

# African Centre of Excellence for Information Ethics established

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Information ethics is a descriptive and emancipatory discipline dealing with the study of the changes in the relationship between people and the world due to information and communication technologies. Information ethics in Africa provides a unique platform to build an information and knowledge society driven by critical reflection on ethos and values within the African context. It addresses opportunities and challenges unique to the development of African societies.

The African Centre of Excellence for Information Ethics (ACEIE) was established in the Department of Information Science at the University of Pretoria on 17 May 2012. This was the culmination of a series of activities and events by various stakeholders involved in information ethics.

In 2007, a group of international academics in the fields of information technology, philosophy and politics came together to form an academic network to do research on information ethics. This network was formalised, and is now known as the African Network on Information Ethics (ANIE).

At approximately the same time, the rollout of broadband capacity in South Africa and Africa resulted in information being more readily available. The recent and ongoing construction of various submarine network

cables, such as SEACOM, directly contributed to the expansion of the broadband capacity on the African continent,

thereby making more information available to more people at greater speeds.

The growth in communication and information management capacity contributed significantly to the development and management of e-skills, e-governance and information ethics, and the challenges related to these matters.

The ANIE identified a gap in the academic representation of the African continent on the global stage, specifically pertaining to

information ethics, and therefore started organising events to stimulate research on information ethics in Africa. Similarly, because it is a new field of research and study, it was found that students were not properly introduced to information ethics and did not fully understand the concept, purpose and practice of this field.

The result of these activities and international collaboration has led to a partnership with the South African national Department of Communications, the United Nations Education, Scientific and Culture Organization (UNESCO) and various universities across Africa. The Department of Information Science took the lead and formed an integral part of the conceptualisation and negotiations between the parties. Finally, this collaboration contributed to the establishment of the ACEIE, and the Department now hosts the Centre.

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One of the main objectives of the Centre is to develop a curriculum to teach information ethics in Africa. During the first three years, the ACEIE will develop a curriculum structure and implement the content at universities in Africa. A group of more than 30 international



→ Back row (from left): Prof Roelf Sandenbergh (Dean: Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology), Jaco du Toit (Communication and Information Advisor to UNESCO), Lucky Musi (Deputy Director: e-Education, national Department of Communications), Prof Theo Bothma (Head: Department of Information Science), Prof Stephanie Burton (Vice-Principal: Research and Postgraduate Studies) and Coetzee Bester (Director: ACEIE). Middle (from left): Nozipho Mashiyi (Director: e-Education, national Department of Communications), Nonkqubela Jordan (Chief Director: International Africa Desk) and Rachel Bothma (Research and Administrative Assistant: ACEIE). Front (from left): Prof Cheryl de la Rey (Vice-Chancellor and Principal) and Alfred Mashishi (Chief Director: Special Projects, national Department of Communications).

academics are working together on this pilot project.

According to a formal memorandum of agreement between the University of Pretoria and the South African national Department of Communications, signed on 15 December 2011, the ACEIE was conceptualised and will further fulfil the following functions:

- Support the establishment of other ethics centres in Africa through the African Ethics Research Centre Network
- Convene, coordinate and handle the administration of the ethics conference, and follow up the implementation of the conference resolutions
- Facilitate the hosting of ethics awards ceremonies in collaboration with other partners
- Focus on research and training in information ethics

- Develop short courses for government officials in the nine provinces of South Africa
- Encourage information ethics workshops, where academics and practitioners can exchange their knowledge and enhance the practical dynamics of information ethics
- Function as a centre where research interests can converge

- to endorse key proposals concerning information ethics and its application in African societies, governments and institutions
- Maintain its collaborative relationships with UNESCO, the E-skills Hub, hosted by the Department of Informatics, and its host, the Department of Information Science

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