

# **“With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility”: Ethical and Legal Frameworks for Libraries as Creators, Publishers, and Hosts of New Information.**

## **Seven Steps to Ethical Decision Making**

Step 1: Define the problem

Expectation:

Reality:

PLUS Filter - Does the existing situation violate any of the PLUS considerations?

Step 2: Seek out relevant assistance, guidance and support

People:

Professional Guidelines:

Organization Policies:

Step 3: Identify alternatives (3-5)

Alternative 1:

Alternative 2:

Alternative 3:

Step 4: Evaluate the alternatives

Possible Positive Outcomes:

Possible Negative Outcomes:

Likely Outcomes (Degree of Confidence):

PLUS Filter

Will the alternative I am considering resolve the PLUS violations?

Will the alternative being considered create any new PLUS considerations?

Are the ethical trade-offs acceptable?

Step 5: Make the decision

Best Alternative:

Rationale for Decision:

Step 6: Implement the decision

Step 1:

Step 7: Evaluate the decision

Did the problem go away?

Did it change appreciably?

Is it better now, or worse, or the same?

What new problems did the solution create?

PLUS Filter

Does the resultant situation resolve the earlier PLUS considerations?

Are there any new PLUS considerations to be addressed?

PLUS Ethical Decision Making Model, Ethics and Compliance Initiative – [www.ethics.org](http://www.ethics.org)

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### **Four Scenarios**

1. A recent English graduate, Dr. Hopeful has come to you with a request. Her dissertation contained a collection of her critically annotated poems that she would like to publish in a separate work. Her dissertation is currently stored in the university digital repository, and is discoverable through Google. She has spoken with a publisher about her book but they are reluctant to take on the project while the dissertation is online. She asks that her dissertation be removed or repressed from the repository. How do you respond to her request?
2. Professor Hoarder is preparing to retire and is requesting the university place in the archive and make available a substantial collection of digital data from his research work. The data are in a variety of digital formats, and the quality varies widely. The data may or may not have complete documentation or codebooks. Some data in this collection have resulted in publications, but other data resulted from abandoned or failed projects. How will you answer Professor Hoarder?
3. The library has collaborated with a digital humanities team to curate a collection of digital research projects from an international group of scholars. The library worked alongside the team to gather and prepare the collection. The library hosts the digital collection on its servers, and has played a key role in publicizing the collection. One of the participating scholars, Professor Precious, has contacted the library. She believes that her project has been plagiarized on another site, and asks the library as her digital publisher to assist her in asserting her copyright. How do you respond to Professor Precious?
4. A research paper by Professor Xavier that contains a number of critical statements about Doctor Magneto’s work has been stored in the university’s repository. Doctor Magneto is threatening Professor Xavier with legal action and is prepared to launch a second action against the library if the paper is not immediately removed and expunged from the Internet. How might the library proceed?