

Title: Should Internet Ethics and Etiquette be Included in Business Education Curriculum

Authors:

Nicole M. Snow, M.B.A., M.Ed.
College of Education
Northern Arizona University
Box 5774
Flagstaff, Az 86011
Nicole.Snow@nau.edu
928-523-2560 928-523-1929 (fax)

Michael R. Roberts, Ed.D.
College of Education
Northern Arizona University
Box 5774
Flagstaff, Az 86011
Mike.Roberts@nau.edu
928-523-9408 928-523-1929 (fax)

Abstract

Research in the area of ethics in business education is currently limited to a focus on either methodology or strategies for teaching ethics, or on determining the ethics of students and/or teachers. However in the Sixth Edition of Needed Research in Business Education, posed to Delta Pi Epsilon members, the topic of Ethics on the Internet was in the top fifteen overall topics and was the top ethics topic determined to important and timely research topics in business education.

This study is designed to provide data to support the inclusion of the topics of Internet Ethics and Etiquette in the business education classroom. The objectives are two-fold: 1) to show that both business and educators feel these topics are important to include in the curriculum; and 2) to determine the extent to which the topics are currently being covered in the curriculum and make recommendations based upon these findings.

This research in progress is collecting data from two sources: Fortune 500 companies (IT and HR executives) and secondary and post-secondary business education educators. Expected outcomes include both groups rating the topic of Internet Ethics and Etiquette to be high with slight differences between groups shown using ANOVA analysis. It is also expected that the current curriculum inclusion rate will be less than 20%. The final paper will include recommendations to implement curriculum changes based upon the results.

Introduction

This study developed out of a presentation on teaching Internet Ethics and Etiquette in the Business Education Classroom. The presentation was conducted in two subsequent sessions at the annual Arizona Career and Technical Education summer conference. When conducting research for the presentation many methodologies, strategies, and techniques for teaching these topics were found, consolidated, and presented. However, the researchers could find no information related to whether teaching these topics is important (relative to other business topics or general ethics topics) or whether these

topics were being taught in business education classrooms. The purpose of this study is to collect information on two areas related to teaching Internet ethics and etiquette in business education: 1) Should these topics be taught in business education classrooms and 2) Are these topics being taught in business education classrooms.

In President Bush's July 9, 2002 speech in New York addressing corporate misconduct he stated:

“Tougher laws and stricter requirements will help. It will help. Yet, ultimately, the ethics of American business depend on the conscience of America's business leaders. We need men and women of character who know the difference between ambition and destructive greed, between justified risks and irresponsibility, between enterprise and fraud.

Our schools of business must be principled teachers of right and wrong and not surrender to moral confusion and relativism.” P. 1

Although his speech did not directly address the topic of Internet ethics and etiquette it did call to light the recent national focus on the topic of business ethics and timeliness of doing research in this area.

Purpose of the study

When conducting a search of literature on the topic of ethics in business education, one will find a small body of research, entirely focused on either methodology or strategies for teaching ethics, or on determining the ethics of students and/or teachers. A search for specifically ethics on the Internet results in an even smaller body of literature in the same focus area. Internet etiquette as a specific topic can be found in early childhood education articles but not in business education (A to Z: The Early Childhood Educator's Guide to the Internet, 1998 and Hinchliffe, 1996). No research can be found related to whether this topic is being covered in business education, or whether it is important for the topic to be covered.

In the Sixth Edition of Needed Research in Business Education, posed to Delta Pi Epsilon members were over 121 research topics were divided into twelve categories. One of the twelve categories was Ethics. The topic of Ethics on the Internet was in the top fifteen topics determined to important and timely research topics in business education. Of the six topics in the Ethics category, it was the ranked the highest. This study was published and presented at the November, 2001 Delta Pi Epsilon National Conference.

Zhao (1996) conducted a study to determine the recommended computer end-user skills for business students. He surveyed 83 Fortune 500 corporations and reported the findings in the Summer 1996 issue of the Delta Pi Epsilon Journal. Zhao & Alexander (2001) duplicated this study and updated it for the expanding integration of the Internet and Web technologies. The results of the study recommended a skill set for now and toward 2005. However, even in the updated study there were no questions that addressed ethics or

etiquette skills. Telecommunications and Workgroup Software was a separate category of questions on the survey, and although data on eleven topics related to telecommunications were surveyed and reported, none of these topics addressed either ethics or etiquette as a skill set.

Objectives of the Study

This study is designed to provide data to support the inclusion of the topics of Internet Ethics and Etiquette in the business education classroom. The objectives are two-fold: 1) to show that both business and educators feel these topics are important to include in the curriculum; and 2) to determine the extent to which the topics are currently being covered in the curriculum and make recommendations based upon these findings.

