

## **Title of Proposal**

Ethical Issues and Solutions Identified by Instructional Technologists in Online Course Design and Training Situations

**Hong Lin:** I earned my Ph.D. degree from the Department of Learning and Performance System at the Pennsylvania State University. My research interests include online education, blended learning, and assessment. My recent articles have appeared in such top journals as Educational Technology Research and Development (ET R & D) and Performance Improvement Quarterly (PIQ) in the field of instructional Technology. Currently, I am Manager of Faculty Development in the Institute for Teaching and Learning Excellence at Oklahoma State University.

### *Abstract*

This presentation will provide empirical data regarding ethical issues associated with the use of instructional technology in online course design and Web- based training situations. In-depth interviews of 20 instructional technology professionals were conducted. The top three concerns reported were related to copyright, learner privacy, and accessibility issues. Contributions to new knowledge will be discussed.

### *Introduction*

In recent years, there is a significant need that learning and training become digital, mobile, and virtual to accommodate distance education and flexible work arrangements. For this reason, institutions have motivated to increasingly incorporate instructional technology to online course design and Web-based training.

The phenomenal instructional technology that has impacted online course design and Web-based training practices has also given rise to a proliferation of ethical issues relating to the application of the technology. A laundry list of such ethical issues includes, but is not limited to, digital copyright infringement, violation of online private information, and other inappropriate use of instructional technology. Clearly, such ethical issues pose challenges to those professionals who have taken the responsibility for incorporating technology applications in course design and training situations.

To address the emerging ethical issues in the field of educational communications and technology, Association for Educational Communication Technology (AECT) has established a Code of Professional Ethics. In the same token, the AECT professional journal *TechTrend* has been to publish a series of ethics columns to provide interpretation of the Code. In each column, a brief scenario involving an ethical issue of technology use was described, and the relevant principle from the Code was discussed.

Unfortunately, research that investigates ethical issues associated with the use of instructional technology is under represented in the literature. In fact, as Marbry & O'Driscoll (2003) indicated, "by far the least researched perspective is an empirical one that examines ethics and ethical dilemmas actually encountered in practice" (p. 82). The lack of literature in the area of ethics and instructional technology is a concern given the fact that more and more professionals are employing instructional technology on a daily basis. A research study that utilizes qualitative methodology is a good first step in identifying ethical issues.

### *Overarching Research Question*

What ethical issues associated with instructional technology do designers and technologists report as having experienced in online course design and Web-based training situations? What are the suggested solutions to these ethical issues?

### *Methodology*

In-depth, face-to-face interviews were used to collect data. The interview protocol consisted of seven open-ended questions with suggested probes and clarifications under each question. The length of the interviews varied with an average session lasting about 40 minutes. The interviews were conducted over a four-month period.

### *Results*

The issues mentioned most frequently by the participants are copyright, privacy, accessibility, diversity, conflicts of interest, and professionalism/Confidence. Out of 20 participants, fifteen mentioned copyright as a major ethical issue they had to handle in their daily work activities. Suggested solutions include team communication, laws and policies, management and consultation, professional integrity, and technical solutions.