2012-03-16

Evaluating the Ethics and Issues in Media Case Studies

Stephen D. Hulme
Brigham Young University - Provo

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Hulme, Stephen D., "Evaluating the Ethics and Issues in Media Case Studies" (2012). *All Theses and Dissertations*. 3154.
https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/3154

Evaluating the Ethics and Issues in Media Case Studies

Stephen Hulme

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science

David Williams, Chair
Larry Seawright
Peter Rich

Department of Instructional Psychology and Technology
Brigham Young University
April 2012

ABSTRACT

Evaluating the Ethics and Issues in Media Case Studies

Stephen Hulme

Department of Instructional Psychology and Technology, BYU

Master of Science

Ethics and Issues in Media is an interactive case-study software that allows communications students to make ethical decisions based on real-life case studies. The evaluation of *Ethics and Issues in Media* focused on whether or not *Ethics and Issues in Media* 1) was easy to use, 2) allowed students to make real-life ethical decisions in realistic contexts, 3) enabled students to think about ethical issues in new ways, 4) enabled students to think through and determine potential courses of action to realistic ethical issues and 5) enabled students to understand the consequences of others' ethical decisions. A focus group discussion was held with the creator of *Ethics and Issues in Media* and with the students who had used it. Students' comments regarding *Ethics and Issues in Media* were generally positive. *Ethics and Issues in Media* proved to be successful in the ways that it enabled students to think through ethical issues for themselves, understand the consequences of others' ethical decisions, and think about ethical issues in new ways. Some students found *Ethics and Issues in Media* to be difficult to navigate, and many had trouble trusting that their answers were saved or submitted properly. The students recommended that the instructor expand the number and type of case studies included in *Ethics and Issues in Media*. Additionally, I recommend a more thorough orientation to *Ethics and Issues in Media* prior to implementation as a final exam.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my Heavenly Father. I felt His Spirit with me guiding me through this entire process. Secondly I would like to thank my incredible wife; for the pep-talks, encouragement, and taking on more than her fair share of chores around the house to allow me to have the time I needed to complete this masters thesis.

I would also like to thank my incredible committee who has had their patience tried on a regular basis. Dr. Williams, thank you for the countless hours you have spent teaching me about evaluation and reviewing the millions of drafts I have sent to you. Thank you for your patience, for believing in me, and for your specific feedback that guided each draft to be better than the previous draft.

Dr. Seawright, thank you for being such a great friend and mentor to me. You will never realize the impact you have made on my life, and I appreciate your kind heart and willingness to do anything in your power to help others. Thank you for hiring me at the CTL and being patient with an evaluation report that is far too tardy.

I also want to thank Dr. Rich who has hung on for the ride and brought himself up to speed and been there when I really needed him. Thank you for your input and for being on my committee.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) at BYU designs products to enhance teachers' teaching efforts and students' learning. Part of the CTL's instructional design process is the formal evaluation of their products. This evaluation report completes the formal evaluation of *Ethics and Issues in Media*, a product created by the CTL.

In the past, the Communications 300 and 480 classes at BYU relied on a group project to assess the students' knowledge of ethical theories. The students and instructor alike felt that using a group assessment was not an accurate reflection of the real-life situation that a communications professional would find themselves in, and the opinions of the group were often swayed by the more vocal participants. Dr. Stoker, one of the Communications 480 instructors, approached the CTL with an idea for a computer-based assessment that allowed students to respond individually to a series of realistic case studies. With the input of Dr. Stoker the CTL created *Ethics and Issues in Media* to allow Dr. Stoker to assess the learning of his students in new ways. *Ethics and Issues in Media* was first used as a final exam in Dr. Stoker's class. Following the exam, a focus group was held with both the students and Dr. Stoker, focusing on the main objectives of *Ethics and Issues in Media*. This report will focus on the design and results of the evaluation of *Ethics and Issues in Media*.

This chapter will explain the background of the evaluand, my experience and background as an evaluator, the stakeholders and their concerns with the evaluation, and more details surrounding the evaluand.

Background and Context

One of the biggest challenges for students in the BYU communications major is learning how to deal with ethical conflicts. Even when someone feels they have made the right ethical decision, there are often residual, unanticipated consequences that follow. Students need to know how to rationally justify a moral decision that has been made in order to better deal with the residual consequences.

The field of communications has its share of ethical dilemmas. To prepare students for a career that will be laden with moral and ethical decisions, the teachers of Communications 300 and 480 classes have developed various learning activities associated with ethical decision-making.

Prior to *Ethics and Issues in Media*, Dr. Stoker used group discussions in his classes to allow students to talk through and explore ethical situations and their accompanying issues. Both the students and instructor felt that these group discussions have been very valuable to help students internalize, challenge, discuss, and debate the best course of action for a given ethical dilemma. However, despite the many advantages of these group activities, the teachers and students have pointed out several accompanying limitations, including difficulty assessing students' levels of comprehension, covering a wide range of topics, and providing students with authentic ways to apply ethical theories outside of class. They commented that at times there was an unequal balance of participation in the group. Often a more dominant participant would inadvertently prevent a more passive participant from internalizing, reasoning, weighing, and deciding the best course of action for themselves. These imbalances also made it difficult for teachers to assess an individual's understanding of a given issue. Additionally, the group

discussion format required a significant amount of classroom time to be spent on each issue, leaving many issues not covered due to lack of time.

Brigham Young University has an in-house instructional design service called the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) that has been assisting BYU faculty since 1999. The CTL's goals are to

- *Refine* effective program- and course-level learning outcomes,
- *Design* learning experiences to achieve desired outcomes,
- *Enhance* the quality of learning experiences through technology integration,
- *Evaluate* the effectiveness of learning experiences, and
- *Advance* knowledge of effective learning and teaching.

One of the ways the CTL improves teaching and learning is by creating instructional products, websites, software, modules, games, and other products for faculty members and their students. Each of these projects is created with a team consisting of an Instructional Designer, formal Evaluator, Project Manager, and other needed team members (web designers, artists, programmers, animators, etc.). The CTL has strong roots in instructional design, and as such, implements formal evaluation for all of its projects.

One of the most unique aspects of the CTL is its strong emphasis on evaluation. Larry Seawright, director of the CTL, utilizes a design approach that integrates evaluation throughout all steps of the design process. As an evaluator himself, he has been able to create an environment at the CTL that is very evaluation-friendly. The CTL employs an evaluation team that consists of graduate students who are trained in program evaluation. These student

evaluators are allowed to use work projects as school projects and theses. This usually results in a longer lag time for the evaluation to be completed, but the CTL sees value in the learning process of using a real-life project for a school project. While most other clients would have been frustrated that the evaluation report took so long to complete, the CTL has been very helpful, supportive, and patient throughout this evaluation.

Dr. Kevin Stoker a professor of Communications 480, approached the Center for Teaching and Learning with a concept that allowed individual students to apply ethical theories to real-life scenarios. The CTL worked with Dr. Stoker to develop a web-based piece of software, called *Ethics and Issues in Media*, which would allow individuals to make ethical decisions based on real-life case studies in the field of Communications.

Ethics and Issues in Media began with students logging on to the website, where they were presented with a case-study dealing with an ethical problem. After they read through the scenario they were asked to make an ethical decision. When the students decided on a response to the ethical decision, they typed their response into the text box and explained their reasoning supported by the ethical theories they learned in class.

By using these situations to decide which course of action would be most appropriate, the program designers and the instructor assumed the students would be able to reason, weigh, evaluate, and process the theories they learned.   By avoiding the typical fill-in-the-blank method, the *Ethics and Issues in Media* sponsors believed they were requiring deep processing and active responses of the students. Because of the online nature of this assignment, students could practice their ethical reasoning outside of the classroom, at their own pace. If *Ethics and Issues in Media* worked as planned, it would provide students with the opportunity to evaluate

these ethical decisions with all the time they required, rather than limiting their response time to an hour-long class.

In addition to benefitting the students, *Ethics and Issues in Media* was meant to directly benefit the instructors as well. Through use of these case studies, instructors could assess the understanding of each individual student on each individual issue, rather than relying on a group discussion to reflect the knowledge of individuals. This glimpse into the understanding of each student could be used to make changes and adjustments to the course material mid-course to better meet the needs of the students.

In a collaborative effort among the CTL, the instructional designer, Michael Johnson, and Dr. Stoker, *Ethics and Issues in Media* was completed one month prior to the end of the semester. With a pool of students ready to use the new software, Dr. Stoker, Michael Johnson, and others from the CTL felt that *Ethics and Issues in Media* was ready to be formatively evaluated.

