Ethics in Student Projects
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What is ethics?

The county next to Thuthex?
What is ethics?

The moral principles by which a person is guided (OED)

What are Ethics?

Ethics are based on an underlying moral code
That code is culturally dependent
Different philosophical schools imply different codes of ethics

What do you think of dwarf tossing?
What are Ethics?
The legal system reflects the extremes of the moral code
Just because something is legal it is not necessarily ethical
Examples?
  Tax avoidance verses tax evasion
  Phone hacking
  MPs and expenses

What are Ethics?
As well as legal codes there are codes of ethics
Usually applied by organizations

What are Ethics?
There are no hard-and-fast rules
  beyond the law
  …and even that is subject to judgement
Personal judgements
Cultural differences
Every decision you make has an ethical (values) dimension
Nothing I say today can be taken as definitive
Ethics in projects

1. Ensuring that the work of the project is carried out according to ethical principles.

2. Having regard for the moral implications of the results of the project.

Ensuring that the work of the project is carried out according to ethical principles

The basics

- No plagiarism
- Not making up results
- Writing a true account as to what you did
- Acknowledging assistance (including supervisor)
- Respecting copyright
- Using licensed software
- etc…

If in doubt - ask
Ensuring that the work of the project is carried out according to ethical principles

Regarding any people involved

Having regard for the moral implications of the results of the project

Not necessarily clear-cut
The student has no control over the use of their project results

Why ethics in projects?

We should all act ethically
Students should learn how to work in an ethical manner
Projects are an opportunity to demonstrate that they have learned this
External bodies like to see evidence that students understand ethics
1. General moral imperatives

1.1 Contribute to society and human well-being.

This principle concerning the quality of life of all people affirms an obligation to protect fundamental human rights and to respect the diversity of all cultures. An essential aim of computing professionals is to minimize negative consequences of computing systems, including threats to health and safety. When designing or implementing systems, computing professionals must attempt to ensure that the products of their efforts will be used in socially responsible ways, will meet social needs, and will avoid harmful effects to health and welfare.
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1. General moral imperatives

As an ACM member I will ....
1.1 Contribute to society and human well-being.
1.2 Avoid harm to others.
1.3 Be honest and trustworthy.
1.4 Be fair and take action not to discriminate.
1.5 Honor property rights including copyrights and patent.
1.6 Give proper credit for intellectual property.
1.7 Respect the privacy of others.
1.8 Honor confidentiality.

1. General moral imperatives

Is there a student project to which those do not apply?
1. General moral imperatives

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Examples

Are there ethical objections to the following?

Project involving reading private emails

Illegal

…and therefore unethical
for the department to allow it
or a student to undertake it
Software to assist in animal experiments
Not illegal
Student might have ethical objections
  should not be forced to do such a project
Student who chooses to do it should provide an ethical statement
  The greater good?

Spam generator
Illegal?
Immoral
  Student should not be allowed to do such a project
  The Department’s ethical responsibility

Password-cracker
Would require a clear justification/ethics statement
Would have to be carried out with care
Other attempts to subvert security?
Poker bots
Not illegal
But against the rules of on-line casinos
University of Alberta Computer Poker Research Group
http://poker.cs.ualberta.ca
http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2009/feb/12/online-poker-bots

Others which would require careful justification
Password cracker
Poker bots
Card counter
Crossword solver
Others?

Summary
Some projects are clearly unethical – usually illegal ones
Some raise ethical questions which the student must be prepared to address
Some ethical consequences cannot be anticipated
If in doubt
Talk to your supervisor
If he or she is still in doubt
talk to me
If I am still in doubt
I will refer to the Physical Sciences Ethics Committee

There must be a Statement of Ethics

Marking the ethics statement
Not marking the ethics
whether you agree with them
Marking the student’s appreciation of the ethical implications
It is up to the marker to what extent they consider the Statement of Ethics in their mark.
Marks
Supervisor says ethical aspects were *Important, many and complex*
Student says there were no ethical questions
- Poor mark

Marks
Supervisor says there were some ethical considerations
Student’s Statement of Ethics contradicts the body of the report
  e.g. No evidence of informed consent
- Poor mark

Marks
Supervisor says there were few ethical considerations
Student’s Statement of Ethics says there were few ethical considerations
- Good mark
Not just a list of assertions

Not
‘All personal data were kept securely.’

Rather
‘All personal data were kept securely. They were stored in an encrypted file on a separate USB drive. The password for the file is known only to the student and the supervisor.’

Good Statement of Ethics

All participants were briefed from the script shown in Appendix A. They then signed a consent form. (A sample blank form is in Appendix B). Their data was stored in an encrypted form, identifiable by participant number only. Only the student and his supervisor have access to that data. The key mapping participant numbers to identities is in the possession of the supervisor.

Good Statement of Ethics

This is a theoretically-based project. It has been carried out in an ethical manner and there are no significant ethical implications of the outcomes.
Help with the statement

http://www-users.cs.york.ac.uk/~alistair/Ethics

Sample output
http://www-users.cs.york.ac.uk/~alistair/Ethics/report.html

What do you think of dwarf tossing?

References

University of York Code of practice and principles for good ethical governance
https://www.york.ac.uk/staff/research/governance/policies/ethics/code/

ACM Code of Ethics:
http://www.acm.org/about/code-of-ethics

British Psychological Society code of conduct:
http://www.bps.org.uk/the-society/code-of-conduct/code-of-conduct_home.cfm

Ethical Principles for conducting Research with Human Participants
http://www.bps.org.uk/document-download-area/document-downloads.cfm	?file_id=97f170d0e454b0cb7580-818f1f0d8e454b0cb7580

BCS Code of Conduct:
http://www.bcs.org/server.php?show=nav.6030
References


Spinello, R (2013) Cyberethics: Morality and Law in Cyberspace, Jones and Bartlett


Consent form
http://www-users.cs.york.ac.uk/~alistair/projects/consent.html

Ethics questionnaire
http://www-users.cs.york.ac.uk/~alistair/ethos

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