

Fostering Ethical Deliberation over the Internet: the University of Denver Experience

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This session included a live demonstration of the online *Center for Ethical Deliberation* (CED) at the University of Denver. The CED is an interactive website designed to help users (1) identify the ethical dimension of their choices, and (2) deliberate more effectively about how to resolve ethical conflicts. The demonstration showed:

- How the CED has attempted to harness the three main advantages of the internet:
 1. Using **links** to show the connections between diverse ethical perspectives (and encourage deeper inquiry without overwhelming the user from the start, and allow them to start wherever they most need to be)
 2. Encouraging personal **reflection** by prompting users to provide further explanation about their own previous inputs
 3. Providing an **anonymous environment** in which users can ask questions they may be uncomfortable discussing face-to-face.
- How the CED's interactive process guides users' deliberations about tough ethical choices, without simply being one more authoritative source for telling users what they should do, and
- Why a site like the CED may be better at clarifying ethical judgment than at cultivating ethical motivation, and how peer ethics coaches can be used to enhance its motivational effect.

Participants offered their own examples of hypothetical student dilemmas, which were input into the site directly. We then used the guided deliberation process to see how it helps students identify common mistakes and temptations and harness resources for overcoming them.

In closing the discussion, Dr. Matchett offered some reflections on DU's first year of experience with the CED. Although it was originally designed as a tool for residential life, it has found more usage in academic classes: faculty in 10 different disciplines (including engineering, library sciences, psychology and sociology) are now requiring students to complete assignments based on the site, and report noticeable increases in the quality of student ethical reasoning as a result. However, there are some tensions between academic usages (which require some level of user tracking and monitoring), and the value of having a place where students can discuss ethical issues anonymously. At DU, we have opted NOT to institute any tracking procedures on the site itself, so faculty who require use of the site must use various workarounds (requiring students to print out work, etc.). A site such as the CED also raises a number of privacy and risk management issues that should be addressed up front. In particular, it is important for users to be aware of situations in which the university could be required by law to attempt to discover their real identity, and of the limitations on internet security. These are documented in the CED privacy policy, but to date we have not had any issues that would require us to take action outside the site.