Because of the strict timeline we were working with, it was crucial to collect as much raw evaluative data as possible before the opportunity passed. Dr. Stoker and the CTL were planning on creating a version two of *Ethics and Issues in Media* in the near future, and the formative evaluation of the initial trial could help guide development of version two.

At the time of the evaluation, *Ethics and Issues in Media* version one had been implemented in one semester of Communications 480. Students were told that *Ethics and Issues in Media* would be used as their final exam. A focus group discussion was conducted with Dr. Stoker and his students several days after they used *Ethics and Issues in Media* for the first time. This focus group was video recorded for future analysis.

Unfortunately, prior to the completion of this evaluation, Dr. Stoker left BYU for a position in Texas and a lot of the enthusiasm surrounding version two of *Ethics and Issues in Media* died down. Despite the CTL's best efforts to involve other faculty members, nobody was passionate about improving *Ethics and Issues in Media*. The CTL planned to look into it as a problem-based learning tool for multiple disciplines, but it didn't end up generating enough interest from any faculty members to warrant furthering the project. There are no immediate plans to build version two. Normally, an evaluation client would lose all interest in a formative evaluation at this time. However, the CTL is interested in more than the evaluation of their products. They are interested in learning about future interactions with graduate students conducting evaluations, working with processors, and avoiding similar outcomes with new projects. This is not the first project that the CTL has created that ended up not being used right after completion. In fact, the CTL's current policy for accepting projects was created based on feedback from prior evaluations of projects that haven't always ended up as planned. The CTL's current policy now evaluates the potential longevity of projects prior to acceptance. So, although there are no plans to continue improving *Ethics and Issues in Media*, this evaluation will still be useful to the CTL.

Evaluator Background

As an IP&T student with an emphasis in evaluation, I have taken several courses that have prepared me to evaluate projects, programs, and other initiatives. While not yet a professional evaluator, I have been taught the necessary skills to evaluate a variety of evaluands, and with a year of experience as the Evaluation Team Lead at the CTL, I have furthered my abilities.

From the beginning of my studies in the program, I quickly became interested in instructional design, psychometrics, and evaluation. After several semesters of evaluation classes , I secured a job at the CTL working as an evaluator, where I had the opportunity to formally evaluate a number of projects for the CTL. One of those projects included "*Ethics and Issues in Media*." After a year at the CTL, I secured another job, but I remained in close contact with Larry Seawright, the associate director of the CTL and with the original Instructional Designer of the *Ethics and Issues in Media* software. I requested their permission to complete the evaluation as my Master's Project. They both agreed and have been very accommodating to allow this to happen.

Michael Johnson, the instructional designer of this project, consulted Dr. Stoker and me early in the design process. The three of us were able to establish goals, needs, and outcomes for the project. After Dr. Stoker's class used *Ethics and Issues in Media* the first time, he invited me to meet with his students and conduct a focus group with those who had used the software.

Stakeholders

There were several key people and organizations who stood to benefit from this evaluation. Some asked for the evaluation and others did not. See Table 1 for a summary of key stakeholders and their roles in the project.

One of the most important stakeholders was Larry Seawright, associate director of the CTL. He represented the best interests of the CTL. From the beginning of the project, Dr. Seawright assigned me as the formal evaluator of *Ethics and Issues in Media*. At that time, all projects created at the CTL were assigned a formal evaluator to examine lessons learned, strengths, weaknesses, best practices, and other useful data to help the CTL constantly improve.

Table 1

Stakeholders' Roles, Responsibilities, and Concerns

Stakeholder	Roles/responsibilities	What are they most interested in?
Larry Seawright, associate director of the CTL (representing the Center for Teaching and Learning)	The CTL owns the creation and delivery of the project. While it is Dr. Stoker's brainchild, the CTL built *Ethics and Issues in Media*.	Because the CTL plans on building future projects of a similar nature, the evaluation feedback could be highly valuable for future projects. The CTL is concerned with the quality of their products, customer satisfaction, and lessons learned. They wanted to see how *Ethics and Issues in Media* was used, what went well, what didn't go well, etc. They were interested in any other feedback that could improve future versions.
Michael Johnson, the Instructional Designer of the project.	Michael Johnson was the instructional designer that oversaw and carried out the design of *Ethics and Issues in Media*.	It is very likely that Michael Johnson will be working on future versions of this platform. As the designer, this formal evaluation of phase one could provide valuable input to future versions of this platform. He is the person most likely to implement the evaluation findings to bring about a change in the future. Michael is interested in improving his practices and becoming a better instructional designer.
Dr. Kevin Stoker	Dr. Stoker was the person who came up with the idea in the first place. Although Michael Johnson designed it, he used Dr. Stoker's input to form the desired product.	This *Ethics and Issues in Media* software was Dr. Stoker's brainchild and he was interested in knowing how it impacted students' learning in regards to ethics in the field of communications. He was interested in gathering input from the students to improve the way it was implemented, as well as revamp *Ethics and Issues in Media* for version 2. He was interested in students' opinions about *Ethics and Issues in Media* as an assessment tool and activity to compliment the other activities of the course.
The students who will be using *Ethics and Issues in Media* in the future.	These are the end-users who will be most impacted by the *Ethics and Issues in Media*.	Students are primarily concerned with meaningful assignments. Assignments that are designed to improve learning, but proven not to be effective, are detrimental to a student's limited amount of time to learn. They were concerned with the meaningfulness and effectiveness of *Ethics and Issues in Media*. In particular, the students who will use *Ethics and Issues in Media* in the future will benefit from this evaluation to the extent that the evaluation findings bring about change. It is typically unusual for end-users, particularly students, to have a voice in the creation of instructional materials. Fortunately, this evaluation was different. By including end-users (students) as stakeholders in the evaluation process, there was a sense of respect for findings that could influence changes and benefit end-users.

Equally interested in the evaluation findings was Michael Johnson, the instructional designer in charge of *Ethics and Issues in Media*. Michael intended to prepare future versions of this platform for future customers, and he could make the largest impact based on evaluation findings. This formative evaluation was intended to help him improve future versions of products based on a similar case-study format.

The third person who asked for the evaluation was the author of the project, Dr. Kevin Stoker. *Ethics and Issues in Media* software was his brainchild and he wanted to know how it could be improved and better implemented. He had neither the time nor expertise to personally evaluate *Ethics and Issues in Media* and requested that the CTL do so.

Another group of stakeholders who stood to benefit from this evaluation were future students who will be interacting with future versions of software based on the case-study format used in *Ethics and Issues in Media*. The evaluation findings have the potential to make future versions of *Ethics and Issues in Media* more effective for all students. Even if the CTL decided not to create version two of *Ethics and Issues in Media*, evaluation findings could lead to an improved implementation plan, which would greatly benefit future students. These students often do not have a voice in issues surrounding their course assignments. By including end-users (students) as stakeholders in the evaluation process, there was a sense of respect for them.

Evaluand

The evaluand that was examined in this evaluation was the *Ethics and Issues in Media* software (version one) created by the CTL. *Ethics and Issues in Media* was an

online case-study software that allowed end-users to make values-based decisions based on real-life ethical dilemmas. Students were presented with a real-life situation relating to the field of Communications in the form of video-clips and/or text. An ethical dilemma was then presented to the students. The students were asked to respond in a text box and recommend a course of action. They were encouraged to state their reasoning, ethical theories used, and rationale behind their choice.

Ethics and Issues in Media then provided further information and asked students to make further decisions based on the information provided them. Once again, they were invited to cite theories and rationale used to make the decision, and to defend their answer. These responses were again typed into the text box on the website.

After responses were collected, *Ethics and Issues in Media* displayed the actual outcome of the dilemma in real life, including an analysis and explanation of the results and potential unintended or unanticipated consequences of the student's decision.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This review examines literature surrounding three topics: (a) the history of formative evaluation in an educational context, (b) the evolution of best practices surrounding the evaluation of ethical training, and (3) current methods for evaluating web-based tools such as *Ethics and Issues in Media*. This literature review will lay the foundation for the methods to be used in this evaluation.

Formative Evaluation in Education

In the 1920s researchers became increasingly interested in measuring the effectiveness of instructional materials. However, these evaluations were strictly

summative in nature and only examined the efforts *after* they were produced. It wasn't until the 1940s and the 1950s that evaluators began examining instructional materials in their formative stages (Gagne, 1987).

One of the first scholars to discuss the ideas of formative evaluation in education was Ralph Tyler who believed that the process of evaluation was a "recurring process" and that the results of evaluation "will suggest desirable modifications in teaching and in the educational program itself" (Gagné, 1987, p. 115). Although Tyler understood the role of formative evaluation in education, many others did not. Very few products developed in the 1940s and 1950s underwent any formative evaluation processes (Gagné, 1987).

