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Section: CIS 150-76  
Case Study: 2.3, Group 5  
Case Name: Censorship at New England University  
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### **Part 1: Ethical Dilemma**

New England University is concerned about the potential moral and legal ramifications of allowing access to sexually oriented newsgroups and pornographic websites on its servers after an incident where pornographic images were put on display in the computer lab. The Dean of the university has chosen to restrict access to these sites, but has faced severe criticism, saying his decision suppresses the right to free speech. What should Dean Jenkins do now that his decision to restrict access to sexually oriented newsgroups and pornographic sites is facing severe criticism?

### **Part 2: Role of I.T.**

The main I.T. components in this case are the school's internet servers. Other I.T. components also involved in this case are the hardware used to access the internet and display the pornographic images in the computer lab. Although the case doesn't go into much detail about how the university is blocking the sites, there is also likely a software component being used in order to restrict access to the internet.

### **Part 3: Stakeholders**

1. Dean Jenkins: He has the right to punish the group of students that were involved in displaying these images. He also has the right to make the decision on what and what not the students and faculty are allowed to search on the university's internet.
2. Shirley Pellegrisi (Dean of Students): She has the right to meet up with the Dean as a representative of the students and inform him of how the students feel and what action should be taken.
3. Students: they have the right to receive a quality education without the distraction of "pranks" such as the pornographic images being displayed on the computers.
4. University's administrator for information technology systems: The administrator has the right to decide himself if the internet should be restricted or not. He does not have to restrict the internet, but consequences may follow that his decision.

### **Part 4: Alternative Actions and Consequences**

1. Do nothing (restricted internet): If Dean Jenkins sticks with his decision to restrict access to the university's internet, it could cause the students some difficulty in the future when attempting to do any research on campus. This will affect the Dean of Students as well because students will come to her upset about the decision the Dean has made and will want a change in the restriction. The administrator will be following the Dean's orders, but many complaints and wishes to change the restriction will come their way. This course of action will also likely bring bad publicity to the college which could hurt future enrollment,

2. Remove the internet restrictions: Due to the outrage from the public and members of the University, Dean Jenkins may have to change his decision of restricting the internet. This will affect his reputation in the future because it leads some to believe if there is enough complaints about a matter, there is a possibility he will change his mind and agree with the most influential side. The Dean of Students will not be able to successfully protect the students offended by the images displayed because there is still full access to search any web material. Depending on the views of the administrator, this could cause a problem. If he does not feel like the internet should be unrestricted, he may refuse to change it, which may result in firing them.

3. Remove the internet restrictions, but put boundaries in place: Dean Jenkins does not have to fully restrict the University's access, there are other options he can take. He can assign staff members as lab supervisors in order to monitor the displays on the screens. This will reduce the chance of inappropriate images being displayed on the monitors. Most students and faculty will approve of this decision because they will still receive full internet access, while not being prone to see pornographic images when they walk into a classroom. The administrator may have to be in charge of monitoring these computers, whether it be in person, or through a desktop monitoring software if no other staff member is available.

4. Allow the students and faculty to vote on the final decision: Due to the controversy on the decision to restrict the University's access to the internet, the Dean can create a poll to solve the problem. Each member of the University will be allowed to vote once on the issue of restricting the internet or leaving it unrestricted. This will allow the students and faculty to each voice their opinion on the matter and the majority of the members will be pleased with the final decision. This will also give the Dean some relief because he does not have to make the final, possibly upsetting decision for the University. The Dean of Students and the administrator will not get as much criticism either because the majority of the members will be pleased with the final decision.

