USING AN ONLINE SIMULATION TO TEACH ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING

Because ethical reasoning is a skill that requires understanding and consideration of the points of view, values, and cultural backgrounds of other many other individuals or groups, ethics courses often incorporate group discussion or decision-making exercises. For this reason, many professors hesitate to teach ethics courses in an online format, where spontaneous, interactive activities are more difficult to accomplish. Modern education, however, increasingly requires online course delivery. Additionally, some students prefer this learning environment, and may achieve greater success through online learning than they would in a traditional class setting. Thus, to continue to teach the ethical reasoning skills needed by our future leaders and professionals, colleges and universities must find effective ways to teach these skills online.

This paper explores the use of an online computer simulation package, EthicsGame, to teach ethical decision-making skills in an undergraduate business ethics course. The course was designed in a "mixed technology" format in which approximately half of the course was delivered in a traditional class setting and half was delivered as an online course. The online component of the course was structured around EthicsGame, a simulation package that placed students in leadership roles in a fictitious company, presented them with ethical dilemmas, and required them to decide upon an ethical course of action from multiple perspectives. The simulation also provided discussion boards where students could engage in online discussions. In conjunction with EthicsGame, the students completed the Ethical Lens Inventory™ (ELI), an online assessment instrument designed to identify a person's ethical "lens" or decision-making perspective. At the end of the course, the students provided feedback on their perceptions comparing the value of this online learning experience to traditional learning experiences such as writing research papers and participating in live group discussions or activities.