

The ethics of MOOC research: why we should involve learners

.....
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Ethics are increasingly important



‘Visions of the Future’ run by www.laceproject.eu

Too much Big Brother vision to be appealing.

Examples from USA and InBloom clearly demonstrates that lack of trust regarding how private data is managed is crucial

Concerned about device security, data protection, transparency of policy, use of data and ethics.

There should be strong discussion about the Ethical concerns that apply to each approach to Learning Analytics

important that all aspects of privacy and data integrity and data control is secure

Learning Analytics is being used in schools with no consideration of ethics, still less consultation or informed consent. This is likely to lead to a backlash.

Users should be entitled to know how their data are interrogated and used and for what reasons. This should be made explicit and easy to understand

Continue to raise profile of ownership and ethics around data.

What could go wrong?



Nine states, 11 million students, \$10 million



**HELP FIGHT
inBloom
student data snatchers**

Test scores, attendance records and daily grades may not provide Gates with the entire picture he desires to track our students. Taking prescriptive learning and analytics to the next level, Gates proposes using "galvanic" bracelets to measure student engagement

Current situation



When did you last read FutureLearn's terms and conditions... and its code of research ethics?



<https://about.futurelearn.com/terms/>
<https://about.futurelearn.com/terms/research-ethics-for-futurelearn/>

Policies are not enough



- People do not read privacy policies
- If they read privacy policies, they do not understand them
- If they read and understand them, they do not have enough background knowledge to make an informed choice
- If they read, understand and make an informed choice that choice may be skewed by decision-making difficulties

By taking part in a free open online course, where they are informed that activities may be monitored for research purposes, participants can be assumed to have given consent for participation in research conducted according to these guidelines

- FutureLearn T&Cs = 5716 words
- 300 wpm = 19 minutes to read
- Code of Research Ethics (4 mins)
- Privacy policy (6 mins)
- Cookies policy (4 mins)
- + Userveice + New Relic + Google Analytics + CloudFlare + vzaar

T&Cs are not enough

Would you give this data to a complete stranger?

- Name,
- Age
- Sex
- Birthday
- Hometown
- Current city
- Education history
- IP addresses
- Entire friend list
- All your Timeline posts on Facebook

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What if they offered you a Wordle in return?



17.5 million people handed over their data

Moving forward: code of practice

Elements can be applied to MOOC research

- **Complete transparency** and clear institutional policies are essential
- Institutions should **clearly describe** the processes involved in producing the analytics to students and staff
- The use of “sensitive data” for the purposes of learning analytics requires additional safeguards
- Ensure that trends, norms, categorisation or any labelling of students do not bias staff, student or institutional perceptions and behaviours towards them

The Jisc logo consists of the word "Jisc" in white, lowercase letters, centered within an orange rectangular box.

Code of practice for
learning analytics

OU LA ethical principles



- 1: Learning analytics is an ethical practice** that should align with core organisational principles, such as open entry to undergraduate level study.
- 2: The OU has a responsibility to all stakeholders to use and extract meaning** from student data for the benefit of students where feasible.
- 3: Students should not be wholly defined by their visible data or our interpretation of**
- 4: The purpose and the boundaries regarding the use of learning analytics should be well defined and visible.**
- 5: The University is transparent regarding data collection,** and will provide students with the opportunity to update their own data and consent agreements at regular intervals.
- 6: Students should be engaged as active agents** in the implementation of learning analytics (e.g. informed consent, personalised learning paths, interventions).
- 7: Modelling and interventions based on analysis of data should be sound and free from bias.**
- 8: Adoption of learning analytics within the OU requires broad acceptance of the values and benefits (organisational culture) and the development of appropriate skills across the organisation.**

An ethics policy is not enough

I do not approve of the OU holding personal details on file about me other than those very specifically related to my studies. Some questions I view as impertinent and intrusive.

Is the University hell-bent on gaining a reputation as an intrusive busy body?

Most students in the study by Sharon Slade and Paul Prinsloo were unaware that higher education institutions in the UK routinely collect a wide range of data for regulatory and reporting purposes

An ethics policy is not enough

I don't object to somebody at the OU who I have seen fit to add to a Facebook group commenting. That's why they have added to a group.

But I don't add The OU as an entity to a group.

And I don't expect it to go wandering about the web picking up snippets about me and feeding that in as data to be used in an analytical programme.

Some students felt the university should not try to draw in information from third-party sites for its own purpose – this would overstep the boundaries of acceptable permissions

An ethics policy is not enough

There's a huge difference IMO between anonymised data to observe/monitor large scale trends and the "snooping" variety of data collection tracking the individual.

I'm happy for any of my data to be used in the former;

with the latter I would be uncomfortable about the prospect that it would be used to label and categorise students in an unhelpful or intrusive way

Students were often wary about learning analytics. They suggested that both the need for and the uses of learning analytics should be communicated better – making it clear what information is gathered and how it will be used, and providing examples

Informed consent

By placing an order via this Web site on the first day of the fourth month of the year 2010 Anno Domini, you agree to grant Us a non transferable option to claim, for now and for ever more, your immortal soul. Should We wish to exercise this option, you agree to surrender your immortal soul, and any claim you may have on it, within 5 (five) working days of receiving written notification from gamesation.co.uk or one of its duly authorized minions.

7,500 people agreed to this clause, along with the other terms and conditions

- As FutureLearn researchers we have access to huge amounts of data
- Perceived misuse of data can be disastrous (InBloom, TalkTalk, Vtech)
- We have terms and conditions and policies, but does anybody read them, understand them and make informed decisions based on them?
- **We need to make learners and educators more aware of our research and the benefits it provides**
- **How can we do this? How can we engage them as active agents?**



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