MLIS 7650
Information and Ethics

Wallace Koehler
wkoehler@valdosta.edu
MLIS Program, Odum Library, Valdosta State University
1500 N Patterson St., Valdosta, GA 31698
Voice 229 245 3732, Fax 259 5055

Electronic Office Hours
I will respond to e-mail within 48 school day hours of receipt
I may be contacted by telephone during business hours
Appointments in person

Course Description and Goal

This course is designed to acquaint students first with the diverse historical traditions of ethics and ethical thinking.
We are particularly concerned with contemporary applied ethics issues and the new information and communications technologies. In order to understand the current information revolution, we will look to earlier information revolutions for guidance. These include the development of writing, advances in paper and writing technology, the printing press, telegraphy and telephony, as well as the Internet and its component parts.

We will cross cut these technological revolutions with a set of major themes, to include: Access, Ownership, Privacy, Security, Community, and the Profession. We will address information ethics with a specific but not exclusive focus for the librarian.

The chief outcome of this course will be to equip students to be able to reflect critically upon their personal and professional decision-making.

This is a Web-based course. It is, for the most part, an asynchronous course. There are no specific meeting times. From time to time we may schedule participation in electronic conferences and meetings as they are available to us.

The course is divided into modules. Each module and its assignment is to be completed at the specified time.

Required Text

Michael Gorman. 2000. *Our Enduring Values: Librarianship in the 21st Century*. Chicago: American Library Association.

Readings

T. Michael Ciolek, Ethics and Etiquette of Internet Resources, *The World-Wide Web Virtual Library*, Available:
http://www.ciolek.com/WWWVLPages/QltyPages/QltyEtiq.html

Walt Crawford. 1999. *Being Analog: Creating Tomorrow's Libraries*. Chicago: American Library Association.

Wallace Koehler, Ethics Links to Librarian and Information Manager Associations WWW Pages, available
http://books.valdosta.peachnet.edu/mlis/ethics/EthicsBibOrg.htm

Wallace Koehler, Jitka Hurych, Wanda Dole, and Joanna Wall, "Ethical Values of Information and Library Professionals -- An Expanded Analysis." *International Information & Library Review, 32* (3/4) 2000: 485-506.

Wallace Koehler and J. Michael Pemberton. 2000. "A Search for Core Values: Towards a Model Code of Ethics for Information Professionals," *Journal of Information Ethics 9,* 1: 26-54

F.W. Lancaster, ed. 1991. *Ethics and the Librarian*. Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois

Alasdair MacIntyre. 1998. *A Short History of Ethics*, 2nd ed., University of Notre Dame Press.

Z. Sandar and J. Ravitz, (eds). 1996. *Cyberfutures, Culture And Politics on the Information Superhighway*. New York: New York University Press.

Martha Smith 2001 "Information Ethics" *Advances in Librarianship 25*: 29-66.

Richard N. Stichler and Robert Hauptman, eds 1998. *Ethics, Information, and Technology: Readings*,
McFarland.

Modules

Module 1. Weeks 1 and 2
What is this thing called "ethics"? What are the major approaches? Differentiate among ethics, values, morals, and law. Do ethics "matter"?

Prepare a short paper (not to exceed five page), due at the end of week 3. Describe the major philosophical approaches to ethics. Differentiate among ethics, values, morals, and law. **20% of grade.**

Module 2. Weeks 3 and 4
Is librarianship a profession? Should librarians and other information professionals be concerned with ethical practice. What are the ethical positions taken by professional organizations? What values do other information professionals hold?

Module 3. Weeks 4-10.
Consider the specific professional values do librarians and other information workers hold. Explore the ethical and values statements of librarians, computer scientists, journalists, and communications professionals. How do they differ – and if they do – why?

Prepare a paper, not to exceed 15 pages, building on insight acquired in Modules 2 and 3. Paper due at the end of week 11. For this paper, consider the proposed **Core Values Statement** developed for the American Library Association. Based on your understanding of professional values and ethics, critique the proposed Core Values Statement. Include in your critique its value as a guide to practice as well as arguments for and against it by major stakeholders. **30% of grade**.

Module 4. Weeks 11-15
Major Issues facing information professionals, including Access, Service, Stewardship, Intellectual Freedom, Ownership, Privacy, Security, Community. How important is technological change as a driving force?

Prepare a paper that ties the issues facing information professionals into professionalism. Reflect on how ethical practice impacts on the area of professional focus you have chosen to follow. **40% of grade.**

Grades
Note first that the assignments total 90% of the final grade. Online discussion is an important part of this course. The final 10% of the grade will be based on the frequency and quality of comments to the class mail list. Papers and participation are to be graded on an **A+** to **F** scale. Grades for papers and participation are assessed as follows: A=exceptional, B=expected graduate work, C=acceptable, D=marginal, and F=unacceptable. The "+" and "-" are used on papers to indicate granularity within the category. Paper and participation grades will be weighted appropriately as indicated and final grades awarded. I round up – a "B++" is an "A-", is an "A"