

Ethics in Film Project Report May 31, 2006

The *Ethics in Film* online journal has completed two phases of development, thanks to financial assistance from the Institute for Ethical and Civic Engagement at the University of Colorado at Boulder, the Arthur W. Page Center in the College of Communications at The Pennsylvania State University and the Writer Family.

Technical development

The first phase involved the creation of the web portal. Initial discussions of how the site might function led to the decision to customize open source software to create a basic website capable of displaying articles in PDF format with information about the accompanying video segment. A logo and basic page design were also developed.

Several submissions were solicited to test the process. Ethics instructors used a word template to format articles which use video clips to illustrate ethical dilemmas. A panel of reviewers was assembled to allow for a double-blind review process. Each submission was printed out and mailed, along with an evaluation form and a DVD rented from Netflix, to two reviewers. The reviewers returned the form and DVD by mail with their comments, which were relayed to the author by email. The author made appropriate revisions and successful submissions were posted on the Ethics in Film website.

This process was cumbersome and frequent delays resulted from waiting for delivery of new DVDs or mail return of reviews. Further, about half of the reviewers are outside the United States, which necessitated individualized postage calculations. An entirely online review process was desired. At this same time, the EIF project solicited and received an opinion letter from the University of Colorado attorney charged with intellectual property. The letter stated that the posting of the actual video clips for each article on the Ethics in Film website would be a fair use under copyright law. A website revision was begun to allow electronic submissions, review and the posting of video clips in both the review copy of the article as well as the final published version.

The online review process was tested in March, 2006. Most reviewers experienced little or no difficulty in logging on to the secure section of the website, accessing the password protected PDF of the article with an embedded video clip, and filling out the electronic evaluation form. Video clips were included as part of newly published articles and were added to articles previously published on the site.

Content development

Submission of articles outpaced the technical ability to process them in the first phase of development. The standardized, electronic format now allows almost immediate transmission of submissions to reviewers. When reviewers fill out the evaluation form, it is emailed directly to the managing editor of the journal, who sends the anonymous comments back to the author for revision. Delays now result primarily from the time constraints of the volunteer reviewing panel, rather than the process.