

# DISTANCE education

Volume 6, Number 7

April 1, 2002

Report

## Modeling Ethics for Distance Learners

by Paul Bauman

As the variety of information offered via the Internet grows at a staggering pace, so too do the ethical issues associated with online learning. Among the gray areas program administrators and faculty must contend with are cheating and plagiarism; the changing roles of instructors; and copyright and ownership issues.

### The battle for academic integrity

In general, technology has simplified the act of cheating for those inclined to do so. "In the past, you had to plan to plagiarize," explains Lawrence Hinman, director of the Values Institute at the University of San Diego. "Now, at 11 p.m. you can get on the Web and hand in a (plagiarized) paper by 8 a.m. It's not that students are less honest than before, it's that information is so fast."

Hinman, whose institute has addressed the issue of academic integrity, says honesty in distance education coursework is a growing concern. "A lot of people see it as part of the larger picture — a stepping stone to professional integrity. If you cheat early, you'll keep doing it until you get caught."

According to one set of statistics, 20

percent of all students will cheat whenever they have a chance, 20 percent won't cheat under any circumstances, and 60 percent are part of "the battle for academic integrity."

---

*"The failure of faculty to address the issue of integrity with their students sends the message that it's an issue which they don't care about."*

---

"High quality teachers have a large impact on the middle group," says Hinmann. "Academic dishonesty arises when there's a vacuum of good teaching."

It's important to instill the right values in students before they progress too far in their education — especially since middle and high school students are starting to do considerably more work online, says Hinman. He suggests institutions develop ethics policy statements so students and faculty are clear about

the ground rules at all times. In setting such standards, policymakers must fully consider the myriad situations that could occur. He cites the following example:

An introduction to physics student finds that another university has online answers to the same questions that are part of her homework. Is it wrong for her to consult them?

A policy statement would provide clear guidance on this issue, says Hinman.

### Let students know the ground rules

At Dakota State University (Madison, S.D.), where Deb Gearhart is director of distance education and web technology, individual professors determine the cheating policies for their courses. It's very important for faculty to outline their ethical standards to students before a course begins, she says. "Our faculty members stress their concerns with plagiarism in their syllabi."

Gearhart, who has worked for 16 years in distance education, originally at Penn State, says this dialogue must be twofold. "One of the areas that I teach — and that I have talked to my faculty about — is that they need to explain not only what is ethically right, but what is legally right.

"Students' attitudes on web research are changing at all levels, including K-12," she says. "This is when they develop habits and philosophies about what is acceptable." For example, she notes how common it is for young people to download music and movies onto CDs without giving much thought to copyright issues. They need to understand what the law permits, and what it prohibits, she stresses.

### in this issue

The Ethics of Distance Ed .....	1
Resources: Publications You Need .....	2
In the Field: The Accreditation Maze .....	4
In the Field: Best of the FETC Conference .....	5
In the Business: Blackboard Pulls (Way) Ahead .....	6
Tech Briefing: Tricks With Audio .....	7
Governance: eArmyU Update .....	8

continued on page 2 ———▶

# DISTANCE education

Report

*Distance Education Report* (ISSN 1094-320X) is published semimonthly by Magna Publications Inc., 2718 Dryden Drive, Madison, WI 53704.

Phone: 800-433-0499. Copyright © 2002. One-year (24 issues) subscription: \$399. Periodicals postage paid at Madison, WI POSTMASTER: Send change of address to: *Distance Education Report*, 2718 Dryden Drive, Madison, WI 53704. E-mail: [custserv@magnapubs.com](mailto:custserv@magnapubs.com); Web Site: [www.magnapubs.com](http://www.magnapubs.com)

