

Task Force on Technology, Ethics, and Personal Responsibility

Final Report: May 23, 2006

Charge to the Task Force

The context for this task force is clear from its name – it arose out of concern for raising individuals' awareness of their personal responsibility in making ethical use of the technology we are so richly provided with as members of the Elon campus community. As noted by President Lambert in his original memo to the task force in August 2005, despite all the ways that technology has enriched our academic and campus life, inevitable opportunities for misuse have also arisen. Examples of such misuse include invasions of individual privacy, actions that bring harm to campus networks, copyright infringement, and discourteous communication.

Dr. Lambert invited the following individuals to meet during Fall semester, 2005 to explore these issues.

Co-chairs:

- Chris Fulkerson, Assistant Vice President for Technology
- Barbara Taylor, Associate Professor of Computing Sciences

Teaching Faculty

- Jessica Gisclair, Assistant Professor of Communications
- Michael Salmond, Assistant Professor of Art
- Anthony Weston, Professor of Philosophy

Staff

- Richard McBride, University Chaplain
- Jana Lynn Patterson, Associate Dean of Students
- Karen Pore, Assistant Registrar for Computer Services

Students

- Jenifer Blowe, Human Services major, and ELITE staff member
- John O'Brien, Computer Information Systems major

Specifically, the task force was charged to:

thoughtfully examine ways to raise the “institutional consciousness” of Elon University about ethical and responsible uses of technology. In particular, please consider how the existing academic and social honor codes can be used to promote the ethical and responsible use of technology on campus. Recommendations are sought about how to introduce all new members of the university community to appropriate technology use on campus. If the task force has recommendations about policy changes that should be considered by the University, these will receive additional consideration by the senior staff and appropriate faculty committees.

Approaching our Task

At its first meeting on September 7, 2005, the task force set its agenda for the semester to include:

- Identifying issues and topics to be included in the scope of the committee's work.
- Researching those issues by reading suggested articles, reviewing Elon's current policies (and practice), and examining policies and practices in place at other schools.
- Identifying areas where new or revised policies (and practices) were needed and making recommendations for improvement.
- Discussing ways to communicate and educate the campus community.
- Discussing the "disconnect" between policy and practice and ways to actually change behavior of individuals in practice.

We agreed to meet again in two weeks, and at our second meeting, we formed three subcommittees. The first group had as its goal articulating shared community **values**. A second subcommittee was to examine existing **policies** for areas that needed improvement, and the third group that became known as the **enactment** group had the task of generating ideas on how to communicate values and policies to the campus community.

We continued meeting as an entire group throughout fall semester, approximately every other week for a total of seven times, with subcommittees meeting in the intervening weeks. At task force meetings, each subcommittee shared its ongoing work with the larger group for discussion and feedback. As the end of fall semester approached, we realized our work was not near completion, and we received approval from President Lambert to extend our term and continue our work into spring semester.

We presented a progress report at the February 3rd, 2006 Faculty Meeting, during which we shared our work to date and invited faculty to join us for the April 7th Numen Lumen session. We met five times during spring as a large group - every other week through the end of March, with subcommittees continuing their work between task force meetings, and ending with a final luncheon meeting on April 28th.

The subcommittee framework (values, policies, enactment) not only served us well in approaching our task, but also serves as the outline for reporting our work; the outcomes from each group's work follow.

Shared Community Values

The values subcommittee, in collaboration with the entire task force, identified and defined four core values related to technology, ethics, and personal responsibility. These are **safety**, **caretaking**, **originality**, and **civility**. [Appendix A](#) provides a context for these values and definitions of each one.

The task force strongly recommends the adoption of the values document (Appendix A) and recommends that any communication to the campus community about policies, rules, sanctions, etc. also include communication of these values as a context for why such policies exist and are enforced.

Policies

The policies subcommittee began by examining Elon's existing technology policies currently located at <http://www.elon.edu/technology/policies.htm>. Existing policies relevant to the work of the task force include an Acceptable Use Policy, an Email Policy, and a position statement on file sharing. Concerns with existing policies included the lack of breadth, examples, continuity, and consequences. The subcommittee also expressed concern about the increase in complexity of technology since the time the original policies were written as well as the reasoning behind the policies.

Attempts were made during the fall to address these concerns by creating a single integrated policy that incorporated current policies and was based on the already identified values; however, as the subcommittee explored policies in place at other institutions for ideas about organization and format, it became clear that borrowing (with permission of course!) the work of others and adapting it made more sense than starting from scratch. Of particular appeal to the subcommittee and the larger task force were the policies in place at Brown University (<http://www.brown.edu/Facilities/CIS/policy/>). Not only were they impressive in terms of scope, organization, and clarity, but they also fit nicely with the core values the task force had already defined. Chris Fulkerson contacted Brown's IT Department and obtained permission for us to adapt their policies for our own use.

The policies subcommittee spent much of spring semester reading the policies and working to adapt them to Elon's environment. The current working version of these draft policies is located at <http://org.elon.edu/multimedia/test/newtech/policies1.htm>. The following feedback from participants in the April Numen Lumen session still needs to be addressed in the policies:

- Making navigation and locating specific topics easier by adding links at tops of pages to sections on pages and adding a keyword search feature.
- Incorporating more language and examples in the acceptable use section aimed at a student (rather than employee) audience.

The task force recommends that Chris Fulkerson and his staff continue to review and refine these policies to fit Elon's technology environments and that these policies be adopted to replace existing ones.

Enactment: Communicating Values and Policies to the Community

The enactment subcommittee spent its time brainstorming creative ideas for increasing awareness of the shared values and technology policies among students, faculty, staff and others who may use University technology.

