

Professional Ethics

Giving and Receiving Favors

By Rebecca P. Butler

Imagine that you are Dr. Terry Jones, a full professor in educational technology. Money is tight, even on a professor's salary, and you have a growing family to feed. Your primary goal at the present is to find ways to add more cash to your pocket while maintaining your research stream.

The Associate Superintendent of Curriculum for a local school district offers you a proposition. She has written a technology grant proposal and it has been funded beginning with the next school year. Written into this project is a three-year position for a part-time field researcher in high school curriculum/technology integration.

This fits perfectly with your research, which focuses on integrating technology into K-12 education. In addition to the opportunity for fieldwork, the grant pays the equivalent of one third of your yearly salary! You could really use the research position — in more ways than one!

At the same meeting where she offers you this opportunity, the Associate Superintendent mentions her niece, who is attending your university and needs a job as a graduate assistant (GA) in order to obtain a tuition release. Can you help her niece find such a position? You recall her as a student with a caring personality and a positive outlook.

You happen to know there is an opening in your program area for

a GA. It is a very competitive position, with several good candidates already jockeying for the job because it offers not only a tuition waiver but also a nice monthly salary. They are all more qualified, with higher GPAs than the niece.

You would like to help the Associate Superintendent. After all, she is offering you something that you really want and need. All you have to do is recommend her niece for the GA position. This sounds great! But, is it ethical?

Principle

*AECT Code of Professional Ethics
Section 2 - Commitment to Society
Principle 4*

In fulfilling obligations to society, the member shall accept no gratuities, gifts, or favors that might impair or appear to impair professional judgment, or offer any favor, service or thing of value to obtain special advantage.

(Apply the principle to the scenario for yourself before going on to read the analysis.)

Analysis

Several concerns face you in this situation. You feel you are being offered something you need in return for giving something else to another. You really want the research position and the money it will provide.

However, is it appropriate to recommend the Associate Superintendent's niece for your departmental GA position as a favor for someone who is offering you something? Does that make it cheating?

On top of these considerations, you know the Associate Superintendent's niece really could use the GA position. Nevertheless, there are other applicants for the graduate assistantship. Does this mean you are playing favorites?

It seems you have ethical dilemmas here. They involve giving and receiving something for making a choice that may be inappropriate. There appear to be positive reinforcements for such actions for you, the Associate Superintendent and her niece. Are there negative consequences as well? Are you being a "good" professional? What should you do?

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Note

Professional ethics scenarios published in TechTrends are fictitious (see TechTrends March–April, 2006). There is never any intended resemblance to specific individuals or specific institutions. The instructional purpose is to raise consciousness about AECT's professional ethics.