

**RESEARCH IN PROGRESS:  
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ETHICAL ATTITUDES**

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**Abstract**

This research in progress describes a comparative study of business students' attitudes toward ethical issues in information systems. In the present study, approximately 100 subjects were drawn from two populations: full-time business college juniors and seniors at a traditional state university and part-time students studying for a masters in information systems in an evening program at an urban university. Both groups were enrolled in an information systems course at the time of the study.

The subjects read twelve information systems-based scenarios and were asked to classify the nineteen behaviors described in them as Unacceptable, Questionable, or Acceptable. The results of these classifications will be compared to each other, as well as to the results of prior studies using the same instrument. This study used the same instrument as studies by D.B. Paradice ("Ethical Attitudes of Entry-Level MIS Personnel", *Information and Management*, 18, 1990, pp. 143-151) and A. Morris, G. Jones, and J. Rubinsztein ("Entry-Level Information Systems Personnel: A Comparative Study of Ethical Attitudes", *Proceedings of the 1993 ACM SIGCPR Conference*, M.R. Tanniru (editor), pp. 8-17). The replication of their earlier work with somewhat different subject groups provides the foundation for the present study. The prior studies, which compared South African and American undergraduate information systems majors, showed the South African students to be more "ethically lenient" than the corresponding Americans.

It is hypothesized that the graduate students, who are older and have more work experience, will demonstrate a greater sensitivity to ethical issues in information systems than either the undergraduate business or information systems majors. Earlier researchers have used undergraduates as substitutes for information systems personnel in many ethics studies. These two population groups may, in fact, differ.