**Vice President:** Jody Glynn Patrick

**Publisher:** William Haight  
([billh@magnapubs.com](mailto:billh@magnapubs.com))

**Managing Editor:** Christopher Hill  
([chill@magnapubs.com](mailto:chill@magnapubs.com))

**Marketing Manager:** William Haight  
([billh@magnapubs.com](mailto:billh@magnapubs.com))

**Graphics/Production:** Debra Lovelien  
**Customer Service:** Mark Beyer

**Editorial Advisory Board:** Stephen Donahue, M.S., G-Learner Corp.; Stephen Ehrmann, Vice President, TLT Group; Donald P. Ely, Associate Director, ERIC Clearinghouse on Information & Technology; Jeffrey Feldberg, Chairman, CEO, Embanet Corporation; Gordon Freedman, Director, Strategies & Alliances, Prometheus; Christine Geith, Director, Program and Business Development, MSU Global, Michigan State University; Chere Gibson, Ph.D., Associate Professor, University of Wisconsin-Madison; Darcy W. Hardy, Ph.D., Assistant Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs/Director, UT Telecampus, The University of Texas System; Joseph Holland, Chair, Department of Hospitality & Tourism, University of Wisconsin-Stout; Marge Jeffers, WTCN Distance Education Network, Fox Valley Technical College; Marina Stock McLissac, Educational Media and Computers, Arizona State University; Karen L. Murphy, Ed.D., Associate Professor, Texas A&M University; Christine Olgren, Ph.D., Chair, Distance Teaching and Learning Conference, University of Wisconsin-Madison; Rick Shearer, MA, MBA, Instructional Designer, World Campus, Pennsylvania State University; Karen Vignare, Director of Business Strategy & Development, Rochester Institute of Technology; Linda L. Wolcott, Ph.D., Department of Instructional Technology, Utah State University.

To order back issues, call Customer Service at 800-433-0499. Back issues cost \$17.00 each (\$390 for the previous year's complete collection), plus shipping and handling in the US. You can pay with MasterCard, VISA, Discover, or American Express.

This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in regard to the subject matter covered. It is sold with the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering legal, accounting, or other professional service. If legal advice or other expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought. Authorization to photocopy for internal or personal use, or the internal or personal use of specific clients, is granted by *Distance Education Report* for users registered with the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) Transactional Reporting Service, provided that 50 cents per page is paid directly to CCC, 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923; Phone: 978-750-8400; [www.copyright.com](http://www.copyright.com). For those organizations that have been granted a license by CCC, a separate system of payment has been arranged.

Ethics...from page 1

Since a big part of Dakota State's mission is to integrate technology, more and more courses are combining classroom and online experiences. Teaching students how to gather accurate information online has become a much greater part of the university's effort, says Gearhart. "We have an information literacy component for students so they know how to do proper research on the Web to determine what is valid information."

Additionally, online education has created a psychological distance for students, says Gearhart. Since they don't have face-to-face contact with their instructors and others taking a course, they don't see a direct response to their actions. This might be good for the quieter student, who now feels more comfortable expressing opinions. But it also encourages some students to act in ways they wouldn't even consider in a traditional classroom, such as issuing criticisms of other students' work or using profanity in the messages they post.

Ultimately, says Gearhart, the responsibility for appropriate conduct is shared equally by instructors and those they teach. "Faculty must set standards for ethics; students need to take pride in their work and behavior."

## What role should faculty play?

Another ethical issue that online and other distance education programs face is the changing role of instructors. "It's possible to teach certain kinds of courses almost automatically," says Hinman. "Sophisticated software can even recognize why a student made a particular type of mistake."

This can be good for training, he says, but as time goes on, it can diminish the role of the teacher. "The sense of a class being taught by a particular person can go away. Individuals bring a certain feel and approach to the course that is not there when the individual moves on." This is an important consideration for those directing distance programs, he

adds.

On a related issue, many institutions have growing concerns over who holds the rights to a class. If a course is put online by a professor and then the university wants someone else to teach it, who owns it? asks Hinman. It could end up that courses are developed by well-known people and taught by others, such as teaching assistants, he suggests.

Further, since distance education is becoming a popular tool with for-profit institutions, publishers are finding a fertile market for selling more than just textbooks. Now they are peddling courses as well. This leads to a situation in which universities may be able to purchase a section of English 101 for less than it would cost to have a professor develop it. More and more, professors are disappearing as part of courses, says Hinman. Institutions need to weigh the effect this has on their students, their faculty and their reputations.

For the most part, ethical issues for distance education must be weighed in the same ways as ethical issues for traditional classroom education, says Rutgers University Professor Don McCabe, a founding member of The Center for Academic Integrity. "The failure of faculty to address the issue of integrity with their students sends the message to at least some that it's an issue which they don't care about."

He concludes, "Fairness is a critical issue to many students, and faculty behaviors which enable cheating by some almost always lead to cheating by others who feel they have no choice but to cheat so that their GPA is not disadvantaged."

## Related links:

The Values Institute  
<<http://ethics.acusd.edu/values/>>

The Center for Academic Integrity  
<<http://www.academicintegrity.org/>>

A vertical bar on the left side of the page, consisting of a series of horizontal segments in shades of yellow and orange, with a small red diamond at the top.

COPYRIGHT INFORMATION

TITLE: Modeling ethics for distance learners  
SOURCE: Distance Education Report 6 no7 Ap 1 2002  
WN: 0209107241001

Copyright (C) 2001 Magna Publications, Inc. All rights reserved..

Copyright 1982-2002 The H.W. Wilson Company. All rights reserved.