

Code of Ethics

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Introduction

In higher education the instructional design team has a responsibility to design and develop instructional materials that promote student success and follow ethical and legal guidelines. Establishing clear ethical principles will help guide our team in our mission to promote student success and achievement. Below are ethical principles for our university's instructional design team which discuss our legal and ethical responsibilities and different applications of our principles throughout the instructional design process.

Code of Ethics

Instructional designers should avoid intellectual property infringement. This involves respecting the legal rights associated with different types of original content like text, images, videos, and audio files (Johnson, 2006). During the design phase of the instructional design process, designers need to make sure that any materials used in their curriculum are either licensed or fall under fair use guidelines. Instructional designers should have permission from copyright holders and give proper attribution to original creators. This principle helps promote respect for original creators.

Instructional materials should be inclusive. While analyzing learner characteristics, instructional designers should be aware of the different cultural backgrounds and socioeconomic backgrounds of students and embrace learners for their whole true selves (CAST, 2024). Materials should incorporate examples from a different cultural perspective, use language that avoids biases, and present content in a way that feels relatable to a diverse audience. Inclusivity in instructional materials makes all learners feel acknowledged, respected, and like they belong in higher education.

Instructional materials should be accessible for all students. Ensuring that curriculum and instructional materials are accessible means making sure that they are usable by students with a wide range of abilities and disabilities. Accessibility is the ability to access content, regardless of disability (Trillium Creative Solutions, 2018). This includes providing alternative text for images, captions for videos, and making sure that materials are compatible with screen readers. Prioritizing accessibility promotes equal opportunities for learning for all students. During the design phase, instructional designers should make sure their instructional materials are accessible.

Transparency can help build trust throughout the instructional design process. As objectives are established, instructional designers should communicate clear grading criteria like rubrics and assessment methods to students. Transparency informs students of what is expected of them and aligns with the ethical obligation to ensure fairness. During the design and development stages, designers should include detailed rubrics in their instructional materials to enhance clarity and be transparent with students.

Instructional designers should update their skills and knowledge in the field. During the evaluation step of the instructional design process, designers should measure the effectiveness of their curriculum through feedback and data analysis (Johnson, 2006). Engaging in professional development courses can help ensure that instructional materials remain current.

Instructional materials must contain verified, true, and current information. A commitment to having accurate information ensures that students receive reliable knowledge (AECT code of professional ethics, 2018). Instructional designers can integrate this principle by conducting reviews and consulting subject matter experts to ensure that all instructional materials

reflect the most accurate information. During the planning phase of the instructional design process, all information should be based on verified information.

Legal and Ethical Concerns

Intellectual property rights are one of the most significant legal issues instructional designers face. Since instructional materials often include different types of content that are copyrighted like text, images, videos, and audio, designers must respect and obey copyright laws to avoid infringing on the intellectual property of others. Intellectual property infringement can include the use of images, quotes, exercises, and ideas conceived and developed by someone else without the correct permissions (Morrison et al., 2019, p.433). If an instructional designer uses a copyrighted image in a PowerPoint presentation or video, they must ensure they have proper authorization or licenses to use the image. Failing to obtain permission could lead to legal consequences like lawsuits for copyright infringement. Instructional designers must also be mindful of Fair Use laws which allow limited use of copyrighted materials without permission from the copyright holder under specific conditions (Aufderheide & Jaszi, 2018). Fair Use is complex and depends on factors like the purpose of use, the nature of the work, and its potential market impact. Using small excerpts from a textbook for classroom discussion might fall under fair use, but instructional designers should always carefully evaluate whether the materials meet these criteria or if they need to seek permission from the copyright holder or pay for a licence to use the work.

A legal and ethical issue for instructional designers includes designing accessible learning materials. Instructional designers must ensure that their materials are accessible to all students. Laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) require that educational content be made accessible to students with various impairments, including those who are blind,

deaf, or have other disabilities (Yang, et al., 2023). This means that instructional materials must meet certain standards for accessibility like providing alternative text for images, captions for videos, and making sure documents are compatible with screen readers. A failure to provide accessible materials can lead to lawsuits and violations of commitments to ensure all students can succeed.