### **Part 5: Deontological Perspective**

From a deontological perspective, removing the restrictions placed on the internet would be the most moral decision. Although the restrictions guarantee no access to inappropriate content, in actuality it is sensitizing the students. Content like this constantly surrounds us, and hiding it prohibits the students from learning between right from wrong which is not beneficial to them. College is meant to learn, grow, and discover the world. As a prestigious and esteemed university, the school has a duty to challenge their students and promote growth professionally and personally to shape them into the person they become in the future. However, by placing a restriction, you are really holding them back from the world instead of trying to educate them in order for them to learn right from wrong. In a high school environment, it is probably beneficial to censor content for students that use the internet. However, college provides a different atmosphere where students are full-fledged adults and capable of taking care of themselves without others to hold their hand. This is what the restrictions placed by the board does and

hinders the students' learning. From these reason, Dean Jenkins should withdraw the censorship placed on the Internet.

### **Part 6: Teleological Perspective**

From a teleological perspective allowing the university's students and faculty to vote on the final decision would maximize social welfare and be the most moral decision. This can be determined by utilizing moral calculus to figure out that this choice helps the most amount of people. The worst option would be to leave the internet restricted because it is said that 90% of the faculty oppose this decision and the students are also clearly opposed to the measure so this option would have a negative impact on most of the university. The second option to just leave the internet unrestricted is better because in this scenario most of the students and faculty will be happy with the move, however by doing nothing to make sure that this incident doesn't happen again, the dean risks angering the population of students and faculty that want to make sure that an incident like the one that occurred never happens again. An improvement to this option would be the third option of unrestricting the internet while also putting boundaries in place, such as faculty and remote monitoring of all lab computers, because this would have the added benefit of making the part of the university that is opposed to unrestricted access feel heard and work to address the problem of making a safe environment for students and faculty without restricting freedoms. The final option provides the highest social welfare because a vote would ensure that the measure that the majority of the school wants will be taken. This has the added benefit of the Dean not being liable for the decision because it was made by the whole school, not just him, as well as making those opposed to the measure feel even more heard and be placated if they are given a fair and equal stake in the decision. This option will make sure that the decision is made with the majority's best interest, and is also likely to attract new students to the school who like the more democratic approach to school policy.

### **Part 7: My Recommendation**

We think that Dean Jenkins should remove the restrictions from the school internet servers. It stands to reason that the free speech argument holds well when discussing this issue. Not only does it hinder the students within their academic ventures, but the faculty as well given the outcry from both sides. Allowing access to all sites, whether or not the material is quality or not, should be allowed. The severe punishment of being suspended a semester from schooling that you are paying for is punishment enough. Effectively silencing the rest of the student body from speaking their mind or rather expressing themselves in any way they see fit is not the way to pursue action within this certain situation. The rest of the student body has seen the punishment that they are to face if they pursued this type of action. The dean should have left it at that, nothing more, nothing less.

Removing the ban isn't enough though, Jenkins should also issue a personal apology to students and faculty alike. The apology should appeal to a broad audience, meaning both sides who were affected negatively. This includes: the women who were distraught over the images, women in faculty, students whose access to the internet was restricted for no reason and so on and so forth. This would lead to the school lessening the blow that it would receive when the

news of this happening goes public. As we all know, negative publicity destroys companies. Schools are not excluded in this matter. Effectively they are one in the same. The person writing an article about the escapades of the school where they did not reverse the internet safeguards, could effectively write a smear campaign about the school. Hindering future enrollment and creating an inability to compete with other prestigious universities in the area such as Harvard, MIT and etc. The news would be less likely to do so if the school began to fix things 'in house' without getting the general public involved.

The dean should institute a computer monitor that is not part of the student body. Enlist a policy to where at all hours of use in the computer room, there has to be an employee monitoring the student computers. The reason a student shouldn't be enlisted as one anymore is that they may become biased towards allowing negative things to happen in the computer lab due to their colleague's influence. A faculty member would be less susceptible to this sort of thing and would be able to go through and check all of the computers before the next set of students were allowed to enter the room. A clear internet usage policy should also be put in place that outlines proper use of school technology and the consequences of its abuse. This would help the school minimize the chance that a similar event would occur and allow the school to remove the restrictions on the internet, but with additional safeguards in place.