

## Scenarios for Learning About AECT's Professional Ethics

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### Background

The authority of the *Code* is important. It extends beyond the normative influences of government, law, community, school, family, and church. There is an unremitting desire for professionally ethical practice to be specified and imparted to our profession. The higher education faculty who make up the great majority of the Association's membership are the profession's educators and can be highly influential in this regard. Many of the graduate student members become faculty, too. This means the *Code* is not as relevant to AECT members' activities as it is to the labor of those professionals whom they teach. Knowledge of the *Code* and its application therefore deserves dramatic emphasis and respect.

While there are procedures for enforcement—located in the *Policy and Information Manual*—they have not been put into formal operation. In part, this was because the *Code* had been constructed for the profession but only a subset, the members of AECT, had an obligation to adhere to it. Criminal situations are not the primary foundation of the *Code* which, as it should, pushes the profession to higher standards. This comes from the Association's traditional regard for what qualifies as professional performance best for the welfare of those served by the professional field.

Above anything else, it is likely that the *Code* will continue to be questioned, clarified, and developed. Social and cultural contexts will be productive to explore in humanizing processes and outcomes. With the recent shift to Divisional representation on the Committee there should be an increase in understanding of how the *Code* fits the occupational specialties addressed by AECT. Ethical gaps may be detected, as well, and rectified.

### Annotations

Annotations for the current series of scenarios were first published in *TechTrends* (Yeaman, 2013). This update includes annotations for the most recent articles in the collection (Yeaman, 2015). Each annotation identifies professionals experiencing a particular problem and sketches a condensed version of the events and tensions. These annotations do not replace the original texts but provide a landscape view. It shows that the *Code* applies to a wide range of professional work in educational communications and technology and that the profession endeavors to act responsibly toward making social contributions.

### Access

To access the original columns containing these articles, go to the AECT home page and select *TechTrends* from the Publications list.

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### Disclaimer

Please note that the professional ethics scenarios published in *TechTrends* are fictitious (Yeaman, 2006). There is no intentional resemblance to specific people or particular organizations. The instructional purpose is to raise consciousness about AECT's *Code of Professional Ethics*.

### Further reading

In conclusion, here are some suggestions for further reading related to the general topic. Welliver's book on AECT's professional ethics is a classic because it was the first attempt at a synthesis (2001). Instructional design and performance technology perspectives are provided by Davidson-Shivers and Rasmussen (2007). Detailed discussion of the emergence of professional ethics for educational technologists is given by three former Chairs of the Professional Ethics Committee (Yeaman, Eastmond, & Napper, 2008). Moore and Ellsworth take a research point of view on ethics, professional ethics, and design (2014).

For the past quarter of a century there has been a column on professional ethics in *TechTrends*. The first title was Ethics Today. From 1989 to 1995 there were 27 articles and one more in 1998. The column was revived as Ethically Speaking in 2001 and it ran until 2003, having published nine articles. Since 2004 the *TechTrends* column has been named Professional Ethics and the quantity of articles printed numbers over 50.

### References

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## The AECT Code of Professional Ethics Annotated: 2015

### Section 1 Commitment to the Individual Learner<sup>1</sup>

#### Principle 1.

Belland, B. R. (2010). A gray day for science standards. *TechTrends*, 54(5), 18-19.

An instructional designer is commissioned to produce science materials for middle schools. The state is paying her to support the students in passing the science standards test. She believes that an investigative approach to learning will produce the best results. In looking at the topic of atmosphere and air pollution she is dismayed to discover the test requires generalized knowledge from oversimplified models. How can she encourage independent learning and alternate viewpoints?

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<sup>1</sup> The usual understanding is that *individual* refers to caring for the learner because the learner is an individual.

**Principle 2.**

Morris, B. J. (2009). "It's not about you, Ms. McInney." *TechTrends*, 53(3), 29.

A high school media specialist refuses to include 'controversial' books in the library collection. An English teacher wants to use them to interest her students and plans a display on censorship. However, media specialists need to be sure students are given 'access to materials of varying points of view'.

**Principle 3.**

Brewer, E. (2007). Admissions decisions and accommodations for disability. *TechTrends*, 51(1), 16.

A college admissions committee considers a masters program application from a deaf student. There may be insufficient support for his special needs as well as unfair prejudices.