Instructional designers must also consider ethical issues that arise throughout the design process like inclusivity, transparency, and ongoing professional development. Inclusivity is a major ethical responsibility instructional designers have. Instructional designers must create materials that reflect and respect the diversity of students. This means designing content that acknowledges various cultural, socioeconomic, and linguistic backgrounds. When designing a course about global history, an instructional designer must ensure that it includes perspectives from multiple cultures not Western nations perspectives. Language that avoids reinforcing stereotypes based on gender, race, or socioeconomic status is recommended. Using culturally insensitive language or presenting biased perspectives can alienate students and create an environment that does not feel welcoming or inclusive. Ethical instructional design practices strive to create materials where all students can see themselves reflected which promotes a sense of belonging and respect within the learning environment. Transparency is another key ethical concern. Designers have a responsibility to ensure that students clearly understand the expectations of a course, including grading criteria and assessment methods. When designing a course, instructional designers should provide detailed rubrics that break down how each assignment or assessment will be evaluated. Clear rubrics help students understand what is expected of them which promotes fairness. Instructional designers must also be transparent about data collection practices, ensuring that students know how their personal data will be used and

protected (Hai-Jew, 2016). A lack of transparency can undermine trust between students and the institution. For example, if students are unaware of how their data is being used for course evaluations, they may feel that their privacy is compromised. An institution's ethical duty includes being open about how student data is handled. Instructional designers have an ethical obligation to engage in continuous professional development. The field of instructional design is constantly evolving with new technologies, pedagogical approaches, and accessibility requirements regularly emerging. To meet the needs of students and ensure the highest standards of instructional quality, instructional designers must stay informed about the latest trends and tools in the field. As more educational institutions transition to hybrid or online learning, instructional designers must keep up with emerging online learning tools. Engaging in professional development also demonstrates a commitment to maintaining ethical standards.

Impact on Instructional Design

The impact of intellectual property, copyright, accessibility, and other legal requirements on instructional design is significant because these ethical and legal concerns shape how instructional designers create instructional materials. Instructional designers are responsible for creating educational materials that are effective, engaging, and legally and ethically compliant. The legal considerations surrounding intellectual property, copyright, and accessibility influence the instructional design process.

Intellectual property rights and copyright laws impact instructional design by requiring designers to respect the ownership of materials they include in their courses. Designers must ensure that any content they use including images, videos, or text, is either their own creation, properly licensed, or qualifies under the Fair Use doctrine. Complying with copyright laws means instructional designers must assess the materials they incorporate into their courses,

potentially seeking permissions or purchasing licenses to include certain content in their instructional materials (Johnson, 2006). This can affect the time and resources needed to develop instructional materials especially when content requires additional permissions or licensing fees. Designers need to balance using copyrighted material for educational purposes while adhering to copyright regulations which can limit the resources they are allowed to use.

Accessibility requirements can influence the instructional design process. Designers must ensure that instructional materials are accessible to all learners. Digital content should be accessible for as many people as possible, no matter what their perceptual, cognitive, and mobility capabilities might be (Hai-Jew, 2016). This involves creating content that is compatible with screen readers, providing captions for videos, and offering alternative text for images. Failure to meet these accessibility standards can result in legal repercussions like lawsuits, and create barriers to learning for students with disabilities. Instructional designers should use Universal Design for Learning principles when developing curriculum to create accessible and inclusive instructional materials UDL is a framework for designing learning materials that are accessible and enable all individuals to learn. UDL acknowledges that learners can differ in how they navigate a learning environment, approach the learning process, and express what they know (KnowledgeOne, 2023). Instructional designers must carefully integrate accessibility features from the outset of the design process, ensuring that all students can engage with and benefit from the materials.

The legal requirements regarding accessibility and intellectual property affect the overall workflow of instructional design teams. Designers have to allocate time for reviewing materials for copyright compliance and ensure that all instructional materials meet accessibility guidelines. This can add to the complexity and cost of the design process especially in large-scale projects or

when creating content for diverse learner populations. However, prioritizing legal compliance not only avoids legal risks but also demonstrates a commitment to inclusivity and fairness in education which aligns with the ethical responsibility of instructional designers to provide equitable learning opportunities for all students.

Conclusion

The legal and ethical principles that guide instructional design play an important role in shaping the development of educational materials. Intellectual property, copyright, and accessibility requirements impact every aspect of the instructional design process from content selection to delivery. Instructional designers must ensure that all materials used are properly licensed or fall under fair use guidelines, and that they meet accessibility standards to support learners of all abilities. By carefully navigating these legal considerations, instructional designers help create instructional materials that are fair, inclusive, and equitable for all students. Prioritizing these legal and ethical responsibilities helps ensure that instructional designers contribute to a learning environment where students can succeed and feel valued.

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