In the 1960s, formative evaluation began to gain traction in the educational assessment arena. During this era, many of the instructional materials were tested throughout their development. However, some individuals felt that these efforts were not structured enough, and they worked to make formative evaluation more regimented. Of particular interest was Susan Markle, who "prescribed detailed procedures for evaluating materials both during and after the development process" (Gagné, 1987, p. 27). These procedures shaped today's process of formative evaluation. It wasn't until 1967 that the terms "formative" and "summative" evaluation were coined by Michael Scriven (1967).

Formative evaluations focus on collecting data that can affect the evaluand while still in its formative stages. Summative evaluations focus on the final state of an evaluand. *Ethics and Issues in Media* was still in its formative stages and the feedback

from this formal evaluation was intended to be used to improve *Ethics and Issues in Media* for a better student and faculty experience in the future.

Evaluation of Ethics Instruction

In the early 1970's, ethics experts began a movement to measure the effectiveness of ethics training. Early attempts yielded assessment tools rather than comprehensive evaluation tools. The stakeholders were primarily concerned with assessing the amount of learning that was taking place. The standard practice of that time was to implement a standardized Rokeach Values Test before and after the instructional intervention. The Rokeach (1973) test asked participants to rank certain values in order of importance. Based on the relationship of the values to each other, the researcher would estimate the participant's value system. By comparing students' scores before and after the ethics training, researchers would attempt to judge the effectiveness of the instruction.

In 1987, people were still using the Rokeach test to measure ethics instruction. Surlin (1987) hypothesized in his study that his ethics course would improve students' moral and social values, which are considered to be essential for morally and socially responsible behavior respectively. He found that students finishing a mass media ethics course ranked moral values relatively higher than competence values, and social values relatively higher than personal values (Surlin, 1987).

These types of evaluations focused primarily on assessing the *learning* and attitudes associated with certain courses. While this is a noteworthy goal, these evaluations focused almost solely on measurement activities. In certain instances, this is acceptable. However, in the courses using *Ethics and Issues in Media*, the stakeholders

were interested in evaluating more than just the competency of the students; they wanted to evaluate and improve the ease of use, the user-interface, the time resources needed, etc. They sought for suggestions for improve the software as used in this class. Simple pre-post assessments are insufficient to capture this type of information. In order to gather this information, one must collaborate with the end-users.

Rather than focus on the scores of pre-post ethical tests, Lind and Rarick (1992) decided to focus on viewer attitudes. They put their students through a series of eight realistic case-studies then used a telephone survey to gather the opinions of the end-users. This study displayed an important shift to focus on the opinions and attitudes of the end-users.

Over time, instructors increasingly understood the importance of involving the students in the evaluation process. Johnston and Haughton (2007) realized the importance of students' opinions and sought to capture these attitudes along with suggestions for improvement by administering a post-training written questionnaire. These questionnaires were administered during contact time in class, to ensure high response rates and to ensure the attitudes were still fresh in the students' minds.

Similarly, Bying, Norman, and Redfern used retrospective interviews with the end-users to evaluate the effectiveness of their experience (2005). To ensure participants were "information rich" (2005), Bying et al. selected participants who had recently completed the activity. By involving these end-users right after implementation and gathering their opinions, they were able to measure more than aptitude; they were able to measure attitudes, suggestions, likes and dislikes, etc. In like manner, the *Ethics and*

Issues in Media evaluation was implemented during the same semester that participants'

used *Ethics and Issues in Media*.

Clancy, Quinn, and Miller (2005) capitalized on the benefits of a focus group-

based discussion to gather opinions from end-users.   They asked the group a series of

questions to elicit feedback surrounding several key issues and asked students to

complete a written assessment. When they compared the written assessment with the

focus group responses, there was a discrepancy. They realized that the focus group

indicated an increase of knowledge and attitudes that the written assessment was not

capable of capturing.

The majority of studies referenced in this section differ from the evaluation of

Ethics and Issues in Media in one significant way: they were conducted in a live class

setting rather than an asynchronous online environment.   Because of this difference, it is

appropriate to examine the literature surrounding the evaluation of interactive

technology.

Evaluation of Interactive Technology

Technology, in and of itself, is too complex to require one specific evaluation

method. In order to understand the best type of evaluation for *Ethics and Issues in*

Media, I examined the literature surrounding online, real-time instructional technologies.

Mandinach (2005) explains that "e-learning is a relatively young and emerging

instructional medium, [and] it would be premature to look only at its outcomes. Much

valuable formative information can be obtained from the examination of how programs

are being implemented and the processes by which they are delivered" (p.1). This is a

drastic departure from the Rokeach scale used in past evaluations of face-to-face instruction. In order to align with the newer mindset, this evaluation of *Ethics and Issues in Media* examined the implementation, interaction, and user experiences rather than the results of a pre-post test.

Mandinach, (2005) suggested that the nature of e-learning differs substantially from face-to-face delivery, and as such, requires new methods for effective evaluation. These methods are often adaptations of methods used in face-to-face research and evaluation. One of these hybrid methods is the formative experiment. In a formative experiment, the technology itself is not the focus of the evaluation, rather "the focus is on the environment, including the instruction, roles of the professor and student, the institution as an organization, and the technological infrastructure" (Mandinach, 2005, p 1841). Continuing, she also points out the key difference in the role that the researcher assumes in this approach. Rather than being the impartial observer, the researcher becomes a facilitator of innovation and becomes more involved in the evaluation than in previous models. In the case of *Ethics and Issues in Media*, Dr. Stoker had this key role in the development of the evaluation and the collection of data.

Mandinach (2005) also suggests formative evaluation as an alternative to the traditional study, "The objective of a formative experiment is to observe how the technology is being implemented, given the specified goals of its use. Instead of the technology as the unit of analysis, the focus is on the environment, including the instruction, roles of the professor and student, the institution as an organization, and the technological infrastructure" (p. 8).

In 2004, Clark, Quinn, and Miller developed a website to assist people in the grievance process. In an effort to evaluate the effectiveness of the website, they conducted a usability test to observe novice users interacting with the website. As they observed each user. evaluators would note the ease of use and their interactions with the site. A modified version of this approach was used in this study with the evaluator conducting a focus group of novice-users who recently used *Ethics and Issues in Media*.

Chapter 3: Evaluation Design

This chapter highlights the evaluation design used for this study, focusing on evaluation criteria, evaluation questions, data collection, analysis methods, dissemination of findings, resources, schedule and budget involved.

The evaluation of *Ethics and Issues in Media* combined the standard practices associated with evaluating ethical training with the strategies for evaluating online material. To accomplish this, a hybrid approach was used consisting of a formative evaluation that focused on the experiences of the end-users. This was accomplished through a focus-group with the end-users soon after they interacted with the *Ethics and Issues in Media* case studies. This blended model leveraged the strengths of each discipline to provide more usable evaluation results for formatively improving the product for future students.

Dr. Stoker, Larry Seawright, Michael Johnson and I decided it would be best to implement a focus group discussion with students who had recently completed their final exam using *Ethics and Issues in Media*. We agreed to ask a series of questions to elicit feedback surrounding the key criteria set forth by Dr. Stoker (see the "Evaluation

Criteria" section). I conducted the focus group while Dr. Stoker and the students responded to the evaluation questions. The focus group session was recorded via video camera and later analyzed.

Evaluation Criteria

In order to define the evaluation criteria, I met with the key stakeholders: Dr. Stoker, Michael Johnson and Larry Seawright. The following criteria were decided upon.

Ethics and Issues in Media Case Studies will be considered a success if it

- is realistic and representative of real-world decisions

- allows students to respond clearly enough to articulate their thoughts understandably

- is easy to use

- provides the context for students to identify the ethical issues in a given scenario and propose logical solutions

- facilitates assessment of student knowledge and understanding

- captures the students' reasoning and motives behind choosing a certain course of action

It would be naive to expect the initial version of any software to achieve all of its intended objectives perfectly. The stakeholders understood this, but they agreed that the above evaluation criteria would be an appropriate standard against which to measure the effectiveness of *Ethics and Issues in Media*. These criteria were designed to set an effective benchmark to build upon for the version two of *Ethics and Issues in Media*. We

did not rank these criteria in order of importance, but Dr. Stoker continued to stress the importance of *Ethics and Issues in Media*'s ability to allow students to apply ethical theories in a practical way. Because of the increased emphasis on application, it was clear that this criterion was the highest priority.

Evaluation Questions

Dr. Stoker and I developed the following questions based on the criteria previously established. Of highest priority was the question of whether or not *Ethics and Issues in Media* provided a context for the students to apply ethics theory in a practical way. Table 2 links the criteria with the evaluation questions.