Limitations of the Study

Although the data collected from business will be nation wide using a sampling of Fortune 500 corporations, the teacher data will be collected from business education teachers at the secondary and post-secondary levels in the State of Arizona. The researchers work primarily with preparing teachers to enter business classrooms and working with business teachers through in-service and graduate level course work. The area of interest for recommendation is focused on these teachers. However, the data should provide a general guide for educators in other states. The study could be duplicated with other populations of teachers.

Methodology

To collect data on business perception of the importance of Internet ethics and etiquette, the basic construct of the Zhao & Alexander (2001) study will be followed. In that study, Fortune 500 corporations were used because as Teitelbaum said in 1996 “these corporations are the leaders in using computer information technology” (as cited in Zhao & Alexander, 2001, P. 62). Using Bartlett, Higgins, and Kotrlik’s (2001) formula for “Selecting an appropriate sample size for conducting survey research” an appropriate sample size will be determined from the Fortune 500 corporations (Fortune, 2002) after the survey instrument is completed. Then replicating the format of the Zhao & Alexander study both human resource and information technology executives of each corporation in the sample will be surveyed. The survey will have three sections: a) a profile of the company businesses respondents’, b) Internet ethics, and c) Internet etiquette. The five-point scale used by Zhao & Alexander (2001) will be used for this survey: 5 strongly recommend; 4 recommend; 3 no opinion; 2 not recommend; 1 not at all recommend. Their mean weighted response distribution will also be followed 4.5-5.0 = strongly recommend; 3.5-4.4 = recommend; 2.5-3.4 = no opinion; 1.5-2.4 = not recommend; and 1-1.4 = not at all recommend. In addition, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) will also be used as in their study to determine any significant differences of recommendations between the human resource and information technology groups.

To collect data on the teacher perception of the importance of Internet ethics and etiquette, a similar survey will be distributed to all business education teachers listed in the 2002-2003 Business Education Directory published by the Arizona Department of Education. If the 2002-2003 Directory is not available in a timely manner during the Fall of 2002, the 2001-2002 Directory will be used instead. In addition, the phone directories of the post-secondary education institutions in Arizona will be cross-referenced to include post-secondary teachers. The directory published by the Arizona Department of Education is primarily aimed at secondary education. The teacher survey will duplicate the business survey except it will add a fourth section on teaching and curriculum. This section will include questions to determine if the topics are currently being taught in the business education curriculum and to what extent. Data will be analyzed in the manner described for the business survey. The one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) will be used to determine any significant differences of the recommendations between the secondary and post-secondary groups.

Both surveys will be conducted using a bi-modal approach. The primary means for collecting information will be a web-based survey. Email requests for survey response will be sent initially. Seven days from the email a mailed postcard requesting the recipient to access the online survey will be sent. If an email address is not available a postcard will be mailed initially, with a follow-up postcard of a different color being sent in seven days later. Paper surveys will be provided via mail or fax to those who request them either via email or telephone. A personalized follow-up letter will be sent four weeks from the initial request to thank the respondents and to remind the non-respondents to complete the survey.

Discussion of Expected Outcomes

It is expected that the Fortune 500 executives will overall rate ethics items as “strongly recommended” and etiquette items as “recommended.” It is expected that small degrees of significant differences (at the .05 confidence level) will be found between the information technology and human resource executives’ recommendations. It is expected that the human resource executives’ will rate all items as slightly more important because this group typically focuses more on ‘soft’ skills. There is also expected to be a small degree of significant difference (at the .05 confidence level) for recommendations between high school graduates and college graduates. It is expected that the responses for college graduates will be rates slightly more important because of two factors: (1) Fortune 500 companies are more likely to hire college graduates into positions where Internet ethics and etiquette will be important; and (2) executives might believe that the high school graduate has additional opportunity to be exposed to these topics in a higher education setting.

The authors anticipate that the teacher group will overall have similar results to the executive and rate ethics items at “strongly recommended” and etiquette items as “recommended.” No significant degree of difference is expected between secondary and post secondary on the ethics items, however; a small degree of difference is expected

between the groups on the etiquette items. It is expected that the secondary group will rate etiquette items higher than the post secondary group for reasons explained below.

The authors anticipate an overall low percentage (<20%) of teachers covering these topics in their classrooms. A degree of significant difference (at the .05 confidence level) is anticipated between the secondary and higher education groups. It is hypothesized that the secondary group will report a higher degree of covering etiquette topics while the post secondary group will report a higher degree of covering ethics topics. This is expected because of the high degree of coverage in literature and books geared toward elementary and secondary educators related to "Netiquette," even in publications dating back to the early 1990s. Only in recent textbooks (2000 and 2001 versions) is the topic of Internet Ethics being covered. Secondary schools are not able to replace textbooks on an annual basis because of funding restrictions. Post secondary schools adopt new textbooks with regularity because students are expected to purchase their own textbooks each semester and therefore teachers at the post secondary level do not have the funding restrictions.

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