

During the Summer of 2005, the Center offered an Internship Program under the sponsorship of Undergraduate Research Projects Mentored by Calit2 Faculty

Title: Can Computer Games Encourage the Empathic Involvement That Fosters Moral Treatment of Others?

Description: Questions Addressed: What causes moral action? Do scholars have scientific answers to this question? If so, can scholarly findings be used to develop a curriculum to foster and encourage more ethical behavior in students? These questions take on a poignant immediacy when we read news reports of continuing prejudice, discrimination, on-going sectarian violence -- even genocidal activities and war -- and increasing polarization over issues of race, religion, and ethnicity, at home and abroad.

Broad Program- To respond to this challenge, the faculty of the UCI Interdisciplinary Center for the Scientific Study of Ethics and Morality (CEM) have developed a program to bring together the scientific findings on the drive toward moral behavior and then to develop a curriculum to instruct at diverse levels, from school children and the general public to college and graduate students. The intense interdisciplinary program will involve students in biological sciences, computer science, engineering, humanities, social ecology, and social sciences. Students are encouraged to think deeply about their own attitudes toward people judged "different", whether these differences are associated with race, ethnicity, and religion or with age, disability, sexual preference, weight, etc. Students are asked to measure their own self-awareness of prejudice toward different groups, using both quantitative and qualitative measures. They also take a series of implicit assumption tests (IAT) designed to measure the difference between conscious and subconscious attitudes toward prejudice. Students then participate in a program designed to heighten their empathic involvement with members of groups judged different. In some years, this empathic involvement is induced by student interviews with members of these groups, such as an elderly person or a member of a different ethnic group. In other years, students participate in role-playing games, both in class and via computer and video games especially designed by students in computer science at UCI.

At the end of the project, students will take the same tests for tolerance, to determine whether the program altered their underlying prejudice toward members of different groups. The assumption is that classes designed to involve students in empathic involvement actually can influence the students' cognitive frameworks significantly and that this empathic involvement is fostered as effectively using computerized simulations of interaction as it is via the more traditional narrative interviews and face-to-face role playing. The program thus (1) provides information on how research on ethics can most effectively be taught and (2) tests a major empirical finding on ethics, suggesting that a critical influence behind ethics is the empathic involvement with others, an involvement that helps us see the world from another's perspective, thereby heightening the sympathy for the other that fosters a sense of responsibility and concern for the other's suffering.

Summer 2005 Program, Specific Focus and Duties- The call for proposals from Calit2 would involve that part of the program which involves computer students. In particular, we will ask computer science students to develop computer and video games to create role playing games that can teach tolerance. Students will be exposed to critical experiments in social and political psychology. They then will work with Professor Monroe to create computerized versions of these games. (Goals 1, 5, 7, 8, 11, and 12, below.) Faculty in Social Ecology (Peter Ditto) and in Computer Science (Gloria Mark) will also participate in the program.

Overall Goals:

- [1] foster increased ethical sensitivity to underrepresented groups by sensitizing students to ethical implications of cognitive classification of others, with special focus on differences associated with age, physical disabilities, women in science and engineering professions, religion, ethnicity, race, and sexual preference
- [2] sensitize students to ethical issues involved when interviewing human subjects
- [3] determine the role of face-to-face involvement in fostering empathy
- [4] contrast effectiveness of empathic involvement when instilled by (a) in-depth interviewing, (b) role-playing in class experiments and (c) role-playing in computerized games
- [5] determine if/how computer games can encourage empathic involvement
- [6] increase sensitivity to the situation of women in science and engineering, as an underrepresented group
- [7] help computer science students develop web tools to circulate results to a larger audience, thereby both disseminating information and increasing ethical sensitivity of the computer science students creating these tools and websites
- [8] post on the CEM website curricula for graduate courses on empathic involvement
- [9] work with the International Society of Political Psychology's Caucus of Concerned Scholars, Committee on Ethics and Morality to evaluate existing tests of tolerance and ethical sensitivity
- [10] evaluate alternative methods of measuring tolerance and ethical sensitivity using both qualitative and quantitative tests measuring self-awareness of prejudice and the implicit assumption test (IAT) measuring divergence between unconscious and conscious attitudes
- [11] disseminate information to political psychologists via the CEM and the ISPP websites
- [12] disseminate information about our program to the broader community via a program of public outreach to local community colleges in the Southern California area

Broader Impact of the Project- The UCI program is part of a broader effort between the CEM and the Caucus of Concerned Scientists, Committee on Altruism and Ethics, established by the International Society of Political Psychology (hereafter ISPP). To disseminate results, we have established ties with appropriate human rights' organizations, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Detroit Holocaust Museum, and will work to develop further projects to expand and broaden our work to include students other than UCI students.

Research Facilities- UCI Interdisciplinary Center for the Scientific Study of Ethics and Morality, UCI Computer facilities.