Bradshaw, A. C. (2014). Progress can really set you back. *TechTrends*, 58(6), 10-11.

Caught up in the rush to adopt innovative devices, a college technology coordinator experiences a Kafkaesque nightmare. A trial program causes responsibilities to grow and complexities to diverge. It is as if the original plan had not been thought through, particularly in not anticipating needs for increased access.

**Principle 4.**

Callary, J. (2011). School web sites require privacy rule upgrade. *TechTrends*, 55(2), 28-29.

The technologist responsible for several schools' web sites is concerned about pictures being copied. Sometimes they are used in nasty ways. What can she do to protect the privacy of the students?

**Principle 5.**

Napper, V. (2008). Choosing new chairs for a computer lab. *TechTrends*, 52(3), 8.

A computer coordinator in an elementary school is faced with computer lab chairs wearing out and breaking. Accidents are taking place. Buying more lunchroom chairs would be an inexpensive short term solution. Proper computer chairs are more comfortable. Nevertheless, they cost more. Although justification is required for claims of improvements in either academic achievement or safety, there is relevant research in ergonomics.

**Principle 6.**

Yeaman, A. R. J. (2006). Protecting learners from technology. *TechTrends*, 50(2), 11.

The district media supervisor visits a middle school and informs the school librarian that some of the library's computer stations are unsafe. Instead of buying new units, old furniture has been repurposed and it is unsatisfactory. The reason this happened is that lust for more computers predominates.

**Principle 7.**

Hall, L. D. (2007). Making software choices benefit all children. *TechTrends*, 51(1), 15-16.

An elementary principal discovers that the new mathematics software is unlikely to be effective with the school's limited English speaking students. Just what is going on here?

**Principle 8.**

Hall, L. D. (2011). How do you see Native Americans? *TechTrends*, 55(3), 14-15.

A school library media specialist plans a collaborative project with a third grade teacher. She realizes the teacher—while not consciously racist—is furthering racial prejudice through her actions. The teacher is selecting cultural images for instruction on the basis of them being easy to obtain and use and not considering whether or not they are accurate.

### **Principle 9.**

Napper, V. S. (2011). Overwhelmed and behind schedule. *TechTrends*, 55(6), 13-14.

An instructional materials designer tells her intern to put aside his academic project. He must work on a set of revision chores received from her manager. The work was suddenly assigned even though she is already fully committed. The tense situation shows that supervisors can forget their interns should be properly regarded as learners.

## **Section 2 Commitment to Society**

### **Principle 1.**

Walster, D. (2011). Representing institutions: Distinguishing between the official view and your own view is not always simple. *TechTrends*, 55(1), 21-22.

A high school librarian discovers the district library and technology coordinator has imperiously cancelled a popular magazine subscription, thinking it to be inappropriate. While the institutional selection policy is mentioned, the focus here is on both of the professionals erroneously preferring to stick with their personal judgments.

### **Principle 2.**

Eastmond, N., & Hayden, R. (2006). How can I tell the truth? *TechTrends*, 50(3), 13.

The media services director at a college finds that how people represent situations, including what work has been accomplished, varies in accuracy. Truth has become uncomfortably flexible. He must decide how honest he can be when preparing his own reports.

### **Principle 3.**

Martin, S. (2012). To be an early adopter. *TechTrends*, 56(5), 10-12.

The coordinator of instructional technology at a state university is asked to move to a somewhat inferior learning management system. He is promised a reward for his affiliation and endorsement.

### **Principle 4.**

Butler, R. P. (2006). Giving and receiving favors. *TechTrends*, 50(6), 10.

A professor of educational technology is offered a paid research position on a three year grant with a school district. The Associate Superintendent asks for a favor in the form of getting her niece appointed as a graduate assistant.

### **Principle 5.**

Forthcoming.

### **Principle 6.**

Yeaman, A. R. J. (2012). How green was my screen? *TechTrends*, 56(3), 12.

A middle school teacher is examining materials for teaching about the environment and realizes that educational technology may have unanticipated effects. The librarian works with the teacher on this question. They report their answers to the district technology committee. Together, they hope to increase environmental awareness and responsibility.

Belland, B. R. (2013). Our students deserve the very best. *TechTrends*, 57(5), 6-7.

The race for more computer power and speedier computers is giving educators a headache. The solutions available to a school technology coordinator appear to generate further obstacles. Among these are environmentally irresponsible recycling and socially irresponsible recycling.