Data Collection and Analysis Methods

Data were collected via a video camera that captured the focus group discussion. There were two criteria for deciding which students would be in the focus group. The first criterion was that the students had to choose to participate in the focus group.   The second criterion was that the students were required to complete their final exam (using *Ethics and Issues in Media*) prior to the focus group discussion. This focus group was held on the last day of the semester. Dr. Stoker and 15 other students participated in the focus group. It was not possible to collect feedback from every student in Dr. Stoker's class due to the fact that not all the students met both criteria. Students who had no desire to participate, or who had not yet completed their final exam using *Ethics and Issues in Media* were not included. I am unsure of the number of students who were not present. Although the 16 focus group participants were not statistically representative of the class, the variety of their experiences and opinions surrounding *Ethics and Issues in*

Table 2

Evaluation Criteria and Evaluation Questions

Evaluation Criteria	Evaluation Questions
Be realistic and representative of real-world decisions	Did *Ethics and Issues in Media* enable students to think about ethical issues in new ways?
Allow students to respond clearly enough to articulate their thoughts understandably	How do students feel about *Ethics and Issues in Media*?
	Is *Ethics and Issues in Media* more effective than previous assessment methods used?
Be enjoyable to use	How do students feel about *Ethics and Issues in Media*?
	How user-friendly is the format of *Ethics and Issues in Media*?
	When are students completing *Ethics and Issues in Media*? At the end of the course, throughout, at the beginning?
	Does *Ethics and Issues in Media* increase the workload of the students significantly?
Provide the context for students to identify the ethical issues in a case and propose logical solutions	Does *Ethics and Issues in Media* enable students to think through and determine potential courses of action to certain ethical issues?
Facilitate assessment of student knowledge and understanding	Does *Ethics and Issues in Media* enable students to think through and determine potential courses of action to certain ethical issues?
	Did *Ethics and Issues in Media* enable students to better understand the consequences of others' decisions?
Capture the students' reasoning and motives behind choosing a certain course of action	Did *Ethics and Issues in Media* work as expected?

Media was judged sufficient by Dr. Stoker and others to represent the views of the whole class.

Data Collection and Analysis Methods

Data were collected via a video camera that captured the focus group discussion. There were two criteria for deciding which students would be in the focus group. The first criterion was that the students had to choose to participate in the focus group. The second criterion was that the students were required to complete their final exam (using *Ethics and Issues in Media*) prior to the focus group discussion. This focus group was held on the last day of the semester. Dr. Stoker and 15 other students participated in the focus group. It was not possible to collect feedback from every student in Dr. Stoker's class due to the fact that not all the students met both criteria. Students who had no desire to participate, or who had not yet completed their final exam using *Ethics and Issues in Media* were not included. I am unsure of the number of students who were not present. Although the 16 focus group participants were not statistically representative of the class, the variety of their experiences and opinions surrounding *Ethics and Issues in Media* was judged sufficient by Dr. Stoker and others to represent the views of the whole class.

I conducted the focus group and asked the group a series of questions. Dr. Stoker participated in the discussion as well to allow more insight from the faculty's perspective, and to help facilitate the discussion and draw out more meaningful responses from the students. Two CTL employees videotaped the focus group discussion for future analysis.

Once the video footage was compiled, I transcribed the conversation and analyzed the video footage for common themes. These themes, trends, and common opinions were summarized and opposing opinions were mentioned in their proper context.

Reports to Stakeholders

In a formative evaluation such as this, it is very important that evaluation results are effectively communicated to the stakeholders or the evaluation would be of little use. Interim reports were delivered to Michael Johnson, the instructional designer who was tasked with building version two. These reports were given both electronically and orally as formative feedback prior to the design of version 2 of *Ethics and Issues in Media*.

At the end of this evaluation, the following stakeholders received a copy of the evaluation report: Dr. Stoker, Larry Seawright and Michael Johnson. The evaluation report is available to all interested CTL employees, along with any Communications instructors who are interested in viewing the results. Any students who used *Ethics and Issues in Media* are welcome to view the evaluation report, but tracking them down proved to be unfeasible and unnecessary for this evaluation since they are not going to be the final beneficiaries of the evaluation.

The evaluation report is stored with the project data at the CTL, and copies of this report were emailed to all key stakeholders. The final report was completed and distributed when the project was successfully defended as a master project.

Required Resources

The data collection for the focus group required the end-users (students), the instructor, the evaluator, and the two assistants from the CTL. They were needed for an

hour and a half for the initial data collection. The physical resources used included a classroom and a video camera.

Schedule

Table 3 compares the proposed schedule for this project with the actual schedule that was carried out. Fortunately the CTL was patient with me for the duration of this evaluation, but it has taken longer than it should have to deliver the results. The evaluation is not nearly as effective as had it been delivered on time. Despite the tardy delivery of the report, the results are still valuable to the CTL.

Table 3

Evaluation Schedule

Proposed Date	Actual Date	Task
Fall 2008	March 2010	Evaluation proposal complete
Fall 2008	Fall 2008	Data Collection
Winter 2009	April-October 2011	Data analysis
Winter 2009	December 2011	Masters Project submitted
Winter 2009	January 2012	Masters project defense
Winter 2009	February 2012	Evaluation Report is completed and distributed.

Budget

Initially, the CTL covered the budget expenses associated with the evaluation because of the stakes they held in this evaluation. In regards to time, the CTL expected me and other relevant employees to participate in the evaluation and contribute their paid time and thoughts to the evaluation. Table 4 compares the initial estimate of the budget with the actual budget. Although the total dollars spent on the evaluation did not change,

the total time spent was greatly over budget. I delivered interim reports, including the raw footage from the focus groups, to Michael Johnson. As it became evident that version two of *Ethics and Issues in Media* was less and less likely, the delivery date became less important. As such, I took my time completing this evaluation report in between working three jobs while completing my thesis. Having never completed an evaluation report of this magnitude, I was not prepared for the challenge before me. I struggled to make meaningful progress and direct my thoughts at times. With the help of a great committee and chairman I was able to polish and complete this evaluation report. Regardless, the final evaluation report was later than desirable and it would have been more effective if it had been completed in a timelier manner.

Limitations

As with all evaluations, this evaluation project had its own accompanying limitations. Since this evaluation was also used as my Masters project, it had several unique limitations. One unique aspect of this evaluation was that the data were collected historically, prior to its approval as a master's project. The committee discussed the concerns with using historical data for a Masters project, but they felt that the historical data were sufficient for this evaluation. This created a serious potential limitation, but because of the early involvement of Larry Seawright, the evaluation was aligned to the needs of the applicable stakeholders.

As an employee of the CTL, it would be impossible to be completely objective in my evaluation. However, the format the CTL used to assign external evaluators helps minimize subjectivity. Even though I was consulted during the initial design stages of

Table 4

Budget

Person/Resources	Proposed Hours	Actual Hours	Task
Dr. Stoker	12	12	Heavy involvement in the beginning with the planning of the evaluation, as well as the administration of *Ethics and Issues in Media*. Participating in the focus group as well.
Class	4-5 per person	4-5 per person	Piloting *Ethics and Issues in Media* and attending the focus group to provide feedback.
Evaluator	20	20	Preparing focus group questions, sending out pre-evaluation communications
Walk-in Center Staff (2)	8	8	Capturing the focus group via video camera. Duplicating and disseminating video footage.
Evaluator	100	400	Preparing Evaluation Proposal
Evaluator	50	300	Video analysis and markup
Evaluator	300	400	Completing evaluation report and defense.
Evaluator	4	10	Dissemination of results

I was not involved in the creation or implementation of *Ethics and Issues in Media*, and my role felt more like an external evaluator than an internal evaluator.

There were pros and cons to allowing Dr. Stoker to participate in the focus group discussion. Because of the power and authority difference between students and Dr. Stoker, there was a strong potential for biased responses. I was initially worried that students would be telling Dr. Stoker exactly what he wanted to hear, or at least omit key comments that would otherwise have been made had he not been present. Through my meetings with Dr. Stoker, it became apparent that he was truly interested in honest feedback. I came to the realization that his students also understood his intentions: to hear what people actually thought, good or bad, about *Ethics and Issues in Media*. He assured me that he had an open relationship with his students and that they would be straightforward, whether he was in the room or not. This triangulation, albeit a small example, led me to believe that there would be very little halo effect, and that the positive aspects of including Dr. Stoker in the focus group far outweighed the potential negative impacts. More triangulation followed as I saw the ways the students interacted with him in the focus group.

