TEACHING INFORMATION ETHICS IN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE, NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, ZIMBABWE

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Teaching of information ethics (IE) has assumed an important position in the training of library and information (LIS) personnel in today’s society, coz information has become commodity (Babik cited in Ndwandwe 2009, 1) and a predominant factor in production.

Its use and management is prone to abuse and misuse, thus, fraught with ethical dilemmas, which constantly confront LIS personnel.

Hence, necessity of LIS personnel to become aware of ethical issues in their area of work; which is the thrust in information ethics education.

Aim of teaching IE is to develop the capacity to independently make ethical decisions in the students so that they will be able to make sound choices, on their own, when confront by ethical dilemmas in their work environment (Hannabus 1996; Fleishmann, Ronnings and Wallace, 2011).

Subject of IE focus on principles and rules that guide behaviour and use of information in all sectors in society. Ndwandwe (2009) provides a detailed review of the concept.

In LIS, whose domain is information management, the subject of IE pertains to the “responsible creation and use of information in a variety of formats” (Mabawonku, 2010); ie, on ideas of what is considered right or wrong when working with information during the processes: acquisition, organisation, dissemination and use, of its management.

Information issues that raise ethical dilemmas include the privacy, access, accuracy and property rights issues.
Concrete issues that raise ethical considerations/dilemmas for information personnel are of various forms, influenced by events at an international level and by conditions in a specific society.

Some of these issues are pointed out by Fallis (2007:14) in Ndwandwe (2009:2), eg, whether or not to charge for specialist services in a public library, an access issue.

Decisions of choices made in resolving such dilemmas can be informed by professional principles and/or personal ethical predispositions.

Professionally, information personnel should strive to provide unfettered access to information.

However, realisation of this principle could be affected by a person’s ethical predisposition which is influenced by someone’s moral standpoint, reasoning and cultural values.

Thus, for the provision of quality service, it is important that an information professional is aware of the ethical dynamics of their work environment; which a course in information ethics should cover.
Ndwandwe (2009:77-78) gives a summary of what is outlined in literature as the justification for teaching IE in LIS schools.

It is noted that information has an empowering effect in that its availability or absence directly affects a person’s quality of life; hence the importance of unfettered access. Information personnel need to know the implications of the work they do so that they can act responsibly with integrity; which an IE course would do.
NUST LIS progs, are not adequately covering IE, different aspects in a number of courses. But, none includes ethical theories or an analysis of the implications of ethical issues. Legal and Professional Issues, a Part 2 BSc LIS course is closest IE. Content are legal statutes & codes of ethics. Such is no longer adequate to instill ethical behaviour in an information society. Also, relying on codes & legal statutes, exclusively, is not the best in a service industry where quality of service depends on nature of personal relationships that are created with clients more than fear of the law.
Currently, IE aspects covered under different subjects at various levels:

- BSc (Hons) LIS (4 year)
  - Part 1 (Information and society; Information sources and services; Application of IT tools in information centres; Peace, leadership and conflict transformation; Information retrieval systems)
  - Part 2 (Legal and professional issues; Online information retrieval)
  - Part 4 (IE can be covered in research projects)
- PGDLIS (18 months block release)
  (Information retrieval; Application of IT tools in information centres)

- MSc LIS (24 months block release)
  (Contemporary issues in lis; Information policy studies; Ethics covered in dissertations)

- Mphil in LIS & Dphil in LIS
  - To date no one has taken up the subject area
PROPOSED TEACHING OF INFORMATION ETHICS

- IE course - standalone subject for the undergraduate programme. Content outline in ANIE Curriculum 2102 document (pp 20-22).
- Enhance content of IE aspects for the other levels.
- Encourage research in IE
PURPOSE

To provide grounding on ethical implications of accessing and disseminating information through various means. Areas of study include moral questions relating to life cycle of information as it pertains to its generation, gathering, organisation, storage, retrieval and use. Broadly, it examines issues related to information privacy, security and access, intellectual freedom, quality & integrity of information as well as intellectual property rights. It will help students to make professional decisions when confronted with ethical & legal dilemmas in the work place.
AIM OF THE SUBJECT

- To introduce students to the philosophy of ethics as the basis for ethical theories and ethical reasoning.
- To create in students an awareness of ethical issues that pertain to working with information.
- To offer students an opportunity to examine their own ethical positions.
- To foster in students the development of ethical decision making capacity.
EXPECTED OUTPUTS

- Students’ enhanced knowledge of own sense of ethics.
- Students will gain an understanding of ethical theories underpinning ethical behaviour and ethical choices.
- Students will gain an understanding of the dynamics of ethical issues at a local and international level.
Teaching and learning activities

- Lecturing
- Group work – working on case studies
- Assignment

Assessment

- Formative: assignments, in-class tests (30%)
- Summative: end of semester exam (70%)
National University of Science and Technology, Department of Library and Information Science

The Department has combined adoption of IE course with a review of the curriculum. This has involved circulating proposed curriculum to stakeholders for review, feedback has been received, implemented. Proposal yet to be validated at a Faculty Board meeting, Academic Board meeting before end of this year. Implementation should be effected in the 2015-2016 academic year.
Harare Polytechnic, Department of Library and Information Science

NUST is working with the Harare Polytechnic, Depart LIS, to establish a B Technology degree in Library and Information Science. The programme is specifically aimed to give an opportunity to LIS Higher National Diploma holders to study for a degree in their field. The IE course has been included as a standalone subject in the programme. The programme should start in the 2014-2015 academic year.
CONCLUSION

It is hoped that, by offering the subject of information ethics as a stand alone course, enough ground will be covered to produce students who will readily bear responsibility for their action and are able to provide quality services.
THANK YOU