Ethics for Information and Library Professionals Project Assignment

Project Assignment Overview: Investigate the information policies and practices of an organization that collects, stores, and distributes information (e.g., a school, library, business, social service, information service, government, academic unit, etc.). Perform an ethical evaluation of these policies and practices using the ethical theories and normative principles discussed in the course. Propose any changes to practices or policies that may improve the ethical standing of the organization.

You may focus on a particular aspect of the organization (e.g., collection, storage, organization, dissemination) or its practices in a particular area (e.g., privacy, intellectual property, access, censorship).

This project will result in two graded components: a paper and a presentation. It will also require that you turn in various pieces (e.g., proposed topic, annotated bibliography, and interview questions) as you progress.

Research

- **Literature**: Research your target organization. This should result in an annotated bibliography of between 5 to 10 sources from a range of types of sources (e.g., web, books, journal articles). Be sure to look for information on the following questions:

  Are there any applicable laws, ethical codes, etc. that apply to the information practices of this organization?
  Is there any literature discussing ethical issues, dilemmas, etc. that your organization typically confronts?

- **Documentation:** Gather any relevant documents that the organization has produced relevant to your project.
- **Interview**: Interview at least one person who is connected with the organization and has knowledge of its information practices. A set of questions based on your research should be composed in advance. You will need to have your interviewee sign and interview consent form, which you must retain and list in your appendix as available on request. A sample consent form is posted in d2l.

Graded Components

Presentation: Your presentation should provide an overview of the results of your project so far.

- o **Virtual Presentation (for virtual courses only):** Create a webpage or other virtual presentation format to communicate the results of your research so far to the class. Think about how to prompt class discussion of your research--remember this is a chance to get valuable feedback. During the week you will moderate a discussion of your presentation.
- o **Live Presentation (for f2f courses only):** It should be 20 minutes total, with 10-15 minutes for your presentation and 5 to 10 minutes for discussion. Be sure to budget your time. The discussion is an essential component of the presentation. Your presentation should have some visual aid--e.g., power-point, white board, video, etc. Think about how to prompt discussion of your project in ways that will be helpful to you and the class.

Paper: Your paper should be approximately 5-6 pages, typed, double-spaced, 12-point font, with one-inch margins. It should have the following components.

- • **Body**
  - o **Introductory paragraph**
    - ▪ State your evaluation of the information ethics practices of the institution and your policy proposal.
  - o **Description**
    - ▪ Briefly describe the organization you evaluated: it's size, whom it serves, it's primary function, etc.
    - ▪ Describe the organization's information practices, support with references to the interview and with any documents you obtained from the organization.
  - o **Evaluation**
    - ▪ Evaluate these ethical practices using applicable ethical theories, normative principles, or principles of special relevance to the information issues involved (e.g., intellectual freedom, privacy, access to information).
      - ▪ This must include reference to at least one of the main ethical theories discussed in this course.
      - ▪ You may also refer to any professional codes of ethics, statements of principles, etc. relevant to this organization.
  - o **Proposal**
    - ▪ Propose any policy changes that would be appropriate given your evaluation. Support this policy proposal

with relevant ethical theories, normative, constitutional, or legal principles.

- o **Works Cited Page:** Should include any sources used in the preparation of your paper. You may use any standard bibliographic format (e.g., MLA, APA). Note, that this list will not necessarily be identical to your annotated bibliography.
- **Appendices**: The documents in your appendix should include:
  - Any relevant documents that support your description of the organization and its practices.
  - The interview consent form.
  - Notes from your interview (these may be handwritten, a tape, etc). [There is no need to fully transcribe your interview.]
  - The Appendix does not need to be turned in. It should be kept by you for one semester after the end of the course, in case I need to see it.

See Course Schedule for due dates.

Questions (These are some possible questions I thought people might have. Let me know if you have any other questions.)

May I use a different moral theory than the main ones we discussed in class (Utilitarianism, Kant, Rawls, Ross, Rights, Ethic of Care, Virtue Ethics)?

Yes. If there is a good reason to think that a different ethical approach would be more useful in this context, then you may use an alternative for the purposes of ethical evaluation. You should explain in your paper why the ethical approach you chose is most appropriate. However, consider also offering an analysis of one of the main theories for purposes of comparison.

Do I have to focus on only privacy, intellectual property, access, or intellectual freedom?

No. You can discuss other ethical issues surrounding information. This may include such things as the ethics of gathering information, securing sensitive information, insuring the accuracy of information, etc. However, if you do so, you will need to do a bit more research and spend more time in your paper describing the ethical issues involved.

Can I do my project about the Government (e.g., about the Patriot Act or the NSA wiretapping?)

The short answer is no, because you will need to interview someone who works for the organization in question about their policies and practices. However, if you know someone from the FBI or the NSA who will talk to you, then great!