Once the focus group began I was able to see more evidence that any halo effect Dr. Stoker may have introduced was minimal. It was apparent that the students respected his opinion and were eager to help me collect feedback about *Ethics and Issues in Media*. There appeared to be a good relationship between the students and Dr. Stoker. They wanted to help him and assist him in collecting both positive and negative formative feedback about *Ethics and Issues in Media*. From the onset of the focus group I was on the lookout for answers that seemed too good to be true. Although there were lots of

positive comments regarding *Ethics and Issues in Media*, there was a fair share of critical comments as well. Students were very candid in their responses. In fact, several students went on to share, respectfully, opinions that criticized Dr. Stoker and *Ethics and Issues in Media*. Several students candidly admitted that there were several poor exam questions. While Dr. Stoker intended these questions to be neutral, the students admitted that they could tell exactly what answers Dr. Stoker was looking for. This helped me realize that Dr. Stoker's students weren't sugar-coating their responses, and that he had developed a relationship with them that allowed them to feel comfortable sharing their candid feelings, regardless of the power and authority that he had over them.

In addition to these unfavorable comments, there were many nonverbal gestures that reinforced my feelings that the halo was minimal. One of the biggest strengths to including the video transcript was the ability to capture the nonverbal gestures and expressions of the students as they responded. I was paying special attention to the nonverbal responses of the students. I was surprised to notice that none of the students were seeking Dr. Stoker's approval with their answers. Students would look him directly in the eye when responding to questions. Their confidence and relaxed nature when giving unfavorable feedback to Dr. Stoker led me to further believe that they were completely comfortable giving Dr. Stoker responses that were critical of his project and approach.   While it is impossible to identify exactly what bias Dr. Stoker's presence may have added to the focus group, these examples have led me to believe that any halo effect regarding Dr. Stoker was minimal. If I had noticed signs (both verbal and nonverbal) that the students were giving Dr. Stoker the answers he wanted to hear, there were several courses of action I could have taken to triangulate data including: surveys, usability

testing, and even a follow-up focus group without Dr. Stoker present. However, I did not feel that his presence affected the focus group in a negative way, and I decided these measures would not be necessary.

There were several key benefits to involving Dr. Stoker in the focus group. From the very beginning of the focus group discussion, Dr. Stoker was able to introduce me as the evaluator, which helped set the tone for the evaluation, and it gave me instant credibility with the participants. Dr. Stoker acted as a sort of interpreter to help me clarify my follow-up questions in a way the students would understand. His presence was truly helpful. The focus group brought out a lot of rich dialogue between Dr. Stoker and the students that wouldn't have been possible without him. It became apparent that the students felt comfortable sharing open and honest feedback, regardless of Dr. Stoker's presence. I concluded that Dr. Stoker's positive impacts on the focus group far outweighed any small negative impacts that he might have had. Each participant made significant contributions to the discussion, and if any one of them had been absent, it would have changed the dynamic of the focus group. Dr. Stoker was no exception to this.

Ethics and Issues in Media was implemented as the final exam at the end of the semester. This put increased pressure on the students to pilot new software in a high-stakes environment. The focus group was held on the last day of the semester. Follow-up interviews were not possible because the students were done with the class and many had gone on to graduate and leave BYU. Since we had a small window of opportunity, we allocated the evaluation effort with only one priority: gathering data before the students graduated. There wasn't much more we could do given the circumstances, but it

should be noted that this was a limitation. Additionally, the data were collected prior to approval as a master's project. This meant that there was reduced flexibility in the evaluation, as it applied to my degree.

The timeframe for the evaluation was greatly delayed, which surely impacted its effectiveness as a formative evaluation tool. I did provide "on time" interim reports to the key stakeholders along the way. But the final evaluation report was delivered far beyond the desired delivery date, due to many disruptions and distractions of my own.

This evaluation did not minimize time demands on the evaluator. Due to my inexperience at the time, I did not realize how big the evaluation was becoming as we added evaluation questions to the focus group interview. The amount of data was overwhelming, and I was not prepared for the amount of analysis that would take place.

The final limitation was my inability to keep financial and time records for all involved.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter presents the evaluation findings. Findings will be grouped into the questions that they address.

Is *Ethics and Issues in Media* More Effective than Previous Assessment Methods Used?

To preface the answers, comments by Dr. Stoker may be helpful regarding why he switched from a group approach to an assessment that required individuals to make these decisions without influence of the group. He said,

You know, the challenge sometimes with group work is that you just kind of, you know, you're talking, but you don't necessarily have individual change. When you have to make what they call a meta-analysis: when you have to come back and start analyzing why you did what you did, I think that leads to a higher order of thinking. And a lot of times you just don't get there with a group, you know? One person may, but maybe not the whole group.

The students realized that a group approach can influence how engaged an individual is on making the decision. They recognized that it was easier to just allow the group to make a decision rather than being held accountable as an individual to make their own decision. One student made the following remarks,

…in terms of applying the theories, [Ethic and Issues in Media] compared very favorably [to the previous group assessment method.] I think sometimes in our group, maybe there was somebody that was on a different theme, but everyone kind of silenced them, like "no, that's bad" and so I think in this way it might be… You have to stand up for it and you can't let somebody else pull you along

Another student replied,

These are good comments. I kinda like the individual aspect of it just because it made me be the main person in it. If it were a group, I would probably have said 'oh yeah, that's a good idea' and I probably would have had a better theory. Like I probably would have chosen utilitarianism and got it right. But at the same time I was able to make a comment and try to support it. And it made me think

through why, to justify why I did that. So, while there were the benefits of both [group work and individual work], I preferred [individual].

Many students felt that there was value in both a group decision and an individual decision, and that their education would be incomplete if they were to only focus on one approach. One student replied,

I think both things work good. I think you have to be able to make a decision [as an individual], to have that individual process, that's just you, and testing what you know, and how you will act to it, but at the same time, you [still] need the group thing. So I think you have to get both.

Another student said,

I think it's good to be able to go through the process with someone else because a lot of times [in the real-world] you will. But at the same time I thought [*Ethics and Issues in Media*] was good because it made you do it individually and also because it did give you feedback. It wasn't like you went through it all entirely blindly. There were certain parts where it said 'well, did you consider this?' And that's kind of what the value of having the group would do anyways; to bring in an alternative perspective. So I think that doing both are good separately

These comments prompted me to ask if *Ethics and Issues in Media* would be a favorable medium to facilitate the group aspect of ethical decision-making. It became apparent that the students did not like the idea of *Ethics and Issues in Media* being used in a group situation. They preferred *Ethics and Issues in Media* when focusing on individual decisions rather than group decisions. One student replied: "I just don't see

how it would operate as a group… doing the case studies in class is effective, but I think

it fills a different purpose than this." Another student said,

> He ended up saying exactly what I was thinking. That they were both valuable to
>
> learning in different ways. I don't think I would like it if it were a group thing
>
> online. I think it would just get too long and confusing, and I feel that I already
>
> have feedback built in.

> Another student commented,

> I think the emphasis with group work is talking, and the emphasis here was
>
> writing everything down, so I think it would be kind of annoying to do [*Ethics*
>
> *and Issues in Media*] in class together as a group.

> Dr. Stoker liked the way that *Ethics and Issues in Media* allowed him to assess

each student's knowledge. He felt that *Ethics and Issues in Media* helped overcome the

weaknesses of assessing individuals' knowledge in a group setting. He said,

> A lot of times in these classes we'll do case studies and have everybody discuss it
>
> and everything but I really don't know how everybody has… internalized that
>
> because… somebody can take over a group, or something could happen. This
>
> actually allows [the individual] to show what [they] know.

Did *Ethics and Issues in Media* Enable Students to Think about Ethical Issues in

New Ways?

The students felt that *Ethics and Issues in Media* enabled them to think about

ethical issues in new ways. The case-study format, coupled with the individual aspect of

Ethics and Issues in Media, required students to dig a little deeper for their answers and process the theories more.

Students enjoyed the case-study format of *Ethics and Issues in Media*. One student felt that the case studies were the best way to think about ethical issues. He stated: "In general, I think that case studies are the best way for me to feel like I learned something." He later stated that case studies allowed him to "Go through the thought process."

Students also liked the adaptive nature of *Ethics and Issues in Media*. Students felt that when *Ethics and Issues in Media* presented them with a new ethical problems based on their previous answers, "it made it seem more realistic…and that got the thought process going, which I thought that was helpful."

Students had a bit of difficulty separating the knowledge gained from the class and the knowledge gained from *Ethics and Issues in Media*. They felt that *Ethics and Issues in Media* complemented the class well, and it was well aligned with the course objectives. There was no doubt that students felt that the course, including the *Ethics and Issues in Media* final, helped them think about ethical issues in new ways. However, they had a hard time attributing their knowledge to one single element of the class (*Ethics and Issues in Media*) versus the entire sum of its parts. One student was able to point out the distinct way that *Ethics and Issues in Media* helped her think about ethical issues in new ways. She stated that she felt like *Ethics and Issues in Media* was "in line with the course objectives [because] it was more about *becoming* a person who can rationalize ethically than it was about *knowing* facts and basic tendencies about ethicism."