### **Section 3 Commitment to the Profession**

#### **Principle 1.**

Eastmond, N. (2014). Welcoming varying points of view. *TechTrends*, 58(2), 11-12.

A program planner for an international conference discovers that colleagues from some parts of the world are late in sending in their proposals. Is it right to intervene in the process and place them on the program?

Yeaman, A. R. J. (2014). Let's not and say we did. *TechTrends*, 58(4), 5-6.

Two conference program planners have decided to eliminate any proposal that feels like an oddball to them. Formal review is sidestepped along with consideration of what appear to be provocative topics. The planners then show a couple of the abstracts they have rejected to a third planner.

#### **Principle 2.**

Kim, C. (2014). Game or no game. *TechTrends*, 58(1), 14.

A principal agrees to volunteer teachers and their classes so that instructional software can be tested. One of the algebra teachers objects to using computer games for learning. How far can the principal go with this idea without becoming coercive?

#### **Principle 3.**

Sugar, W. (2010). Help wanted. *TechTrends*, 54(3), 19.

A longterm adjunct professor who is teaching in a university's instructional technology program also runs his own business. He is a media production expert and was sent to the AECT conference so he might learn what to do to increase interest in media production. While he is there, he finds and hires a new instructional media specialist for his business. He is criticized for not having dedicated 100% of his time to raising the department's enrollment.

Most AECT professional ethics principles relate to what is good practice in the profession in general. This one, however, specifies members of the Association—most of whom are academics. The illustrative article also offers an instructional bonus in presenting a scene where there may be an unfair or unjust accusation, depending on how the reader takes the organizational dynamics.

#### **Principle 4.**

Walster, D. (2007). Sharing network security information. *TechTrends*, 51(4), 14.

A school library media specialist also serves as a school's network coordinator. After attending a professional development workshop, a problem appears regarding disseminating what was learned. The workshop was on computer security. In order to understand things thoroughly, the participants had to learn how to spy on what people were doing and how to create damage. The problem comes from the school's requirement that anyone attending a workshop is obliged to share what was learned with everyone else in the school.

**Principle 5.**

Branch, R. M. (2013). Hype or the real deal? *TechTrends*, 57(4), 16.

Your team needs to be outstandingly competitive so you can be awarded the desired project. What are you going to do when you discover your colleagues are putting such a good spin on things that the proposal does not match reality? This is not only a test of your loyalty but also an ethical question about your responsibility as a professional.

**Principle 6.**

Rysavy, M. (2013). Professional business or personal? *TechTrends*, 57(3), 6.

A high school computer teacher has her plans accepted for updating her computer lab. While the funding has been approved, the refurbishment cost is large enough to necessitate competitive bids for a contract. However, there is a way to get around that requirement so the new computer lab can be ready for the start of the school year.

**Principle 7.**

Spannaus, T. W. (2014). What if? *TechTrends*, 58(5), 11.

Some doubts have been raised that one of the instructional designers will not be sufficiently experienced to take on a project efficiently. What are the options? Should the person be replaced, at least for the time being?

**Principle 8.**

Butler, R. P. (2015). How do you tell a faculty member to respect copyright? *TechTrends*, 59(1) 12-13.

The school librarian believes a teacher is almost certainly disregarding copyright in reproducing instructional materials and distributing them to students. Are there some ways in which the professional obligation to intervene can produce outcomes that are positive?

**Principle 9.**

Yeaman, A. R. J. (2015). If it was illegal the technology wouldn't allow it. *TechTrends*, 59(3).  
Forthcoming.

**Principle 10.**

Belland, B. R., & Belland, J. C. (2008). A case study gone awry. *TechTrends*, 52(1), 15.

A researcher is faced with one of the three participants in his longterm case study wishing to drop out. The participant has found a selection from his recorded and transcribed words to be unacceptable. Although the researcher believes the quotations are valuable and a consent form has been signed, the participant wishes to withdraw.

Brown, C. A. (2011). A golden opportunity to gather "authentic data". *TechTrends*, 55(4), 13-15.

A teacher is progressing toward school media certification. She wants to gather data in her media specialist internship to support a grant proposal for a workshop. However, in questioning teachers on how they feel about a new technology the research may harmfully intrude into their privacy. This is especially concerning if the results are passed to the school's administrators.