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NTPG: Acceptable Use Policies Network Technology Planning Guide (NTPG) - Appendix E.

By its very nature, the free-flowing, uncensored exchange of communication that characterizes the Internet has forced the issue of how and by whom the network should be used. Realizing the potential for everything from criminal activities to unwholesome entertainment, many network administrators are wary of the negative power of the Internet in an educational environment.

Consequently, a plethora of appropriate and acceptable-use policies have sprung up across the country in the last two years. Small rural schools (such as Woodland High School in California) as well as national organizations (such as the National Science Foundation) are addressing the issue by setting limits on the use of their networks. Depending upon its source, an acceptable-use policy may take the form of a loosely interpreted guideline or a stringent set of rules and regulations. Generally, acceptable use standards fall within the jurisdiction of a network's system administrator both in design and enforcement. Violators can expect termination of their accounts. The system administrator may be at the school, district, county office of education, or an Internet service provider, although usually the policy will be designed by the local school administration in charge of school or district networks.

Although each educational institution may use language geared to its particular constituency, many acceptable use policies share common criteria. We selected fourteen samples from across the country for the purposes of this document. They represent two professional networking organizations, three state educational networks, five universities, and four high schools. The following concerns were expressed throughout all institutions:

Use of the network is intended to aid education and research.

Use of the network may not be used for personal profit or commercial activities.

Other networking issues reflected in the above samples appear below in descending order of frequency:

Must not display pornography or obscenities (6)

Must not violate other users' right to privacy (6)

Student users must sign a contract (4)

Institution not liable for service or damages (4)

Must not break or suggest breaking any civil laws (4)

No vandalism; e.g. destroying data or loading a virus (4)

SysAdmin preselects listservs/newsgroups (4)

Must not restrict others' use of network (4)

Only public domain software may be uploaded (3)

Must conserve time and space and maintain email (3)

Must not disseminate copyrighted material (3)

Security problems must be reported to SysAdmin (2)

Users must receive training and be tested (1)

Internet stickers must be placed on student's ID cards (1)

Game playing; e.g. MUD, not allowed (1)

Requests for comments (RFC) regarding acceptable use policies appear often among the many Internet

newsgroups. A carefully placed RFC can result in literally hundreds of responses from members of the queried newsgroup. Researchers should be advised of the power of this medium and proceed with caution.

Another option for accessing current acceptable use policies is to find servers that already contain archives of such information. One of the best sources available is the Armadillo Website on the Texas Education Network <http://www.tenet.edu> (Outside Source).

As previously mentioned, acceptable use policies mirror the environment of their particular organizations. Since everyone's needs are different, no two policies look exactly alike. But we offer the document on the following pages from the California Department of Education. This AUP was developed by a team of educators and administrators after reviewing many issues and policies developed by a number of sites.

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