One other student recognized that *Ethics and Issues in Media* forced him to provide an answer regarding why he made a certain decision. He said:

> I think that normally… ethical decisions are pretty innate. Like a lot of times… you just *know* [what you should do] but [*Ethics and Issues in Media*] really gave me a chance to [ask myself] 'but why? Why would you choose that?

As voiced by the students, *Ethics and Issues in Media* did in fact enable them to think about ethical issues in new ways.

Did *Ethics and Issues in Media* Enable Students to Think Through and Determine Potential Courses of Action to Certain Ethical Issues?

The students realized the value of the post-decision feedback that *Ethics and Issues in Media* provided for each example. They recognized the value added from the feedback, and many felt that it helped make them more prepared to make better ethical decisions in the real world, or at least it helped them have a rationale for what they had decided through their own evaluation process and in response to their feelings.

One student felt that viewing the consequence of his decisions helped him feel like he was operating in a real-life scenario. He said he liked the way that *Ethics and Issues in Media*:

> actually gave you a specific [consequence] to respond to as opposed to having to go into these kind of weird abstract theoreticals… So it was good because it kind of gave you something concrete to work with. You made *this* decision and *here* was your consequence… Usually you can only guess at your consequence. [*Ethics and Issues in Media*] actually kept making you go through the process.

Students enjoyed the way that *Ethics and Issues in Media* gave them multiple chances to respond and think through each course of action. One student stated that *Ethics and Issues in Media* made her "think it through logically… Practice makes perfect… and the more you go through it, the more times you foster these types of ideas."

Due to the way that *Ethics and Issues in Media* solicited responses from individuals rather than a group, it enabled students to think through the decision more than in a group setting. In a group setting, they had the option to be passive and sit back while someone else thought through the consequences of their ethical decision. It was an exercise of self-awareness for many students. One student stated,

> I realized I need a team to think through these things because I'm not a very patient person. I really like to get going and get started because it doesn't do any good to just sit on it. [*Ethics and Issues in Media* helped me] realize I really need someone else to balance me out

 It was clear that *Ethics and Issues in Media* made her more aware of her ability (or lack thereof) to think through potential courses of action. It was clear that the students recognized this and felt that it enhanced their learning.

Did *Ethics and Issues in Media* Enable Students to better Understand the Consequences of Others' decisions?

One of the main reasons that *Ethics and Issues in Media* was created was to allow the users to understand the consequences of others' decisions. In fact, one student said that it was the "main advantage" of *Ethics and Issues in Media*. Students felt that *Ethics*

and Issues in Media helped them better understand the consequences of others' decisions, but Dr. Stoker envisioned it being even more effective in the future.

The simple fact that *Ethics and Issues in Media* stated the consequences of each decision made it a strength of the program. The way that *Ethics and Issues in Media* included expert opinions and their reasoning really helped one student in particular. She stated the expert advice "shows you what the [experts] would have said. That helped me."

Although many of the proposed situations were fictional, *Ethics and Issues in Media* would relate them to a historical case surrounding the same issue. This helped the students realize that these scenarios were found in everyday life and the consequences were real. One student explained that the real-life case study helped him understand the consequences. He stated that after he made his decision, *Ethics and Issues in Media* "said 'here's a real-life situation and this is what happened.'" He went on to explain that seeing the real-life situation and how their decision impacted the situation,

> ended up reinforcing my decision; just being able to see how it, to take it off the
> screen and put it into real life and see how that actually translated. I think that
> beyond the fact that it gave me my personal consequence, it also gave me an
> example, it really drove it home.

Another way that *Ethics and Issues in Media* helped students understand the consequences of others' decisions was the way that it showed both the positive and the negative impacts of each decision. Even when a student selected the "right" decision, *Ethics and Issues in Media* presented all the consequences: both good and bad. Although

this was taught in class, *Ethics and Issues in Media* really drove it home for one student. He realized that sometimes there is no easy solution that is devoid of negative consequences. He stated,

> I think that it was really good that it showed the effects. Like, even if you picked the right answer, sometimes it showed that there were negative effects even if you made the right choice. I really like that, because sometimes you have this vision that if you make the right choice that everything is going to go well with the company. I just think back on the Tylenol [case study]. I'll bet there were people in the Tylenol company who were peeved at that decision: 'pull every Tylenol bottle off the shelf? You're kidding me.' You know? But to be able to see that and see that you're still going to have to stick with your guns on this, and it's not just going to be over when you make this decision.

Dr. Stoker recognized the strengths with *Ethics and Issues in Media*, but he felt that version two could reinforce the consequences of others even further. He stated that he envisioned "a video at the end in which the person who was involved was talking about how he wrestled with this issue and how he handled it." He went on to say "ultimately I'd like to be able to do that… to go out and videotape these folks… so the real-life situation becomes even more real-life because you're looking at the living, breathing person who had to deal with this situation."

How user-friendly is the format of *Ethics and Issues in Media*?

This evaluation is centered on each student's first use of *Ethics and Issues in Media*. As can be expected with a group's first interaction with a new piece of software,

students experienced a learning curve their first time using *Ethics and Issues in Media*. Once students had become familiar with the features and controls of *Ethics and Issues in Media*, they were able to focus on the case studies rather than the mechanics of navigating *Ethics and Issues in Media*. One student said "once you got in, it was pretty simple; it was good." The group nodded in agreement.

Ethics and Issues in Media was designed for each section to include multiple case studies. At the time of testing, only a handful of case studies had been entered prior to the first use. This caused some confusion with the students. One student expressed her difficulties navigating to the proper case study. She said,

> You can't click on the word 'public relations', you have to click on the name of the case study. If you click on 'public relations' I think that would be [helpful.] I didn't even notice the name of the case [at first until I scrolled below 'public relations'

Dr. Stoker explained this challenge, "We'll end up having several cases hopefully under each selection so that you would have those options. But for right now you can only have two cases done."

Since the beta test was conducted as a final exam, students were especially concerned about making sure their responses were recorded correctly. Some did not trust *Ethics and Issues in Media* to record their responses correctly. Since this was a pilot test of *Ethics and Issues in Media*, some students were more apprehensive than normal. One student ended up saving her responses elsewhere because of her fear that *Ethics and Issues in Media* did not record her responses correctly. She stated,

I put everything in word, so I have my whole page and a half on another file

because I didn't feel like [*Ethics and Issues in Media*] was safe. I felt like I was

gunna click something wrong and it was all going to disappear.

Many other students agreed with her.

Ethics and Issues in Media was more user-friendly for some students than others.

This was due largely in part to a lack of familiarity with some of the features of *Ethics*

and Issues in Media. While some of the students were concerned about whether or not

Ethics and Issues in Media recorded their responses, other students had found the

"report" feature to check the answers. One student pointed this out and said "at the very

end you could click and look at your summary, or whatever, and it would show all your

answers. So that was kind of a means of knowing all my stuff was there." This was

news to many of the students in the focus group. When they realized that *Ethics and*

Issues in Media had a reporting feature, some responded that they still "wouldn't have

trusted it."

Another student, through trial and error, discovered that it was possible to log out,

and then back in, and your answers would still be there. He ran out of time halfway

through the test and closed it. He came back 10 hours later and found that all his answers

were saved from before. He was the only student in the class who realized that *Ethics*

and Issues in Media would save the responses.

When are Students Completing *Ethics and Issues in Media*?

All of the students who were participating in the focus group had completed

Ethics and Issues in Media prior to the discussion. *Ethics and Issues in Media* was built

to be able to allow students to complete their final exam at any time in any location. Students completed *Ethics and Issues in Media* at different times of the day. One student began *Ethics and Issues in Media*, but ran out of time to complete it in one sitting. He shut his computer down and resumed at a later time. The majority of the focus group participants completed *Ethics and Issues in Media* in their apartments or dorm rooms. A small minority (an estimated 15% by raise of hands) completed it on campus. When I asked the students how long it took them to complete *Ethics and Issues in Media*, answers ranged from 30 to 45 minutes. "Way less than a real final" one student replied.

All but three of the students in the focus group completed *Ethics and Issues in Media* in one sitting. One student said "I thought [Dr. Stoker] said we had to do it in one sitting." It was not possible to determine the number of students who had not completed *Ethics and Issues in Media* prior to the focus group.

Does *Ethics and Issues in Media* increase the workload of the students significantly?

