

InSITE 2007 Doctoral Consortium Abstract: An Examination of Factors Associated with Students' Ethical Decision Making in Post-Secondary Online Learning Programs

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Abstract

Technological advances and the increasing popularity of the Internet have enabled post-secondary institutions to implement e-learning technologies as a teaching environment. Students' enrollment in e-learning courses has proliferated over the past decade. However, ethical issues with students' conduct in e-learning courses have been raised by several scholars and were noted as a major concern. Moreover, scholars argue that students' unethical conduct has intensified due to technology use.

Ethical decision making has been associated with individuals' conduct. Ethical decision making is grounded upon decision making theory. Various studies have linked numerous factors such as familiarity with the organization's code of conduct, academic experience, and expertise with the use of technology with ethical decision making. Research indicates that familiarity with the organization's code of conduct is instrumental in aiding individuals to make ethical decisions. Moreover, research suggests that academic experience and students' expertise with the use of technology appear to contribute to students' ethical decision making in post-secondary educational institutions.

This research is intended to construct and empirically validate a model that will determine the contribution of three factors to students' ethical decision making: their academic experience, their expertise with the use of technology, and their familiarity with their institution's code of conduct. Participants will consist of students enrolled in post-secondary e-learning programs of two institutions: independent and state. The proposed theoretical model will be investigated using multiple linear regressions for significance of the contribution of each of the three independent variables on the dependent variable. Additionally, interaction analysis will be done to investigate the correlations among all independent variables. Results of the bivariate correlations and interaction analysis will be reported. Moreover, analysis will be done using a t-test to show if there is significant

difference between the undergraduates and the graduates in the dependent variable, ethical decision making. Conclusions and suggestions for future research will be made based on the results of the study.

Keywords: Ethical decision making, Ethics in online learning, Academic misconduct, Students' code of conduct.

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