Ethical Considerations for Streaming Business Publications

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ABSTRACT. This exploratory ethics study of a publication and presentation practice herein defined as "streaming" investigates the attitudes of deans of schools of business and business professors regarding such behavior. Streaming publications is the practice of presenting or publishing an article at one outlet and then taking the same article with perhaps minor revisions and presenting or publishing it at another publication outlet. The results of the survey suggest that the most important ethical behavior regarding streaming practices is disclosure. If authors fully disclose the intellectual history of a paper's developmental process, allegations of possible professional misconduct will be minimized if not eliminated.

A publication record is an essential ingredient for a successful career as a college faculty member. Tenure, promotions, and merit rely heavily upon a faculty member's professional achievement record, particularly at research oriented universities. This pressure is producing a record number of publications among faculty (Mooney, 1991, p. A17). Because of the pressure to produce publications, faculty often seek a variety of publication outlets that will produce a number of publications from one research effort (Mooney, 1991, p. A16). By pursuing this objective, faculty may engage in publication practices, knowingly or unknowingly, which could be considered morally wrong or ethically unprofessional. Such publication practices are resulting not only in the close examination of ethical conduct of faculty but also the emergence of codes of ethical conduct by professional organizations and institutions (Heath, 1989, p. 472; Academy of Management, 1991; Engle and Smith, 1990; and Zumberge, 1988, p. 202).

Many editors as well as regional and national program and paper chairs recommend that when faculty prepare papers for presentation or publication that they follow a sequence of developmental steps. The Academy of Management Review journal, for example, publishes in the notice to contributors section of the journal the statement: "presentation of a paper at a professional meeting does not disqualify it from consideration." The notice to contributors also states "an extensive developmental process" is encouraged, but with the understanding that the manuscript has not been published elsewhere. Authors often receive similar correspondence, either informal or formal, from editors and program chairs recommending that feedback received from working papers or professional meetings may be used to revise articles before resubmitting them to other outlets for publication consideration. Because of these recommendations, some faculty perceive that an informal set of developmental steps is recommended for preparing an article for publication. These steps typically include presenting a working paper to colleagues for critique before presenting a paper at either a regional or national meeting, and then revising the paper and submitting the work for publication in a journal. This developmental process can be thought of as publication "streaming." One paper with or without minor revisions may result in a number of publication citations for a faculty member's resume.

Some journal editors and program chairs stipulate that previously published manuscripts will disqualify an article for consideration. For example, the Decision Sciences Institute stipulates in their call for papers: "presentation of the same paper at another conference is considered a breach of professional
ethics.” The Journal of Economic Theory, Journal of Finance, and the Journal of Accounting Education are three of many journals requiring that a work not be submitted elsewhere or previously published (Cabell, 1990, pp. 873, 696, and 901). Other journals such as the Journal of Financial Research and the Journal of Marketing provide no guidelines concerning prior presentations and publications of a manuscript (Cabell, 1990, pp. 919 and 1053). These differing procedures and requirements create confusion in the minds of some faculty. This confusion may lead to violation of ethical norms, either intentionally or unintentionally. This paper offers some clarification regarding ethical publishing practices of faculty, particularly the streaming process for preparing and developing manuscripts for publication.

Research design

Philosophers classify the study of ethics into three areas: normative ethics, metaethics, and descriptive ethics (Goodpaster, 1985). Normative ethics is an investigation into the decision making and judgments used to decide right or wrong; whereas, metaethics is an investigation into the meaning and interpretation of ethical decisions. Interrelationships among scientific, legal, religious, cultural, and moral judgments are all issues considered in the study of metaethics. Descriptive ethics investigations are empirical descriptive investigations of ethical behavior of an individual or group. The exploratory and survey methodology design in the current study is best identified with the descriptive ethics philosophy and, consequently, serves as the theoretical model for this study.

Survey sampling design

The sampling frame consisted of the 667 domestic educational institutions listed in the 1988–89 AACSB Membership Directory. Two hundred and fifty-nine (39 per cent) of these institutions are accredited by AACSB and 408 (61 per cent) are nonaccredited. From the list of 667, a random sample of 117 institutions was selected. The dean of each institution was asked to respond to the ethics survey concerning the streaming of publications. In addition, each dean received six faculty surveys — one for each of six disciplines (accounting, economics, finance, management, marketing, and management information systems) — and was requested to randomly select from the list of productive faculty in each discipline faculty to participate in the survey. Thirty-seven of the 117 deans (32 per cent) contacted elected to participate in the survey. A total of 128 faculty of the 222 contacted (57 per cent) responded to the survey. Of the 37 deans who responded to the survey, fourteen (38 per cent) were from institutions accredited by the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) and 23 (62 per cent) from non-accredited institutions. Fifty-one of the faculty (40 per cent) were from AACSB-accredited institutions and 74 (60 per cent) were from non-accredited institutions. The sample percentages of deans and faculty from AACSB accredited schools matches closely with target population percentage of accredited schools.

Instrument integrity

Items to be included on each of the questionnaires for the deans and faculty were determined by content validity procedures. Initially, a review of the literature was performed to assist in identifying relevant ethical issues involving the “streaming” of professional publications. In addition to the information taken from the manuscript guidelines previously specified from Cabell’s (1990) reference book, several other reference sources provided some insights. Czyzewski and Dickinson (1990, p. 98) found that articles presented at national and regional meetings and that were published as part of the proceedings have an increased likelihood of rejection by journal reviewers. Presentations where there was no prior publication of the manuscript had no impact on the probability of rejection. Mooney (1991, p. A16) cites instances of faculty padding their resumes by submitting the same paper to different outlets with only title changes or with minor revisions. In addition to the literature review, a focus group composed of faculty members who represented five different business disciplines served as a resource for identifying what they considered key ethical issues regarding their concept of “streaming” professional achievement publications. Their input