Ethics and Issues in Media, as it was implemented, did not significantly increase the workload of the students. If it were to be used as a weekly exercise, the students felt that it would require too much time. When asked if *Ethics and Issues in Media* significantly increased their workload for this test, the students shook their head and responded with a resounding "no." The decision was unanimous and they enjoyed the fact that *Ethics and Issues in Media* did not require as much time as a normal final exam.

As noted in Chapter 3, not all students participated in the focus group. It is possible that some of the students who put the test off until the last day felt differently about the workload that *Ethics and Issues in Media* required.

How do Students Feel about *Ethics and Issues in Media*?

   This evaluation question was meant to gather general feedback about students' initial impressions. The students had mixed reactions about their expectations of *Ethics and Issues in Media*. Some students said *Ethics and Issues in Media* met their expectations, while others felt that it exceeded their expectations. One student remarked,

   I expected [*Ethics and Issues in Media*] to be like less aesthetically pleasing.   It

   was really nicely laid out, I was kinda impressed. I was like how did we pull this

   off? I thought it was just going to be really basic and …it was a lot nicer than I

   expected.

Several other students agreed.

   Another student was impressed with how interactive *Ethics and Issues in Media* is. She said,

   I was really surprised with how accurate the responses were. I was kinda

   confused at first like what was going on; I didn't expect that. It was some cool

   technology to be able to give you feedback like that… I really thought it was cool.

   Since this first iteration of *Ethics and Issues in Media* was a pilot, the students had some valuable feedback on suggestions for improvements. One student said "I can't spell, so a spellchecker in the box would be nice." The class answered with a chorus of "yeah." In order to work around the spellchecker issue, she tried to copy her response from *Ethics and Issues in Media* into MS Word. She noted that it was easy to transfer from Word to *Ethics and Issues in Media*, but when transferring from *Ethics and Issues*

in Media to Word, the text was lost. She said "I went to copy it and put it into word and it went away, and it wouldn't paste anywhere, so I was very sad. I [lost my answers.]"

Another feature that a lot of the students wanted to see was the ability to go back and view an answer they had previously entered. One student said,

> I don't know if this is feasible or not… but after I had submitted [my answers] I wanted to go back and re-edit them, or read them over. I should have just thrown them into word. I didn't even think about that, but that would be a nice function...When I submit it I'd like to be able to proof-read it or go back before it's permanent... I answered the first question, and I'm pretty sure I got that completely wrong. I must have read the question wrong, and I was [wanting to] change that, but you can't.

Dr. Stoker provided some additional insight,

> Well, the other thing that might be nice at that stage would be for you to be able to read over the summary and say 'you know, I'd really like to be able to add to that first answer now. There are some things, what would you like to change in your answers based on having gone through this', instead of saying 'what did you learn from this, now based on the real case and having looked over your answer, what would you add?'

Lots of students nodded in agreement to Dr. Stoker's comments. One student replied "that's what I would have liked."

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

This section addresses the conclusions of the evaluation, with accompanying recommendations. The conclusions and recommendations are organized by the evaluation question to which they relate. Recommendations come from me, the lead evaluator, as well as the focus group participants. Table 5 compiles all the recommendations into one place.

Is *Ethics and Issues in Media* more effective than previous assessment methods used?

Students recognized the added benefits of *Ethics and Issues in Media*, and recognized that *Ethics and Issues in Media* is more appropriate when used as an assessment tool targeted towards an individual rather than a group. Dr. Stoker agreed that *Ethics and Issues in Media* was a better assessment tool than the group work, when trying to assess an individual's understanding.

While students appreciated *Ethics and Issues in Media*, they did not feel that it should replace the group assignments entirely. In the words of one of the students,

> I think you have to be able to make a decision [as an individual], to have that individual process, that's just you, and testing what you know, and how you will act to it; but at the same time, you [still] need the group thing. So I think you have to get both.

Based on the student feedback, I recommend that future classes find a balance between incorporating *Ethics and Issues in Media* with the group work to ensure that students practice making ethical decisions in both individual and group settings.

Did *Ethics and Issues in Media* enable students to think about ethical issues in new ways?

The students felt that *Ethics and Issues in Media* enabled them to think about ethical issues in new ways. However, students also understood that while *Ethics and Issues in Media* contributed to their learning that semester, there were other aspects of the course that also assisted them to learn how to think about ethical issues in new ways. One student said,

> I feel [the ability to think about ethical issues in new ways] was the objective of the class. I feel like [*Ethics and Issues in Media*] was in line with the course objectives 'cuz I think it was more about becoming a person who can rationalize ethically than it was about knowing facts and basic tendencies about ethicism.

Although the students had been learning about media ethics all semester, for some, *Ethics and Issues in Media* was the first time they were forced to ask themselves "but why? Why would you choose that?" I feel that the accountability that *Ethics and Issues in Media* places on the students is a great strength.

Based on these findings, I recommend that stakeholders continue to leverage the unique ways that *Ethics and Issues in Media* enables students to think about ethical issues in new ways

Did *Ethics and Issues in Media* Enable Students to Think Through and Determine Potential Courses of Action to Certain Ethical Issues?

The students realized that Ethical Issues in Media enabled them to determine potential courses of action better than the other assignments in the course.

On the other hand, some students found that by changing their answer, they could tell what Dr. Stoker wanted them to choose, thus circumventing the need to think through the potential consequences. Several students felt like the answers were biased and easy to guess which answer was the correct answer. They recommend he re-evaluate the wording of each response and re-write them, if necessary, to ensure one response is not obviously favored over another.

While some circumstances showed both the positive and negative impacts of a decision, not all of them did. One student requested that *Ethics and Issues in Media* highlight both the positive *and* negative aspects of her ethical decision. She was grateful that her response generated positive feedback, but she knew that every ethical decision has a potential negative consequence, and wanted *Ethics and Issues in Media* to recognize those negative consequences. I recommend each potential decision be coupled with both positive and negative feedback.

Did *Ethics and Issues in Media* Enable Students to better Understand the Consequences of Others' decisions?

One student stated that the "main advantage" of *Ethics and Issues in Media* was created was to allow the users to understand the consequences of others' decisions. The expert advice, coupled with the real-life similar stories really helped students understand the consequences of others' decisions. However, Dr. Stoker had an even broader vision to help it be more effective in future versions of *Ethics and Issues in Media*. He recommends including a "video at the end in which the person who was involved was talking about how he wrestled with this issue and how he handled it." He felt that this

would make the "real-life situation …even more real-life because you're looking at the living, breathing person who had to deal with this situation."

How User-friendly is the Format of *Ethics and Issues in Media*

Students had mixed opinions about how user-friendly *Ethics and Issues in Media* was. One student stated that *Ethics and Issues in Media* was just what he expected it to be, yet several other students often made statements such as "I'm not sure if this feature is available or not but…" Throughout the course of the focus group, students would explain how they used and navigated *Ethics and Issues in Media*. As students shared their tips, others would often respond with comments such as "I didn't know that was available, I wish I had." It became apparent that the students would have benefited from a more in-depth orientation to *Ethics and Issues in Media*, rather than having to rely on discovering features on their own. I strongly recommend teaching the students how to use *Ethics and Issues in Media* in depth before their grade depends on it.

As can be expected with any pilot test, several flaws and errors in *Ethics and Issues in Media* rose to the surface as students utilized it for the first time. One of the first issues that rose to the surface occurred right after login. One student commented, "when I first signed on, the opening page was in Spanish." Another student realized it was Latin, not Spanish, and was used as filler text. I recommend replacing this filler text with instructions, or remove it altogether.

One of the most requested features was the ability to save one's answers so they could come back and edit them at a later time. One student had entered a partial response, but wanted to navigate back to a prior screen to gather more info. When she

returned back to their partial answer, it had been deleted. Students want a way to save

their answer, navigate back, and come back to their saved answer and add to it. They

also want a way to go back and make changes to prior answers. One student said "[I

wish] there was a part where you could like save and submit. Because sometimes

blackboard will do that. Like sometimes you can save and then go back. That way you

know it's saved." Another student mentioned "I thought about my Gmail and I can type

for like 3 minutes and Gmail will say 'a draft has been saved.' So I don't ever care about

Gmail because I know it's done for me." I recommend an auto-save feature with *Ethics*

and Issues in Media, with an accompanying notification that the work has been saved up

to that point.

Several students mentioned the desire for a built-in spell-checker. The lack of

spell-checker led one student to compose their responses in MS Word, verify correct

spelling, then copy and paste their response from MS Word into *Ethics and Issues in*

Media.

