Chapter 5

HCI and User Experience Design Education: Principles for Ethical and Responsible Practices in Inclusive Research and Application

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ABSTRACT

A thorough and robust understanding of responsible and ethical practices in UX is essential to user experience designers. Ethical UX practices include authentic inclusion, vulnerability in participants, the inclusion of IRB-protected groups in research, tolerance for risk and motivation, truth in research, fair and respectful conduct, informed consent, cultural sensitivity, accessibility in UX processes, stigmatized populations, idiosyncratic populations, right to privacy, and an understanding of ADA-compliant accommodations by UX researchers and participants. This chapter will introduce these principles as well as demonstrate one possible application in an undergraduate design classroom.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the reader with twelve (12) ethical principles which can be applied to the field of User Experience Research and Design. The objectives of this chapter are not only to introduce these principles to the reader, but also an application of these principles in an undergraduate classroom.

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BACKGROUND

There is a historical lack of ethics in research on a global basis from the late 20th and persisting into the 21st century. Predominantly conducted by and/or on behalf of U.S. researchers in the name of scientific and medical advancement, this lack of ethical standards and conduct produced a wide range of issues that require professional oversights and protocols.

All scientific researchers must be aware of these egregious activities and understand the necessary responsibilities of themselves and ethical standards for which they must uphold. Researchers in the social sciences (which User Experience Research is a part of) must look to the medical professions as well as governmental oversight to begin informing guiding principles and codes of conduct to uphold while conducting their research.

The following discusses foundational understandings of ethics, the need for ethics and inclusion in UX, introduces the 12 Guiding Principles for Ethical and Inclusive Research (E-UX), and applies these to a typical undergraduate research exercise in creating a user persona. These E-UX principles are proposed by compiling best practices and ethical standards from a variety of organizations, federal and professional, who have already successfully incorporated ethical standards into their disciplines.

ETHICS OVERVIEW

Ethics, or moral philosophy, is a branch of philosophy that involves systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of right and wrong conduct. (“Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource,” n.d.)

The 3 major areas of Ethical study

Three major areas of study within ethics recognized today are: (“Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource,” n.d.):

1. Meta-ethics, concerning the theoretical meaning and reference of moral propositions, and how their truth values (if any) can be determined,
2. Normative ethics, concerning the practical means of determining a moral course of action,
3. Applied ethics, concerning what a person is obligated (or permitted) to do in a specific situation or a particular domain of action

“In recent years applied ethical issues have been subdivided into convenient groups such as medical ethics, business ethics, environmental ethics, and sexual ethics.” (Internet encyclopedia) Moreover, applied ethics is a discipline that attempts to apply ethical theory to real-life situations. This discipline has many specialized fields, such as engineering ethics, bioethics, geoethics, public service ethics and business ethics. Applied ethics involves examining specific controversial issues, such as abortion, infanticide, animal rights, environmental concerns, homosexuality, capital punishment, or nuclear war. (“Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource,” n.d.)