Issues and Challenges of Information Ethics Education in Library and Information Science in South Africa

Dennis N. Ocholla
Department of Information Studies, University of Zululand, South Africa.
docholla@pan.uzulu.ac.za
Presentation Outline

- Background
- Research Approach
- The case study
- Conclusions
- Agenda
Library and Information Education in Africa – Overview

- One billion people (2009 stats)
- Size – 30065000 sq km (i.e. USA three-tenth the size of Africa)
- Africa has 53 independent countries
- 21 are English speaking (Anglophone),
- 24 French speaking (Francophone),
- 5 Portuguese speaking (Lucophone),
- 7 Arabic speaking
- 2 Spanish speaking
- Local languages - several as well
- 60 Library and Information Science/studies Schools (LIS)
- South Africa (12), Nigeria (8), Kenya (7)
- LIS Schools are located within universities
- South Africa teaching models:
  - contact (11) and
  - distance (1);
  - both undergraduate and postgraduate (10);
  - general and vocational (1),
  - postgraduate only (2).
Ethical Theories

Recognised:
- Origin and development of IE
- Some ethical theories e.g. Understanding the conflicting relationships between: morals, ethics and laws
- Consequence, duty, rights and virtue-based theories
- Implications to IE education
- Ethical dilemma in IS.
- Conceptions of IE
Research approach- qualitative

- Case Study- 5 LIS schools
- Web based open ended questions(8) requiring comments- detailed email responses
- Experiential knowledge
- Review of Literature
- Content analysis of existing curricula
Case Study Participation

- 5 senior LIS faculty members from South Africa participated in the survey through open ended questionnaires via e-mail:
  - Durban University of Technology (DUT) – integrated
  - University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN) - Integrated
  - University of Pretoria (UP) – stand alone module/course (SAM)
  - University of South Africa (UNISA) – SAM
  - University of Zululand (UZ) - SAM

Selection criteria:
- IE education – confirmed
- Willingness to participate in the survey
- Relatively stronger IE offering/dispensation
Research Questions

1. Is ethics and information ethics education as a whole necessary in LIS schools?
2. Who should offer such education in terms of academic unit/department/faculty, and individual/expertise?
3. Who offers such education?
4. Why is it being offered by the academic unit, discipline or the individual?
Research Questions

5. Who should learn information ethics?
6. How long should information ethics education take in the curricula (e.g. quarterly)?
7. At what learning level should it be offered?
8. What should be learnt or taught in an information ethics course?
9. What are the challenges and opportunities of information ethics education in Africa?
1. It is overwhelmingly agreed that ethics and information ethics education is essential.

2. 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.

3. Notably, current work requirements demand that information professionals be conversant with and able to apply information ethics
Outcome- 2(Q 2,3,4)

- 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.
- Although mixed feelings exist with some suggesting LIS schools and the LIS Faculty and others opting for a more multidisciplinary approach, LIS schools are strongly supported for offering EI because of their contextual knowledge of the Information Environ.
- 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.
Outcome -3(Q 5)

- 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.
Outcome 4 (Q 6 and 7)

- 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.
Cross-cutting themes

- Conceptions – terminology, importance, history
- Information ethics and society
- Ethics Theories
- Information ethics in the work place
- Intellectual property - copyright and industrial property
- Information policy
- Cyber ethics -
- IE dilemma
- Code of professional ethics for information workers
- Access and protection themes and issues - information and communication freedoms, privacy, security, censorship etc
- Role of educators and professional associations
- Role of IFLA, UNESCO, WSIS, WTO, WIPO, ARIPO, National Information Legislations and Policies
- Security and integrity of information content
- Ethical dimensions of information
- digital divide
- Case studies
Outcome 6a

The **challenges** facing IE education are numerous.

- Lack of understanding or appreciation of IE, lip service
- Inadequate or absent legislation, and where policies exist, enforcement is weak;
- Negative legislations that restrict access; censorship, sensitivity.
- Lack of expertise e.g. EI lecturers/professors;
- Poor course design; EI content
- Lack of space in the curriculum;
- Complications arising from ICT use;
- Unsatisfactory professional practice, among others
- Digital divide - e.g dilemma of access and protection
Outcome 6b – Opportunities

- Curriculum reviews that incorporate IE
- Involvement of professional associations that have the power to influence information policies e.g. IFLA, SCECSAL, LIASA
- Involvement of Government and Civil Society
- Increased research in IE
- The African Information Ethics Conference organized by Hannes Britz and Rafael Capurro held in Pretoria in February 2007
- World Summit on Information Society resolutions also provided an opportunity for developing IE education in Africa.
- NIE-website
- A Reader on Information Ethics, workshops
- IE Conference in Botswana
Agenda

- Should we offer IEE to all who produce, handle and use/consume information?
- Is there unanimity on ethics or ethical globally?
- How do we address the challenges of IE education?
- How do we maximize the opportunities of IE education?
- How do we make LIS values and ethics/infoethics requisite in accredited undergraduate, postgraduate and Doctoral programs?
- Can we agree on the IE curriculum? Is Uniformity (standard) impossible?
- How do we popularise IE beyond LIS?
Conclusion - Agenda cont.

- "Would LIS scholars and educators want their students to drive on this [global information] superhighway without knowing the traffic rules? (Vagaan 2003)

- 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?" (Vagaan 2003)
Recent work

- Ndwandwe Sipho, Ocholla Dennis and Dube Luyanda (2009), Information Ethics Education in Library and Information Science Departments/Schools in South Africa. *Mousaion*, Vol.27(2), 75-88
Which are our big five EI topics?
Quick, where are the books on beekeeping?