Because of their prior experience losing answers while navigating *Ethics and*

Issues in Media, many students wanted a validation message in case they accidentally

deleted their intended response. At the end of *Ethics and Issues in Media*, students are

asked to submit their test.   I recommend an electronic validation that validates that each

text box has text in it. Some students were afraid that their test wasn't submitted

properly, so they kept a back-up copy in MS Word just in case. One student stated how

nice it would be to have a "pop-up message that said 'your name and completion results

will now be sent to your professor.' In order to show that [*Ethics and Issues in Media*]

didn't just lose everything I just did."   Another student was expecting something similar

to blackboard and how it reminds you if you have "forgotten to fill out a question and [it will say] 'you forgot to click an answer for question 28.' Now [I'm second-guessing myself] and I'm hop[ing] I didn't [accidentally] delete something."

Even though *Ethics and Issues in Media* has an answer summary available prior to submission of the test, one student recommended making this mandatory to pop up prior to final submission. Several students did not know this feature existed, and they requested that it be added when they learned that the feature was available. They requested that it be automatically included.

Additionally, the wording and the story flow of the "Plastic Cash" case study was noted as being choppy and difficult to follow. It is recommended that Dr. Stoker go back and review this case study to make sure it contained all the necessary details and elements of the story.

At the time of the pilot, students only had two case studies to choose from. They requested that Dr. Stoker add more case studies for future classes.

When are Students Completing *Ethics and Issues in Media*?

All of the students in the focus group completed *Ethics and Issues in Media* prior to the focus group. Although it was far better to implement *Ethics and Issues in Media* at the end of the semester rather than not at all, in the future, *Ethics and Issues in Media* should be introduced earlier in the semester, as an assignment that does not have such high stakes consequences associated with it as a final exam has.

Students also had several concerns regarding how their responses would be graded. Using *Ethics and Issues in Media* for a smaller assignment prior to using it as a

final exam would allow the students to get feedback regarding their responses prior to the final. Once students are familiar with *Ethics and Issues in Media*, it would be appropriate to use a version of it as an assessment tool with higher stakes, such as an exam.

Does *Ethics and Issues in Media* increase the workload of the students significantly?

Students really appreciated that *Ethics and Issues in Media* did not end up increasing their workload significantly. I recommend *Ethics and Issues in Media* continue to be used as an exam.

How do Students Feel about *Ethics and Issues in Media*?

Students were impressed overall with the fit, finish, and feel of *Ethics and Issues in Media*. One student replied "how did we pull this off? I thought it was just going to be really basic and …it was a lot nicer than I expected." Students' attitudes towards *Ethics and Issues in Media* were very favorable. Aside from the Latin text previously mentioned, I have no further recommendations regarding the overall fit and finish.

In conclusion, *Ethics and Issues in Media* has demonstrated many of the strengths that it set out to demonstrate. The students enjoyed working with *Ethics and Issues in Media*, and with a few refinements, it can be even more effective. The preliminary results were reported to Michael Johnson at the CTL via interim reports. I am unaware of how the results have been used, but he has assured me that these evaluation findings are still pertinent and helpful to him and the CTL. Through the duration of this evaluation, the stakeholders have changed. However, Michael Johnson is anxious to read the final evaluation report to learn how to enhance future projects.

Table 5

Recommendations Summary

Category	Requestor	Recommendation
Implementation	Me	Try to find a balance between the group work and *Ethics and Issues in Media*. This will allow students to practice making ethical decisions in individual settings as well as group settings.
Implementation	Me	I recommend that stakeholders continue to utilize *Ethics and Issues in Media* in ways that leverage the unique ways it enables students to think through ethical issues.
Content	Student	Each potential ethical decision should be coupled with both positive and negative feedback.
Content	Dr. Stoker	Add video interviews at the end of each segment to emphasize what happened in real life.
Orientation	Me	Teach the students how to use *Ethics and Issues in Media* in depth before their grade depends on it.
Content	Student	Replace Latin filler text with instructions, or remove it altogether.
Enhancement	Students	Add auto-save feature with an accompanying notification that the work has been saved up to that point.
Enhancement	Students	Make the answer summary a required screen prior to progressing.
Content	Students	Have Dr. Stoker go back and review the plastic cash case study to ensure all the details to the story are present.
Content	Students	Add more case studies so there is a variety to choose from.
Implementation	Students	Continue to use Ethics and Issues and Media as a final exam.

Lessons Learned

This section highlights the key lessons I have learned through the completion of this project. This section would not normally be included in an evaluation report, but I felt that it was important to include a reflection of how this process has made me a better evaluator, since this report is also being submitted as my final masters degree project.

There were some key things that I learned through this process. I learned that no evaluation will ever be "perfect" and 100% thorough. There is no doubt I gathered great data, but it's always possible to gather more. On the other hand, I learned that it is also possible to gather too much data. Rather than striving for the perfect evaluation, I will strive to work within my given constraints and reduce bias a much as possible in the future. It is important to realize that no evaluation is going to be flawless.

This project reinforced the importance of planning the evaluation prior to execution. A well-planned evaluation will stay aligned with the evaluation criteria. I was pleasantly surprised to see the results of the focus group aligned with the evaluation questions. I credit this to effective planning prior to carrying out the evaluation.

In the past, I understood that it was important to consult stakeholders during the design of the evaluation. However, I did not fully understand just how important it was until I had completed my evaluation. There are several evaluation questions that I would not have thought to ask had I not consulted the stakeholders in the design of the evaluation. By having internal stakeholders collaborate with external evaluators, the evaluation examined many facets of the evaluand that would otherwise have been overlooked.

Another point that was reinforced was the importance of identifying stakeholders. I did not identify my graduate committee as key stakeholders until writing this report. To them, a key evaluand was my project (in addition to the *Ethics and Issues in Media* Case Studies), and I foolishly overlooked the stake that they held in this project.

The most difficult part about completing this project was attempting to make an organic, flowing conversation fit the linear format of this report. Some responses fit in more than one category, but I was required to choose the best fit. Some conversations strayed outside of the evaluation questions, but ended up contributing to the evaluation. It was a challenge to fit a fluid conversation into a formal paper.

There are several things I would do differently if I were to do it again. First, I would begin with the end in mind. I would have an idea of what the evaluation report would look like, and what it would cover, prior to asking focus group questions. Second, I would complete the report sooner. Third, I would not have focused on so many evaluation criteria. In an effort to be thorough, I encouraged Dr. Stoker to identify as many evaluation criteria as he could think of. In hindsight, I should have required him to pick his most important evaluation criteria. I was overwhelmed with the amount of data that were generated, and I definitely should have asked fewer evaluation questions.

In conclusion, this evaluation prepared me for the real world in ways that a class could not. I am a better evaluator having completed this report from beginning to end, and I feel more confident that I could complete future evaluations in a timely and professional manner.

References

Bying, R., Norman, I., & Redfern, S. (2005). Using Realistic Evaluation to Evaluate a Practice-level Intervention to Improve Primary Healthcare for Patients with Long-term Mental Illness. *Evaluation, 11*(1), 69-93

Clancy, E., Quinn, P., & Miller, J. (2005). Assessment of a Case Study Laboratory to Increase Awareness of Ethical Issues in Engineering. *IEEE Transactions on Education, 48*(2), 313-317.

Clark, S., Burgess, T., Laven, G., Bull, M., Marker, J., & Browne, E. (2004). Developing and Evaluating the Grieflink Web Site: Processes, Protocols, Dilemmas and Lessons Learned. *Death Studies, 28*(10), 955-970.

Johnston, C., & Haughton, P. (2007). Medical Students' Perceptions of their Ethics Teaching. *Journal of Medical Ethics 33*, 418-422.

Lind, R., Rarick, D. (1992). Public Attitudes Toward Ethical Issues in TV Programming: Multiple Viewer Orientations. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics, 7,* 133-151.

Mandinach, E. (2005). The Development of Effective Evaluation Methods for E-Learning: A Concept Paper and Action Plan. *Teachers College Record*, 107(8), 1814-1835.

Markle, S. M. (1967). Empirical testing of programs. In P. C. Lange *Ed.), *Programmed instruction; the sixty sixth yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part II.* Chicago: University of Chicago press.

Plemmons, D., Brody, S., & Kalichman, M. (2006). Student Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Education in the Responsible Conduct of Research. *Science and Engineering Ethics*, 12, 571-582.

Rokeach, M. (1973). *The nature of human values.* New York: Free Press.

Surlin, S. (1987). Value System Changes by Students as Result of Media Ethics Course. *Journalism Quarterly*, 64(2-3), 564-568.

Scriven, M. (1967). The methodology of evaluation. In R. W. Tyler, R. M. Gange, & M. Scriven. *Perspectives of curriculum evaluation* 39-83. Chicago, UL. Rand McNally.

Tyler, R. W. (1942). General statement on evaluation. *Journal of Educational Research*. 35, 492-501