustively, four ethical theories; the relationship between morals, ethics and laws; and the various dilemmas of information ethics that information professionals have to face; as fundamental frameworks in information ethics education. It is overwhelmingly agreed that ethics and information ethics education is essential. Such education would support information professionals in their understanding and development of ethical values and morals with regard to protection (e.g. privacy and confidentiality), provide them with a professional identity built upon an information value system (i.e. the service value of information professionals), allow them to understand today's information and knowledge driven society and find jobs, recognize the requirements and complexities of access to information (e.g. inequality and fair use) and sensitize them to the benefits of research in IE development. Notably, current work requirements demand that information professionals be conversant with and able to apply information ethics. Vagaan (2003) sums it up succinctly this way: "*Would LIS scholars and educators want their students to drive on this [global information] superhighway without knowing the*

*traffic rules? Should our students not also be provided with moral benchmarking tools so they can better assess the challenges and pitfalls referred to initially, such as globalization, and the possibility of ethical misconduct such as the misuse of information?* In this study, there were varying views on who should offer information ethics education. However, there is a general feeling that IE education should be multidisciplinary, tapping into the knowledge and skills of ethics-related professions and using knowledgeable faculty/staff members to offer the course. The course should also be context related (the use of case studies is a good example of contextualization) and involve various stakeholders. This approach is expected to be cost effective and beneficial, particularly in [the mostly] under resourced learning environments found in Africa. Regarding who should learn the course, it is suggested that IE should be offered to all students, regardless of level, as they interact with information on a regular basis during their learning processes and are therefore confronted with ethical issues on a daily basis. The duration of an IE course should also not be too short, for example only a single quarter (one term), and should be dictated by the course aim, objectives and expected outcomes. Evidently, there will be differences in the objectives of an integrated, autonomous, undergraduate and postgraduate IE course. Integrated IE units are likely to focus more on general awareness, while autonomous courses provide more in-depth education. The latter would appeal more to senior undergraduates and postgraduate students, some of whom could be specializing in the domain. Continuous professional education is also identified as a suitable forum for IE education. Essentially we should decide whether and when to go 'one inch deep and a mile wide' or vice versa in the learning process. The responses to what should be learnt or covered invited a number of suggestions that confirmed a general awareness of IE course content and suggested that IE is offered by the LIS Schools. Broadly, the offerings could be grouped into the following areas: IE theory, professional codes of conduct and practice, evaluation of policy and legislations, accessibility (e.g. rights, freedoms of expression/access etc), protection (e.g. censorship, privacy, data security, copyright, licensing, intellectual property -e.g. copyright, industrial property etc), and cyber ethics/trans-border data flow etc. Most IE issues can be clustered under protection or accessibility, where debates and research are rapidly increasing.

The challenges facing IE education are numerous. Some of these include a lack of understanding or appreciation of IE; inadequate or absent legislation, and where policies exist, enforcement is weak; negative legislations that restrict access; lack of expertise; poor course design; lack of space in the curriculum; complications arising from ICT use; and unsatisfactory professional practice, among others. There is not unanimity on ethics or ethical globally. I believe that African philosophy such as that based on

“UBUNTU”(a southern African philosophy based on humanity towards others “we are people because of other people” and “ I am who I am because of who we all are”) paradigm is likely to interpret ethics in a slightly different way from western philosophy by adding its own flavour.

The challenges and opportunities identified in this paper should be placed on the agenda of LIS professionals in Africa for further research and engagement. At grassroots level, Vangaan advises that LIS educators need to make LIS values and ethics/infoethics requisite in accredited undergraduate, postgraduate and Doctoral programs (Vangaan, 2003).

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