It is assumed that Instructional Technology Services will commit staff and budgetary support to implementing the ideas described below and to promoting and publicizing values and policies. A key component of that will be support from the ELITE Program whose mission is to "integrate(s) technology into academics, administration, and collegiate life." Their philosophy is to provide a safe learning environment for the Elon community to gain technology skills and to integrate these skills into academics, administration, and collegiate life. Television Services and Media Services can assist as well with video production and posters.

Listed below are suggested tactics aimed at increasing awareness that were generated both by the enactment group and by participants at the April Numen Lumen session:

- Having all new students (and employees?) review at least the values statement (Appendix A) before they can receive an email account or use other campus technology resources.
- Creating a series of short videos to explain the importance of the technology policy in a creative and fun fashion.
- Making programming (through ELITE) available to New Student Orientation and Elon 101 as well as resident advisors and Greek life housing managers in an effort to reach both new and current students.
- Developing workshops or mini-sessions with catchy themes like Cell phones - a 12 step program, Cameras - shake it like a Polaroid, Computers - It isn't broken... yet, and iPodding - the right way, along with other topics such as video camera usage (and the potential for abuse) and the Internet. Possibly have these streamed so people can watch them on the Internet without having to attend in person.
- Incorporating discussion of the ethical use of technology into the Honor Code discussion and the ritual signing of the Honor Code pledge in Elon 101 classes.
- Utilizing posters and campus media to promote special events, mini sessions, technology updates; media formats might include a monthly column, press releases, PSAs, and e-net announcements.
- Having a presence at College Coffee at least once a semester and/or setting up tables in Moseley in an effort to provide new technology information which could be distributed as handouts or attached to giveaways such as mouse pads and t-shirts.
- Sponsoring a week-long technology campaign in October, which is national technology month; this would provide many venues for participation and awareness.

- Developing a means of communicating values and policies to campus guests including both visiting speakers and community users of the library and other resources.

The task force recommends that staff and other necessary budgetary resources be committed and that the proposed measures or similar ones be enacted; relevant offices should make a conscious effort to continue this sort of brainstorming in the future.

Recommendations for future consideration

There was at least one area where the task force felt the need for additional attention and work in the future, and that was in the area of copyright law and Fair Use Guidelines. The task force felt strongly that additional education needs to be done in this area and that in general, faculty and students are not familiar with how to appropriately use the work of others. The task force recommends that another committee be set up to work on this issue and that the new committee include representation from the library staff. We were very impressed with the information and assistance that Brown University provides its users in this area, and we recommend that this serve as a starting point for developing similar information for the Elon community.

Rather late in the course of our work, we also became aware of other campus committees that were meeting and dealing with similar issues. These included one led by Assistant Dean of Students, Scott Nelson on the Social Honor Code apparently looking at combining the social and academic honor pledges. There is surely much overlap between the work of our task force and this committee's work, and this overlap might extend to the development of educational materials and the use of staff and resources.

An additional committee that we became aware of was the committee in Athletics dealing with appropriate use of Web-based communities and Web postings by student athletes. Again, it would likely be helpful if this committee were made aware of the work of our task force as it continues to deal with these challenges.

Finally, we would suggest that the work of our task force be revisited every few years – that policies be continuously monitored and kept up to date as technologies expand and change.

Technology, Ethics, and Personal Responsibility Shared Community Values

Elon University is a community dedicated to the intellectual, personal, and spiritual growth of all of its members, especially its students; to the advancement of knowledge for the good of all; and to service to the local, national, and global community. New technologies can contribute to all of these goals, creating unprecedented opportunities for learning and service. However, as they bring new levels of interdependence, they also bring unprecedented kinds of individual and collective vulnerability. As we respond to both opportunities and vulnerability as a community, we need to be more explicit and more intentional about our shared values and their implications. We must also recognize the effect our individual actions have on the larger community.

Safety

A learning community devoted to the growth and flourishing of its members requires the safety, both intellectual and physical, of its members. Intellectual adventurousness requires an environment of safety where we can freely speak our minds and explore possibilities. Emotional and relational self-discovery requires physical safety and well-respected privacy within the community. Correspondingly, each member of the community must respect and take care for the safety of all others. We must respect the freedom of expression of others, up to and including keeping some conversations “within the walls.” We must respect the privacy of others, no more intruding upon them electronically than we would physically. Personal information – others’ as well as our own – must be treated with particular care in a time when we are all increasingly vulnerable to outside exploitation.

Caretaking

Any community with shared resources upon which all depend requires all of its members to take care of those resources diligently. Shared electronic resources may not be as visible as library books or exercise equipment, but the same expectation of respect and civility applies. Leave the resource as good as you found it – indeed, ideally, better than you found it – and stay alert to the need to defend and protect it, and through it to defend and protect the community. In particular, we are responsible to take care not to open the university network to slowdown or infection, as well as to stay alert for ways in which the system can be supported and enhanced by individual users.

Originality

The aim of our learning is to develop our own capacities to think for ourselves, to discover new things, and ultimately to contribute to the world. Thus a learning community such as Elon is not concerned solely with the mastery of more information, but also, and perhaps most fundamentally, with the originality of thought. We honor the thinking of others, then, by taking great care to give proper credit and/or compensation, recognizing that it is increasingly easy to appropriate the work of others, even unintentionally, as electronic text and other information become every more readily transferable. In truth, we should no more appropriate the work of others electronically

than we would physically – both because we honor originality and respect the rights of others, and because we honor and respect our own.

Civility

A learning community relies on the civility of its members in order to achieve the desired environment that is necessary for its success. People may mistakenly assume a sense of detachment while communicating electronically and forget there is a person with feelings on the other end receiving the communication, a person who deserves to be treated with respect. Nothing should be communicated electronically that would not be said face to face. We need to honor each other in every way and that includes being courteous and respectful in all communications electronic or otherwise.