The rapid acceleration and direction of on-line courses necessitates revisiting an old, yet all too familiar academic concern of ethics and ethical standards. Allegations of plagiarism and cheating in institutions of higher learning have rapidly increased with access and availability to electronically based media, particularly the internet. No system of higher education is immune, as students become increasingly more technologically skilled and competent to retrieve and extract large quantities of data from pertinent documents for the production of their own writing. As a consequence of unlimited electronic access to enormous amounts of information and data, academic dishonesty and fraud have resurfaced through e-learning environments. Unequivocally, plagiarism and cheating with the use of technology challenges the standard of education in terms of value, integrity, and honor at the most fundamental level.

Undeniably, electronic learning environments have become the present educational “currency” and solution to knowledge acquisition and transfer in a competitive marketplace driven by increasing economic constraints (Pittinsky, 2003). The linking of technology in the learning environment has offered considerable benefits, particularly in the areas of literacy and language acquisition (Sturm, 2003). Several research studies have indicated that on-line learning alternatives have provided greater accessibility to university courses and degree programs, specifically for non-traditional, mature, or disabled students (Duffy and Kirkley, 2004). However, despite the obvious advancements that digital learning opportunities may provide learners, the increase of access to education via technology also raises many new ethical concerns.

Practices of plagiarism and cheating severely dilute the value and integrity of an institution’s reputation and impacts significantly on the standard of education for everyone. The need for positive redress is timely and essential as increasing concerns and allegations of cheating and fraud are identified as rampant and repetitive occurrences across educational institutions of higher learning. In the United States, studies relating to cheating date as far back to the 1940’s with Drakes (1941) seminal work. Bowers’ (1964) classic study reported significant accounts of academic dishonesty from a sample of 99 Colleges and University with a population of 5000 students. More recently, McCabe, Trevino, and Butterfield (2001) replicated Bowers’ study concluding relative increases from the original work. The work of Jensen, Arnett, Feldman and Cauffman (2002) has indicated lower rates of academic dishonesty and fraud, but acknowledge the epidemic nature of these practices embedded in learning.
There are a number of interrelated issues that perhaps impinge on a clear understanding of how ethics may need to be framed within a technologically advancing educational arena. For students the notion of what constitutes plagiarism or academic fraud may become increasing more difficult to decipher particularly with the plethora of information available on the web. For example, information obtained from the web, may be viewed as ‘free’ and thus not necessitating the usual academic documentation or citation. For these students, a simple ‘cut and paste’ from a web-site, may be viewed as providing evidence of ‘like-minded’ thinkers. Furthermore, since these opinions are found on the web, students may accept that such work is not officially ‘published’ (like articles that appear in scholarly academic journals) and thus do not require academic references. Additionally, students may interpret information gathered through web-sites as ‘legitimate’ sources of data, and thus opt to incorporate such findings into their work.

Often without formal training or hesitation, students are technologically prepared to “connect on-line” for their course instructions through active cyber discussion boards, chats, or list group participation. As a result, today’s educator must be ready to engage in electronic based mediums of instruction to meet the needs of this rapidly electronic/computer based learning society. Educators must not only be prepared to develop and revise instructional material and courses that merge traditional learning (3 R’s) with modern technology, but also be prepared to address issues of academic integrity in e-learning environments. The general aim of this presentation is to assist faculty, educational practitioners and prospective teachers with appropriate materials and strategies to meet the changing multi-dimensional, electronically enhanced interfaced context and needs for teaching and learning in a digitally modified academic environment.